

# TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING TEACHER

**Dr. William J. Banach  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning teacher.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

- 1. Know your stuff.** Parents and students want teachers to be competent in their
- 2. subject area.** Let them know how you prepared for your teaching assignment and what you are doing to stay current in your area of expertise. Display your diploma. Be a model for life-long learning. And, make sure you know your stuff.
- 2. Help students and parents know you as a professional ... and as a person.** Of course parents and students want to know your professional qualifications, but they also want to know something about you personally. They are looking for something they can relate to – something that makes you just like them. That's why they want to know if you have children, if you like photography, or if you have a dog. Tell students and parents about yourself the first day of school (sooner, if possible). Take the initiative and you can build a host of positive relationships.
- 3. Show parents the agenda.** Parents want to know what you plan to teach. They want to know your goals for the year, the subject matter that you'll cover, and your instructional timeline. Give them an overview at the beginning of the year and provide them with specific updates at least monthly.
- 4. Clearly communicate what you expect ... from students *and* parents.** If you expect students to ask questions and participate in classroom dialogue, tell them. If you expect class assignments to be completed on time, tell them. You will get what you expect.

The same is true for parents. They need to know if you want parent involvement and what form it should take. They need to know if it's okay to call you and the best time to phone.

Open a dialogue with students and parents and you'll get more support than you expect.

5. Make learning fun. Survey respondents say that preparing for tests has taken all the fun out of learning. Both parents and students are calling for educators to "lighten up" and let young people have some fun.

We guess that if you make learning fun, students will learn more. After all, everyone likes doing fun things.

6. Nail bad behavior. Both parents and students say that teachers should deal with disruptive youngsters promptly. Bad behavior diminishes your instructional effectiveness. Jump on it.

7. Report progress twice as often as you think you should. Students want more frequent feedback on how well they're doing in class. Parents may be even more demanding.

The Internet has hooked people on instant access. They expect teachers to use it to keep them posted. Increasingly, they say that they'd like to see the lesson plan for the coming week over the weekend and be able to access a report of their child's progress on the following Friday. Some parents even want to access information about their child's progress daily.

8. Coach your class – one student at a time. About one-half of the students and parents we surveyed said that teachers rarely make comments about student work or give suggestions for improvement. Make sure you do this. It is a fundamental component of the teaching act. Students want to know how well they're doing and how they might do better. Their parents want to know, too.

9. Don't get silly about homework and class projects. Students have a life beyond school. They shouldn't spend every night toiling at homework assignments or class projects.

Parents have a life beyond school, too. Most of them would rather not spend their evenings helping their children with school work. Americans are time-

starved. They need more time than they can get and they are hoarding what they have. Infringe on family time carefully.

10. Celebrate each child's success. Everybody wants to be recognized for something. Teachers know the research on self-esteem, motivation, and satisfaction. Recognition is at the heart of it. And they know that even a little individual attention is a good thing. Teachers have to find time to celebrate student success. And they need to savor the satisfaction of making success possible.

According to the people we surveyed, this is what it takes to be a winning teacher. Most teachers do many of these things as a part of their daily routine. They don't look at the ten items as another list of things to do. They look at it as a description of what they must be – winners!



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# TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING PRINCIPAL

**Dr. William J. Banach**  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning principal.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

1. Be a champion of reading, writing, spelling, and “computers.” This is the instructional focus of parents. Make sure students learn how to read, write, and spell, and parents will be your advocate. Add a little math for good measure. Then, make sure that youngsters in your school are learning how to use technology as a tool to leverage human capacity. (Note that parents don't think about “leveraging human capacity.” They think about computers generically, and they cite program names (e.g., “My child is learning Microsoft Word.”) as evidence that students are learning “computers.”
2. Make discipline fair and equitable. Both students and parents are opposed to lax discipline. But they are also opposed to discipline that is too severe for the “crime” and to discipline that is perceived to be inequitable; i.e., treating athletes, smart kids, trouble-makers, or any other classification of students differently.
3. Stand for something ... *anything!* In marketing, standing for something is an important part of positioning (creating an identity in the minds of your constituents). Your school -- and you -- will be known by what you stand for, whether it is respect for others, the good manners of your students, or running “a tight ship.” Students, parents, and staff need to be able to say, “At my school, we stand for ....”

