

COMMUNICATIONS FOUNDATIONS

*STRATEGIES & IDEAS for Leaders to become POWERFUL
COMMUNICATORS & Create a CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION*

MASA Aspiring Superintendents Cohort
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CONTACT INFORMATION



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Today's Agenda

- **Basic Tenets** - Understanding core ideas that help establish and enhance a culture of communication
- **Communications 101** - Understanding foundational concepts in creating an overall communication approach
- **Nine Strategy Areas** - Understanding the core strategies needed to create an effective communication approach
- **Where to Start** - Ideas for creating and leading a culture of communication in your district

Table Conversation



**What does communication
currently look and feel like
in your district?**

Basic Tenets

**Understanding core ideas that
help establish and enhance a
culture of communication**

Basic Tenet #1

A **culture of communication** is where **two-way communication is an expectation** and is executed through an **ongoing communications plan**.

Transparency is a hallmark of organizations with an established culture of communication.

Basic Tenet #2

Communication, marketing and engagement are **management functions** guided by an **overall plan and strategy**.

They should operate much like a budget guides the fiscal direction of an organization.

Basic Tenet #3

The **superintendent** and other key leaders are **essential** in creating a **culture of communication**.

Effective communications should be modeled from the top.

Basic Tenet #4

The **effectiveness of your district's communication processes** are often a **bellwether** of the overall health of your organization.

Districts struggling with communications, marketing and engagement are often struggling in other areas as well.

Basic Tenet #5

Establishing **trust through effective communication** typically **happens over time** but can be **quickly eroded**.

Rebuilding trust and relationships is difficult, and in some cases, may never be fully recovered.

Table Conversation



**What do you notice about the
basic tenets? What caught
your attention?**

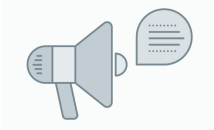
Communications 101

**Understanding foundational
concepts in creating an overall
communications approach**

Communication Reminders

- Communication is a **two-way process**
- Effective communication is **planned**
- **Message development** and **repetition** is essential
- Communication **builds relationships**
- One communication channel is **not enough**
- Attention spans have **shrunk**
- Shifting perceptions **takes time**
- Effective communication **motivates behavior** and **action**

Types of Communication



MASS COMMUNICATION

- ★ Communicate to large numbers quickly
- ★ Minimal Engagement



- Shaping Opinion
- Telling Stories



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

- ★ Connecting with people
- ★ More Engaging
- ★ Builds relationships



- Making Connections
- Making Decisions

Hierarchy of Communication

Creating Trust & Relationships



- Face to face contact
- Small group discussion
- Speaking before a large group
- Phone conversation
- Handwritten personal note
- Typed personal letter
- Personal “form letters”
- Mass produced, non-personal letter
- Direct mail brochures
- Article in a newsletter
- News carried in the press
- Advertising in media

Sharing Information

Effective Communication Must Be ...

- **Timely** – hear news from you first
- **Consistent** – audiences need to rely on you as an information source
- **Clear** – key messages are obvious and easily understood
- **Concise** – messages are prioritized and presented quickly
- **Relevant** – messages are important to audience
- **Interesting** – messages are attractive and easy to read

Effective Communicators Must Be Seen As ...

- **Credible** – establish reputation as believable
- **Knowledgeable** - be seen as an expert or informed source
- **Honest** - share complete perspective and don't sugar coat
- **Calm** - respond with facts and appropriate emotion
- **Organized** - know what you are going to communicate before you start - no winging it

Table Conversation



**Where have you seen effective
communications in your district?
What was missing when
communication was not
as effective?**

Nine Strategy Areas

**Understanding the core strategies
needed to create your district's
communication approach**

Nine Communication Strategies

1. Communication Strategy and Planning
2. Internal Communication and Engagement
3. Parent/Family Communication
4. External Communication (residents without enrolled students)
5. Stakeholder Engagement (students, parents/families, community members)
6. Brand Experience and Reputation
7. Student Enrollment Retention and Recruitment
8. Employee Retention and Recruitment
9. Crisis Communication and Prepared

REMEMBER: STRATEGY DRIVES THE USE OF TACTICS

Communication Strategies (*Overview*)

Overarching questions to consider:

- As a leader, what are my **expectations** of the communications function? Of communications staff?
- How and how often do you **assess the effectiveness** of your communications strategy and tactics?
- How and how often do you **assess communications expectations** of key leaders?
- Does our communication **investment align with our expectations**?

1) Communication Strategy & Planning

Your district's communication approach is driven by a strategy and executed through a comprehensive strategic communications plan

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do we have a communications plan?
 - If so, how often do we review or update it?
- Is there a person or people designated to be in charge of the communications strategy implementation?
- How do we assess the general effectiveness of our communications function?
- What tactics are we using as part of our strategy?

2) Internal Communication & Engagement

Your communication plan includes a strategy to communicate and connect with staff members at the school and district level

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do we have a newsletter or some other form of regular communication for staff members?
- How do we regularly recognize our staff members?
- Is there a process in place to seek input and feedback from staff?
- How do we welcome new staff members into our district?
- Is there an expectation among staff members to be informed?

