



Developing Key Messages

Public Engagement in Action

MASA Fresh Start Series
Workshop
August 22, 2009



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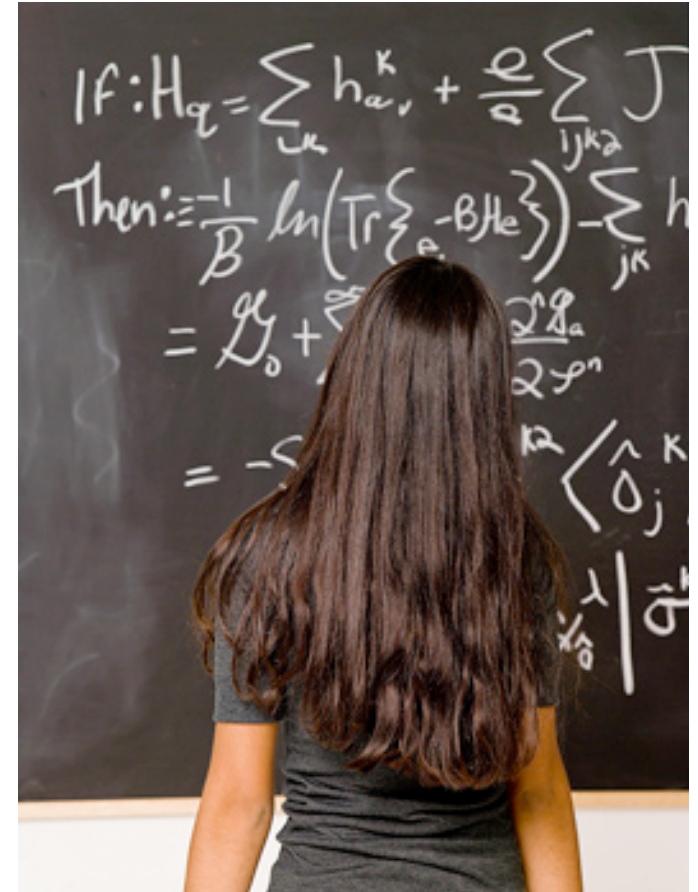
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Setting the Stage

Consider a time when key messages would have helped a situation.

Care to share?

[CLICK HERE](#)



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Communication Protocol Outline

- What is the issue or problem?
- How will the issue be framed?
- How does this issue or problem affect other issues?
- What stakeholder groups need to know about this issue?
- What are the key messages that we will communicate about the issue?
- How will this issue be communicated?
- What is the timeline to publicly release or respond to this issue?
- Who is the main spokesperson on this issue?

NSPRA's School Public Relations, Building Confidence in Education



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What is a key message?

- A concise set of brief comments that are memorable for the listener and can be easily recited by the person delivering the message.
- The goal of the message is to lead to a desired outcome.
 - Action, attitude change, awareness



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Why use key messages?

- To focus audience's attention
- Maintain organization and control
- Keep everyone on the same page
- Help audiences understand your position
- Support communication goals and strategies

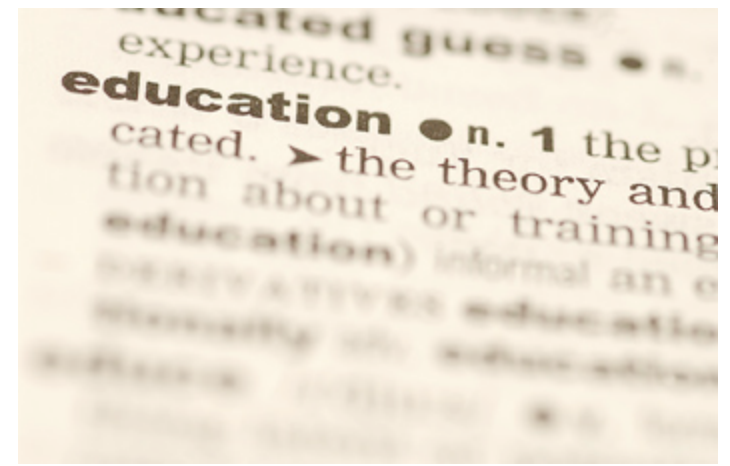


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What should key messages do?

- Communicate your district's values
- Motivate audience to act
- Resonate your audience's self-interest
- Represent what you want people to take-away



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What should key messages look like?