4. Keep the school clean, outside and inside. Odds are most people in your community haven't been inside your school in a long time. And, it is likely that some residents have never been inside your school. So, they judge what is happening inside the school by what the school looks like on the outside. That's why it is important to keep the grounds clean, to cut the grass and trim the shrubs, and to make sure the marquee is current and reflects the quality of education occurring inside the school.

Once the outside reflects what you are, create a positive learning environment by making sure that the inside is in order, too. And, make sure that you thank your custodial/maintenance staff for their continuous attention to your school's appearance.

5. Create a culture of competence and caring. Both students and parents want all staff to be competent, and they want education delivered in a caring environment. Yet, students say that they don't get enough individual attention. They also yearn for people on the school staff to care about them "as a person."

Most school staff members categorize themselves as "competent and caring." Make sure they are "walking the talk."

6. Exude enthusiasm. Shuffle about and you (and your school) will be perceived as a ho-hum place. You'll be perceived a lot more positively if you put a little bounce in your step, smear a smile across your face, and exude some enthusiasm about students, schooling, learning, and life in general. People like positive people.

7. Listen – really listen! – to staff, students, and parents. Successful people learn the most when they're listening. Listening is how you discover what people like and don't like, want, and don't want. It gives you a one-up when it comes to being ahead of the curve. Think about it: Have you ever been unforgiving of anyone who listened to you and *really* heard what you had to say?

8. Know their names. If you don't know your staff and students by name, you've been spending too much time in your office. People love to hear their name pronounced properly and to see it spelled correctly. So, learn names and use them to greet people. It establishes an all-important personal connection.

9. Be best friends with bus drivers. Bus drivers set the stage for the school day. They also influence a student's agenda at the end of the day. Tell bus drivers the

important role that they play in your school's educational program. They can set the tone for the day, alert you to student successes and problems, and they can help send positive vibes into the home at the end of the day.

10. Serve a good lunch. Most school lunches are nutritious. But many of them lack presentation. Students will always want better food (and more of it). But students never complain about having a choice of options or cafeteria people who have a sense of humor. Don't let your quality educational program be scuttled by lunches that are unattractive and impersonally delivered.

According to the people we surveyed, this is what it takes to be a winning principal. Most principals do many of these things as a part of their daily routine. They don't look at the ten items as another list of things to do. They look at it as a description of what they must be – winners!



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# **TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER**

**Dr. William J. Banach  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning school board member.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

1. Know your role. It is the role of a school board to set policy and to hire (or fire) the superintendent or chief executive officer of the school district. While this seems simple enough, it is common for school boards to encroach on administrative turf. Keep reminding yourself that it is the role of the school board to set policy, and it is the role of the superintendent or chief executive officer to administer the policy. Things begin to fall apart when board members (or the superintendent) cross the gray area that separates policy-setting from administration.

Before you make your next decision, ask yourself this question: "What does this have to do with policy-setting?" The answer will help assure that you are playing the proper role.

2. Be a team player. Athletic teams falter when players don't work together. The same is true of school boards. Trying to control things or to grandstand signals that members of the board aren't working together. There is nothing wrong with

discussion and debate, but, in the end, team players work together to support what's good for the team.

3. Be a good listener – really *hear* what people are saying. For too many adults, listening is the act of preparing to talk. Listen to what people are saying. Try paraphrasing what they are saying to make sure that you understand. Then know what to do with what you've really heard.

4. Ask questions to learn. Unless you know everything (and, hence, are unique in the revolving universe), you shouldn't hesitate to ask questions. (You reaffirm your normalcy when you ask questions to learn.)

