COMMUNICATIONS
PRESS RELEASES
2024 Math and Science Scholars Named in Urban Schools

WASHINGTON, June 18 – Four graduating high school seniors have been selected by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) to receive the 2024 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship. The students were chosen from more than 300 applicants in big-city school districts across the nation for their academic performance, leadership qualities, and community involvement.

Now in its sixth year, the scholarship was created by former NASA astronaut Dr. Bernard A. Harris, Jr., the first African American to walk in space, and the Council to encourage and assist promising students of diverse backgrounds who plan to pursue science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) studies after high school.

The awards were given to two African-American and two Hispanic seniors from high schools in four of the 78 urban school districts represented by the Council.

“Encouraging students of diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in STEM has been a life-long goal for me, so I am grateful for the opportunity to support the educational journeys of these future STEM leaders,” said Dr. Harris. “These scholarships will make education more accessible for this year’s recipients, and I wish them all the best as they undergo their post-secondary studies.”

Each scholar will receive $5,000 for continued education in a STEM-related field. This year’s award winners are:

• Alyssa Almaguer, Lucy Garrett Beckham High School, Charleston County School District

• Angel Gabriel Hernández Hernández, Escuela Especializada en Bellas Artes Anita Otero Hernández, Puerto Rico Department of Education

• Emerie McCann, Young Women's College Preparatory Academy, Houston Independent School District

• Joshua McLeod, Norview High School, Norfolk Public Schools
In the fall, Almaguer will attend Clemson University Honors College and major in bioengineering. Hernández Hernández will major in biomedical engineering-mechanical at the University of Miami. McCann plans to study environmental engineering at the University of Texas at Austin and McLeod will major in electrical engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

This year’s scholarship program was generously funded by the Peter Pharis Foundation as well as the Savvas Learning Company, and Dr. Harris.

“We thank the Peter Pharis Foundation, Savvas, and Dr. Harris for their generosity and congratulate this year’s scholarship winners as they join the ranks of our past scholarship recipients,” said Council Executive Ray Hart. “It's inspiring to witness the positive impact this scholarship has on their lives and to continue to support the next generation of urban students pursuing math- and science- related degrees.”

Administration of the scholarship program, including the application process, pre-selection and presentation of awards, is provided by CGCS. Dr. Harris makes the final selection of recipients.

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 78 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge to deliver the best possible education for urban youth. For more information, visit www.cgcs.org
The Council of the Great City Schools Awards Janice Alexis with $10,000 Dr. Michael Casserly Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice

The college scholarship, sponsored by Curriculum Associates, will support the Science, Technology and Research Early College High School graduate as she pursues a degree in biomedical engineering.

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 2, 2024

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) recently presented Janice Alexis, a graduate of Science, Technology and Research Early College High School at Erasmus in Brooklyn, NY, with the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice. Sponsored by Curriculum Associates, the $10,000 college scholarship will be used by Alexis to attend Syracuse University and pursue a degree in biomedical engineering, aiming to bridge the gap between the medical field and minority communities.

The scholarship is part of the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice, named after the Council’s former executive director. The annual award, now in its fourth year, is presented to a person who has made outstanding contributions in the field of Grades K–12 urban education by taking a courageous and passionate stance on the issue of educational justice and equity. This year’s award was presented to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), who played a major role in championing support for Head Start, a national early childhood education support program that provides support for early education, social, emotional and nutritional health, and social services for children with disabilities.

Alexis recently graduated from the Science, Technology and Research Early College High School at Erasmus, where she played on the school’s volleyball and track and field teams. She spent the summer of her Grade 11 working with the Council of Peoples Organization, a New York City nonprofit organization serving low-income immigrant families, particularly those in the South Asian community. There, Alexis worked in the food pantry and built connections with visitors, strengthening her bonds with her community.

“Janice is an exceptional student who has devoted her high school career to mentoring peers and serving her community,” said Casserly, strategic advisor for CGCS. “We are proud to partner with Curriculum Associates to commend Janice for her efforts and help her pursue her passions. As she endeavors to bridge the gap between the medical field and communities of color, her passion and commitment will positively impact her community and beyond.”

“We are proud of Janice and all of her accomplishments, and we look forward to the many ways her talents will benefit her profession and her community,” said Sonya Coleman, vice
president for strategic relationships at Curriculum Associates. “Our partnership with CGCS continues to be of great importance as we work together toward educational justice and equity.”

CGCS is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 78 large-city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate on behalf of inner-city students through legislation, research, and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts that share common problems to exchange information and collectively address new challenges as they emerge to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

To learn more about CGCS, visit CGCS.org. To learn more about Curriculum Associates, visit CurriculumAssociates.com.

About CGCS
It is the special mission of America’s urban public schools to educate the nation’s most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to our democracy and global community. The Council brings together 78 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems in a coalition dedicated to the improvement of public education for our nation’s urban public school children. See CGCS.org.

About Curriculum Associates
Founded in 1969, Curriculum Associates, LLC designs research-based print and online instructional materials, screens and assessments, and data management tools. The company’s products and outstanding customer service provide teachers and administrators with the resources necessary for teaching diverse student populations and fostering learning for all students.

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Media contact: press@cainc.com
STATEMENTS
Statement by Ray Hart, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools
On U.S. Surgeon General’s Landmark Advisory on Firearm Violence

WASHINGTON -- The Council of the Great City Schools strongly supports U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murphy’s landmark advisory declaring firearm violence in America to be a public health crisis with devastating and far-reaching consequences for the nation's health and well-being.

Gun violence has plagued nearly every major urban community in the United States over the last decade, as well as many non-urban communities, and has taken the lives of too many promising young people.

The Council applauds the U.S. Surgeon General for calling the American people’s attention to this urgent public issue and commends his courage and determination to end the gun violence that is plaguing the nation.

Our public schools, particularly in the nation’s Great Cities, remain one of the safest places for our children to be, but the toll that gun violence takes on our students is devastating.

With firearm-related injuries as the most common cause of injury-related death for children and youth ages 1 to 24 in the United States, the Council and its member school districts cannot reduce gun violence in the nation’s urban schools and communities alone. This is why last year the Council teamed up with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to jointly release a report that provides schools and police new and innovative approaches to reducing crime and violence in their communities.

The price that our young people, particularly our males of color, are paying in our cities for the inaction of adults in reducing firearm deaths is unbearable. And the nation itself is paying a high cost as so many promising young lives are lost to gun violence.

We commend U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murphy, the Biden Harris Administration, and U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona for this
landmark advisory, which takes a public health approach to firearm violence prevention. It is an important step forward, but we need everyone—lawmakers, law enforcement leaders, public health leaders, community activists, faith-based leaders—to step up to the plate and work together to reduce gun violence and safeguard the future of our nation’s children.

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ARTICLES: COUNCIL REPORTS, REVIEWS, AND COACHING
FUTURE OF LEARNING

New superintendents need ‘a fighting chance for success’

A 2-year-old program tries to combat superintendent churn by preparing school leaders for the job’s harsh realities

by JAVERIA SALMAN May 23, 2024

Michael Hinojosa, superintendent-in-residence at the Council for the Great City Schools, leads a cohort of district leaders training to be superintendents. Credit: Alex Jones/Council for the Great City Schools

The Hechinger Report is a national nonprofit newsroom that reports on one topic: education. Sign up for our weekly newsletters to get stories like this delivered directly to your inbox. Consider supporting our stories and becoming a member today.
Among the superintendents of 78 of the nation’s urban school districts, just 11 have been in their jobs since 2020.

