A united school board builds community trust

School board members hear from vocal special interests and want to be responsive to constituents, but they are obligated to making decisions to benefit the community at large. To build trust and maintain credibility, the board needs to present a united front. Read tips for developing and working as an effective school board team.

Does your team include a communications pro?

A solid public relations program should provide research, clear thinking, wise counseling and effective services to help shape the organization to meet the needs of the district. It should be strategic, help you stay focused on your district’s mission and help the school board and administration accomplish their goals. Learn why your district team should include a professional communicator.

Effective social media on a tight budget

Social media is one of the best ways to communicate when you have limited time and money. Use it effectively to maximize your reach. These tips will help you make smart use of social tools.

How to communicate stranger danger incidents

What and how should schools communicate about stranger danger incidents? When these frightening issues happen, word spreads fast. It is essential to understand the roles of the district and the police, and communicate well to maintain parent trust.

Ten tips for developing good email habits

Email is one of the best ways to reach people 50 and older. Read why you need to keep an email list and how to write and send effective email messages.

Insights for Parents: Tips for a Safe, Smart Summer

Students need a break during the summer, but the long vacation can be difficult. Most students experience learning loss during the long break that they need to make up when the new year starts. Long summer months also pose a greater risk of weight gain. Read tips for keeping students active, safe and academically ready.

Bonus summer reading list

Summer reading recommendations from Oregon school leaders to educate, inform and get back in the swing of things this fall: http://bit.ly/24yWX5B
A united school board builds community trust

School board members, like other elected officials, must be responsive to their constituents. Like other elected officials, they hear from vocal special interest groups who want support for their views. Unlike other elected officials, this non-partisan position can avoid partisan divisiveness that erodes public trust by committing to work as a team on behalf of students.

Can the public trust you?

Presenting a united front builds credibility and trust. Divided school boards give voters a good reason to vote no on bond proposals and distrust schools in general. To voters, school boards that can’t work together won’t be able to manage millions of dollars for bond projects.

Voters don’t need a reason to vote no. It is the responsibility of school boards to remind them of the reasons to vote yes. Ideally, those reasons are based on good data that also reflects community priorities for schools.

Survey data is the best source of information about what likely voters support. Scientific surveys are also the easiest to defend. They are representative of the community and are most likely to mirror election results. They are also not influenced by active special interest groups that may try to sway opinion by organizing supporters to testify, write letters or complete self-selected online surveys that are open to all respondents.

Keep vocal special interest groups in perspective

One way to divide a board and to damage public trust is to base decisions on input from small but vocal community groups. Consider this hypothetical situation:

Athletic supporters in a local district wanted the district’s next bond proposal to include a stadium project. They were a vocal group who passionately believed that athletic space was an essential educational requirement that encouraged academic improvements and provided incentives for many students to attend school.

School board members did not disagree, but they did stand behind a survey of voters in the community that showed lukewarm support, at best. Voters expressed concern about adding stadium space that would result in higher tax rates and reduce support for the instructional space and maintenance projects in the package. The survey found that support for the project was well below the majority requirement for passage.

As the community members continued to advocate for their project, they became increasingly and publicly critical of the school board, which, they believed, was opposing important educational opportunities for students.
Although the board’s position to not include a stadium was based on survey data, it was loudly criticized by the sports boosters. When some members of the board began to join the group in criticizing their colleagues, members of the public began to doubt the ability of the board to oversee a capital bond program.

**Building trust by listening to the community**

Elected school board members are not likely to oppose a popular, widely held position. Unless the issue has misunderstood cost, safety or compliance requirements, board members generally support giving the people what they want.

In the example above, the board heard concerns about costs from voters in a scientific survey. They heard support for the project from a special interest group of athletic supporters who passionately wanted their project.

This scenario is tough for school boards that follow the will of the silent majority in the face of criticism by the vocal minority.

**Listen early and listen often**

Developing and proposing a bond measure is one of the most important and most difficult tasks facing school boards. Some educational facilities are harder to sell to others, and increasing tax rates is always challenging. It can be tough to sell high-dollar performing arts and athletic projects to the general public, who worry about costs, but they don’t usually show up to testify at board meetings.

For capital projects, and any new initiative, the key is to provide multiple opportunities for input, including a scientific survey. Board meetings should have regular opportunities for testimony about agenda items and non-agenda items at each meeting. The district should also provide options for contacting board members via email address, phone numbers or website forms.