Ask questions to become better informed because – when you are better informed – you will make better decisions.

Note that the purpose of asking questions is *not* to put others “on the spot” or in an embarrassing position. If you're doing that, you're playing games.

5. Explain your point of view. When there's an item on the table, it's okay to explain your point of view. That will help other members of the board team understand your position, and it will help everyone assess the caliber of your thinking.

Don't bother explaining your point of view after the board votes. Once the board votes, you should be talking about (and supporting) the *board's* decision.

6. Hold opinions about issues, not people. Keep your comments on the issue. People are tired of character assassinations and “dirty politics.” Before you even think about attacking a person's intelligence and character, think about what your school district will gain from your behavior.

7. Swear off hidden agendas. No winning board ever says, “We have a lot of board members with hidden agendas.” If you have an agenda, say so. Let people know where you stand. It will help them understand the forces that influence your decision-making. Keep people guessing about your agenda and they'll second-guess every decision that you make.

8. Look and act like a professional. No community wants a school board that looks and acts like a bunch of yo-yos. Dress up. Conduct your business in an environment that speaks to its importance. Pay attention to the structure of your agenda and the professionalism with which it is addressed.

9. Don't do business in the parking lot. Some people call this “the meeting after the meeting” – an often-clandestine session where one or two board members replay the board meeting with one or more citizens. It's where gossip is fueled, and any sense of professionalism is hosed. Don't do it. It's not democratic and it certainly undermines team play.

10. Understand the big things (so you don't get bogged down with the little things). Actually, you might have to dispense with the little things so that you can focus on the big things. If you are focused on the color of the tile or the wattage of the light bulbs, you'll find it difficult to set policies that enhance the curriculum or improve student achievement.

Do this: Have each board member make a list of all the little things bogging down your board's decision-making. Then work together to deal with the little things so that you can invest your time on the big things that really matter.

According to the people we surveyed, this is what it takes to be a winning school board member. Most school board members do many of these things as a part of their daily routine. They don't look at the ten items as another list of things to do. They look at it as a description of what they must be – winners!



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## **TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING STUDENT**

**Dr. William J. Banach  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning student.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

1. Be prepared for class. Being prepared means reading your assignments and doing your homework. It also means being rested, alert, and physically fit. When something is important, people prepare.

If learning is important to you, be prepared for class.

2. Look interested. Even if you are not interested, look interested. When you're tuned in to what the teacher is saying, the teacher will tune in to you. (How interested are you in people who aren't interested in you?)

3. Participate – ask questions/make suggestions. You get what you give. Be an active participant in class discussions. Just sitting there dampens effective teaching. It also can cheat you out of a chance to share your insights and ideas.

Ask questions, too. Questions help you think ahead and get more out of class. Remember that answers describe the present while questions define the future.

Remember also that your teacher is not a mind-reader. If you have a question or suggestion, raise your hand.

4. Give your best. When it comes to your education, "good enough" isn't good enough. Give your best and you'll do your best. No one can fault that.

5. Ask for help when your best comes up short. If you're giving your best and still not understanding, ask for help. Most of the time a simple explanation from the teacher is all that's needed to get you rolling again.

6. Volunteer. Be a classroom contributor. Volunteer a suggestion, solution, or an idea. Get engaged in what's going on in class.

7. Do your homework. Homework should reinforce your lessons. That's why it's important. And, if you think your homework isn't reinforcing your lessons or is irrelevant busywork, express your concern to your teacher. (Teachers have a lot of experience with homework. In fact, they have to do their homework to make sure that *your* lessons are well prepared.)

8. Show your manners. Many of the students that we surveyed said that students should "be nicer." The first move is yours. Be polite. Say please and thank you and excuse me. You might even try "Yes, Mr. Brooks." and "No, Miss Jones."

Good manners should be the norm, not something saved for a special occasion.