That statistic startled Michael Hinojosa, a former leader of the Dallas Independent School District who is now superintendent-in-residence at the Council for the Great City Schools, a coalition representing those 78 districts.

The pandemic made superintendents’ jobs even harder. On top of their other duties, they had to make decisions about masking and vaccines and address such issues as community food needs. The flare-up of the education culture wars in 2021 also added to the pressures on districts’ top administrators. Some superintendents transitioned to other roles in their communities or districts, while others chose to retire, according to Ray Hart, the council’s executive director.

Two years ago, the council asked Hinojosa to create an initiative to develop people for district leadership positions. Known as the Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute, the year-long program prepares urban school district leaders to take on the superintendent role by providing training on the biggest challenges and responsibilities of the job post-pandemic, including politics and student behavioral and mental health challenges. The institute accepts 10 candidates a year who attend seven in-person, weekend-long sessions in addition to virtual meetings.

“It’s a very complex job,” said Hinojosa, “and we want to make sure you have a fighting chance for success.”

To design the curriculum, Hinojosa and his colleagues studied the qualities of successful superintendents. Those who could create connections with board, staff and community members had a much better chance of thriving in their jobs, he said. Based on that research, the sessions focus on topics such as school board relationships, finance and budgets, and media and politics. Instructors walk
candidates through real case studies of school districts, diagnosing problems and coming up with potential solutions.

Matias Segura was appointed interim superintendent of the Austin Independent School District in December 2022, after five years as the district’s chief of operations. Around the same time, he got a call from Hinojosa encouraging him to apply for the program.

Cindy Marten, deputy secretary of education, speaks to a group of district leaders at the Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute. Credit: Alex Jones/Council for the Great City Schools

Segura said the program has given him practical training, as well as access to a network of other leaders who are facing similar challenges.

“What really, really helped,” he said, “was how to be more effective once you’re in the seat.” In January, Segura was selected to remain as Austin’s permanent superintendent.
Hinojosa said the program is trying to select candidates from underrepresented demographic groups. Nationwide, only 4.4 percent of superintendents are Black and 3.1 percent are Hispanic, according to a 2023 survey by the School Superintendents Association. During the 2022-23 school year, women made up 28 percent of superintendents.

In addition to Segura, the first cohort included Ebony Johnson, who has since become Tulsa Public Schools superintendent, and Brenda Larsen-Mitchell, now interim superintendent for Clark County School District, in Nevada.

Both have taken over districts whose challenges reflect the times: Johnson, the Tulsa district’s former chief academic officer, became superintendent after former Superintendent Deborah Gist resigned in order to avoid a state takeover of the school system. Larsen-Mitchell, former deputy superintendent, was promoted after her predecessor took a buyout, following years of a tense relationship between the school board and educators.

Segura said a school leader preparation program is particularly vital for urban districts, many of which serve Black, Hispanic and emergent bilingual students.

“If you have individuals who aren’t ready to take the role, then our students are going to be impacted, which is why this type of cohort is so critically important,” Segura said. “A disruption can be catastrophic.”

This story about superintendents was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Sign up for the Hechinger newsletter.
Helping K-12 Schools on a National Scale

Willie Burroughs knows K-12 challenges and serves the Council of Great City Schools with extensive experience after leading Dallas and San Antonio school districts.

By Jake Meister, Contributing Writer
EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Willie Burroughs doesn’t see problems, but rather opportunities for improvement. That’s not because he’s an endlessly optimistic person with a quirky personality and an inability for cynicism, but rather a trained analytical and curious mind with an enthusiasm for bowties.

The Director of Management Services for the Council of the Great City Schools, Burroughs graduated Clemson University in 1992 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Industrial Engineering before working as a participant in a manufacturing training
program followed by a six month officer basic course as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. From September 1995 to November 2002 he worked as a project/operations manager with Champion Aerospace in his home state of South Carolina. The job, which was conducted as he earned his MBA from Clemson, was focused on perfecting manufacturing processes.

Those skills would translate well to his new career in K-12 schools facility management.

From Aerospace to education

Burroughs found a groove with work that suited him at Champion Aerospace. While he appreciated public education — his wife was a Spanish teacher who instilled in him an appreciation for social consciousness — a career in K-12 facilities wasn’t something Burroughs really considered. However, a friend who worked at Aramark introduced Burroughs to key decision makers at Houston Independent School District (HISD). A unique fit was sensed, and in December 2002 he began working with the district as Aramark’s general manager of facility services.

Burroughs quickly realized the skills he honed as a collegiate and young professional in the private sector translated to any environment, including K-12 education.

“There really isn't a difference,” Burroughs says. “In K-12, we’re always in competition. Either we do the work better with internal resources or we outsource. What are our KPIs? What are the things that tell us that business is healthy?”

During six years with Aramark, Burroughs took his insatiable appetite to improve the systems for doing work and used it to lead maintenance, custodial, and grounds work at 50 of HISD’s schools. Work in the private industry taught him how to eye margin spreads. On the non-academic side of public education, he looked to improve the systems that had the greatest financial impact on the district. He developed and implemented training programs for technical staff to increase efficiency and effectiveness and conducted regular stakeholder engagements in order to identify and address customer needs. This led to more efficient operations, saving the school money it could reallocate into the classroom.

Fond of Burroughs’ methods and the results they produced, HISD hired him to be its general manager of construction services. In just less than two-and-a-half years, he provided strategic oversight for the implementation of the $1.2 billion facilities capital bond program, managed planning, design, and construction
activities, and developed budgets for each project. The work earned Burroughs a promotion to HISD's director of special projects. For three years, he developed and managed budgets to maximize the use of resources and implemented performance measurement tools — more exciting ways for him to work toward increased efficiency.

Always learning

Burroughs is constantly in pursuit of knowledge. He tells his son — now a senior in high school — that a person must always be learning, and that duty doesn’t decline as one advances through adulthood. So, as a lifelong learner, Burroughs accepted a job as the executive director of maintenance and facilities at the Dallas Independent School District.

The position required him to problem solve issues pertaining to maintenance, HVAC, grounds, environmental services, custodial work, capital improvement and energy management. There was so much to handle, but Burroughs yet again didn’t see a true problem in this.

“There are things that you’re not going to be an expert in or not know,” he says. “Surround yourself with people that are really bright and have enthusiasm in what they do. Through desire you obtain knowledge, which builds skill, which you then apply.”

In Burroughs’ role, HVAC was something to monitor regardless of season. He also says, “systems are going to be systems,” so the district’s aged infrastructure was always going to present an issue.

There’s also a constant need to stay on top of infection control practices, as evidenced by the fact the first Ebola patient diagnosed in the United States was treated, and later died, in Dallas in 2014. Regardless of the issue, Burroughs says the most important step is to provide customer care. How an operation engages with the end user can make all the difference.