**Vote together and tell people that you listened**

For money measures, a unanimous vote is essential. In their book, *Election Success: Proven Ways to Win* (www.nspra.org), Jeanne Magmer and Gay Campbell advise boards to do the work ahead of time so they are on the same page when voting for the bond proposal:

“Vote unanimously to place the measure on the ballot. A less than unanimous decision is an open invitation for opponents to raise doubts about supporting the measure. A split board vote on a ballot measure signals disagreement about the merits of the issue and gives “undecided” and reluctant voters a reason to vote “no.”

During the vote and during the election, a key message should be that the board listened to the community. Boards should remind people that the proposal is based on the input they received before sending the bond proposal to the ballot.

*(Over)*
Tips for developing successful and effective school boards

School boards have common goals: improving academic achievement by supporting schools and students. Working as a team helps them to be effective.

The following tips from the American School Board Journal recommends other ways to improve school board effectiveness in its online article, Seven Signs of Effective School Board Members (http://bit.ly/1rxXRgS):

1. **Going solo’s a no-no.** Board members have no power as individuals. Success of each member is tied to the success of the board.

2. **Respect the team.** Emotions on controversial issues may run high, but it is essential to take a long view of the board and respect the views of fellow members. Remember, too, that the board sets the tone for the whole district. They must model collaboration.

3. **Understand the difference between board and staff.** Board members must refrain from management functions. Those are the responsibility of the superintendent and district staff. Learn and explain the chain of command to constituents.

4. **Share and defend your views, but listen to the views of others.** Model good communication by listening and compromising. Move forward respectfully after difficult decisions.

5. **Do your homework and ask tough questions.** Decision making requires an understanding of extensive background information on complex issues. Do your homework, ask questions, and clarify issues so that members of the community can understand the topics and decisions.

6. **Respect your oath.** Board members are elected officials that swear oaths to uphold laws. Respect that oath by maintaining confidentiality and following public processes.

7. **Keep learning.** Participate in professional development opportunities. There is a big learning curve in educational reform, requirements and jargon. Keep up-to-date by reading resources from state and federal associations. Attend conferences and work closely with the superintendent and board chair.

*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*
Does your team include a communications pro?

You wouldn’t engage in a legal battle without consulting an attorney. You wouldn’t build a school without guidance from an architect. Yet many school districts think they can strategically communicate with parents, staff and community without the help of a communications pro.

Think again.

Good communications is much more than just whipping up an occasional press release or sending out a newsletter. In fact, a communications specialist might encourage you to start a blog or do a weekly video instead of a newsletter. The tools for communicating with today’s tech-savvy public are ever changing, and you need to use the right tool for the right message.

A solid public relations program should provide research, clear thinking, wise counseling and effective services to help shape the organization to meet the needs of the district. It should be strategic, help you stay focused on your district’s mission and help the school board and administration accomplish their goals.

Many districts, though, haven’t had the benefit of having a communications specialist on staff. Sometimes it’s a lack of money. And sometimes it’s because the leadership hasn’t had an opportunity to see the value that comes from having someone with the expertise and skills to help them shape and deliver messages.

Define the value of communications for your district

An important job of communications specialists is to help staff understand what they do and how they can help achieve school and district communication goals. If staff members don’t understand the strategies behind the work, they are unlikely to fully value the contributions of communications staff.

Here are some tips to make this position a valued part of the team:

**Lobby to be on the district’s leadership team.** Some people consider the communications specialist’s role to be a technician rather than a strategic thinker. And that’s a mistake. One of the most important roles of the communications specialist is to see the big picture and help leaders consider a decision not only from the district’s perspective but also assess how it will be perceived by different stakeholders. A savvy communications pro can help you consider viewpoints and options beyond the obvious. That way you can make adjustments before a proposal is presented, rather than do damage control afterwards.

**Stay current on tools and trends.** Research is clear that most people prefer getting information electronically, but there’s no one tool that delivers it best. New tools are
developed almost daily, and old tools are updated frequently with new features. It’s important to stay up to date on available tools and help leadership staff choose the best method to deliver a particular message.

Don’t discount the old tried-and-true face-to-face method of communication. This remains one of the most effective ways to communicate important messages, even though it is challenging to get stakeholders to come to meetings.

