The Ultimate Guide for
Twitter

Learn how to improve communication using Twitter for your school

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The Ultimate Guide for Twitter for Schools

Table of contents:

Introduction

You've decided that your school or district needs to start 'Tweeting' but not entirely sure where to start. Your students and younger teachers are seasoned practitioners of Twitter. Parents are starting to get on board too.

As the number of younger teachers entering the school workforce grows, and the number of adults who use Twitter starts to rise commensurate with parents of school-age children, Twitter use will continue to spiral upwards. Edtech lover Jeff Dunn (http://bit.ly/1J7biXV) cites that 26% of teachers are using Twitter and 16% of adults use it.

More and more **people depend on Twitter t**o get and share all kinds of information. They use it to follow celebrities, pop culture, media, sports figures – and each other. **It's about time they start following you.** Your school. Your teams. Your school leaders.

Businesses, non-profits, organizations and causes of all kinds are embracing Twitter to promote, build and engage. A culture of sharing has clearly emerged from the the widespread use of social media – Twitter foremost among them. Who'd have guessed words like hashtag and trending would be part of our daily vocabulary?

Your school may already be sharing on social media, but navigating the Twittersphere – learning how, what and when to share on this very popular channel – requires staying up with the technology and best practices.

The *Ultimate Guide for Twitter for Schools* is designed to help the school communications professional not only manage his or her school's Twitter, but begin maximizing this pervasive medium to **enhance engagement with students, staff, media, parents and the entire school community**.

For the Twitter newbie, this guide will help you get your school's Twitter program off the ground. We'll walk you through setting up your account, creating your Tweets, and how and when to post them. We'll also show you a formula for coming up with content to give you some ideas about what to Tweet. For the more advanced user, the best practices and tools covered in the this guide are sure to help you get more out of using Twitter.

So get going. Start Tweeting and begin building your school's following to help generate support, start sharing ideas and project a great image for your school.

About the Author

Co-founder of Campus Suite, Steve's on a mission of helping schools and colleges stay current with web technology and communications. His tech savvy and passion for design fuel his desire to help educators understand and seize the power of web communications.

Getting started

Setting up your Twitter account

Your first step to getting Twitter rolling at your school or district is to create a mission statement that lays out what it is you're trying to accomplish. It is important to **get buy-in** from everyone from the school leadership – namely the superintendent, school board and principals – to make Twitter support all your communications.

All the key stakeholders in your school communications need a clear idea of how **Twitter fits into your larger communications strategy**, including other social media, websites and non-digital tactics.

Build a team.

Next, put together a small team of people who can help you **manage the process and help promote Twitter** at your school. Having others involved in finding and creating social media content is a good start to the user-generated content network that you will be building as your social media program gets rolling. A team approach also helps share the burden of generating and managing your Twitter content.

Your team will serve as champions for not only Twitter, but for social media and web communications in general. **Surround yourself with social media supporters**:

- **Teachers, other staff.** Reach out to some social media-savvy colleagues.
- **Student helpers**. Your students are the ones most familiar with using Twitter and may turn into a valuable resource for your own development.
- **College intern.** Social media jobs are among the hottest jobs available, so check with a local college to find a student or recent graduate looking to gain some valuable experience.

