Celebrating Los Angeles County education professionals overcoming the challenges of COVID-19

2022 NSPRA National School Communication Awards
Publication and Digital Media Excellence Awards
ENTRY CATEGORY:
Social Media

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION:
Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), is an education agency with approximately 1500 employees who support L.A. County’s 80 districts, which are comprised of more than 1,850 schools that serve approximately 1.4 million students.
PROJECT SUMMARY

As a communications department supporting 80 school districts throughout the largest region in the nation, we had a first-hand understanding of the communications challenges facing many public agencies. Both classified and certificated staff have done so much to support students, each other and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to find a unique way to celebrate these heroes in the month of May when we traditionally recognize the Day of the Teacher and Classified Employees week. While we are huge advocates for celebrating teachers every single day, in May 2021 we celebrated educators all month long with a comic series, written and drawn by Communications staff, dedicated to illustrating the obstacles school staff have overcome over the last year. Each comic was posted on LACOE.edu alongside an interview Q&A with the subject of the comic.

We gathered relevant information and data regarding the mental health and social-emotional wellbeing of educators during the pandemic. We took that information and cross-compared that against popular stories in the media and on social networks commenting on education and distance learning during the pandemic. Our research found that while some social media accounts were celebrating the hard work and dedication of educators, the large majority of mainstream news focused on the downfalls of distance learning, emphasizing that it was “not working” and that students were “not learning.” Additionally, we identified that most if not all news information used a logos or ethos appeal, focusing on ethics and fact-sharing. With that information in mind, we applied Aristotle’s rhetorical triangle, identifying pathos as an area of opportunity to uplift educators while telling their true and authentic stories, capturing the challenges that they had faced as individuals.

From caveman drawings to silent movies, visual storytelling has been used to educate, engage, and motivate audiences for centuries. The digital age has ushered in a new set of tools and technologies for visual storytelling. We scanned a variety of social channels to see how other organizations were celebrating essential workers and noted that cartoon style animation appeared to be a trending graphic style.

The goal was to showcase at least 8 school employees representing the diversity of LA County and its various regions, with equal portrayal of classified employees and credentialed teaching staff. We identified individuals from throughout Los Angeles County based on classified employees of the year and teachers of the year. We had a staff member who had formerly worked as a reporter to interview the subjects and develop a storyline. We turned that storyline over to our artists on staff to develop the comics. The comics were published along with Q&As on our website, through our social media channels and e-news.

The project uplifted the work of our education professionals during a very difficult time in the pandemic as the year closed and we were forced to consider end of year testing, grades, and virtual celebrations. We measured geographic representation, diversity, and inclusion of stories ranging from new school staff to more tenured school staff.
RELEVANT POSTINGS

Web | www.lacoe.edu
Rediscovering the heart of teaching during COVID-19
Inspiring students to give their best
Overcoming the challenges of COVID-19
Working on the front lines to support students
Rising to the challenges of change
Honoring school lunch heroes
Empathy at the heart of service
Going above and beyond for students, families amid COVID-19

Instagram*
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*The comics were shared across all of the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s official social media channels: Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Posts were strategically posted on different days on each platform so that content did not overlap across platforms.