**Stay connected.** Professional development is as important for communicators as it is for teachers and principals. Make it a priority to attend conferences and trainings related to school communications. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) offers an outstanding conference every July for school communicators, and there are local branches in nearly every state. Share what you learn with your leadership team. You not only build support for new strategies or programs you might want to try, but also increase confidence in your expertise and knowledge.

**Create a communications plan and share it.** Cranking out press releases and posting photos on Twitter can feel productive, but without a master plan, it might be a lot of effort for tasks that aren’t yielding the best results. Involve your stakeholders in setting priorities and creating your plan. Once you’re specific about what you are trying to accomplish, you will be able to better target your audience and methods of communication.

Most important, share your plan with district leaders. This will provide accountability and help them realize that effective communications is not a hit and miss proposition. It must be well thought out and executed. Otherwise, it’s easy to focus on things like how many people clicked on your Facebook posting rather than concrete outcomes, such as how many parents actually registered their children at Kindergarten Roundup.

**See and be seen.** Visit schools regularly, with camera in hand. Take photos to post on Facebook and the website. Gather stories you can tell to civic clubs. Make sure staff know you’re there to help them and share the good things they are doing.

**Be a coach.** Share your knowledge and expertise with your administrative team. Meet at least annually with principals to review their communications efforts – newsletters, website, etc., – and offer suggestions. Maybe it’s time to discontinue printed newsletters and start a blog. Offer to create a school brochure that they can give to prospective families. Make yourself invaluable to them.

**Build trust.** In whatever you do, be direct, honest and reliable. Leaders need to have confidence that you are providing solid information and not just offering seat-of-the-pants recommendations. If you say you can complete a project by a certain deadline, make sure you deliver. Be someone your team can rely on for sensible, solid advice.

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*Contributed by Connie Potter, chief of staff, Forest Grove School District, Forest Grove, Ore.*
Effective social media on a tight budget

From fundraisers to team sports and bond proposals to clothing drives, there is always information that schools want share with the community. Every school and district communications director knows the delicate balance of resources when it comes to promoting the great things schools are up to.

But when it comes right down to it, a tight budget has as much to do with time as with resources. It’s important to make sure you’re using your time as effectively as possible.

Don’t do it all

Social media consultants can give guidance on how to be effective on all the new social media apps, but the truth is – less really is more, especially when you have limited resources. Getting your school or district website under control should be your primary goal, so your news is there for people to find. When parents want information, that’s the first place they go.

Then it’s just a matter of where best to share that news with the world. Does your community hang out on Facebook? If so, that’s the place to focus your attention. Maybe Snapchat and Instagram are better ways to communicate with your students.

Of course, not all communities have embraced social media. It’s possible the parents in your district have overwhelmingly requested information via email – great! Try sending them brief newsletters with links to your press releases? The key is to meet parents where they are, not try to get them to adopt the new social media apps you want to use.

Social sharing buttons

When great school news happens, parents and kids want to share it with friends and family. Schools need to make that easy. Most modern website platforms make it simple to add social sharing buttons to posts on the school’s website. For extra credit, find out how to put social sharing buttons right in your email newsletter! Parents love sharing their kids’ success stories. The more you can encourage that, the better your school looks.

Start conversations

Social media is just a digital way to engage the community that is already involved through the PTA, the board, and your schools’ clubs, career and technical education and athletic departments. The best way to bring everyone in under the same social media roof is through conversations. What are these different groups concerned about? How can you get them to communicate directly with you? Take some time to think about stories that might showcase each of the groups you want to communicate with and ways that you can help them achieve their missions through greater engagement with the community.
At the beginning, you may need to let students know via offline methods that the school’s social media accounts are going to start seeing some action. Select hashtags for each group if they don’t exist already, so students can select to see news that affects them. Be aware that the hashtag might change without input from you – social media is a constantly shifting landscape – be willing to go with the flow.

**Connect people to resources**

Parents and students may be going to the school’s website for school-related news, but they probably aren’t visiting it for college preparation advice, or ideas for Halloween costumes. But why not? Families trust the school district, and you are in a position to regularly come across great ideas for parents to help prepare their kids for the future or find creative solutions for day-to-day problems. If you have extra time, this is a great place to focus it.

One of the tools for finding resources is Google Alerts. When news happens that relates to the keywords you select, it gets emailed directly to you. This gives you a regular newsfeed of current information. Another tool is Feedly (www.feedly.com), a newsfeed that lets you put all your favorite blogs and newsfeeds in one stream so you can quickly see the news of the day, and decide which of it you want to share with your community.