How you structure the Twitter process at your school is up to you and the resources you have, obviously, but don't try to do too much too soon. **Start small, and get some early successes** (retweets and followers!) Don't be overwhelmed.
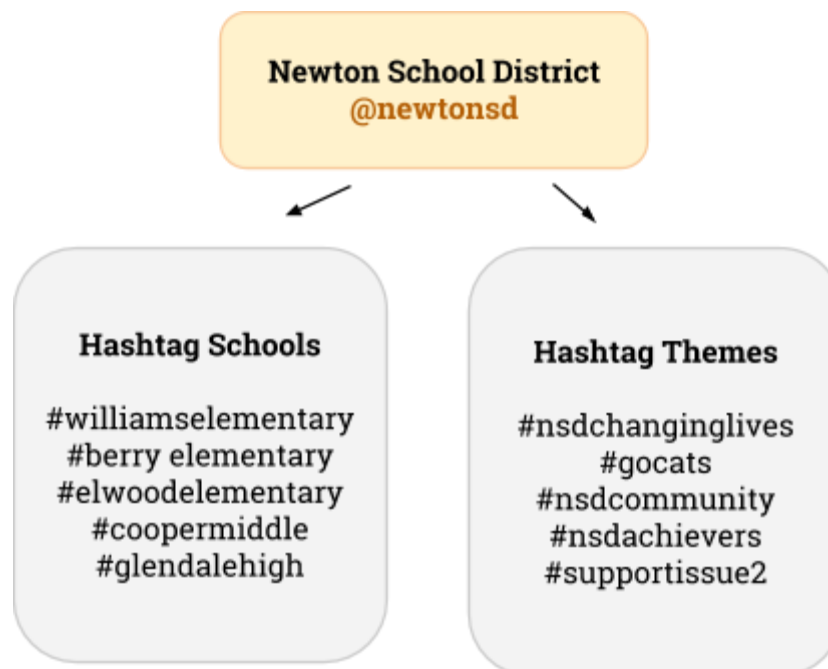
Twitter Account Set Up

After determining who's going to be Tweeting, you need to **set up your Twitter account**, or in some districts, multiple accounts.

In many cases we realize the task of managing Twitter will be driven by the communications lead in your district. So start with a district-level account. Typically, schools don't 'dive in' with lots of accounts, but even if you're looking to **simply start with one Twitter account**, give some thought as to how you want to establish the framework for multiple official school accounts when you start fully realizing the power of Twitter.
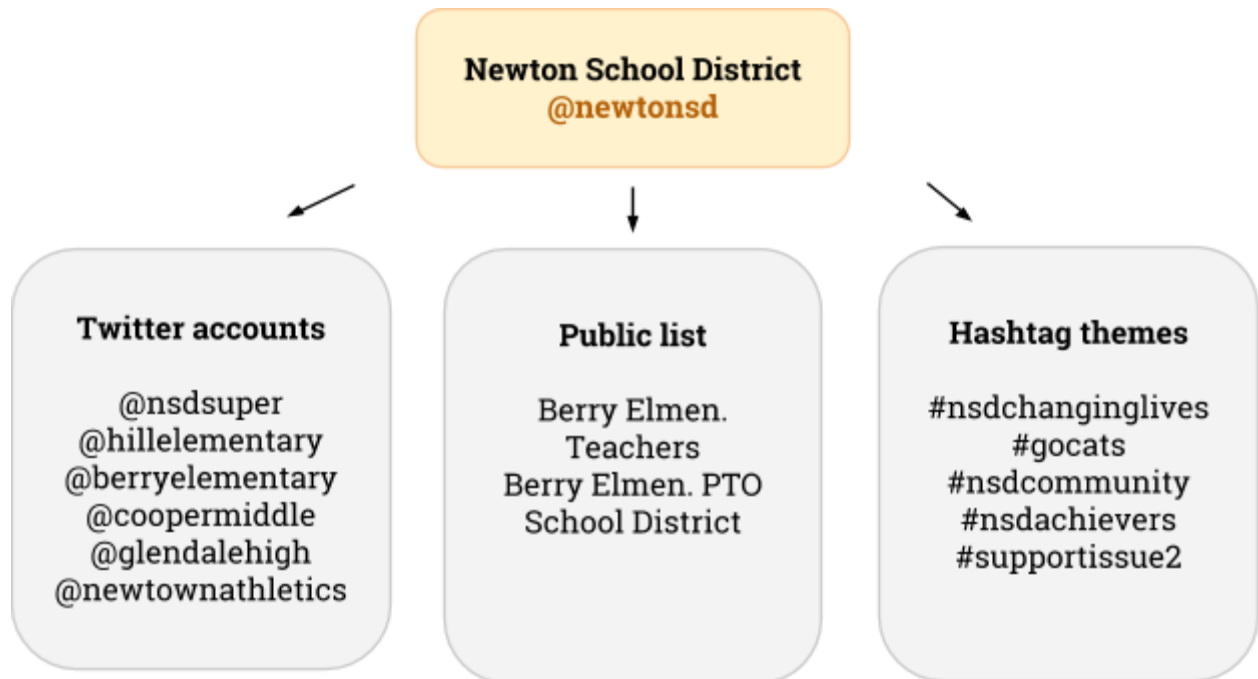
Basic set-up

Rather than setting up multiple accounts for one district or school, you can opt to use hashtags to denote the distinct accounts.

