Developing a District Communication Plan

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All communications documents, including sample comprehensive plans and annual reports, may be found at this link: http://goo.gl/8qGv5s

1994 technology still going strong!
Sage advice from the old supe:

A curriculum mix-up — forgivable
An error in the budget — survival is probable
A little botulism in the cafeteria — not pretty, but life goes on
Inability to effectively communicate — get your résumé ready
It’s impossible not to eavesdrop when you hear your district mentioned.

What do you hope to hear?
Expectations for today?
Overview of today’s session

- Models for planning
- Advisory teams
- Audiences
- Internal Communications
- The right communication tool
- Research
- Messages
- Project-based communication plans
- Evaluation/follow-up
Today’s work is only part of the process

- Today we frame the plan
- Take it home
- Get a date on your calendar and start
- Get others in on the plan
- Do your research
- Develop and execute your comprehensive and project-based communication plans.
RPIE

- Research
- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation
Advisory Groups

- Don’t work in a vacuum
- Keep it manageable
- Diverse voices (in one person)
- External participants
- Internal participants
- Make the work meaningful
- Continue to tap into the groups
Build Your Communication Advisory Team

Keep the committee manageable.

*How?*

*Diverse voices/groups (in one person)*
Determining Audiences: Internal / External

Think demographics
When the house is on fire, tell those inside first!

- Builds trust
- “When the eagles are silent the parrots will jabber.” (Knocks down rumors)
- Your best PR team is your staff
- Special superintendent survival note: you really want to tell your board first.
Communication Tools & Methods

Website    Email    Social Media
Apps    Letters home    Publications
Mass Media    Large groups
Small Groups    Video    Auto-calls
Personal calls    Direct Mail
Billboards    Local media
Skywriting
Cross reference audiences with communication tools and methods.

Where is your district strong?
Where are the weak spots?
Do your research

What information needs to be shared?
Who needs to know?
What do they need to know?
How do they want to receive the information?
Who is the messenger?
Forms of research

pros & cons

- Phone
- Focus/discussion groups
- Community engagement
- Online surveys
- Individual interviews
- Coffee klatches
- Using state and national resources
Messages

- The takeaway, master narrative, elevator pitch
- What’s needed to engage people.
- Bite-sized summations that articulate:
  - what you do
  - what you stand for
  - how you are different
  - what value you bring to stakeholders.
Messages

- Clear, concise and consistent
- Supports district mission
- Relevant and accurate: supported by data
- Compelling – Simple – Memorable

As a school district, all of your messages must keep in mind the benefits to students
Developing your message

- Remember radio station “W I I - F M”
- Audience is thinking, “What’s in it for me?”
- Message should reflect their interests, not yours.
- Talk about outcomes for kids, not just inputs.
- Features tell, but benefits sell
- “I’m so excited to be here!” (So what…why?)
- Bring it back to students almost all of the time!
Sidebar: Avoid Jargon

“Pre-dawn vertical insertion”
Parachute drop at night
“Modular learning environment”
Trailer
“DCA”
District Common Assessment (huh?)
Test all the kids take
30-Word Home Base (elevator pitch)

- First 30 words are absorbed by audience
- Main point + 3 supporting points
- Takes 12-15 seconds to say
- About the length of a TV sound bite
- Forms basis of your “message map”
Sample Home Base

The City of Springfield is about providing a high quality of life for residents by using tax dollars wisely, meeting citizens’ needs and hiring outstanding employees.
Sample Home Base

Silver Dollar City creates memories worth repeating by providing fun family activities in a clean, friendly environment led by a caring staff.
A Good Home Base?

FACS is a holistic, multidisciplinary, systems-approach to address complex and practical problems facing individuals, families and the environment.
Sample Home Base

Parkway Schools help all students succeed by providing a great education with superior teachers, an outstanding curriculum and a caring environment.
Use Home Base to Map Your Message

Home Base

Supporting Points

Superior Teachers

Student Success

Top-notch Curriculum

Caring Environment
Student Success

- Superior Teachers
- 2nd Most National Certifications in State
- Student Success: 95% Graduation Rate
- Student Success Story: National Spelling Bee Champ
- Nationally Recognized Schools of Character
- Top-notch Curriculum
- Caring Environment
- Student Success Story: Autistic Student Voted Top by Peers
What is your district’s Home Base?  
The Big Picture

- Take a moment to share/discuss your district’s primary message.
- Make sure the central focus is students.
- *This could be a version of your district’s mission statement.*
Project-Based Communication Plans

Determine an issue that is on the horizon that needs to be strategically addressed with multiple audiences.

(Use the grid provided to create your plan.)
Evaluate

After developing and executing your communication plan… **evaluate.** *(In fact, evaluate throughout the process!)*

It’s one thing to put the message out there, it’s another to know if it was heard and understood.

Always evaluate and, if needed, follow-up.
Comprehensive communications plan

- Get with your advisory team
- Look at other districts’ plans
- Determine primary audiences
- Determine primary ongoing messages
- Determine objectives, strategies and tools to reach audiences
- Determine how to measure effectiveness
Samples and Next Steps

- We will email you a list of websites with good comprehensive communication plans.
- We’ll also email you additional documents and links that will help you in the process.
- Don’t wait on this! Start the process and begin implementing both comprehensive and project-based plans in the very near future.
In Review

- RPIE
- Advisory teams
- Audiences: internal / external
- Internal Communications
- The right communication tool
- Research
- Message
- Project-based communication plans
- Evaluation
A little feedback, please

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/N5HXMNT

Yep. We’ll email this to you.
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Thanks to our friends for helping present! Join!