- They should be:
 - Honest
 - Clear and concise
 - Free of jargon / educationalese
 - Easy to say
 - Written in active voice
 - Written for a 6-8th grade audience
 - Consistent with your goals
 - Avoid negativity and enhance the positive



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When to use key messages

- Ongoing sharing of district issues / programs / policies
- Crisis situations
- Responding to common inquiries (staff/community)



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How to develop key messages

- Determine who will craft the message and if others will help
 - Sometimes the leader crafts the message
 - Most often others involved
- What do we know and what additional information do I need to gather?
 - Take the time to do this right
 - Challenge your staff to view from multiple perspectives



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How to develop key messages

- Is there greater context to be considered?
 - Double-check that any program key messages do not conflict with the district key message
- Identify primary and secondary audiences?
 - Who needs to hear your message and who might benefit from hearing your message



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How to develop key messages

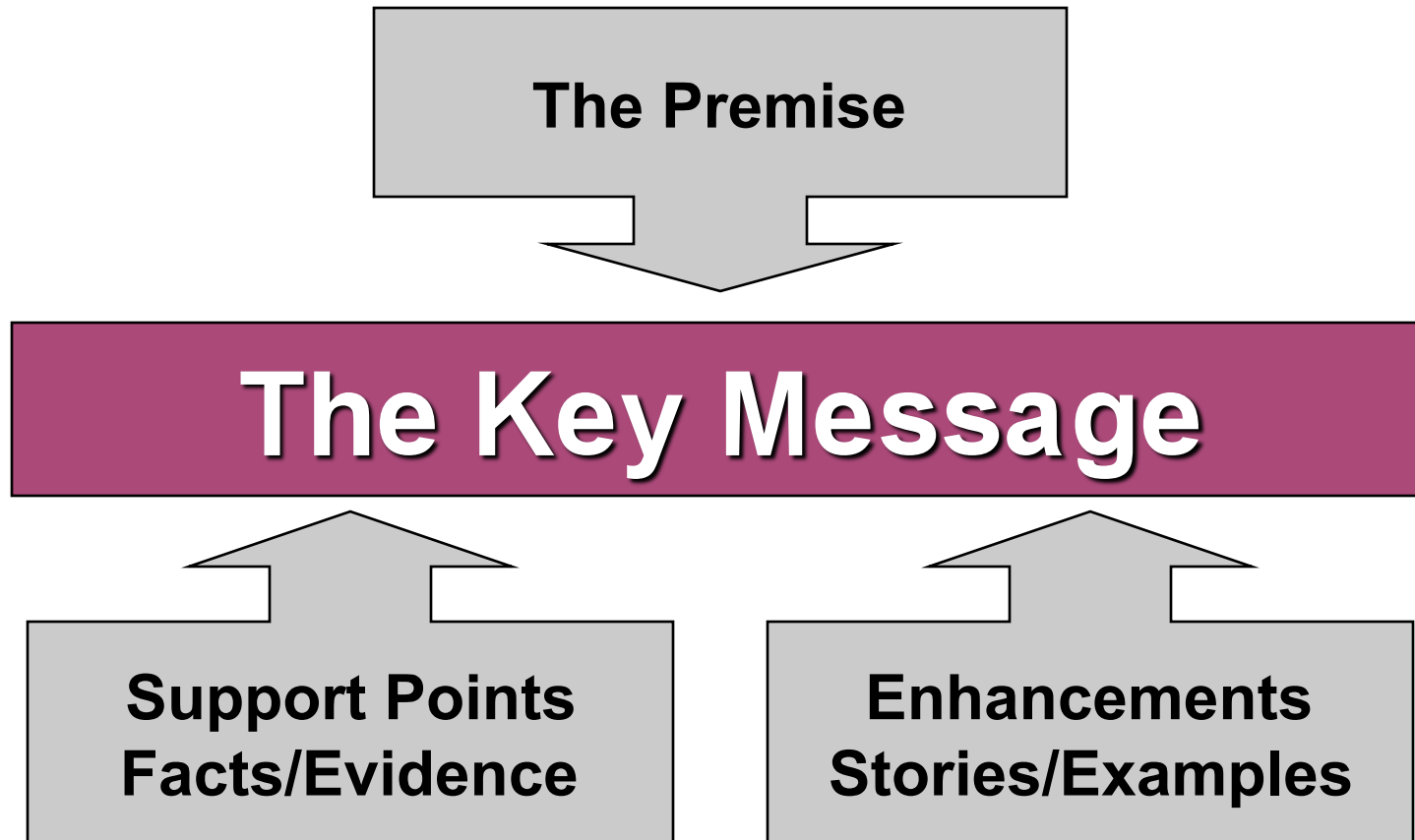
- What is the desired outcome?
 - Understanding, change in attitude, etc.
- Write and rewrite?
 - Keep it simple to understand
 - Don't use acronyms and jargon
- Practice delivering the key messages



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How to develop key messages



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How do you use key messages?