Newton School District
@newtonsd

Hashtag Schools

#williamselementary
#berry elementary
#elwoodelementary
#coopermiddle
#glendalehigh

Hashtag Themes

#nsdchanginglives
#gocats
#nsdcommunity
#nsdachievers
#supportissue2

Advanced set-up

If your Twitter and social media development is to the point where you want to establish multiple accounts, then give some thought as how to best organize it. Certain departments and people could each have dedicated accounts.

Newton School District
@newtonsd

Twitter accounts

@nsdsuper
@hillelementary
@berryelementary
@coopermiddle
@glendalehigh
@newtownathletics

Public list

Berry Elmen.
Teachers
Berry Elmen. PTO
School District

Hashtag themes

#nsdchanginglives
#gocats
#nsdcommunity
#nsdachievers
#supportissue2

It's up to you how to set up your district's or school's accounts. You can do it by **district, school**, or even by **department** (e.g., athletic teams, drama club, cheer squad, etc.).

One key best practice you'd want to put in place is having your **superintendents and/or principals** have their own account. This is a great way to both personalize the school experience for your followers and **reinforce thought leadership** from, well, the schools' leaders.

Optimizing your profile

After determining how many accounts, who has privileges and access to those accounts, you want to be sure to optimize your account profile. Optimizing means making the most of the information you provide in the profile, which includes some basic elements such as images and descriptive biography information. Size of images, links and length of copy come into play here.

Header photo. Size: 1500 x 500 pixels
The header is the very top image displayed on your Twitter screen. It's a key visual that should be carefully selected and represent an important aspect or facet of your school. The header works closely with the profile picture to establish an overall recognizable image, projecting your school (or district, department, or personal) brand. Headers can be changed at anytime. Authentic images that capture your school's spirit are cool to use.

Profile photo/logo. Size: 400 x 400 pixels
Also known as the the avatar, your account's profile picture is the square image that is inset below the header image. Many schools use a school logo here, a recognizable mark such as a mascot or brand mark.

Bio. 160-character limit
Be clear and direct here. Less is more. Make it certain who 'owns' the account, whether it's the official district, school or other account. (e.g., The official Twitter home of the Mapledale H.S. football team. Sarah Jones is the superintendent of Washington County School District.)

Link. Use a link shortener (http://bit.ly/ICCSmb) to save on valuable 140-character limit. Include a link to your school website. Remember, you want to make it easy for your followers to find more content, so be sure to have a nice tight link that's evident to where it's taking whoever clicks it.

Background. In addition to your header and avatar images, customize the background with a design element that will serve as 'wallpaper' behind your core profile content.

Creating your Tweets

There is a variety subject matter to share, different types of content to share, and several ways to format your Tweets.
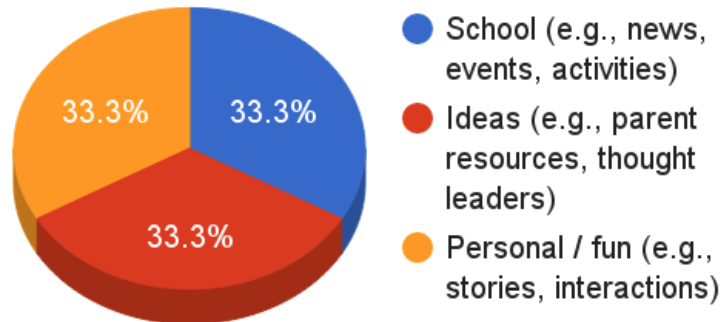
Subject matter

There's a variety of kinds of Tweets you can use to promote your school. A Tweet can be news, events, ideas and human interest tidbits that are either directly about your school, or you'd like to associate somehow with your school. Some schools get hung up on just focusing on news and events. That represents only a portion of the kind of info you can share.

