



WINTER 2011

IN THIS BRIEF...

You will learn about strategies that utilize
technology and social media tools to
recruit and retain personnel.



Highlighting PIC Work...

The PIC is supporting local Early Intervention (EI) programs in their setting up of Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as developing a private online community for EI personnel. The Personnel Improvement Center's (PIC's) own Facebook page has more than 1,500 members. On Facebook, the PIC posts YouTube videos and articles relevant to the recruitment of special education, early intervention and related services personnel; invites visitors to sign up for the monthly PIC newsletter; encourages discussion on topics such as "What draws people to the field of special education?" and "What are the reasons for personnel shortages?"; links to related Facebook pages (e.g., the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals [NRCPP] and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE]) and polls visitors on what they would like to see more of on the PIC Facebook page.

About Us...

We are the National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities (Personnel Improvement Center), a federally funded technical assistance and dissemination project, created on October 1, 2008 and maintained through a cooperative agreement, H325C080001, between the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the US Department of Education.

USING NEW SOCIAL MEDIA TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN QUALIFIED SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL

by *Eve Müller, Ph.D.*

As communication technologies continue to evolve at an ever-expanding rate, some states and localities are turning to new social media tools as a means of recruiting and retaining qualified education personnel. Based on examples from around the country drawn from early intervention (EI) programs, state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs) and national organizations and centers, including the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC), this practice brief provides suggestions for using Facebook, Twitter, blogs and/or private online communities to improve recruitment and retention of special education personnel, including related service providers and EI personnel.

FACEBOOK

Facebook (www.facebook.com/) is a social networking website with more than 500 million users. In addition to allowing individual Facebook users to create personalized pages, Facebook allows groups and organizations to create their own pages. Individual Facebook users who are interested in a particular topic or issue can visit relevant group or organization pages, or even "join" the page if they wish to receive updates from favorite groups or organizations whenever new "posts" (e.g., comments, photos, related links) are added to the page.

Several national- and state-level education and/or related service provider organizations have created Facebook pages. Examples include:

- The PIC (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Personnel-Improvement-Center-for-Special-Education-and-Related-Personnel/92363577551?ref=search>);
- Indiana Department of Education (<http://www.facebook.com/ineducation?ref=search>);
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) (<http://www.facebook.com/ineducation?ref=search#!/asha.org?ref=ts>);
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) (<http://www.facebook.com/nichcy?ref=search>);
- Secretary Arne Duncan, U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.facebook.com/SecretaryArneDuncan?ref=sgm>); and
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/NASDSE-The-National-Association-for-State-Directors-of-Special-Education/132424103463660?ref=search>).

Why Use Facebook to Recruit and Retain?

An organizational Facebook account provides a simple, cost-effective way of reaching out to potential job applicants and keeping in touch with existing personnel. Facebook allows the posting of testimonials from veteran special education teachers, related service providers and/or EI personnel, video clips of teachers in action, links to related articles and announcements of upcoming training opportunities. It's also a great place to post



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job vacancies. The PIC is working with several local EI programs in Texas to set up Facebook pages as a means of promoting their communities and programs as appealing places to live and work. For example:

- Center for Healthcare Services – Early Childhood Intervention (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/profile.php?id=100000998110124&ref=search>).

Creating and Using an Organization-Based Facebook Page

Administering a Facebook Account. It is important to identify one or more administrators for an organizational Facebook page, all of whom must have individual Facebook accounts. Administrators can be added or removed with the click of a button. Facebook allows organizations to choose whether only *administrators* can post on the organization's page or whether the page will be interactive and also permit *visitors* to post comments and queries on the page. For example, the Center for Healthcare Services in San Antonio, TX opted to allow only administrative posts, whereas the Early Childhood Intervention of Lakes Regional Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center in Hunt County, TX hopes to make its Facebook page interactive. In order to ensure the quality and appropriateness of postings, the PIC, for example, established a protocol for editing/reviewing of administrator postings before they are posted to the PIC's Facebook page.

Tracking and Reporting. Facebook keeps track of how many visits a page receives, numbers of unique page visitors and numbers of "members" (i.e., unique visitors who joined the page). For example, the PIC requests that weekly email reports of Facebook traffic on its page be sent to the page's administrator.

Using Facebook Applications. In addition to posting comments, photos and related links to a Facebook page, page administrators can use the following applications to enhance the page's recruitment capacity:

- *Video Feed* – enabling the posting of recruitment videos, including YouTube video clips of teachers in action or brief testimonials from special education personnel serving a specific EI program or district.
- *Surveys* – Allowing an organizations to find out more about the visitors/members of its Facebook page, including their educational background, where they live, what drew them to the page and whether they are seeking employment or additional information;
- *Calendar* – Highlighting upcoming events in a particular community, both special education-related and otherwise.

- *Discussion Threads* – Engaging visitors in interactive discussions on topics relevant to the field.
- *Notes* – Providing a place for testimonials from veteran education personnel regarding the benefits of working in a particular EI program or school district.
- *Favorite Pages* – Enabling links to other related Facebook pages, which can increase a page's networking potential.

How Others Are Using Facebook

With support from the PIC, local EI programs in Texas are planning the following uses of Facebook to improve recruitment:

- using organizational logos as their Facebook "photos" and posting their organizations' mission statements;
- posting links to newspaper articles featuring success stories in special education and EI;
- including profiles of one or more "Staff of the Year;"
- generating conversations on EI and special education-related topics;
- linking directly to their organizations' employment opportunity sites;
- advertising their Facebook pages in order to increase the number of visitors (e.g., posting a link on their organizations' websites or advertising on Facebook for a small fee);
- reminding visitors to sign-up for their email newsletters; and
- including events calendars (e.g., rural areas might wish to highlight the range of activities available within the community at large).

