

Normal has Shifted:

ESSENTIAL CHANGES to your Communications & Marketing Strategy to SURVIVE in the Post-COVID MARKETPLACE

Minnesota Association of School Administrators
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Today's Agenda

- **Core Thoughts** - Understanding core thoughts that have always been true and are now amplified
- **Changes in the Marketplace** - Understanding fundamental shifts that have a significant impact on school districts
- **How to Change your Strategy** - Six communication strategies that need to be adjusted and ideas on how to start implementing the changes

Core Thoughts

**Understanding core thoughts
that have always been true
and are now amplified**

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Core Thought #1

It is **easier for critics** to get their **messages** into your community if there is a **“communication vacuum”** or lack of communication from the district

- It is essential for districts to create communication channels and fill them with their own positive messages and stories

Core Thought #2

The 20-60-20 rule is at the **center of communication** in every district

- 20 percent - agree with you because it's you - typically agree with you on most issues
- 60 percent - are undecided or not yet informed and/or have not yet formed an opinion
- 20 percent - disagree with you because it's you - typically disagree with you on most issues

Core Thought #3

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

- Effective communications needs to be modeled from the top

Core Thought #4

The **most important** part of any school district communications effort is **internal communication and engagement**

- Your staff members can make or break your district - investing in staff connections is critical.

Core Thought #5

The students who **live within your district boundaries** have more learning options **than ever before** and there is **no guarantee they will enroll** in your district

- The retention of current students and recruitment of new students must be an ongoing process

Changes in the Marketplace

**Understanding fundamental
shifts that have a significant
impact on school districts**

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Fundamental Shifts

School districts have always been affected by political issues - the following shifts in our culture have changed the dynamics for school leaders:

- Voices are **louder** and increasingly more **polarized**
- Opinions and **personal** perspectives **dominate** facts
- Single **voices** have been replaced with well-organized and **well-funded** campaigns
- Compromise is **not acceptable** by many - people are advocating for a **single solution**

Fundamental Shifts (continued)

- Many **solutions** that worked in the past will **not work** in the future - the **very nature** of school districts has changed
- **“Storms”** have become **more frequent** than the “calm”
- Apologies for **missteps** are becoming essential, but are **not always** sufficient
- Strong **leaders** in districts have **never been more** critical - the current **challenges** can only be addressed through **strong leadership**

Issues Not Going Away

- **Employee shortages** - hiring and retaining employees will continue to be challenging
- **Labor relations** - negotiating with unions will likely become more contentious
- **School choice** - your families will have more and more learning options to choose from
- **Impact of politics** - the polarization of public opinion will continue to affect school leaders and decisions

How to Change your Strategy

**Six communications
strategies that need to be
adjusted and ideas to start
implementing changes**

BIG PICTURE - OVERALL THINGS TO DO

Identify **WHO YOU ARE** as an organization

What makes you **UNIQUE**

Clarify your **KEY SELLING POINT**

Answer **WHY** someone would **CHOOSE YOUR DISTRICT**

Act like you have to **RECRUIT EVERY STUDENT** to choose your district

REPUTATION MATTERS

How your district is perceived in the marketplace drives your ability to retain and recruit students and staff, and stay focused on delivering a quality experience

Internal Communications & Engagement

What has changed

- Importance of using staff as ambassadors has been significantly amplified
- Expectations among many staff to know everything have increased
- Staff members have become more polarized and there is a risk of losing support if a solid connection is not maintained
- Loyalty of staff is more tenuous

Internal Communications & Engagement

What to do

- Reduce the clutter of email with one internal newsletter that simply and clearly communicates what staff need to know and do
- Change every job description to include accountability to participate in district communications; increase expectations
- Create real engagement - set up a process to collect insight before decisions and show how insight was used - include staff as partners in decision making

Staff Retention & Recruitment

What has changed

- Staff are leaving schools for other industries in record numbers
- More staff are looking for flexibility as part of their employment package
- Staff have more and more employment options
- Hiring people has become more challenging
- You need them more than they need you

Staff Retention & Recruitment

What to do

- Turn employee recruitment into a year-long strategy - not just posting job openings
- Tend to the care and feeding of current employees - monitor and fix issues that might be causing people to leave
- Create a culture of communication and engagement where issues are managed and talked about
- Consider how to creatively organize work to allow for staff flexibility

Student Retention & Recruitment

What has changed

- There are more and more reasons to choose another school option and there are more and more school options
- Competition will come from all directions
- Much of your competition has a head start and is better at this work

Student Retention & Recruitment

What to do

- Understand what is happening in your district and in other learning options. What districts or schools are competing for your students? Are there non-traditional learning options like online academies that are attractive to students and families? Listen to what students and families are telling you
- Create a year-long, ongoing strategy for student enrollment marketing to showcase your district in the marketplace
- Redesign your website to be a marketing tool that highlights your brand and targets prospective families
- Engage your principals in this work - enrollment has to be part of a school leader's responsibilities

Marketing & Storytelling

What has changed

- The choice to market your schools has disappeared - it is now a requirement to survive
- The narrative surrounding schools has become more negative and polarizing and less focused on the things that really matter
- Lies about your schools are sticking more and your district's voice needs to be heard

Marketing & Storytelling

What to do

- Change the narrative and focus on the magical stories from the classroom - flood your community with emotional, powerful content
- Market your schools - develop a marketing approach for every school
- Use social media strategically as a key storytelling channel
- Start now and focus on both retention and recruitment

Issues Management

What has changed

- Political issues are now affecting decisions and operations in districts
- Polarization is putting pressure on individuals and organizations to take a side
- The wrong statement at the wrong time can become a distraction for months

Issues Management

What to do

- Regularly (three or four times a year) review and discuss emerging issues to see what might affect your district
- Outline your district's basic stance on key issues and shape messaging to effectively share your position - you can have a position without taking sides
- Avoid taking on issues that don't belong to you
- "Overcommunicate" on key issues because people forget and others will lie about your position

Community & External Relations

What has changed

- More residents are getting information about your schools from outside sources
- The availability of quality, trusted news sources is quickly diminishing
- Your district is being judged based on negative perceptions from other sources
- Messages about your district are being shared in community-based social media channels

Community & External Relations

What to do

- Get in front of community members every chance you get
- Create a regular channel to communicate with residents without children in your schools
- Develop a strategy to use available media resources to help share your messages



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