


World Class Customer Service for Public Schools

A District Customer Service Planning Guide

Customer service and public schools – these two ideas may not initially appear in a school or district planning document, but they should. At the heart of improving student achievement and school culture is the need to intentionally and systematically focus on relationship development. Often obscured by other district initiatives and priorities, the research that supports the need and importance of making connections and developing represents the very essence of the teaching and learning process. Robert Marzano (2007) probably captures this idea best when he posits the question, “What will we do to develop and maintain effective relationships with students?”

Customer service encompasses all aspects of schooling. The following pages offer an overview of available customer service trainings which can be adapted to meet the needs of individual districts. The trainings are fast-paced, practical and based on customer service and relationship practices implemented by the best companies, schools and districts across the United States.

Please visit the website: www.whocares-pr.com



Who Cares?

Improving Public Schools Through Relationships and Customer Service

Kelly E. Middleton & Elizabeth A. Pettit

Who Cares? provides a plethora of much needed ideas and insights for teachers, administrators, and anyone interested in the future of public education. The book is packed with ideas that, when implemented, will benefit us all, but especially and most importantly, students. I recommend it.

—Mark Sanborn, speaker and author of *The Fred Factor* and *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader*

Who Cares? is a call to arms for all proponents of public schools: administrators, teachers, support staff, and unions. It encourages schools to focus on the most important “R” of all—relationships. Many advocate the importance of relationships in a school, but few articulate how to systematically address it. *Who Cares?* offers hope with real world, customer service examples and practices that have been implemented in one public school district in the battle to win back students. Readers can expect to find a variety of tools and resources including:

- Customer service ideas for all staff members (secretaries, coaches, bus drivers, custodians, cooks)
- Home visits best practice checklist (K-12)
- 29 ways for teachers to WOW parents and administrators
- 10 of the best customer service practices borrowed from the business world and applied to public education

An intentional focus on customer service, relationships, and making connections will not only positively impact the culture of your school, but will also result in improved academic achievement.

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Who Cares?
Middleton & Pettit

Customer Service Belief Statements

Beliefs guide actions. There must be an intentional focus on developing and sustaining relationships in schools for all students. The following statements are not only a reflection of our beliefs related to customer service, but are also focal points that can be emphasized during professional development sessions. As you peruse the following belief statements, you can check the ones you believe would be important to reinforce when training your staff.

We believe...

students are the “first” customer and decisions should reflect this

every student should have an adult advocate who believes in them and supports them.

every parent should have a positive contact from the school before encountering a negative one

every employee needs to have a basic understanding of the competition and how it impacts our future

customer service, as any major initiative, must emanate from leadership and must resonate throughout the school or district

when relationships are first, student achievement follows

every employee must be trained in customer service

customer service must be monitored and evaluated throughout the organization

good customer service must be rewarded and bad customer service must be confronted

student voice should be a primary source of data influencing our decision as educators

trained staff members should answer the school phones

parents and students have a right to expect good customer service from each and every employee from the superintendent through the person who parks cars at school events

every student should be treated better than we expect someone to treat our own child

new students should be welcomed and acclimated to a school based on a positive, proactive plan

schools who place a high priority on customer service do not take anything for granted, including what their facilities communicate

hiring caring educators is just as important as hiring highly qualified educators

public schools victimize themselves by failing to “keep backstage items, backstage”

public schools need a customer service improvement mindset

everything revolves around relationships in public schools

the best companies and schools know how to recover effectively when a mistake is made

as schools and companies compete for limited resources, great customer service can ensure staying power.

all staff should understand they are sending a negative message when their children do not attend a public school

A Word About Training:

Training is paramount in providing effective customer service practices and transforming our schools to focus on our first customer, the student. There are some general topics that are relevant to all audiences and are not job specific. Every person is a point of contact for the school. Therefore, every staff member should be trained in customer service.

Training can be customized for each school. Each of the following descriptions can be viewed as a menu of options. Topics found throughout this document are interchangeable and adapted for each of the various job-alike groups.