3) Parent/Family Communication

Your communication plan includes a strategy to communicate and connect with parents/families at the school and district level

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How and how often are we currently communicating with parents/families? From district? From schools?
- Are there expectations/accountability for principals around communication, marketing and engagement?
- How are we communicating with parents/families for whom English is not their first language?

4) External Communication

Your communication plan includes a strategy to communicate and maintain strong relationships with residents, organizations and businesses

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How and how often do we regularly communicate with our external audiences?
- How and how often are you and other key leaders visible throughout the community?
- How are we using third-party voices to help communicate and advocate for your district?

5) Stakeholder Engagement

Your communication plan includes a strategy to regularly seek insight and feedback from students, staff, parents and community members to inform key decisions

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Is there a process for regularly soliciting insight and input?
- Do principals know how to effectively engage the voices of students?
- How would your stakeholder audiences describe your engagement process?
- Is there a clear process for using insight and input?

6) Brand Experience & Reputation

Along with tactics to communicate your brand, your district has a clearly articulated brand that amplifies the core purpose of your district

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do you know how staff members, parents/families and community members describe your district?
- Is your desired reputation consistent with how your district is perceived by others?
- Can leaders consistently describe your district?

7) Student Enrollment Retention & Recruitment

Your communication plan includes an ongoing strategy to retain current students and recruit new students, and position your district as a compelling choice

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do you know why students leave or come to your district?
- What are your important enrollment numbers? Projected and right-size enrollment? Market share?
- What tactics are in place to assess student/parent satisfaction?
- Who is responsible for enrollment and recruitment?
- Is your website being used as a marketing tool?

8) Employee Retention & Recruitment

Your communication plan includes an ongoing strategy to retain current employees and recruit new employees by positioning your district as an attractive and welcoming place to work

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do you know why employees leave or come to your district?
- Does your district have an effort to retain staff?
- When are you recruiting new employees? Regularly? When positions are open?

9) Crisis Communication & Preparedness

Your communication plan includes an processes to communicate as part of crisis situations

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Do you have a crisis team that meets regularly to review plans?
- Do you have written procedures for communicating during a crisis?
- Do you have sample letters or templates for potential emergency situations?
- Do you have evacuation and reunification plans for every school?
- Do you have sufficient redundancy built into your plans?

Table Conversation



What makes sense and what questions do you have about the nine strategies?

Where to Start

**15 ideas for creating and
leading a culture of
communication
in your district**

Creating a Culture of Communication

1. **SHARE YOUR STRATEGY & PLAN** - Your staff and community will be more willing to follow if they know where you are going.
2. **USE “WHEN” AND “HOW” TO GUIDE COMMUNICATION DECISIONS RATHER THAN “IF”** - Transparency is the key to creating and maintaining trust; always look toward communicating.
3. **KEEP YOUR SCHOOL BOARD IN THE LOOP** - The “care and feeding” of a school board is essential to effective communication and can set the stage for further engagement.

Creating a Culture of Communication

4. **ATTACH COMMUNICATION THINKING TO EVERY DECISION** - Add one key question to all important agenda items to help make communication more routine:
"How will we communicate this issue or decision?"
5. **COMMUNICATE FROM THE INSIDE OUT** - The most critical audience for any superintendent is your internal audience. Leaving employees out of the loop will hurt your reputation.
6. **INVEST IN COMMUNICATION** - Effective communication only happens when it is a priority. It requires investment of time, effort and resources.

Creating a Culture of Communication

7. **SHARE BAD NEWS AND MOVE ON** - When bad news happens, respond immediately and apologize as necessary. Dealing with bad news sooner rather than later will help shorten the life of the news.
8. **BE SEEN** - Visibility matters. Being present throughout your district and in your community goes a long way toward creating positive perceptions of the district.
9. **LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK** - Deliver your messages efficiently and then take time to ask questions and engage your stakeholders.

Creating a Culture of Communication

10. **EXPLAIN THE “WHY” BEHIND YOUR DECISIONS** - Your constituents may not agree with all of your decisions, but there will be fewer public ripple effects if you explain the reasons behind your decisions.
11. **TIE ISSUES TOGETHER** - Very few issues in districts stand alone. Most things are interrelated and connected with at least one other issue.
12. **STEP AROUND THE GATEKEEPERS** - Feeding information to the media is not enough to communicate. Find ways to connect directly with your audience so others can't filter your message.

Creating a Culture of Communication

13. **LEAVE AN INFORMATION TRAIL BEHIND YOU** - Prepare brief fact sheets or topic summaries to leave behind when meeting with staff, parent and community groups to reinforce your key messages.
14. **SEEK INPUT AS A RULE, NOT AN EXCEPTION** - Listening to stakeholders is key in developing a culture of communication, and your stakeholders will be more likely to participate if they know their input is being used.
15. **ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION AS AN EXPECTATION OF EVERYONE** - Make it clear to all employees that they are responsible for staying informed and communicating in a positive way.

Table Conversation



**What insights are emerging for you
as you think about creating a
culture of communication?**

Questions



FINAL Table Conversation



How will you apply what you have
learned to your current and future
leadership work?



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