The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) is also quite large, which is why Burroughs jumped at the opportunity to be its chief operations officer in the spring 2017. The job placed 1,600 employees under Burroughs, six of whom were direct reports. The bulk of the staff held custodial and child nutrition jobs, with about three of both varieties hired at each of the 100 campuses. It was in this job that Burroughs had the opportunity to learn from Pedro Martinez, now the CEO of Chicago Public Schools. Under Martinez’s leadership, the largest bond referendum in the history of the San Antonio district passed. Burroughs says one of the most crucial catalysts to that success was making teachers and all stakeholders part of the conversation. This gave Burroughs a vital lesson in
effective communication, which he said evokes the proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.”

While the most important professional lesson Burroughs got in San Antonio related to communication, his most profound experience was realizing how much of an inspiration his presence was to many of the students in the district.

Having grown up in rural South Carolina, Burroughs didn’t attend schools flush with a bevy of resources, so his opportunities for unique learning experiences were capped. This alone connected him with students at SAISD. Sure, the district was much larger than the one Burroughs attended, but it was similar in that many of the students are impoverished. Another similarity — and perhaps this is the most important one — is that like many of the students, Burroughs is a person of color.

Burroughs says he likely appeared to students as “sort of a unicorn.” Here he was, a Black man in a suit, succeeding in one of the most important positions in the district.

“Seeing you can really impact the life of others and not even know it … Representation matters,” Burroughs says, adding that it was his teachers in South Carolina that inspired him to pursue higher education.

**Representing K-12 on a national scale**

As Burroughs was making a lasting impact in San Antonio, Bob Carlson worked part of his 29-year career at the Council of Great City Schools, which brings the nation’s 100 largest school districts together to discuss and learn best practices related to programming, operation, funding, and policy.

Burroughs has long held both Carlson and the Council in high esteem, so when its executive director, Dr. Raymond Hart, texted Burroughs with a request to chat, he was quick to respond. The Council offers a variety of different panels at different conferences, so Burroughs was thinking Hart might want him to speak at one such event. The idea of participating sounded great, but what Hart pitched to Burroughs was better. Carlson was going to be transitioning towards retirement, and Hart wanted him for the role.

“After I picked my jaw off the ground I thought, ‘Wow, you guys are calling me?’,” Burroughs says.

Now a little over two years into his role, Burroughs is having “the time of his life” supporting districts as they work in an exciting, but difficult, time in education. He gets to lead conferences and help put together whitepapers and best practice
documents. Burroughs is also involved in the council’s partnership with the Consortium for School Networking, which with funding from Amazon Web Services, is putting together a checklist that will help K-12 schools use artificial intelligence (AI) to their advantage.

There are also the less joyful challenges. Many districts face declining enrollment, resulting in less funding, which in turn has many districts projecting hundreds of millions of dollars in deficits. Of course, Burroughs sees an opportunity to problem solve. One possible way to do this, he says, is by right-sizing building capacities, leading to greater efficiency, resulting in cost savings.

Other challenges include staffing shortages — bus drivers, special education teachers, IT workers — and talent retention. The supply chain is an issue, too. Burroughs says HVAC solutions are on ice with 18 months to years’ long waits for certain chillers. The wait to replace or upgrade school buses is similarly long. Looking ahead, AI presents opportunities to improve efficiency by taking certain tasks from workers — think number crunching and invoicing — leaving them to do something else that necessitates the human mind. Of course, with the prospect of this change comes resistance. Burroughs said the council will support districts that choose to embrace AI. Those who don’t, he said, will likely fall behind.

No matter the issue, industry experts believe Burroughs and the council gives schools a chance to overcome.

“[Burroughs] is keeping a strong connection to all district leadership around the country,” says Clarence Carson, an industry consultant and former chief facilities officer for Chicago Public Schools. “The council is increasing the participation of the members and maintaining membership. A big part of his draw is that he seeks to collaborate with others, which makes him a gem in the industry.”

*Jake Meister is a freelance writer in Milwaukee.*
ARTICLES: DISTRICT LEADERSHIP
Baltimore schools CEO could leave amid contract dispute. Insiders are worried.

Liz Bowie
5/8/2024 12:37 p.m. EDT

Negotiations between Baltimore’s school board and its long-serving CEO, Sonja Santelises, appear to have stalled less than two months before her contract expires — a highly unusual situation that could suddenly leave the school system without a leader if they can’t reach a deal.

Parents and community members say the board has left them in the dark.

Three sources with knowledge of the negotiations said the board does not want to give Santelises a four-year contract, the standard for superintendents in the city and around the state. Santelises has asked for a contract that would keep her in the job for another 2.5 years, those sources said. They did not want to be identified because of the sensitivity of the negotiations.

Two other sources, who are close to the board, said many board members aren’t being told the details of the negotiations. The chair and vice chair have said the discussion with Santelises centers around a one-year contract, according to the sources. Board leadership has not informed the rest of the board that 30 months is even part of the discussion, those sources said.

Sources said salary does not appear to be an issue in the negotiations. She was the highest paid superintendent in Maryland in 2020 when the board approved her current four-year contract and a $325,000 salary that allowed for a 2.5% annual pay increase. Superintendents usually receive pay increases when they get a new contract.

Board chair Ronald McFadden declined to respond by Tuesday evening to questions sent to him on Friday. Board members did not respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

“The main question is why haven’t we received an update on whichever way it is going,” said Angie Winder, chair of the city schools Parent and Community Advisory
Board. “It would be nice to receive some information. Families deserve to know what direction it is being taken. ... We would love to have some transparency.”

It is unclear why the board does not want to give Santelises a four year contract.

The subject of who will be CEO has become a hot topic of parent conversation, Winder said. Not all parents want to see Santelises continue.

Marnell Cooper, who was chair of the school board that hired Santelises in 2016, said the board’s lack of an agreement so close to the end of the contract is concerning. “The fact that the board has not yet reached a resolution on her contract is a little unnerving,” he said. “I don’t understand what the board is trying to do by not extending a four-year contract and wanting something less.”

If Santelises stays on the job, she will be one of the longest-serving urban superintendents in the country. Of the 78 districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization representing large urban districts, Santelises is the second-longest-serving superintendent in the same district. Only the Toledo superintendent has been in the job longer.

Santelises also is among a small group of superintendents in Maryland who would be beginning a third term, including those in Harford and St. Mary’s counties, according to the association representing the state’s superintendents.

Santelises has repeatedly said she is not interested in becoming a superintendent in another school district.

Her long tenure is what makes Santelises so valuable to the city, said Cooper. He said he asked Santelises to please stay for a decade after he read research showing that the most successful superintendents were those with longer tenures. It is difficult, Cooper said, for any leader to make significant change in a large, urban school system in just a few years. He said academic achievement has improved under Santelises and she has brought stability after years of turmoil.

“Superintendent searches are hard, and they are time-consuming,” said Cooper, who maintains it is not in the best interest of the district to change superintendents. No current board member, he said, has experience with a search for a new leader.

At the time Santelises was hired, the board and community had become dissatisfied with CEO Gregory Thornton, who had been chosen after an extensive national search and was on the job less than two years. The board decision to hire Santelises
was a surprise, done without telling the public they were searching for a replacement for Thornton.