The following section shares some general concepts that would be appropriate for all audiences.

General Concepts Related to Customer Service

1. **Competition Update** – (Home schools, private schools, virtual schools) Trends across the United States and implications for every public school employee
2. **Keeping Backstage Items Backstage** – How the best companies maintain an appearance of unity by avoiding the mistake of “airing their dirty laundry” in public (*Don’t kill yourself in public!*)
3. **Recovery** - How the best customer service companies recover when they make mistakes
4. **Recognition**- Monitoring and rewarding customer service within your school or system
5. **Leadership-driven** -The importance of district and building leadership buying into a customer service initiative
6. **Promoting relationships** – What the very best companies do to create a collaborative climate
7. **A District Lens** – looking at the **twelve customer service concepts** from a district perspective (What do **we** do well? Where do **we** need to improve? How does that compare among various job alike groups?)

In addition to the general concepts, schools can select training options that have more specific outcomes as they relate to specific job roles and responsibilities. The following sections outline some of these roles and possible topics.

Audience: Superintendent and School Board

(Three Hours)

1. **Public Perception** - How the best companies change public perception and control the flow of information and what that would look like in a school or district
2. **The Rewards of a Customer Service Focus – “Show Me the Data!”**
Evidence of customer service improving discipline district wide, as well as improving student achievement throughout a district
3. **Collecting Good Information** - How to set up focus and advisory groups to “troubleshoot” and to collaborate improving customer service and public relations including what the best schools and districts do
4. **Why Everyone?** - Customer service is important at every touch point
5. **Walking the Talk – Understanding the Relationship Hierarchy** – The Board and Superintendent must model good customer service if they want their employees to give good customer service

Audience: District and School Administrators

(Up to six hours)

In addition to all the topics listed for the Board and Superintendent, additional topics for administrators might include:

1. **Selling a Customer Service Focus** - It doesn't just happen. School administrators must sell the customer service initiatives to staff
2. **Praise What You Want to Raise!** - How to monitor and evaluate customer service initiatives
3. **Let's Hear from Our Customers** - How to include your students in the decision making process, as well as collecting reliable information about your practices and how that impacts school culture
4. **Getting to the Bottom Line** - How relationships will improve student achievement

Audience: Teachers

(Up to six hours)

1. ***Mirror, Mirror on the Wall***—A fast-paced and fun overview of customer Service and the 12 principles that guide the direction of the very best companies
2. ***It Looks Like, It Sounds Like*** - How to apply all 12 principles in your Classroom and how that transforms the teaching/learning process
3. ***We're Number One*** - A discussion around the question, "Who is the first customer? Role plays are used to compare beliefs and actions in schools.
4. ***Why Relationships?*** - Evidence of relationship building improving classroom management , increasing test scores, and closing the gaps
5. ***It Doesn't Have to be A Fatal Mistake*** – Even though we don't like to admit it, everyone makes mistakes, the key is how do we recover from them? Learn how the best customer service companies recover when they make mistakes and how to use those same principles as a teacher
6. ***First Impressions Matter!*** - Why you should make your first contact with a parent a positive experience and how that impacts your classroom
7. ***Why I Love My Child's Teacher*** -Out of the box ideas and suggestions that really make a difference to parents
8. ***The Students Speak*** – Based on hundreds of interviews with students, what the students say make the very best teachers and what influences their learning
9. ***Common Sense Isn't So Common*** – Schools are policy driven, often to the extent we lose sight of how it impacts students. What would happen if schools embraced the philosophy, "Common sense trumps policy"?
10. ***How Do We Rate?*** - Of the 12 customer service concepts from the business world, where do we do our best and what are our areas of greatest need? How does this compare to the results from classified staff and school administrators?
11. ***Next Steps*** – What can we commit to? What are some of the best public schools doing in the area of public relations and customer service?