While it's important to share news and events about your school, it's not all about you. It's about sharing, engaging, and establishing your school as a resource to students, staff, parents and the community. Think of your school as the educational hub for your community and create Tweets that help build a network of links to pertinent people, organizations and resources.

Tweets can drive action. such as finding new donors, volunteers, or promoting attendance at an event.

Use 'Rule of Thirds' for content variety

The content you should be pushing out through Twitter can be lumped into three broad categories. **School news and events** such as school delays, awards, scores; **ideas** (think cool facts and thought-provoking discussion) gleaned from various resources and thought leaders; and **human interest stories** and imagery for that personal, warm-and-fuzzy content.

School (e.g., news, events, activities)

Ideas (e.g., parent resources, thought leaders)

Personal / fun (e.g., stories, interactions)

ReTweeting

There are two things to keep in mind when retweeting, which is forwarding or re-posting somebody else's Tweet: first, **personalize the retweet** by telling the reader why this particular retweet relates to your school. In other words, have a reason for the retweet. Randomly retweeting with no purpose or no connection back to your school shows that you yourself are not relating the content to your school, and it clutters up everyone's feeds.

Also, always **give credit where credit is due**. For that matter, this applies to any content you might be sharing. By attributing your source through a link or words, you are not only being forthright on where you obtained your information, but are **creating some reciprocal following opportunities** back to the source. This give-and-take forms the very basis of the social media 'networking' you're trying to create.

Curating content

Curating content is the process of finding information on the web, sorting through it and organizing it around a specific theme or topic. It's important to **relate this content somehow to your school**, and again, always be sure to fully attribute the content for, besides being forthright on your sources, attributing creates 'following' opportunities.

Types of content to share

Use a good 'mix' of content types in your Tweets so you're not sharing the same kind of content with every Tweet.

- **Links** – Links are the quickest and most efficient to share content from other sources. Be sure to look into link shortener apps (e.g., Bitly, TinyURL) that change sometimes lengthy links into compact ones to save space in your posts.

- **Pics and videos**– The power of images (http://bit.ly/KnnVq2) is undeniable in social media. Colorful, creative pictures quickly capture attention, support the message you're sending, and can even help with SEO performance. (Image files are crawled by search engines too.)

- **Blog articles** – Blogs provide great repositories for valuable search-optimized content that can be directly or indirectly attributed to your school. If your school doesn't have one of its own, create one. A blog is an ideal way for your superintendent, principal or other school leaders to share thought leadership.

Types of Tweets

As you likely gathered by now: all Tweets are not created equal. As you and your colleagues get more familiar with the medium, you'll be able to identify and create for yourself the different kinds of Tweets that accomplish specific goals. Regardless of the type of Tweet you are creating, always be as concise as possible, and don't try to be too cute or clever.

We like how social media expert Diana Urban (http://bit.ly/1aAh7l2), author of how-to books on Twitter, lays out the various Tweet types, all of which you can use.

1) Basic Shared Content

Tweeting 101. Always include a relevant hashtag and author's Twitter handle to credit your information source. It not only gives props to the content creator, but who knows, they might reciprocate and share some of your content with their followers.

> Our school has an Instagram account now. Check out http://bit.ly/1ILchjM 'How to Use Instagram for Schools' #edapp by @newtonsd

2) ReTweet With Comments

Twitter just recently added a way to streamline reTweeting. We recommend always adding at least some comment to your retweets to personalize them. Click the retweet icon at the bottom of the tweet, add a comment in the box. Your comment should go at the start of the retweet. You don't have to worry about the 140-character restricting your comment either. The original Tweet is embedded and doesn't eat into your comment character count.

> Hmmm. Wondering if our school needs a mobile app "Is it Time for a School Mobile App?" http://bit.ly/1ILchjM #edtech by @newtonsd

3) Problem-Solution

State a common problem and point the reader to a possible solution. Share the answer or some tips from an expert on the topic and toss in your school's perspective. Show them you can help by sharing other's solutions. Search for and add a relevant hashtag.

> Can't get your kid away from the video games?
> http://url.com #madduxparents

4) Facts and stats

Our society loves quick facts and interesting stats. They can be about your school, an educational topic, anything that might spark interest. Give readers a teaser then link them to an article, image, or video that elaborates on the subject.