Under Maryland law, the length of a superintendent’s contract is required to be four years, except in Baltimore, where the length of the contract and any renewals can be up to four years. On June 30, Santelises will have served two four-year contracts.

Unlike other Maryland school systems, the city also does not have to adhere to deadlines for hiring a superintendent. County superintendents must notify their school boards by Feb. 1 if they would like a new contract. And if a county board decides to reappoint its current superintendent, Maryland law says that the board must take action no later than March 1.

In practice, most school boards and superintendents make a decision on whether a contract will be renewed in the fall, about nine months before the end of the contract. If the superintendent isn’t staying in the job, the board usually starts a search by January and hires a new leader by the spring.

The city school board’s failure to take action by May is unusual.

Santelises’ contract required her to inform the board whether she wanted another contract by March 30, but her decision was not made public.

Santelises did not respond for a request to discuss the negotiations.

If there is no agreement by June 30, a spokesman for the school system said, Santelises and the board could come to understanding to keep her in place until there is some resolution on her contract or she leaves.

For decades, the city school system had a string of superintendents who came and went, each instituting a new set of priorities. Test scores remained largely flat. Only one superintendent, Andres Alonso, stayed for six years. He instituted several sweeping changes that affected how teachers are paid and the formula for how schools are funded. Legislation was also passed during his tenure that provided a 10-year, $1 billion plan to rebuild and refurbish schools.

When Santelises arrived, she left in place most of what Alonso had started, but focused on the nitty-gritty of teaching and learning in classrooms. She immediately ditched the old curriculum and adopted one proven to raise achievement in other districts. She also began recruiting talent for the central office to stabilize the system.
Under Santelises, the school system has seen test scores increase in English Language Arts in grades 3 through 8 every time the test has been given since 2016, including during the pandemic. Math scores fell during the pandemic and have yet to recover, as is true in other school systems in the state.

She also led the system during a number of crises. In her second year, the heating systems failed at 60 schools, leaving some students in 40-degree classrooms before schools were shut down. The failure focused national attention on the dilapidated buildings. Since then, the buildings have been improved and there is now an early warning system that tells building managers when the boilers are failing.

A grading scandal erupted at Augusta Fells Savage Institute for the Visual Arts in 2019. An investigation found that school leaders had schemed to inflate enrollment, pressured teachers to change grades and scheduled students into classes that didn’t exist.

The school has since been cleaned up and operates under a new principal. An audit done by an outside firm found this winter that no further grade-changing issues existed.
Bob Nelson Defends 'Militant Positivity' in His Farewell Speech as Outgoing FUSD Superintendent

By Nancy Price, Multimedia Journalist

Published 21 hours ago on May 9, 2024

Bob Nelson’s last official act as Fresno Unified School District superintendent came during Wednesday’s School Board meeting when he delivered his final Superintendent’s Report.

Not surprisingly, Nelson spoke at length about his gratitude to his family, friends, and the Fresno Unified community for their support and encouragement during his more than seven years in the district’s top job, which included the challenges of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Very few big school districts survived with its leadership intact after that tumultuous time, Nelson said.

“We represent the third largest, third longest tenured governance team of the 70 major urban school districts that comprise the Council of the Great City Schools,” he said. “In fact, the number of governance teams that actually remain intact on both sides of the pandemic was fewer than five across our entire nation.”

Nelson, who spoke for more than 15 minutes, said he would not have been able to perform his job as successfully without the support of his wife, children, mother, and in-laws, who watched from the first rows of the board room.

**Militant Positivity: ‘Having Resilience and Grit’**
He addressed the criticism he has faced about his adherence to the concept of “militant positivity,” a phrase that he has used repeatedly.

“So people make a lot about military positivity, and I’ll finish with this: Militant positivity should never be confused with wearing rose-colored glasses and pretending things are good when they aren’t good. Militant positivity is about showing up every day, ready to be giving your best self, even in the face of blinding difficulty or aggressive resistance. It’s about having the resilience and the grit to just refuse to stop doing what you believe to be right in the name of support of children,” he said. “You don’t stop because others don’t like it. Leadership involves alienating some people at times. If everyone thinks you’re a good leader, you’re probably not doing anything of significance in this life.”

Nelson is leaving Fresno Unified on July 31 for a faculty job at Fresno State. In the meantime, he will serve as a “special advisor” to both Interim Superintendent Misty Her and the School Board, according to his revised employment contract that the trustees approved Wednesday night.
SOCIAL MEDIA
Communications Report

Tracking The Council's Digital Presence

Monthly Update
April 2024

Council of the Great City Schools
THE NATION’S VOICE FOR URBAN EDUCATION
COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS
Monthly Update: April 2024

Email Campaigns

EMAIL CAMPAIGNS SENT IN APRIL 2024

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Social Media

Facebook - APRIL 2024

Posts: 14
Post reach: 2.5K
Pages likes: ---
Page followers: 2,100
New page likes:16
Page engagement: --

Top 3 Facebook Posts

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<td>277</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the Council’s recent Legislative / Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., conferees heard from U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, Neera Tanden, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and journalist Amy Walter.</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer received the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice from the Council. Sponsored by Curriculum Associates, the award recognizes outstanding contributions to K-12 urban education and advocacy for educational justice and equity.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Top 3 Tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWEETS</th>
<th>IMPRESSIONS</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>LIKES</th>
<th>RETWEETS</th>
<th>LINK CLICKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We thank CoSN for presenting the Council with its 2024 Partnerships that Matter Award. The award recognized the Council for its collaborative efforts on the CoSN/CGCS K-12 Gen Al Maturity Tool.</td>
<td>1,740</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the Council’s recent Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., conferees heard from U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, Neera Tanden, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and journalist Amy Walter. pic.twitter.com/tkvKI3WVB6</td>
<td>1,075</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you ready to witness the solar eclipse? Today marks a rare celestial event. Keep an eye on our feed as we share how some of our member districts are commemorating this remarkable day. Remember to protect your eyes when viewing the solar eclipse!</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LinkedIn - APRIL 2024

Posts: 17
Post reactions: 703
Post comments: 38
Post reposts: 8
Page views: 940
New followers: 332

Top 3 LinkedIn Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POST</th>
<th>IMPRESSIONS</th>
<th>LIKES &amp; REACTIONS</th>
<th>LINK CLICKS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>SHARES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Council held a retreat for Memphis-Shelby County Schools’ new Supt. Dr. Marie N. Feagins and members of her transition team. The retreat focused on academic performance and identifying key priorities that will inform next steps.</td>
<td>5,855</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Feagins, the new Memphis Superintendent (Memphis-Shelby County Schools) isn’t facing this challenge alone! The Council is helping the new leader take the reins of Tennessee’s largest school district. <a href="https://lnkd.in/eeMWiFCX">https://lnkd.in/eeMWiFCX</a></td>
<td>5,285</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congrats to Detroit Public Schools Community District’s Machion Jackson, Deputy Superintendent of Operations and Facilities, who received the Council’s Dr. Robert “Bob” Carlson Distinguished Leadership in Operations Award at the Meeting of Chief Operating Officer and Director of Facilities, Child Nutrition, Safety &amp; Security and Transportation. Accepting the award on her behalf was (left to right) Carl Williams, Executive...</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communications Report