**Reach out to local news sources and bloggers**

Building relationships with people in the community can make your job easier. Even better than doing everything yourself is having bloggers chomping at the bit to do the work for you. Start by asking the PTA if they know anyone in the school community who keeps a blog of local events, and get to know that person well.

Depending on the size of your area, local news organizations tend to love featuring great community stories. Call reporters on your local beat and ask them to lunch. Find out what kind of stories they are interested in. Make reporting the news on their local schools a collaboration. They are always looking for news, and you’re looking to make news. If done right, this is a relationship that can yield tremendous benefits for both of you.

**The big secret**

One of the hardest things about maintaining a social media presence is that it appears to require your attention 24/7. But the pros know that’s partially an illusion. The best way to make sure you’re regularly getting the word out is to make it part of your schedule. A social media dashboard is a great way to do this. One of the biggest benefits to a busy communications director using a social media dashboard is being able to schedule posts in advance.

Sprout Social (www.sproutsocial.com) and Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com) are just two competing dashboards with different pros and cons. They both offer free and low-priced options. These tools let you sit down on Monday morning and schedule the week’s event-related tweets all at once. Big football game on Friday? You can schedule a unique reminder for each day of the week, with an extra one on Friday afternoon.

By the time you’re done scheduling, your feed will be full of scheduled news posts, leaving you free to focus on current news and other matters while giving the illusion that you’re engaged 24/7.

As you can see, managing your resources is more a matter of managing your time and your
relationships than anything else. Fortunately, there are some great tools to help you do that, from search tools that bring information to your doorstep, to posting tools that let you post across multiple platforms all week long in less than five minutes on Monday morning. With a little focus and a good schedule, you can make a small communications team with $5 in your pocket look like a million bucks.

Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, freelance writer and communications consultant, Los Angeles, Calif.
How to communicate stranger danger incidents

An elementary student is walking to school when a strange car pulls up next to him and the driver beckons him closer. The student runs away and the stranger in the car follows him for two blocks. Luckily, the student makes it safely to school. The student’s parents and the police are called. Word spreads, and soon other parents start to call the school with questions.

What and how should the principal communicate with parents?
Stranger danger incidents are difficult to communicate because they occur off campus and outside of school. It can be confusing to determine the communication roles of police versus the school. It is important to get it right to maintain parent trust.

Parents trust the principal to give them all the information they need to keep their children safe. If the principal rushes to communicate too soon, she may cause needless anxiety and hurt her own credibility over what turns out to be a false report. If she fails to communicate in a thorough and timely fashion, she may anger parents who will say that they would have driven their students home from school had they only known about the incident that day. If she gives too much information, it could lead to increased media attention and frustration for the police.

Cell phones and social media spread word of incidents rapidly to parents and media. The principal must consider communicating in a timely fashion to avoid being caught flat-footed. On the other hand, nobody wants to generate media attention and parental anxiety.

The trick is to find the balance between informing parents and generating a major disruption to the school environment. If a principal is going to err, it is always better err on the side of safety and over-communication.

Coordinate with the police
In any stranger danger incident, the first call should be to the police to report the incident. Parents will feel better if they know the police are investigating.

The second, equally important, step is the coordination of messages to the school community. By working closely with police, you can put parents at ease and increase the chances of catching the dangerous stranger, if there is one.

Occasionally the police determine that a student has fabricated the story. In this case, the principal would not want to do an auto dialer message or letter home based solely on the student report. Coordination with police prevents spreading false reports.

Sometimes the police are confident the incident happened as reported and, in other cases, they cannot determine whether the report is genuine. In cases where the police are not sure whether the report is true, the school can do a general reminder to parents without mentioning the incident or by referring to it as a “reported” incident.
Phone message example
**Dubious or unsubstantiated report:** “This is Principal Smith with an important safety message for Jones Elementary parents. Today a student reported being approached by a stranger on the way to school. Police are investigating the incident. In the meantime, I ask you to remind your children to walk in groups, avoid dark or deserted areas and avoid talking to strangers or approaching strange vehicles. Working together we can keep our students and our community safe. If you have any questions, please call me at the school office. Thank you.”