People notice those who have good manners. And, while they'll probably never say anything to you about your good manners, you can bet that your good manners will positively influence their behavior.

9. Treat others with respect and dignity. Our Founding Fathers valued the worth and dignity of every person. They led a revolution to establish "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as a basic tenet of American life. Treating others with respect and dignity builds positive relationships and enduring friendships. Being otherwise does the opposite.

10. Read whatever you can whenever you can ... just for the fun of it. You can't "get smart" if you don't read. And, everyone agrees that reading is central to life-long learning.

But we also need to read for the fun of it. Reading lets us travel to exciting places, meet new people, and learn about new and better ways of doing things.

Not reading is like not exercising – eventually, your mind turns to flab.

According to the people we surveyed, this is what it takes to be a winning student. Most students do many of these things as a part of their daily routine. They don't

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# **TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING PARENT**

**Dr. William J. Banach  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning parent.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

1. Know what's going on. Remember the question that used to be asked during the evening news: "It's eleven o'clock. Do you know where your children are?"

Today, being tuned in is a 24/7 proposition. You have to know what's going on in the lives of your children – from who their friends are to what they're watching on television to the language they use. And, you have to know what's going on at school. Start by asking them what they learned in school today, and don't let them get away by saying, "Nuthin'."

2. Understand how your child is doing. Know if your child's education is characterized by success, stress, or struggle. Extend congratulations on the successes, and listen to (and hear) what they are saying about the stresses and struggles. Then act on your understanding.

3. Set learning standards, expectations, and consequences for your child. When it comes to education, tell your child what you expect. If you expect Cs, that's probably what you'll get. And if there are no consequences for Cs, stand by to see some Ds.

4. Open and maintain dialogue with teachers. Most teachers work to open dialogue with parents at the beginning of the year. You should continue the

dialogue by meeting them halfway. Let them know that you value education and that you want to hear early on if your child isn't working up to classroom expectations. And, don't hesitate to call if you have a question.

5. Be there when you're needed. Most problems get solved when they're "talked through." The next time your child seems troubled, make the first move. Start by saying, "I think there's something that we should talk about." Then go somewhere quiet and talk it through.

6. Never be apathetic about learning. If you don't care what your children are (or aren't) learning in school, guess what? They won't care either.

Take an interest in what happens at school. Talk to your children about responsibility and self-motivation. And, don't let them dismiss today's lesson by saying, "I don't know and I don't care."

Contrary to popular opinion, children do value what their parents say. That makes you one of education's most important salespeople. Don't be apathetic about your responsibility.

7. Understand that schools can't raise your child. For some parents, the school bus could arrive earlier and return later. They view the school day as a vacation from their kids. And, they expect the schools to house their children, feed them, counsel them, prepare them for jobs ... and teach them.

Schools are not parents. But they can be the most important partners parents can have.

8. Do things that broaden your child's horizons. No matter how rich the schools, there are limitations on the education that they can provide. *You* have to broaden your child's horizons. It's your job to talk with them, take them to a sporting event, treat them to a play, teach them responsibility, or go with them to a museum or a park.

Schools can do a lot of things, but they can't do everything to broaden your child's horizons.

9. Model life-long learning. Continuous change is the norm. That's why everyone agrees that life-long learning is essential. And, that's why you must give life-long learning more than lip service.

Your children are watching how you keep learning. Let them catch you reading. Talk to them about what *you* have to learn to keep up on your job. Be a good model.

10. Tell your children about the importance of education ... every chance you get!

No one says that education is useless and a waste of time. To say such a thing would be a demonstration of ignorance. Yet, saying nothing to reinforce the value of education may not be much better.

Let your children know that the old cliché is true – “You ain’t goin’ nowhere without an education.” Don’t make it a speech. Make it something you believe ... because it’s true.