Tracking The Council's Digital Presence

Monthly Update
May 2024

Council of the Great City Schools
THE NATION’S VOICE FOR URBAN EDUCATION

33
# Communications Highlights

## Monthly Update: May 2024

### Press Releases

**Press Release in February 2024**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Press Release Title</th>
<th>Date Posted</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Media Mentions

**Media Mentions in February 2024**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Date Posted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore schools CEO could leave amid contract dispute. Insiders are worried.</td>
<td>The Baltimore Banner</td>
<td>05/08/2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Nelson Defends ‘Militant Positivity’ in His Farewell Speech as Outgoing FUSD Superintendent</td>
<td>GV Wire</td>
<td>05/09/2024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Email Campaigns

## EMAIL CAMPAIGNS SENT IN FEBRUARY 2024

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAMPAIGN TITLE</th>
<th>DATE SENT</th>
<th>TOTAL RECIPIENTS</th>
<th>SUCCESSFUL DELIVERIES</th>
<th>BOUNCES</th>
<th>OPEN RATE</th>
<th>CLICK RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May Urban Educator</td>
<td>05/21/2024</td>
<td>2,566</td>
<td>2,445</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024 Hechinger Report Article</td>
<td>05/30/2024</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social Media

**Facebook - MAY 2024**

Posts: 26  
Post reach: 1.4K  
Pages likes: --  
Page followers: 2,100  
New page likes:12  
Page engagement: --

**Top 3 Facebook Posts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POST</th>
<th>REACH</th>
<th>LIKES &amp; REACTIONS</th>
<th>LINK CLICKS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>SHARES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yesterday, we wrapped up a day of #BIRE24 school visits in Saint Paul Public Schools SPPS with a debrief and discussion, allowing participants to learn how St. Paul implements #ELL programs. There were so many impressive examples of co-teaching and home language integration! Now, onto day 2!</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland Metropolitan School District shared work led by its Multilingual Multicultural Education Department to provide non-traditional opportunities to receive credit for courses taken abroad and accelerated pathways to earn credit for graduation at #BIRE24.</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Council of the Great City Schools presents the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice. Sponsored by Curriculum Associates, it honors individuals making remarkable contributions to urban K–12 education. Learn more: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/2p9hpj86">https://tinyurl.com/2p9hpj86</a></td>
<td>202</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Social Media**

**Twitter - MAY 2024**

Tweets: 27  
Tweet impressions: 11.1K  
Mentions: --  
New followers: --  
Retweets: 18  
Likes: 135  
Link clicks: 17

### Top 3 Tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWEETS</th>
<th>IMPRESSIONS</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>LIKES</th>
<th>RETWEETS</th>
<th>LINK CLICKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After remarks from @MPS_News Multilingual Programs Executive Director Muhidin Warfa, we’re off to visit nine schools in our #BIRE24 host district to continue our learning of innovative #ELL programs and practices. pic.twitter.com/lHW9tGwz7y</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We value all of our students for their uniqueness… You, [#ELL educators], stand in the gap to make sure all our students have what they need.” - Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams, @MPS_News Superintendent, delivered opening remarks on leveraging language as an asset at #BIRE24. pic.twitter.com/phJypDVGejSkills_Pub_v14.pdf …. pic.twitter.com/nEc39zBIDkaA495HPTtA</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Council’s Research Team and presenters from @MPS_News shared considerations for collecting and using English learners data to support and enhance outcomes. This conversation previewed the data-based inquiry process for our new #BIRE24 challenge of practice sessions. pic.</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LinkedIn - MAY 2024

Posts: 25
Post reactions: 1,102
Post comments: 30
Post reposts: 36
Page views: 1,096
New followers: 315

Top 3 LinkedIn Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POST</th>
<th>IMPRESSIONS</th>
<th>LIKES &amp; REACTIONS</th>
<th>LINK CLICKS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>SHARES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“When districts come together, we do great work for our students.” - Saint Paul Public Schools Superintendent Joe Gothard welcomed #BIRE24 attendees on behalf of the Council’s leadership and shared the importance of working together as the Council of the Great City Schools.</td>
<td>3,510</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In March, the Council hosted a session at the SXSW EDU conference in Austin discussing how the Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute is training the next generation of urban school superintendents. After the session, Javeria Salman, with the The Hechinger Report, expressed interest in writing an article about the...</td>
<td>3,431</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After remarks from Minneapolis Public Schools Multilingual Programs Executive Director Muhidin Warfa, we’re off to visit nine schools in our #BIRE24 host district to continue our learning of innovative #ELL programs and practices.</td>
<td>3,063</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education Secretary Cites Federal Initiatives in Support of Schools

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona told school leaders the Biden Administration is coordinating efforts to quell community violence, which too often spills into schools. His priority, he said, is to make sure those efforts don’t sap school resources.

Read More

White House Advisor Addresses Absenteeism in Schools

Neera Tanden, director of the White House
Domestic Policy Council, recently addressed urban educators at the Council of the Great City Schools' Legislative Policy Conference and told them that the White House is focused on helping states and school districts make sure students attend school regularly.

[Read More]

Journalist Gives Perspective on Presidential Politics

Joe Biden and Donald Trump will be running against each other in the 2024 presidential election, something political analyst Amy Walter would not have predicted a year ago when it seemed both men were not in a strong enough position to win their primaries.

[Read More]

Broward and Sacramento Name New Superintendents

Howard Hepburn was recently named the new superintendent of Florida’s Broward County Public Schools after previously serving as the district’s deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. Hepburn will succeed Peter Licata who is retiring due to medical reasons.

[Read More]

Council Honors Longtime Senator Chuck Schumer

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) is the recipient of the 2024 Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice. Sponsored by Curriculum Associates, the award, named after the Council of the Great City Schools’ former executive director,
Urban School Leaders Highlight Progress After the Pandemic

At the Council of the Great City Schools’ recent Annual/Legislative Policy Conference, conferees heard from superintendents of four urban school districts that outpaced national pandemic academic recovery rates in reading, math or both, according to the Education Recovery Scorecard, a joint study by researchers from Stanford University and Harvard University.

Read More

Longtime Des Moines School Board Member Dies

Teree Caldwell-Johnson, a longtime member of Iowa’s Des Moines school board, died March 31 after battling cancer. She was 68. She was the longest-serving member of the Des Moines school board, first being elected in November 2006.

Read More

Upcoming Events

Bilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Education Directors Meeting

When:
May 6 - May 11, 2024

Where:
The Royal Sonesta Minneapolis Downtown
Minneapolis, MN

Register
A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 78 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. Click here to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
Council Fall Conference to Feature Political Analyst, Bestselling Author and Space Activist

Chuck Todd, a former moderator of Meet the Press; Isabel Wilkerson, the author of two New York Times bestsellers; and Katya Echazarreta, an activist for space travel, will address the Council of the Great City Schools’ 68th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 16-20 in Dallas, under the banner “Leading Innovation & Transformation, We Do Urban Education.”
Council Assembles Team to Assist New Memphis Superintendent

New Memphis-Shelby County Schools Superintendent Marie Feagins has tapped key players from the Council of the Great City Schools to advise her newly formed transition team.