How much detail?
Sometimes, the incident is witnessed by other students or adults. In those cases, the police have a solid description of the suspect person or vehicle. They may or may not want the school to share descriptions with parents and the media. Often, the police want to share the detailed suspect description with the community to generate leads and help identify the suspect. But sometimes they want to withhold that information for investigative purposes, such as not wanting the suspect to know that they have already identified him.

The identity of the student should never be shared by the school. If the family wishes to go to the media, that is their decision. But the school should maintain confidentiality. You may say that you are not free to identify the student but you are offering support to him and his family as needed.

Dealing with the media
The police, not the school, should share details of the incident with the media as they see fit. The principal should focus on sharing positive messages with the media about the school response, which would include teaching students and parents about how to avoid such incidents.

**Example:** “Sure, we are disturbed by this reported incident. I will let the police share what they choose to about the incident. My main goal is to keep kids safe, so we are focused on educating students and families.”

When in doubt, communicate
It never hurts to give a general reminder about stranger danger prevention. The positive message is that we can prepare students to avoid dangerous situations wherever they may encounter them. Try to broaden the conversation to address issues of stranger danger wherever they may occur, not just on the way to school or near your school. Keep the focus on educating parents and students because perpetrators could appear anywhere in the community, not necessarily the same spot where a recent incident occurred.

Some parents complain about vague safety messages that do not mention a specific incident. When they find out later about a reported incident, they feel upset that the message from the principal was generic and did not give details. For them, the principal may apologize for any confusion but explain that the details were not solid enough to share, and that the main point was reminding parents to talk to their kids about safety.

Parents do not expect the principal to control what happens on the streets around the school. But they do trust the principal to care as much as they do about student safety and to be as open as possible about safety issues that may affect students.

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*Contributed by Jay Remy, communications director, Salem-Keizer Public Schools, Salem, Ore.*
Ten tips for developing good email habits

Social media tools like Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter are great for reaching young voters and parents, but email is still the preferred communication for the over-50 crowd. This group makes up the majority of your voters and probably most of your business and civic leaders.

Older age groups use Facebook and other social media, but landing in their inbox with a personalized message is still the easiest, most reliable communication tactic, especially for complex information. Plus, emails have a more solid, lasting effect and are often kept for later reference.

Do you already send regular emails? Tally the number you send each day and improve your open rate by adopting these 10 habits to build better readership.

1. The subject line is the grabber
Avoid vague subject lines, like “message from the board chair.” Instead, say what your message is about: “We took your advice in building the next budget.”

Remember, recipients may read your message on a mobile device, so keep your “lively” subject line short. Email newsletter service MailChimp has analyzed 200 million subject lines and found that 28 to 39 characters is the optimal length for the best open rates.

2. Don’t shoot blanks!
Don’t leave the subject line vacant. Consider it a headline. A news story would never appear without a headline, would it? Tell readers what to expect, which will also help them open it in the first place. Spend as much effort on the subject line as the email.

3. Use shorter paragraphs
Readers scan email; they feel overwhelmed with long messages. If your topic is complex, disguise it with frequent subheads and shorter paragraphs. Separate them with an empty line – breathing space, where eyes can rest.

4. CAPS, underlines and !!!!
Did you mean to shout? Nobody likes being shouted at. CAPS makes it look that way. Cap ONE word (sparingly) for emphasis. Never underline unless you’re linking to a site. Use italics or bold for emphasis instead. Use exclamation points even MORE sparingly than all caps! They make you seem over-eager and not trustworthy.

5. Get to the point
No need for a fancy introduction – just get to the point about why they need your information. Keep it to one subject, unless you’re sending your regular message as chair/principal/superintendent. In that case, use subheads for each topic.

(Over)
Resist the temptation to include too many topics – they tend to get missed. Plus, you can’t refer to everything in your subject line. Because you’re the “school district,” people probably won’t delete your email. They may keep it or slide it into a folder, hoping to read it when they have more time. If the topic they want isn’t in the subject line, it could be lost forever.

6. Formal vs. informal
If you’re emailing a friend, informality is fine. But if you’re writing a business/education message, begin with “Dear” (rather than “hi”). Introduce yourself in case the reader does not know you, and don’t use jargon unless you spell it out. Save the ever-increasingly popular emojis for social media and personal messages.

7. Review with fresh eyes
Unless your email is short and sweet, let it simmer for at least an hour if you have time, then spend an equal amount of time editing. You’ll be amazed what “fresh eyes” will do to tighten and clarify your message. Waiting also helps you cool off if you write the message in the heat of the moment. You’ll also discover those embarrassing changes caused by “auto-correct.”

