Synopsis
Davis School District is the second largest district in the State of Utah. With 92 schools and a Community Relations Department of four, it is nearly impossible to be all places. Our department recently established a school ambassador program to help us reach out to schools. The group has become highly successful with representatives from 52 schools, bringing more public understanding and community support for our district.

Research
A communications survey conducted by Y2 Analytics of parents and guardians in the Davis School District shows that the main source of information about the district comes from classroom teachers, school websites and teacher newsletters.

We realized it was essential for us to help schools communicate with their communities and share the good news about their schools. Our team reached out to other school districts who had school ambassador programs to find out how they had achieved success. We also attended an NSPRA webinar about school ambassadors and read several articles on how to build a strong team of brand ambassadors for the district.

Research shows that students do better when parents and communities are involved in their schools. Since Davis School District’s motto is Learning First, we were determined to vault our communication efforts forward by including all schools in our district.

Planning
Our team named the group “Newzz Guruz” and put together a proposal for funding the new initiative. We also determined the roles of our school ambassadors:

- Feeding stories and information to school webmasters
- Taking photos at school events for school websites
- Posting information on social media
- Engaging with teacher and faculty to learn about unique events and activities
- Sending story ideas to our department

A Newzz Guruz print manual was created with tips and guidelines and a schedule was put together for training meetings. Those trainings include:

- Understanding why communication is important
- Learning what is newsworthy
- Determining how to anticipate and capture magical moments
- Knowing the communication channels for sharing story ideas
- Learning the benefits and hazards of social media
- Sharing great stories with the Community Relations Department

Implementation
At the beginning of the school year, our team reaches out to all school principals to ask for a representative. Participants come from several arenas — office managers, school webmasters, assistant principals, teachers and librarians.

The goal is to fill their toolkit with tips on how to be a better communicators for their school. Trainings teach them how to share information on their website, newsletter and social media. We teach them about keeping their message consistent with district messaging. We give photography and writing tips, have participants share success stories and lead group discussions about what works and what doesn’t work in their school communication efforts.

We reach out to individual participants on a regular basis to ask how things are going, find out about story ideas at their school, and offer advice for promoting school events. Our team also tracks their monthly participation to determine each participant’s end-of-year stipend amount.

Evaluation
As a result of Newzz Guruz, the number of schools with a social media presence has increased significantly and schools within our district are now updating their websites with pertinent information more regularly. Over half of the participants have expressed interest in continuing with Newzz Guruz next year.

We also have an extensive network when we need to learn of significant events. A quick email to the Newzz Guruz participants asking about events coming up generates responses within minutes. We have then been able to share the story ideas with the community and generate additional positive media coverage.
“Being a member of Newzz Guruz helped me realize the news of a little community is much bigger than I realized and needs to reflect a positive and accurate representation for the schools that we serve.”
   – Terrie Tenney, Kaysville Junior High

“Newzz Guruz helped me realize the importance of keeping the website up to date and to think of putting things on there to promote the great things we do at Clearfield High.”
   – Shelli Erekson, Clearfield High

“I changed the way I thought about telling our story. We all have different goals and demographics, but telling our story levels the playing field a bit. I learned to take better photos and watch for those personal moments.”
   – Julie Tomney, Sunset Elementary

“I learned that no one else is going to tell your school story. It’s important to share that positive story of what is happening inside the school with the public.”
   – Austin Green, Fremont Elementary

“I’ve learned a lot about the hows and whys of messaging out and controlling the narrative about our schools.”
   – Amy Neal, Holt Elementary
Newzz Guruz

Trainings

Introductory Meeting

We introduce participants to the basics behind public relations and how they have the power to inform and shape opinions. We also share the process for sending us story ideas we can then communicate to the media.

Laying a Foundation: What is PR?

Public Relations, Protecting Reputation & Personal Relationships

Second Meeting

During our second training, we focus on finding interesting stories to share, how to write a story and take good photos. We also lead group discussions about what communication tools are working well for schools.

Is it news?

- First
- Technology
- Well-known
- Human Interest

Does your photo tell a story?

Third Meeting

In our third meeting, we have a veteran photojournalist, who travels the world, talk about what he looks for when he shoots photos at schools. We also have Newzz Guruz participants share photos with us and talk about what photos work well on social media.

Positive to negative comments should be 5 to 1.

“When words are both true and kind, they can change our world.” — Buddha
Newzz Guruz

Manual and Handouts

Communication Handbook

We provide each participant with a communications manual detailing their role, how to become better communicators and tips for spreading their school news.

Davis School District
Learning First

Communication Handbook
for principals, directors, secretaries, Newzz Guruz

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Tips for Taking Great Photos

1. Share a Story
   - Photos need to tell a story, so the viewer can identify what is happening.
   - Action shots make the best story photos. Look for students engaging in an activity.

2. All in the Angle
   - Try different angles to get a good shot (low, high, wide, close-up).
   - Add interesting elements to the shot (people, objects, scenery).

3. Ban the Blur
   - Check the ISO if your photos look blurry and share your tips for better photos.
   - Make sure your tripod is stable and your shutter speed is appropriate.

4. Catch the Close-Up
   - Close-up shots make for better photos. Make sure to focus on the subject.
   - Use a macro lens to capture fine details.

5. Protect Privacy
   - When posting photos of students, protect their privacy by not showing their faces.
   - Ask students to review their photos before they are posted.

6. Formatting Photos
   - Take advantage of the crop tool to adjust your photos.
   - Crop out or remove any unwanted elements from the edges of the photos.
   - Ensure the file size is suitable for online sharing.