Audience: School Secretaries

(Up to six hours)

1. ***Mirror, Mirror on the Wall***—A fast-paced and fun overview of customer service and the 12 principles that guide the direction of the very best companies
2. ***Did They Really Say That?*** - Listen to recorded examples of school secretaries as they interact with a “customer “ on the phone. Evaluate calls based on good or poor customer service practices
3. ***Everybody Makes a Mistake Every Now and Then*** - How to recover when you or your boss makes a mistake and enabling you to turn a negative parent into a supporter
4. ***How Do We Rate?*** - Of the 12 customer service concepts from the business world, where do we do our best and what are our areas of greatest need? How does this compare to the results from teachers and administrators?
5. ***That Extra, Special Touch*** – How to give a little extra and surprise your students and parents, winning you a fan for a lifetime
6. ***We’re in This Together*** – How to make your boss look good!
7. ***You Are Your School*** - Understand that you are vital to the school’s customer service plan as you are the first point of contact for most parents either on the phone or as they enter the door.
8. ***Learning from the Best***– Ideas will be shared about what the very best school secretaries do in the areas of customer service, including some out-of-the-box suggestions
9. ***It’s Not Personal*** –How to put yourself in the shoes of your customers and not taking comments to heart, including the importance of common sense as it relates to your job

Audience: Bus Drivers & Monitors

(Up to three hours)

1. ***Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*** –A fast-paced and fun overview of customer service and the 12 customer service principles and how they can be applied to your job & why you are so important to their success in school (first and last point of contact for students)
2. ***Everybody Makes a Mistake*** - How to recover well when you make a mistake and actually turn a negative parent into a supporter. This also keeps parents from calling your boss
3. ***How Do We Rate?*** - Of the 12 customer service concepts from the business world, where do we do our best and what are our areas of greatest need? How does this compare to the results from teachers and administrators?
4. ***That Extra, Special Touch*** – How to give a little extra and surprise your students and parents, winning you a fan for a lifetime.
5. ***Why Customer Service?*** - How customer service is guaranteed to improve student behavior and decrease discipline problems
6. ***Getting to Know Them*** - How to really get to know your riders and the importance of knowing their names including how to learn all their names the first few days of school
7. ***Learning from the Best*** – Ideas will be shared about what the very best bus drivers do in the areas of customer service, including some out-of-the-box suggestions
8. ***Control, Control, Control!*** - How to act instead of react during student and parent interactions, enabling you to avoid negative confrontations

Audience: Custodians, Cooks & Other Classified Staff
(Up to three hours)

1. ***Good and Bad Customer Service – How Do We Respond?*** – Participants will share examples of good and bad customer service examples and relate practices to schools
2. ***Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*** – A fast-paced and fun overview of customer service and the 12 customer service principles and how they can be applied to your job & why you are so important to their success in school (first and last point of contact for students)
2. ***Everybody Makes a Mistake*** - How to recover well when you make a mistake and actually turn a negative parent into a supporter. This also keeps parents from calling your boss
3. ***How Do We Rate?*** - Of the 12 customer service concepts from the business world, where do we do our best and what are our areas of greatest need? How does this compare to the results from teachers and administrators?
4. ***That Extra, Special Touch*** – How to give a little extra and surprise your students and parents, winning you a fan for a lifetime
5. ***The First Customer*** – Identify who the first customer is and give examples
6. ***Becoming a Fred*** – How to model your behavior after Fred, the postman from the book, *The Fred Factor*
7. ***Becoming a Public Relations Agent*** – How you can become a public relations agent for your school and why you should!

Audience: Coaches
(Up to three hours)

1. ***Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*** –A fast-paced and fun overview of customer service and the 12 customer service principles and how they can be applied to your job & why you are so important to their success in school (first and last point of contact for students)
2. ***Everybody Makes a Mistake*** - How to recover well when you make a mistake and actually turn a negative parent into a supporter. This also keeps parents from calling your boss
3. ***How Do We Rate?*** - Of the 12 customer service concepts from the business world, where do we do our best and what are our areas of greatest need?
4. ***That Extra, Special Touch*** – How to give a little extra increasing support for your efforts and your athletic program
5. ***The First Customer*** – Identify who the first customer is and give examples
6. ***Not Everyone Can Play*** – How to communicate a negative message to a student without embarrassing the athlete
7. ***The Winning Game Plan*** – What coaches should communicate and provide to athletes and their parents (calendars, schedules, expectations, details, etc)
8. ***The Best Offense*** - Role play situations to keep problems from becoming greater than they need to be

The Comment Page

Following are some excerpts from feedback around the country over the last two months related to the customer service training.