According to the people we surveyed, this is what it takes to be a winning parent. Most parents do many of these things as a part of their daily routine. They don’t look at the ten items as another list of things to do. They look at it as a description of what they must be – winners!



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# TEN TIPS FROM THE PEOPLE ON HOW TO BE A WINNING SUPERINTENDENT

**Dr. William J. Banach  
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We have surveyed thousands of students, parents, and school staff members across the country. They had a lot to say about education and what makes a good school. And, they told us what it takes to be a winning administrator.

You should listen to what the people are saying. And you should act on their perceptions and expectations.

Ten tips from the people that we surveyed appear below. Address them and you'll likely be judged a winner.

1. Have a vision. The very nature of your job brands you as a “positional” leader. But being in a leadership position isn't the same as being an effective leader. You have to *do* something.

Why not start with what followers want most from their leaders – a vision well-articulated? Let people know what you want your organization to become. Then help them buy-in.

2. Develop broad horizons and deep perspectives. Make sure your field of view is wide enough to see the big picture. Then seek to understand the elements of the picture.

People expect administrators to be thinking grand thoughts, and to develop insights that will put things in perspective.

Step one in this process is to do some thinking. Look at your calendar for last month. Count how many times you scheduled time to do some thinking. Grade yourself A, B, C, D, or FAIL.

3. Be competent. Don't be done in by “The Peter Principle” (rising to the level of your incompetence). Know your subject. Read. Spend time thinking with those who can enhance your capacity. Keep ahead of the curve.

4. Be organized. Or, hire someone who can organize you.

Moving initiatives forward requires organizational skills. If you can't organize yourself, it will be difficult to organize others.

Start by developing a plan to address your vision. Then execute the plan in an organized fashion.

5. Think service, inside and outside. Most folks don't categorize school administration as a service business, but service is an important part of the superintendency. In addition to generating ideas and suggesting solutions, administrators must help people in the system implement *their* vision-driven ideas. This means listening to people, facilitating their work, "greasing skids," and providing direct assistance where it is needed.

Make those inside the system your priority audience. Serve them first. Then do the same thing to serve those outside the system.

6. Anticipate. Many authors speak to how lonely it is "at the top" of an organization. One reason for the loneliness is that the hierarchy isolated those who were working to create a strategic advantage for their organizations. Now that organizations have flattened, more people must anticipate as part of their daily routine. You should nurture this and facilitate it.

Make sure that your staff members aren't isolated, provide them a forum for their ideas, and help them anticipate events, trends, and issues that have the potential for impacting your organization.

7. Play defense and offense. Part of a superintendent's job is to implement policy by developing strategies and seeing that they are properly executed. It is also the superintendent's responsibility to defend the system.

When there are unrealistic demands on the system, point them out. When people don't see the unintended consequences of the solutions that they propose, help them understand. And, when critics unjustifiably assault your people and their professionalism, make your response swift and substantial.

8. Champion children. Many people say that we should put children first and make them the focal point of every decision that we make. While this makes good sense, people often give little more than lip service to being child-centered.

If – as many people say – children are our future, then it is both professionally and personally wise that we hold them in high esteem and be champions for their future. There can be no higher calling.

9. Know what’s happening in the schools. Do you know what’s really on the agenda in the schools? Are you aware of the work that is being done to address the avalanche of standards and benchmarks? Do you understand why some of the requests you make can be viewed as yet another “administrative demand”?

Doing your job requires that you understand the day-to-day demands on others. Know what’s happening in the schools and you can leverage the capacity of others to get your work done.

10. Keep asking how your work is helping students achieve. All teachers have a common goal: to prepare students to be successful at what they do. Everyone in education should contribute to attaining this goal.

Ask if your accounting procedures are helping or hindering the educational process. Find out if your curriculum initiatives are making a difference or are little more than busywork. And, determine if your communication initiatives are helping staff build public support for schools.

Keep asking this question: When your work is done, what will you have done to enhance student achievement and success? (Try writing out the answer.)

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