

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES for PRINCIPALS

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ABOUT

Principles for Principals offers key information and messages for principals to consider in communicating the basics and getting parents involved. It is written and published by the DoDEA Communications Office.

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SEQUESTRATION AND FURLONGHS

DoDEA's school principals will be out on the front lines communicating with parents, teachers and commanders about the proposed furlough and how it will affect DoDEA schools. DoDEA employees were not exempted from the proposed furlough of up to 11 days for most Department of Defense (DoD) employees that was recently announced by the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense did approve a reduced number of furlough days for DoDEA's 9-month employees because of their unique school year employment schedule.

Principals will have to manage communications with many audiences—including their employees, parents, students, and installation commanders. Concerns will focus on how the furloughs will impact the school community and specifically how furloughs will affect teaching and learning, school operations, extra and co-curricular activities, employees' jobs, and morale. Principals will also have to be vigilant, checking the special Budgetary Uncertainties page on the DoDEA website at (<http://www.dodea.edu/Budget/index1.cfm>) and making sure they are aware of additional specific guidance that will be issued regarding furlough procedures for DoDEA employees.

It is an understatement to say that these are challenging times in uncharted waters. Major budgetary shortfalls drove the basic furlough decision. Compounding the budgetary shortfalls was the sequestration that went into effect across the federal government on March 1.

All funds, including wartime funds, are subject to sequestration. DoD leaders had to use funds originally budgeted for other purposes in order to provide troops at war with every resource they need. All of these factors combined resulted in a more than \$30 billion shortfall in DoD's Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Accounts. These O&M accounts pay many civilian workers, including DoDEA employees.

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All DoD agencies, including DoDEA, have taken actions to reduce the short-fall, and, faced with difficult decisions about how to close the funding gap without jeopardizing military readiness and national security, the decision was made to propose a furlough of most DoD civilian employees of up to 11 days between July 8 and September 21. The Secretary of Defense granted very limited exemptions. Although DoDEA employees were not exempt, the Secretary reduced the number of furlough days for most school-level employees to no more than 5 days.

As the principal, you will be not only dealing with furloughs on a professional level, but also on a personal level as well. You will be facing furlough days just like your employees at your school and your colleagues who work in the military communities you serve.

This issue of PR for Principals is designed to provide you with some talking points, strategies and communications ideas to help you navigate the weeks and months ahead. If you have questions or need help with any communication issue, as always, please give us a call or send us an e-mail.

HEADLINES

The five most important message points you will deliver are:

1. Teachers will be furloughed for no more than five days during School Year 2013–2014.
 - a. Be sure to emphasize that the furloughs will have NO impact on School Year 2012–2013.
 - b. Be sure to emphasize that School Year 2013–2014 will start on time. Furlough days will be taken during the remaining pay periods through September 30, 2013.
 - c. Be specific about the dates your employees will be furloughed.
 - d. Above all, make it your priority to ensure all of your audiences know your efforts will be focused on delivering a quality education, and mitigating the impact of furloughs on students and employees.
2. DoDEA's goal throughout furlough-planning is to preserve the accreditation of its schools and ensure a quality education for all students.
3. Any furlough planning for School Year 2013–2014 will provide for a full-year of academic credit for students and maintain school accreditation standards.
4. DoDEA will offer its Summer Enrichment Program at selected sites during the summer of 2013 and will also offer Virtual Summer School for students needing to earn credits in the summer of 2013.

TO WHOM SHOULD I SPEAK?

The best place to start developing your sequestration communications program is by determining who you need to communicate with – parents, students, your school employees, and the commanders you support.

Without a doubt, the audiences competing for your top priority are your employees and parents. You will be expecting employees to carry on with their job of teaching and enabling students to achieve their full potential. You will want to communicate to students the importance of staying focused on learning. At the same time, you will be delivering Notices of Proposed Furlough to your staff and trying to shore up their morale and motivation.

You will hope for understanding, cooperation and support from parents. They will be looking to you for reassurance and commitment that their children will continue to learn and grow despite what seems to be a very difficult situation.