TWITTER

Twitter (<http://twitter.com/>) is a social networking service with more than 100 million users. Twitter allows users to send and read other users' messages known as "tweets." Tweets are brief public posts of up to 140 characters. As with Facebook, groups and organizations can send messages via Twitter and users can subscribe to a particular group or organization's tweets. This is called "following" and subscribers are called "followers." Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) or smartphones and other compatible external applications. Many organizations link their Twitter accounts with their Facebook accounts, enabling Twitter posts to appear on their Facebook pages. Examples of organizations with Twitter accounts include:



- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (<http://twitter.com/cecmembership>);
- NICHCY (<http://twitter.com/DrNICHCY>);
- Reading Rockets (<http://twitter.com/readingrockets>); and
- National Center on Response to Intervention (<http://twitter.com/RTIcenter>)

Why Use Twitter to Recruit and Retain?

A Twitter account provides a cheap and easy way for organizations to advertise available jobs and communicate instantly with staff. The PIC is working with some of the same EI programs in Texas to set up and use Twitter accounts for keeping in touch with prospective as well as veteran employees.

Creating and Using an Organization-Based Twitter Account

Administering a Twitter Account. When opening a Twitter account, it is necessary to create a branded company profile of no more than 160 characters describing what the organization does. This profile is then used by Twitter members to search by relevance for a specific topic or issue, such as “special education jobs.” As with Facebook, a key person needs to be assigned responsibility for administering the account (i.e., composing and/or automating tweets).

Posting Jobs Using Twitter. Tweets can be sent out whenever a job becomes available. Because Tweets are limited in length, tweets can also be used to direct job seekers to a more detailed job posting on Facebook. Although tweets are public, Twitter also allows direct messaging, which is private. Direct messaging allows an organization’s Twitter administrator to preserve confidentiality while responding to individual job queries.

Communicating with Staff Using Twitter. Twitter can also be used as a means of improving communication among existing staff. For example, Twitter allows San Antonio, Texas’ local EI director to communicate with EI program staff by sending meeting reminders, notifications of cancelled meetings and announcements about professional development opportunities. Early Childhood Intervention of Lakes Regional Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center in Hunt County, TX uses Twitter to announce upcoming trainings and will soon post videos of therapists interacting with infants using Screenr (software enabling the recording of ready-to-tweet screencasts and located at <http://screenr.com/>).

For more information on how EI programs or school districts can use Twitter, see “Twitter 101: A Special Guide for Businesses” at <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/>.

BLOGS AND PRIVATE ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Blogs and private online communities are both places that can be used to have online discussions regarding specific topics. A blog (or “web log”) is a type of website or part of a website that can be devoted to a particular subject such as “issues in special education.” Blogs are usually made up of regular entries displayed in reverse-chronological order. Most blogs are interactive and allow visitors to post comments (which distinguishes them from traditional websites). Numerous blogging services are available for no charge including:

- Wordpress (www.Wordpress.com);
- Blogger (www.blogger.com); and
- Blogtext (<http://blogtext.org/>).

Private online communities are similar to blogs but are password protected to ensure the privacy of those participating and allow multiple threaded discussions on specific topics. Unlike blogs, comments are usually posted in chronological order, enabling users to follow the discussion thread more easily. Also, although online communities are usually administered by one or more individuals, any member of the online community can initiate a new discussion thread. Examples of websites hosting private online communities at no cost include Grouply (<http://www.grouply.com/>) and Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>).

Examples of education-related organizations using blogs or private online communities include:

- CEC’s blog for new teachers (<http://cecblog.typepad.com/>); and
- the IDEA Partnership at NASDSE’s SharedWork web site that includes online communities of practice on more than a dozen topics (<http://sharedwork.org/>).

The PIC has also supported the Center for Healthcare Services in Texas to set up the following EI-themed blog:

- The Center for Healthcare Services Early Childhood Intervention (<http://chcs-eci.blogspot.com/>).

Why Use Blogs and Private Online Communities to Promote Retention?

Blogs and private online communities are an innovative way of providing virtual support services to staff, as well as enabling staff to share experiences with one another from a distance. For example, in an effort to address retention issues among EI personnel, the PIC has created a private online community for local Texas EI programs using the Grouply application. Facilitated by expert mentors in the field of EI, the password-protected site is a pilot for the beginnings of a national community of practice for EI personnel.

Continued on next page...

Creating and Using Blogs and Private Online Communities

Blogs. Setting up a blogging site is quick and easy. Most blogging sites provide ready-made templates and can be branded with an organizational logo. Available features include discussion forums where the administrator can post commentary, photos or video clips at the top of the page and visitors can post questions and responses below. Most blogging sites also allow administrators to archive older blog entries.

Private Online Communities. Although available features vary from one private online community to another, all provide discussion forums. Features available as part of the PIC-sponsored EI community include an event calendar, chat and instant messaging (IM) capabilities, posting of videos and files and tracking of member activity (e.g., total number of member visits or posts). Sites such as Grouphy and Yahoo Groups also allow customized privacy settings so that online communities can control whether discussions are public or private.



Personnel Improvement Center

National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities

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This practice brief is part of a series intended to provide examples of how states and localities throughout the nation are employing recruitment and retention strategies to address personnel shortages in the area of special education, early intervention and related services. The series was produced by the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) and highlights recruitment and retention efforts within states and localities supported by the PIC. There are no copyright restrictions on these practice briefs, but the PIC requests that proper citation be used.

