

Communications Belongs in the Sandbox

WHY PLANNING MAJOR INITIATIVES WITH YOUR TEAMMATES ALLOWS FOR DEEPER COMMUNICATION



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As most public school districts research, develop, and propose major educational initiatives, a plan for internal and external communications is often not considered or even created until implementation is about to begin. Instead, school districts should include and involve their communications and public relations departments from the onset of planning and developing major initiatives.

CREATE A SANDBOX

Encourage your district to create a cross-functional team made up of staff members from multiple departments when researching, planning, and developing major initiatives. A staff member from communications should be included from the very beginning.

NO THROWING SAND

Be prepared for a little bickering among team members as they try to find their place in the group. Plus, having a member of communications offering advice or input can be unfamiliar and a little off-putting for others. The tension will eventually pass as team members discover the benefits of having new colleagues as a resource in their daily work.

LOOK FOR HOLES

Don't be afraid to speak up or offer input when you see "holes" in a plan, missteps, or when things are left out that could come back to create an issue for the district or even become a story for the media. Often, a member of communications can be the voice of reason when evaluating or interpreting the possible effect an initiative might have on internal and external stakeholders, which can lead to a different implementation plan or project scale.

BUT WHY?

Early on, have the team brainstorm the "why" of even developing the initiative in the first place and then remind them of the "why" at each and every meeting. It's easy to get bogged down in the details and semantics of a plan, but if everyone on the team understands the "why," it is more likely to get passed down to their staff, colleagues, and so on. This creates a strong message and understanding

early on at the district level, even before a communications plan is put in place for principals, teachers, parents, and community members.

SHARE YOUR TOOLS

Identifying various stakeholder groups and their varying needs is common practice for those in communications, but not necessarily for educators. Early on, help the team identify the stakeholder groups that will be affected by the initiative and what these groups will need to buy in or accept it. This can often lead to the planning of a more robust set of training and professional development sessions for teachers and principals, or even lead to the decision to implement the initiative in phases or pilot groups.

RESEARCH

As the cross-functional team conducts research, analyzes data, and looks for best practices, the communications member on the team should do the same — reaching out to different school districts who have had success communicating similar initiatives and those who have failed. What would they have done differently? What advice would they give?

DON'T LEAVE ANYONE OUT

When the time comes to develop a communications plan with a robust set of strategies, involve the team. They may have some ideas that you have not considered. Plus, leverage their individual expertise and encourage them to send you ideas, good news, or even shout-outs during the implementation process. This can lead to great stories on your district's website, blog, and social media channels.