Read More

New Superintendents Named in Washoe and Oklahoma City; Fresno Names Interim Leader

After embarking on a national search, Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada, selected Joe Ernst as its next superintendent. Since 2021, he has served as the district's Chief Continuous Improvement Officer.

Read More

Six Urban Schools Ranked Among the Nation's Top 20

U.S. News & World Report recently released its 2024 edition of “Best High Schools,” ranking six schools in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools in the top 20 of 17,655 public schools evaluated nationwide.

Read More

U.S. Presidential Scholars Named

Ahrystina McGuirk from Kalaheo High School and Maile-Lei Ji of Kealakehe High School were recently named U.S. Presidential Scholars, marking a historic moment for the Hawaii Department of Education.

Read More
Exchange Program Opens the World for Toledo, German Students

The two students from Ohio’s Toledo Technology Academy of Engineering (TTA) admit they were nervous about what they would have in common with two German exchange students who would be with them for nearly three weeks.

Read More

Urban Schools Win Green Ribbon Awards

Arlington Elementary School in Lexington, Ky., has a school garden that is used as a living laboratory where students explore seeds, animal habits, and the butterfly life cycle. Teachers at the school also integrate lessons on sustainability throughout the curriculum and in after-school programs.

Read More

Chicago School Wins Urban Debate National Championship

Students across the country who participate in urban debate leagues spend an entire year debating the same topic and building and refining their arguments in preparation for the 2024 Urban Debate National Championships.

Read More

Newark Students Share Their Stories of Immigration in New Book

Students in New Jersey’s Newark Public Schools are not just sharing their stories but lending their unique voices to a new book, We Were Strangers, Once Too: An Immigrant Memoir Collection. This collection of student narratives offers a firsthand look at the diverse experiences of immigration and identity.
Legislative Column

At the end of March, Congress finally finished the last of their appropriations bills for FY 2024, finalizing funding for the upcoming 2024-25 school year almost six months into the federal fiscal year.

Read More

Upcoming Events

Chief Information Officers Meeting

When:
June 4 - June 7, 2024

Where:
Hilton Portland Downtown
Portland, OR

Register
A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 78 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. Click here to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
For the Class of 2024, high school didn’t begin with the traditional journey of crowded hallways and classrooms. Covid-19 created a unique path, starting with online classes and then transitioning to in-person learning with masks and social distancing. Despite these obstacles, students from big-city school districts persevered and discovered new ways to learn, grow, and thrive. Read their inspiring stories.
Duval County, Atlanta, and Portland

Christopher Bernier was recently named the superintendent of Florida’s Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville. He succeeds interim superintendent Dana Kriznar.

Read More

New Leadership at Council to Begin

Marcia Andrews, a member of the school board of Florida’s School District of Palm Beach County, will become chair of the Council of the Great City Schools’ Board of Directors for a one-year term effective on July 1, 2024.

Read More

Council Opens Fall Conference Registration

The Council of the Great City Schools will hold its 68th Annual Fall Conference from October 16-20, hosted by the Dallas Independent School District at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel in Dallas, Texas.

Read More

Boston Urban Educator of the Year Awards $10,000 Green-Garner Scholarship

Last year at the Council of the Great City Schools’ 67th Fall Conference in San Diego, Boston school board member Michael O’Neill was selected as the winner of the Green-Garner Award, presented to the nation’s top urban school board member.

Read More
NYC Student Awarded $10,000 Michael Casserly Scholarship

The Council of the Great City Schools recently presented Janice Alexis, a 2024 graduate of New York City Public Schools, with the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice.

Read More

Four Urban Students Win CGCS-Bernard Harris Scholarships in Math and Science

Four graduating high school seniors with dreams of pursuing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers were recently selected by the Council of the Great City Schools to receive the 2024 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship.

Read More

Upcoming Events

Curriculum, Research, Instructional Leaders Conference

When:  
July 9 - July 11, 2024  

Where:  
Westin Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL

Register

Public Relations Executives Meeting

When:  
July 11 - July 13, 2024
Publishing Note
The Urban Educator will not publish in August. We will return to your inbox in September.

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Staff Writer
Kalin Hicks
khicks@cgcs.org

Staff Writer
Alexandra Benjamin

Acting Chair
Marcia Andrews
Board Member, Palm Beach

Chair-elect
Marcia Andrews
Board Member, Palm Beach

Secretary-Treasurer
Sonja Brookins Santelises
CEO, Baltimore

A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 78 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. Click here to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS
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<td><strong>CRISIS PREVENTION &amp; MITIGATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Crisis Preparation in our Cities and Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PREPARATIONS BEFORE A CRISIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the City’s First Responders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the District’s Crisis Response Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the District’s Crisis Management Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the District’s Crisis Communications Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLARIFYING ROLES &amp; COORDINATING MESSAGING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITICAL KEYS TO CRISIS PREPARATION DURING A CRISIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting the Superintendent in Front of the Messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIMELINE FOR CRISIS UPDATES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First 5-10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First 15-20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First 30-45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First 60 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE CRITICAL FIRST 10 MINUTES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MANAGING NEWS MEDIA</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>PRESS CONFERENCES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRISIS RECOVERY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX A: SAMPLE STATEMENTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Holding Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Text Message / Robo Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample News Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Information Update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX B: COMMUNICATIONS EXAMPLES FROM SCHOOL DISTRICTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita Public Schools' Crisis Communications Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Update from St. Louis Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Message from St. Paul Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Message from Richmond Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX C: MESSAGES ABOUT GUN/WEAPONS FOUND ON CAMPUSES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX D: CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX E: ACTIVE SHOOTER RESOURCES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX F: COMMUNICATING DURING A CYBERATTACK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples from Los Angeles Unified School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples from Des Moines Public Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If Public Relations Executives (PREs) in urban school districts learned anything during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that our capacity to adapt and innovate expands even more during a crisis. We also learned that it has never been more important for PREs and their teams to proactively prepare for life-threatening challenges. Such incidents include a pandemic, a bomb/explosion, an environmental disaster, life-threatening violence against a student or staff member, or a school shooting.

These possibilities, combined with a rise in mental health issues and greater availability of weapons, make it imperative for PREs to prepare for the unthinkable.

We know that when a crisis occurs, communication will begin without us. Chaos and anxiety will be immediate. Students will seek physical and emotional support; families will demand information; loved ones and media will rush to the scene; data and details will be collected and shared in cultural silos; and social media will instantly become a primary source of news.

Our challenge and responsibility in a crisis event is to:

1. Remain calm, exhibit confidence, demonstrate readiness to keep our students and staff safe, and keep families and the community informed;

2. Communicate quickly and professionally on multiple platforms and through interactive communication channels with messaging that is honest, timely, and compassionate; and

3. Be at our best as professionals in managing the news media and in providing all stakeholders with the information they need.

This guidebook was created to help PREs proactively plan for, and be ready to manage, communications during any crisis that raises extreme anxiety over school safety, that threatens the lives of children and staff, and halts routine school operations. The document also includes specific communication examples from school districts that have experienced other types of crisis such as cyberattacks.
CRISIS PREPARATION IN OUR CITIES AND SCHOOLS

Districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) already have active emergency plans in place through their city governments. These plans prepare first responders and related agencies to react immediately and effectively to disasters. This includes responding to school shootings and other events that risk public safety on our campuses, at businesses, and in neighborhoods. In addition to emergency response strategies, school districts are required to develop plans that meet state and federal guidelines for school safety management.