WHAT DO I SAY?

The messages and words you use with each audience will differ—each audience has a different interest and perspective and a different need to know what is happening. We’ve attached some talking points for you to choose from when you address different audiences. Keep them handy and refer to it often.

WHEN DO I SAY IT?

Timing is everything, and this situation is no different. You will want to let your audiences know information as soon as you get it. But, before you talk with your stakeholders, look at the checklist below to make sure your information is not only timely, but that it is accurate and appropriate.

- Has the information been staffed and reviewed at the district/Area Office?
- Have I checked to make sure I can release the information when I want to or do I need to wait?
- Is this information “in my lane” to disseminate, or does it belong to another release official?
- Is this information appropriate for the audience I intend to deliver it to?
- Will I be causing panic, undue anxiety or fueling rumors with this information?

It’s also important to be frequent and consistent with your messages. Unless the situation drastically changes, make sure you are saying the same thing to all of your audiences. There will be times when you will have to tailor the information to make it more relevant or understandable, but the important thing is to be frequent and consistent in what you say.

HOW DO I SAY IT?

Contentious topics such as furloughs, school closings, budget reductions and sequestration don’t get better with age and they don’t get better by delivering the information from behind a screen or inside of an envelope.

Face-to-face meetings with parents, staff, and commanders are probably the best and most effective ways to communicate how sequestration and furloughs will affect your school. This strategy is very effective, particularly at the beginning, and allows for people to ask questions and provides a forum for discussion that will promote better understanding and awareness and help develop a sense of cohesion and community within your audiences.

Try to start your communications program with a Town Hall meeting for parents, an employee meeting for teachers, and a face-to-face meeting with the command group you support. While these forums may be time consuming at first, you will find that you might not have to communicate as frequently and that you will build trust and confidence much quicker.

DO:

- ◆ Ensure your school website contains current and accurate information and working, operational links to District, Area, and DoDEA websites.
- ◆ Follow your initial Town Hall discussion with frequent and consistent newsletters, e-mails, and more Town Halls if necessary.
- ◆ Solicit input for schedules from parents and teachers and be accommodating when coordinating furlough days with other schools in your district/area if possible.
- ◆ Be sure to communicate furlough-specific schedules regarding your school in several venues—e-mail; newsletters; school website; face-to-face discussions.
- ◆ Be understanding, empathetic, patient, considerate, flexible, and positive.
- ◆ Motivate and inspire—that’s what good leaders do.

DON'T:

- ◆ Communicate once and then never follow-up.
- ◆ Give inconsistent, inaccurate information.
- ◆ Isolate yourself.
- ◆ Be lured into political discussions about sequestration and furlough. Don't place the blame on anyone.
- ◆ Be condescending, impatient, inconsiderate, inflexible or negative. Don't spread rumors.
- ◆ Speculate.

WHO CAN HELP ME COMMUNICATE IN MY COMMUNITY?

- ◆ Your area PAO will be your primary communication resource.
- ◆ HQ Communication will provide overarching guidance, messages, templates and other tools/support. Areas will expand on these tools and personalize them for deployment within their respective areas. Area offices and districts will drive the communication tools down to the school level.
- ◆ Expect public and media interest to be high at your school level. You will be relying on the area and installation PAOs for help with Town Halls and media interviews. Always send a draft of your newsletters or letters to parents, teachers, and commanders to your area PAO for review.

WHAT KIND OF TOOLS SHOULD I USE TO HELP GET THE WORD OUT?

These are the tools we will leverage to communicate with parents, students, commands, community partners, DoD media outlets and public affairs assets, and the general public.

- ◆ Print/Web/Graphics
- ◆ Face to Face

OVERARCHING TALKING POINTS

- ◆ DoDEA understands the anxiety budgetary uncertainties and furlough possibilities bring to its school communities.
- ◆ DoDEA has been and continues to review all areas of its budget for potential savings. DoDEA's priority continues to be focused on mitigating the impact of sequestration and furloughs on our students.
- ◆ DoDEA's goal is to preserve the accreditation of its schools; provide a full year of academic credit, ensure a quality education for all of its students and minimize the impact of sequestration on students' education.

