This is the beginning of a new year and the time for superintendents in school districts – large or small – to develop a comprehensive communication plan for themselves. In some districts the superintendent is the communication department. Other school districts have a communication staff. Regardless of those variables, you are the voice of the educational community and you will be most successful if you are visible and approachable.

Education leaders have indicated that the majority of their time is spent communicating, but too few superintendents have personal communication plans for themselves with their stakeholders.

“The research leaves no doubt: The success of schools and programs — and all of the students that they serve — depend on outstanding communication by everyone.” (National School Public Relations Association Communication Accountability Project)

- Publicize the chain of communication within your school district. For example, attempted resolution for a classroom issue begins with the teacher. If unresolved, the conversation may progress to the school principal, etc. Knowledge of this process helps to ensure that stakeholders understand they are invited into a process, not being rejected at any level.
- Ensure all staff knows the importance of their role as communicators. Reinforce this concept regularly through staff communications and workshops.
- Schedule fifteen minutes a day into your calendar to personally connect with a stakeholder. This is not a time to respond to the issues that crop up every day, but rather a time for follow-up and personal outreach. The payback will amaze you.
- Visit a site at least once a week. If you are the superintendent in a large district, this may mean visiting a school. If you are in a smaller district it may mean visiting a classroom or department. Your visibility is important to staff and students and serves as a sign of your engagement. (These visits may also create a resource for directing your personal connection from the preceding bullet. For example, “I was in your school/classroom last week and was impressed with how…” This is a great conversation starter for you to engage and be engaged with a parent, student, teacher, principal, volunteers, support staff, et. al.)

You will accomplish more and enjoy your role as the leader of the school district more if you are fully engaged with the people and personalities in your community.
“The research clearly underscores one straightforward concept: Students simply do better when parents and the community are involved with schools. Test scores climb. Remediation rates dip. Graduation rates improve. And everyone understands and values their roles in the success of the school enterprise.” (National School Public Relations Association Communication Accountability Project)