Existing emergency management systems follow guidelines and directives from the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other emergency, rescue, and law enforcement agencies. City safety personnel, along with state and local agencies, train and prepare staff to prevent and mitigate bomb threats, terrorist acts, natural disasters, and other dangers. They are equipped to assist citizens and organizations, including schools, with preventing violence and help communities recover from a crisis or tragedy.

For Example:

- State legislatures require public and private schools to adopt safety plans.
- City charters describe the responsibilities and powers delegated to the mayor and department directors during a shooting or other crisis events.
- National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) direct departments, agencies, and political subdivisions within states to utilize the system for incident management.
- Mayors direct the city’s elected officials, departments, agencies, and offices on the use of these standard response systems.
- The federal Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, passed in 2006, requires government entities to facilitate the reunification of minors with their parents/guardians in crisis situations.
- Following the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings, in Newtown, Connecticut, the FBI set a national standard for active shooter training that has better aligned federal, state, and local agencies.

Our city school districts have their own comprehensive plans and procedures for responding to bomb threats and other critical incidents in schools. Due to a rise in school shootings, their plans increasingly focus on preparing for active shooter events as well.
Crisis communication cannot be effectively managed without knowing the crisis procedures already in place. PREs and their communications teams should collaborate with their district safety and security teams to observe and become familiar with crisis training for active shooter events, evacuation procedures, and other efforts coordinated with emergency response agencies.

THE VARIOUS ROLES OF THE CITY’S FIRST RESPONDERS

The safety plans managed by city public safety departments and emergency management offices include databases to identify facilities, rescue/evacuation plans and routes, and family reunification procedures with pre-determined sites.

The city’s department of public works typically maintains a list of school facilities, coordinates that list with the office of emergency management, and manages evacuation sites and reunification centers.

School-based safety and security officers work closely with the office of emergency management, city police, FBI and first responders to understand complementary roles in mitigating and responding to school shootings and other crisis events.

Once you and your teams are familiar with those strategies, you can better align your work with theirs.

City public health departments and county health boards are trained to coordinate volunteer healthcare providers (e.g., nurses, physicians, pharmacists). School districts’ Medical Reserve Corps (MRCs) are trained to staff evacuation and reunification centers to:

- Verify credentials, and;
- Coordinate staff and resources.

The American Red Cross also maintains a volunteer corps to assist with staffing and to support students and families in reunification centers.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security respond to investigate incidents and mitigate further threats.
THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT’S CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

School district safety and security teams are expected to implement established protocols when responding to an active shooter or other crisis event. They prepare in advance by using active shooting drills to train principals, teachers, and students. They provide pocket guides and classroom emergency response signage, instructional pamphlets, and flips charts, etc. They also engage on a regular basis in joint response planning with city and county agencies.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT’S CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

In the event of a disaster or crisis, the school district’s CEO/Superintendent will lead crisis management in executing plans to continue operations. This not only includes the safe and orderly evacuation of students but the transporting, housing, and feeding of students during times when normal school operations cease and a crisis unfolds.

During the pandemic, school districts managed crisis situations that closed facilities for extended periods and preserved academic functions, contracted with service providers, provided childcare, distributed course materials and technology, set up meal sites, and provided other services.

In an active shooter situation or other crisis, the district’s top senior leaders should be prepared to:

- Use the student information database to:
  - Facilitate emergency medical response and treatment of victims;
  - Contact parents of students injured or deceased;
  - Support the reunification of families with students at the reunification center;
- Communicate with families, the community and media;
- Assign transportation, food service, nursing, psychological support, language services, disability accommodations, social and emotional learning supports, and other essential services;
- Help external agencies unify and support families, which could include:
  - Transporting students/staff to staging areas;
  - Checking attendance, releasing students, and streamlining the reunification process;
  - Controlling lines of sight for orderly flow with signage, stanchions, and staffing;
  - Notifying and communicating with parents as students are released/picked up; or
  - Completing reunification cards and other recommended documentation.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT’S CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

As the systems for crisis response and management are deployed, PREs must:

- Quickly focus on gathering information from first responders and crisis managers;
- Coordinate messaging through a Joint Information Center (JIC); and
- Equip superintendents with information to communicate first and quickly to the school board and community.

Coordinating communication with other Public Information Officer (PIOs) in city/county agencies in advance of a crisis is one of the most important steps PREs can take. Planning with PIOs ensures that messaging is timely and accurate, and that school district communication is not lost in the shuffle when PIOs from numerous agencies operate and communicate in silos.

A Joint Information Center (JIC) is a designated facility, typically activated by a city or county, to coordinate public information and crisis communication during emergencies on a mass scale. The JIC serves as a central location for first responders to transmit information and for PIO’s to draft and release information to media and the public. Because activating a JIC is standard protocol during times of crisis (flood, explosions, etc.) it is recommended that PREs become familiar with their city’s emergency management protocols and position themselves for inclusion as a central figure in any JIC activated during a school shooting incident or other mass emergency affecting schools. This will not only ensure the PRE has the most accurate and timely information as it is transmitted by first responders, but will also position the school district to be first in communicating critical information to staff and families.
CLARIFYING ROLES & COORDINATING MESSAGING

Before a crisis occurs, it is important that everyone knows what roles they will play. This is why pre-planning for these events is crucial. Here are some things PRE’s should do in advance:

1. Regularly meet with your school district’s safety and security team to:
   - Observe staff training(s).
   - Accompany them at meetings with city/county agencies that plan emergency responses to crisis and active shooter events.

2. Identify and invite the PIOs of agencies in those trainings to plan and prepare for where and how the city’s JIC will operate during a disaster, or how they will coordinate during an active shooter crisis.

3. Get to know your city’s emergency response PIO’s before there is an incident and within the first three or four weeks of any staff transition. Meet quarterly for coffee or lunch to build rapport. Confirm you have each other’s contact information, especially cell phone numbers, so you can quickly connect in a crisis.

4. Establish how information and updates will flow between agencies, and within respective organizations, during the crisis.
   - Confirm which responding agencies will provide continuous updates to the JIC.
   - Clarify how information will flow from the crisis site to the JIC.
   - Plan how the PRE and agency PIOs will collaborate together to draft and finalize talking points.
   - Identify spokespersons in the district and city/county agencies who will deliver information, through which means, and in what order.
   - The CEO/ Superintendent should be at the forefront of crisis communications, where feasible, in partnership with law enforcement or government officials, such as the mayor, during and throughout a crisis such as an active shooter event.
Drafting and Activating Holding Statements

PREs should draft holding statements for use immediately upon receiving word of a crisis event. Holding statements can be developed now and used as a template later when a situation occurs and facts are known. Appendix A of this guidebook includes a sample holding statement and draft news release to use in preparing for an active shooter incident. Using these samples, or creating similar drafts, will enable you to gather and prioritize information as it is available and approved for release by the JIC.

It is also vitally important that school districts update parent/guardian contact information in proactive ways -- similar to methods used by physicians’ offices to routinely verify addresses and phone numbers.