TALKING POINTS

- ◆ ALL DoDEA schools will start on time and as scheduled for School Year 2013-2014.
- ◆ DoDEA will implement the furlough in a manner that minimizes impact on students' education; provides a full year of academic credit; and maintains school accreditation.
- ◆ The furlough and sequestration will impact School Year 2013-2014. The effects of the budgetary reductions are severe and are further compounded by the fact that the cuts have to be absorbed in the last 3 months of Fiscal Year 2013.
- ◆ Employee furloughs will impact the DoDEA workforce in the following ways:
 1. All DoDEA employees working on a 9-month work year schedule will be furloughed for up to 5 days
 2. All other DoDEA employees working on an 11-month work year schedule will be furloughed for up to 11 days.
- ◆ DoDEA teachers are not exempt from furloughs during sequestration, but they have a reduced number of furlough days because of their school year employment schedule.
- ◆ The DoD-approved plan to furlough teachers for fewer days than other DoD civilian employees recognizes the priority placed on students' education, the teachers' unique school year employment schedule, and emphasizes the importance of minimizing the impact of furloughs on the classroom
- ◆ The furlough plan was not developed and/or approved based solely on position or grade. It was solely based on work schedule. A primary consideration was equitable distribution of furlough days which resulted in ensuring there was an equitable proportion of furlough days to the number of work days.
 - ◆ Employees working 9 months per year have fewer furlough days to take than employees working 12 months per year.
 - ◆ Another consideration was to ensure the continued accreditation of our schools.

TALKING POINTS: PROPOSED 11-DAY FURLOUGH OF DoD CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES (CONT.)

- ◆ The furlough is an administrative furlough necessitated by extraordinary and serious budgetary challenges facing the Department of Defense for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, the most serious of which is the sequester that began on March 1, 2013.
- ◆ The steps involved in furlough are:
 - ◆ Notice of proposed furlough—employee acknowledges receipt. Employee cannot be furloughed any earlier than 30 days from acknowledging receipt of the furlough notice.
 - ◆ Reply period—employees have a period of time to respond orally or in writing, providing any supporting material as to why they believe they should not be furloughed. Employees in different pay categories and those covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements have different reply periods.
 - ◆ Final written decision—issued to employee as soon as possible after the reply period. This written decision includes an explanation of specific reasons for the action taken.
 - ◆ NO DECISION TO FURLOUGH EMPLOYEES IS MADE UNTIL FULL CONSIDERATION IS GIVEN TO THEIR REPLY AND A WRITTEN DECISION IS ISSUED TO THE EMPLOYEE
- ◆ The furlough in no way reflects on employees' performance, behavior, competency, or dedication to their mission. This proposed furlough does not diminish your contribution in any way. The furlough is an administrative furlough necessitated by extraordinary and severe budgetary challenges.
- ◆ Every employee in this school makes a critical and significant contribution to DoDEA's mission of educating military-connected children and to DoD's overall mission of meeting the Nation's national security requirements.
- ◆ You are valued, appreciated, and greatly admired for the work that you do on behalf of our students and families regardless of your job.

FURLOUGH PARAMETERS

- ◆ The furloughs will affect School Year 2013–2014.
 - ◆ Furlough days will be taken during the remaining pay periods through September.
 - ◆ To ensure students' safety and to maintain an acceptable level of quality and compliance, schools will be closed to students and U.S. teachers on furlough days.
 - ◆ Educators when furloughed, cannot and must not contact students or parents about any school-related matter. It is illegal. This will undoubtedly be very difficult for our faculty and staff as they care deeply about the success of their students.
 - ◆ Principals will provide parents contact information in the event of an emergency and a parent needs to contact the school.

TALKING POINTS: PROPOSED 11-DAY FURLOUGH OF DoD CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES (CONT.)