Dear Kelly,

I want to thank you for coming to Keokuk. Not a day has gone by without me hearing a reference to the presentation. I ordered some additional books for those who were absent. It was an amazing couple of hours...I'm trying to look at 09-10 and find a day for a return visit...

Lora
Superintendent

Keokuk, Iowa School

Hi Kelly,

I just wanted to thank you for coming to our OKSPRA meeting. I have been hearing great reviews from your presentation. You have truly made a difference in the customer service that Oklahoma students and parents will be receiving. Here are just a few of the comments:

One of the junior high principals who came with Amber to the December meeting was so "wowed" by our speaker that she has purchased extra books to share with her faculty, initiated mini-training seminars and implemented the idea of greeting others by name and speaking to each other in complete sentences at her school for the month of January. Thank you, thank you for making this possible! I'm especially excited because it's happening as the junior high my son attends...

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! The workshop was a turning point for our district, I believe. It has completely changed the game for many of our principals. They are sharing customer service ideas with one another. I'm having a hard time keeping up with all they want to do!

OKSPRA has always been a blessing for me and my role with the district, but this workshop made my colleagues realize what a truly valuable resource the organization is. I hope we can offer more workshops like it, at least annually; I think we will see more school administrators joining us. (That's where the rubber meets the road when it comes to impacting students and families.) Principals are just like us - they love workshops with easy-to-implement and effective ideas.

I completely agree! We had quite a few people there from our Technology Center and they all were ranting and raving over the program. I think the location was ideal and the speakers were very effective in translating the message.

Robyn
OKSPRA
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Good afternoon!

I had the opportunity to hear you speak at OKSPRA in December. It was outstanding. Six of our district principals attended the meeting and left wanting to learn more about your approach to customer service and relationship building. It has inspired them to make it an even greater priority in their buildings.

Amber Graham Fitzgerald
Director of School & Community Relations
Enid, OK

Who Cares? Improving Public Schools Through Relationships and Customer Service,
authors Kelly E. Middleton and Elizabeth A. Petitt

Book review written by Paul Schaumburg, Community Relations Director, Graves County (Ky.) Schools

Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships have become widely accepted at the new Three R's of modern American education. For many educators, the three elements are listed in order of importance. Considering the high-stakes nature of government-mandated, standardized testing, that view is understandable.

In *Who Cares? Improving Public Schools Through Relationships and Customer Service*, authors Kelly E. Middleton and Elizabeth A. Petitt make a compelling case that the last shall be first among the Three R's, or at least that relationships should be. They explain how the concepts of customer service and relationships in 21st Century America extend far beyond the traditional business world and our private lives. They offer well-documented research to convince public education professionals that relationships and customer service are crucial to interaction with parents, the community as a whole, and most importantly, students.

Furthermore, Middleton and Petitt urge public schools and districts to enlist all staff in the process – not only the faculty. They make the point that a cook, custodian, or bus driver can make a major difference in a child's life.

Besides the broad overview, the authors share numerous and practical tips. They offer ideas to transform schools into customer-friendly organizations that genuinely value and develop quality relationships with students and other constituencies.

The impetus to write this book is the best kind. Both authors are employed as associate superintendents in the Mason County, Ky., School District, and share their own experiences of focusing on these factors in their own district. Professionals compelled to find answers to problems they themselves faced did their work out of necessity. They then chose to share what they'd learned with their colleagues across America. It is to their credit that Middleton and Petitt did so and their book is to the benefit of American public education.