> Over 98% of @newtonhs students are above state average in reading http://url.com #supportissue2

5) Support or Endorsement

Showing a little love for someone else's cause or ideas can add that personal touch that people gravitate to in social media. Instead of Tweeting a basic shared content Tweet, add your endorsement and even why you enjoyed the content. Be careful about bashing other's ideas. Dangerous. Keep it positive.

> We love our volunteer fire department! http://url.com
> @owenstownfd #owenstownfd

6) Question

What better way to get the dialogue going than to ask a question. You can do this routinely to get a better handle on your followers likes, dislikes, opinions, etc.

> How much time do you spend with your child reviewing homework? http://url.com #educhat #parentengagement

7) Advice or tips

Giving practical advice is a great way to mix up the kinds of Tweets you're creating. Not all Tweets are meant to drive traffic to certain other content. Often reTweeted, advice posts are good for building credibility and establishing leadership.

> See http://url.com for a list of mobile apps that can block your teen texting behind the wheel

8) Quotes

Who doesn't like a good quote? Inspirational, humorous, historical – a quote can summarize and illustrate some key message you're trying to get across to your followers. Be on the lookout for great quotes, always attribute them, and remember they can come from anywhere (see from the mouths of babes). From Bartlett's Quotations, to your own staff, to some of your primary students, who knows where that next inspirational quote will originate?

> "Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower."– Steve Jobs #nsdpride #edtech

Cool Tweet ideas

Coming up with good content might seem difficult at first, but if you keep in mind the variety of kinds of content you can use, you'll find the sky's the limit. Use the content 'Rule of Thirds' (see above) to evenly distribute the kinds of content you're posting.

Listed below are some specific Tweet ideas you can use.

Tweet this:

1. School picture of the day

2. A 'top 10' list

3. Changes in the daily schedule

4. Photos of athletic teams practicing

5. Daily lunch menu (night before and early morning)

6. Sports scores and results

7. Photos and bios of new teachers

8. School cancellations and any emergency notification

9. Retweet any local media that mentions your school

10. Behind-the-scenes of dress rehearsal for a school play

11. Job openings in your district

12. Upcoming events reminders

13. Questions-of-the-Day for from staff or teachers (for extra-credit)

14. New additions to your library

15. Holidays and years-of-service anniversaries

Adding visuals to your Tweets

If you want to get people to pay attention to your Tweets, be certain you're making the most of using pictures. Including images with your Tweets significantly **improves the click rate**. It's important to not only include them, but make sure your **photos are sized and formatted correctly**. Let's face it, images rule, so increase the chances your messages will be read and shared by properly formatting your photos.

How to easily add a photo
One of the beauties of using photos in Twitter is how easy it is to post a picture. This feature is great for capturing events in near-real time and adding it to your feed. All you need to do is tap the camera icon to take a new picture, or choose the photo icon to select an existing one, and your image is ready to be Tweeted. All you need to do is personalize it with a caption, add a link and a hashtag, and it's ready to post.

Tweeting multiple images at once
Share your images in a collage or storyboard fashion using the multiple photo feature, which enables you to depict up to four photos at once.

Tag whenever possible
You can improve the probability of your Tweet being shared by 'tagging' people in the photos. You'll get an automatic prompt asking who's in the photo, and if they have a Twitter account, their name will appear, then select it.

In-stream photo preview
In-stream images make your Tweets stand out even more by showing your photos right in your users feeds without having to click. The size ratio of the in-stream photo is 2-to-1 (width-to-height).

Building your following

The overall goal of all this Tweeting, retweeting and sharing of content is to build your school's following. A good rule of thumb to get followers is to follow others. **Identify key community organizations, media, local officials, and immediately begin to follow them**. This typically triggers a reciprocal gesture of them following you, and before you know it your followers will slowly begin increasing.

The keys to building your following are doing all you can to make sure you're reaching the right people and groups. By **using lists and hashtags**, you can target your posts. And with an organized schedule of frequent Tweets, you can get your messages in front of your followers on an ongoing basis.

Creating lists

A list enables you to organize Twitter users so you can manage how you look at Tweets. This can be very valuable to you, for you can segment different groups then begin networking and using them to ultimately extend your reach. You can also subscribe to lists others have created (e.g., follow your local news media's Twitter feeds), which can accelerate building your following.