- ◆ Furlough dates will be scheduled at the Area and District level and local administrators will be given maximum flexibility in determining furlough dates based on their community-unique situations and requirements.
- ◆ Principals will announce the exact furlough dates to be implemented at their schools for School Year 2013–14.
- ◆ No schools have planned to begin implementing a furlough until School Year 2013–2014. Announcements regarding furlough days will be made in advance as much as possible to provide teachers, parents, commands and students time to prepare for a furlough and minimize the disruption that such an action can undoubtedly create
- ◆ DoDEA schools will not double up on classrooms.
- ◆ Schools cannot hire substitutes to cover furlough days.
- ◆ Employees who have Extra Duty Compensation (EDC) Assignments (coaching, after-school-clubs, etc.) will be able to perform those assignments on furlough days provided they start after the end of the normal school day.
 - ◆ Athletic practices, sports competitions, after-school club meetings, etc., have to be scheduled outside of the normal school day. Students and teachers may come to school for these activities, but only after the normal school day.s.
- ◆ Principals will have to ensure that adequate building supervision is provided for 11.5 and 12-month employees who may be working in the school despite the fact that the school is closed for teachers and students.
- ◆ Contract and local national employees in schools must report to work.

PROGRAM TALKING POINTS—SCHOOL YEAR 2013–2014

- ◆ High School Seniors will graduate on time and as scheduled.
- ◆ Students will be given credit for a full academic year.
- ◆ DoDEA schools will maintain their accreditation.
- ◆ AP exams and End-of-Year and End-of-Course Exams will be given.
- ◆ DoDEA will offer Virtual Summer School in the summer of 2013 for students needing to earn credits in the summer.
- ◆ DoDEA will offer its Summer Enrichment Program in the summer of 2013 designed for elementary school students in selected communities.
- ◆ Fall 2013 sports and extra and co-curricular programs may need to be adjusted for furlough days.
- ◆ Sequestration could affect school facilities. Funds will be severely reduced for sustaining, restoring, and modernizing school buildings, potentially prolonging repairs in many, schools. Funds will only be available to address life, safety and health requirements.

TALKING POINTS: PROPOSED 11-DAY FURLOUGH OF DoD CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES (CONT.)

TAKE-AWAYS

- ◆ We do not take these actions lightly or in a matter-of-fact fashion.
- ◆ Our ultimate goal is to mitigate any negative impacts of sequestration on our students and to provide them with a full year of academic credit.
- ◆ The actions we are taking to implement furloughs and our sequestration plan are in no way intended to diminish the importance DoD places on education, DoDEA's mission, our teachers, our students or our families.
- ◆ Every member of our school community – teachers, students, school staff members, and parents – contributes to the education of our children and without their dedication and concern, student achievement is not possible.
- ◆ Our teachers understand and are experienced in doing whatever it takes to help students succeed and meet the standards of learning.
- ◆ We will also recalibrate, adjust schedules where necessary, and be flexible and accommodating to ensure all students' academic needs are being met.
- ◆ During these challenging times, we must be focused on our jobs and on our mission of educating and taking care of military children and their families.
- ◆ We have a very serious and weighty mission that carries a great deal of responsibility with it.
- ◆ We sincerely regret having to take these actions to close schools next year for up to 5 days. The actions we have to take are unavoidable, unfortunate, and mandated.

NOTE ON EARLY NOTICE

The Secretary of Defense Memorandum dated May 14, 2013, announced DOD furlough of up to 5 days for DoDEA 9-month, school-level employees (largely teachers) to be taken at the start of School Year 13-14 through September 30 (the end of the fiscal year). Teachers are required by their collective bargaining agreements to be in a pay status during the 30-day notice and reply period. Since most schools will close soon (May/early June), furlough notices must be “tolled” or paused during the summer months when these employees are in a non-pay status, and then they will be resumed when school starts.

Given the closure dates of schools this year (May/early June), DoDEA will providing furlough notices on or about 20 May to our 9-month, school-level employees before the 28 May furlough notice date in the Secretary's Memo. Teachers are not in a pay status during the summer months so we must finalize actions early so as to give teachers full and complete notice.