- Share as planned
 - May be just you and/or a spokesperson
 - May be through a your entire staff or your key communicator network
- Repeat, repeat, repeat through any and all methods planned for sharing the message



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How to share key messages

- Methods relied on by identified audiences, such as:
 - Parent / Staff Newsletters
 - Electronic Messages
 - Web Site
 - School Board presentations
 - Press Releases / Press Inquiries
 - Parent Advisory Committees



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Practice, Practice, Practice

- Work through Key Messages with a recently encountered issue / incident



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Best Practice Tip #1

- Avoid
 - Jargon
 - Judgment and condemnation
 - Promised and predictions
 - Humor

“Get to the point where everyone in the organization can understand and state its uniqueness.”

--Tom Peters in Thriving on Chaos



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Best Practice Tip #2

- Use third-party sources
 - Distribute your key messages to committed stakeholders and gain their permission to involve them in delivery on important issues.



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Best Practice Tip #3

- A firm foundation of facts
 - Be sure messages are based in facts and evidence is readily available.

“Always tell the truth. That way you never have to remember what you said.”

--Bill Henry



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Best Practice Tip #4

- Tell me a story
 - Using a story to illustrate your key message will leave a lasting impression and the chance to be repeated.



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Best Practice Tip #5

- Feed the Beast
 - When dealing with the media, don't ignore. View this as an opportunity to deliver your key messages to a wider audience.

“They will forgive you if you make a mistake. They will never forgive you if you lie to them.”

--Dudley Kircher



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Best Practice Tip #6

- Acknowledge and Bridge
 - When presented with a challenge, acknowledge and immediately bridge to a key message.

“If you want a two-week saga, dribble out the details.”

--Thomas R. Hagley, Jr.



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QUESTIONS OR FINAL COMMENTS?

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Sample

- If reading achievement is going to improve at our school, we need the help of parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters – everyone in the home – to make reading a priority.
- **Reading must be a family affair.**



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High School Coach

- KEY MESSAGES PERTAINING TO CG COACH CHARGES:
 - We can confirm that E D was a Park High School Hockey Coach.
 - The alleged incident occurred after he had resigned his position with the district.
 - Because this is pending litigation, no additional comments will be made.



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Transfer Student

- KEY MESSAGES PERTAINING TO TRANSFER STUDENT:
 - We are a public school system, and as such have an obligation to provide a quality, equitable education to all enrolled students.
 - Regardless of a student's history, if they are enrolled in our district, it is because the judicial system and individuals working with this student are provided a safe educational environment.
 - Due to status as a juvenile, it is not the responsibility of a school system to disclose information that is beyond the district's defined directory information.
 - The issue of public disclosure is one determined by the judicial system, not the public school system.



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Death of Employee

- KEY MESSAGES PERTAINING TO DEATH OF AN EMPLOYEE:
 - Wayne Dietz, long time Woodbury Royals baseball coach and mathematics teacher experienced a serious medical emergency on Saturday and is now in intensive care at Regents Hospital. While riding his bicycle. Wayne experienced cardiac arrhythmia, causing him to fall from his bike and into a ravine.
 - The family will update us on his condition as they know more. Woodbury High School will post any changes or updates on its web site.
 - Please keep Wayne and his family in your thoughts.



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Confidential Alert to Admin

- KEY MESSAGES PERTAINING TO LOCAL ARMED ROBBERY:
 - We have been notified by the Cottage Grove Police Department that an attempted armed robbery occurred at Cub Foods. For your information, we have placed potential schools impacted by the person who fled on foot on a modified lockdown.
 - The buildings are: ALC – DPC – DSC – Armstrong – Hillside – Crestview – Park High School – Grey Cloud Elem and Cottage Grove JH
 - We've just heard that the police believes the person has left the area, HOWEVER, we want to be certain that this is the case. We will share an all clear soon.



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Picketers near school

- KEY MESSAGES PERTAINING TO CONSTRUCTION PICKETERS:
 - A group of union protestors are in the vicinity of the City of Cottage Ice Arena this week. They are in a dispute between union workers and an electrical employer.
 - The dispute is in no way affiliated with the school district or the construction projects at Park High School. The picketers are not on district property and are not blocking sidewalks or traffic patterns for buses and cars. The situation is being monitored closely by the Cottage Grove Police Department.
 - In addition, school administration is being consistently updated and is taking every precaution to ensure student safety at all times.



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