8. Ask someone else to proofread
Ever notice that when someone else reads your writing, they spot mistakes? That’s because you can’t find your own typos. In fact, perfectionist editors will insist on two proofreaders because each will find something different. You’re probably shaking your head. “Two proofreaders, really?” Try this instead: Temporarily change the font and the type-size of your email — like something in 18 point — then read it aloud. Also, be sure that your proofreaders understand the difference between proofing for typos and proofing for style. Changing happy to glad is not what you are asking.

9. Replying to emails
Readers view email as “quick information” so if you don’t respond within 24 hours they feel disrespected. If you can’t answer right away, send a brief reply noting that you will respond when you’ll have more information. Getting the needed detail is important to you, which shows you respect them.

When you reply to an email, remember to change the subject line to personalize it. You’ll be sending something like “I’d love to attend your June 15 meeting” instead of “Re: announcing our next meeting.” Instant personal touch.

10. Your emails are not private
As a public official, even your informal messages can be requested by the public or subpoenaed by courts. Just pretend that your email could be “read on the 6 o’clock news” or published in the local newspaper. Never gossip or complain – or, if you must, do it in conversation rather than email.

Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former public relations director for the Oregon School Boards Association
The summer break is a great time to relax and recharge. Everyone should have some summer fun balanced with activities that promote school success. The long break from school shouldn’t mean a break from learning.

**Summer achievement gap**
The National Summer Learning Association advocates continuing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills. Research on the association’s website identifies gaps in academic achievement after summer break. It has identified learning problem when students do not participate in summer enrichment programs or learning activities:

All young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer. Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer.

Most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains.

More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college.

Children lose more than academic knowledge over the summer. Most children – particularly children at high risk of obesity – gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school during summer break.

Parents consistently cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do.

*www.summerlearning.org/?page=know_the_facts*

**Smart summer**
Reading is one of the best ways to combat summer learning loss. Regular trips to the library are helpful ways to motivate students to read and ensure a steady supply of good books. Many libraries also have summer reading programs that offer special activities and incentives.

Search the web for other ideas. For example, see 13 Ways to Sneak Learning into Summer Fun on the Camp PBS Parents site. (*www.pbs.org/parents/summer/13-ways-to-sneak-learning-into-summer-fun/*).
Try simple science experiments.
Create a family newsletter
Find a pen pal.
Make up silly stories.
Record your own audiobooks.
Create your own books series.
Experiment with different art media.
Play restaurant.
Use word magnets to make sentences.
Do laundry together.
Study a foreign language together.
Make a reading scrapbook.
Do jigsaw puzzles together.

Active summer
Just because the weather is warm doesn’t mean that kids abandon video games for tree climbing. Research shows that children gain weight three times faster during summer months, gaining as much weight as they do in an entire school year. http://bit.ly/lzkGUUUW

Help keep children healthy by maintaining a mealtime routine rather than allowing all-day snacking. Ensure that kids get daily physical activity. Summer camps and programs can keep kids moving. If that isn’t possible, trips to the park, walking the dog or playing outside with friends will also help.

Safe summer
Minimize risk during the summer by taking safety precautions to reduce injuries. Require helmets for bikes, skateboards and scooters. Accidental falls are the number one cause of childhood injury. Helmets can reduce head injury by 85 percent.

Prevent heat stress and dehydration. Send your child with a water bottle for activities on hot days. Hydrate before athletic activities. Health experts recommend two to three cups of water two hours before a game and water breaks every 20 minutes during play.

Get children swimming lessons and supervise around water. Drowning is the second leading cause of childhood deaths between ages 1 and 14. Teach them to always swim with a buddy and be sure adults are nearby when kids are in the water.

Slather with sunscreen. Sunburns are not just painful; they are dangerous. Children should always be protected with sunscreen that is 30 SPF or higher. Reapply every two hours and more often if swimming or physically active. Add extra protection with wide-brimmed sun hats and sunglasses. Minimize exposure during the sun’s peak from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Beware of bugs. Kids shouldn’t be afraid of bugs, but they should be protected from bugs that pose health risks. Watch for ticks, which could carry Lyme disease, by inspecting your child after a day in the woods. Protect against mosquitoes, which may carry West Nile or other viruses, by spraying with repellent.
http://wb.md/1SJRvW8