Note, starting or subscribing to a list enables you to see Tweets from others; it's not a way to send out Tweets. You have to 'earn' your followers by sharing good content.

Here are some **list suggestions** your school can create or subscribe to:

- Alumni
- Faculty and staff
- Other teachers, schools, schools athletic conference
- Community leaders (politicians, faith-based organizations)
- Create a PLN (Personal Learning Network) by reaching out to colleagues at other schools through Twitter.
- Using Hashtags

Leveraging hashtags

Hashtags are at the heart of building your following. Understanding how to use them can greatly enhance both sharing and discovering great content.

As we learned in the setting up accounts section above hashtags are one way to organize your users. They're also a **powerful way to find, organize, and share your content**. Hashtags help your school and messages get seen by more people/ Buffersocial cites a statistic that Tweets with hashtags get 2x the amount of engagement. Find and create ones that relate to your school.

Place a hashtag before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) to help sort your Tweet content into categories. This helps your Tweet show up more readily when someone goes to search that topic. Hashtags are clickable and searchable. When you click on a hashtagged word, you are directed to all the other messages on Twitter so tagged.

#EastDanceTeam
#vote4WashCoSchoollevy
#SpartanBoosters

Hashtags can also be used across other social media channels: specifically, Facebook, Instagram and Google+.

Hashtag best practices
- Create uniform hashtag strategy around 'content hubs'.
- Don't overuse them. Use no more than two hashtags per Tweet.
- Place links before the halfway point (in characters) of tweets to get higher clickthrough rates.
- Use Twitter analytics to measure which hashtags are working best for you.

There's a shared document compiled by contributing educators that lists the popular Twitter education hashtags that you can use to begin boosting your engagement. Find and stick with the ones that work best for you.

Scheduling and frequency

As with any other media – television ads, radio spots, billboards, print ads and online banner ads – **strategic placement and frequency are key** to getting your messages heard and acted upon. Your school must be consistent in these areas to build your following and improve engagement.

Schools should be **posting several times daily** at certain times to get the most reach.

Among the fastest-moving of all social media, Twitter requires a disciplined approach to keeping a consistent stream of Tweets flowing. Considering that the **lifespan of most Twitter content is so short** – just a few minutes – it's all that more important your school post often and at the right times. (By contrast, on Facebook, most engagement occurs within a couple of hours.)

Consider too that by repeating your Tweets several times on a prescribed schedule, you are also extending your content. This eliminates the need to create a constant stream of fresh, almost-real-time content, such as the short-lived content required by a media outlet.

While certain content has a long shelf life – evergreen even – be careful not to repost dated Tweets past their 'expiration' date (e.g., an event whose date and time has passed.)

Tweet often.

Daily Frequency

Post per day	**3-5**	**2**	**2**	**1**

Get great mileage out of your Tweets.

Frequency per tweet

	Twitter	Facebook	Google+	LinkedIn
On Publish	✅	✅	✅	✅
2 hours Later	✅			
Next Day	✅			
Next Week	✅	✅	✅	✅
Next Month	✅		✅	
2 Months	✅		✅	

Managing your Twitter

Interacting and responding

The true beauty of social media is that interaction that occurs when someone responds to your posts either directly or indirectly. It can be a retweet, someone favoriting a Tweet, or even a direct message.

It's important you first **monitor your Tweets**, then **be prepared to respond** in a timely manner. Quick engagement and response is necessary to project a professional image.

It can be a challenge, however, to keep up with it all. The lack of manpower and resources requires you tap all the tools available to help you manage your Twitter activity.

Tools to streamline

Tools to help you manage the Twitter activity for your school.

Finding content
Select the topics and sources you want and have content fed to you in one handy location.

- **Feedly:** www.feedly.com
- **Google Alert:** www.google.com/alerts

Scheduling
Use these to eliminate having to manually feeding each and every Tweet.

- **Hootsuite:** www.hootsuite.com
- **Buffer:** www.buffer.com

Responding and interacting
- **Mention:** www.mention.com

Working with photos
- **Pixlr:** www.pixlr.com