Questions to Ask in Your District Before a Crisis Occurs:

**Preparation:**

- Do you understand how your team will deploy when a crisis occurs?
- What happens when a team member is pulled out of the mix (vacation, having surgery, family issue, etc.)?
- Does your team include representatives from community agencies?
- Have you practiced with your team to find out who can think clearly under pressure and accomplish the work assigned to them (are there too many or not the right tasks)?
- Do key stakeholders know their role (as a board member, superintendent, central office leader)?
- How will you keep district leaders informed about real/potential crisis situations to avoid surprises?

**Speed vs. Accuracy:**

- Does your district operate with one voice?
- Are you prepared to respond to messages from other parties whose comments you can't control?
- Have you discussed the impact of social media on communication, specifically the impact on speed of messaging in order to remain a trusted voice with key stakeholders?
- Who is talking to Board of Education members and who is talking to first responders?

**Your Toolbox:**

- Do you know who will contact you, and how, to provide information when a crisis occurs?
- Have you identified all key stakeholders who need information in a crisis, and who is responsible for reaching out to them? How will you reach them? When will you reach out to them?
- Do you have communication plans when you are out of the office or after hours?
- Have you developed plans to communicate with parents that don’t speak English fluently?
- Have you prepared messages in advance?
PUTTING THE SUPERINTENDENT IN FRONT OF THE MESSAGING

This step deserves more than a mention in a crisis communications guidebook. In an ideal situation PREs should provide the district CEO/Superintendent with the most accurate information within the first 10-15 minutes of an emergency event or school shooting event (refer to the timeline on page 11). However, in many cases this may not be possible due to the chaotic nature of such events. But even if the superintendent is not able to have all the facts, they still need to appear with law enforcement and other first responders. Although superintendents will most likely be flanked by the chief of police and heads of other agencies at a news conference, families need to see their school superintendent front and center in a school crisis.

Families need more than updates on casualties and the status of the city’s emergency response. Families need to hear messages of compassion, hope, and support. They also need guidance on where to go to reunify with their children and get the help they need. This is essential before handing off the microphone to a mayor, sheriff, police chief, or a medical worker for crisis/situation-specific updates.

KEEPING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS INFORMED

Keeping school board members informed is essential to your response, as is making sure they are updated simultaneously. Your superintendent likely communicates with trustees through a group text and/or a group e-mail (and should be clear that no one can “reply all” without violating open meeting laws). The superintendent will want to let them know when the next update or news conference is coming and/or share a general timeline for when information will be shared. For example, “We’ll update the public at tomorrow’s 9 a.m. news conference” or “we’ll update as soon as the police chief reports back.”

Board members will receive immediate calls and text messages from concerned constituents, members of the media, and others. Providing school board members with identical talking points will ensure they respond word for word, with the same message as the district.

The board president should stand next to the superintendent at press conferences to show support and solidarity with the district’s response. Ideally, though, the district speaks with one voice—that of the superintendent. The school board at some point may want to make a statement, however it is not in the first 48 hours in most cases and the school PRE should assist the school board in drafting language to make sure of its accuracy.
In a world driven by social media, communication is instant. Our colleagues who have experienced crisis events know this firsthand and have taught us that when such a crisis begins, we can expect that:

- PREs will receive text messages from chiefs and security teams that an active shooting or other event may be underway.
- Students and staff who hear shots or experience the crisis will call 911.
- Children will text their parents to ask for help or express their fear.
- Messages will be shared electronically, posted on social media, and picked up by news organizations (who will then call you to confirm what they are hearing).
- Parents will call their child’s school and the superintendent’s office, jamming phone lines across the district.
- Parents, news media, and community members will immediately race to the school.

The pre-planning outlined at the beginning of this guidebook prepares PREs for how information will flow and how key decisions will be made. It also outlines the information that should be shared as soon as the crisis response, management, and crisis communications teams activate individual and collective procedures.

Knowing how information will flow into the JIC, PREs can avoid the mistakes of first responders and school officials slow to communicate or contradict and correct each other’s statements when they do. The school community and media will demand information and regular communication from school officials. Trust and credibility should be established in the first 30 minutes of the crisis with regular communication intervals even if new information or more
TIMELINE FOR CRISIS UPDATES

Experienced crisis communications professionals suggest a standard timeline known as the “15-30-60-90 Rule”. But when it comes to communicating with families, waiting 15 minutes for any information will feel like an eternity. It makes sense, therefore, for PREs to plan more aggressively, with a plan that gets something out within 5-10 minutes. If possible, update families every 10-15 minutes, as information critical to the emergency response, status of the rescue, and evacuation/reunification is known.

Using social media to communicate with families on snow days or calamity days shows how it has replaced the tradition of communicating through television or radio. School district information shared on our website and social media platforms is quickly shared with parents and the community. Communication is two-way. Families and students comment on our posts in real time, and local media check our sites for the most current, accurate, and reliable information about our schools. That is why PREs should plan and prepare to communicate first, and quickly, to establish the school district as the most timely and reliable source of information.

THE FIRST 5-10 MINUTES

Within the first 5-10 minutes, districts should release their first communication directly to internal and external stakeholders, starting with those most affected: students, staff, and families. That message should immediately be followed by a statement to media. This can be a simple acknowledgement of the situation before details are known. In addition, you can use the holding statements in Appendix A to, 1) provide reassurance that an emergency response has been activated, 2) instruct what staff and families should be doing, and 3) inform where and when updates will be posted as soon as information is received and verified.

THE FIRST 15-20 MINUTES

Within 15-20 minutes, first responders, in communication with the JIC, are likely to have confirmed the first details that can be shared on the school district’s website and social media pages. News media will benefit (and appreciate) being given, or directed to, information about the school affected, its demographics, etc., and an estimated time for the first news conference.

THE FIRST 30-45 MINUTES

Your superintendent should be readied for his/her first public appearance. Families and the community will look to the school district for the most current and reliable information. This appearance should be live-streamed, if possible, and recorded so it can be posted immediately on the district’s website and social media platforms. This message must include details as they are known, as well as empathetic affirmations already drafted into the holding statement.

THE FIRST 60 MINUTES

Additional press conferences should follow. In addition to the superintendent, they may include other key leaders as appropriate (e.g., mayor, sheriff, chief of police). Participants should be representatives with whom the school district and city’s security detail have worked to secure the school, apprehend the suspect, evacuate the students, treat the injured, support the families, etc. Working in cooperation with other PIOs in the JIC, PREs should help create talking points for their respective spokespersons and plan the order for each representative to provide details from their perspective and area of knowledge and expertise.
GATHERING INFORMATION

- News media and others will pick up information in “real time” on police scanners (which may or may not be accurate).

- Without access to the scene, news anchors or reporters will convey information observed from their helicopter’s aerial view and from students, staff, and others calling newsrooms.

- PREs, in cooperation with other PIOs in the JIC, should have access to scanners and to reliable contacts at the crisis site to verify information as its transmitted.

- As facts are relayed and verified, talking points, prepared in the JIC, will ensure consistent messaging for all PIOs.

- Advanced planning for when and how the superintendent and other agency heads will share information will ensure the school district is communicating first, or simultaneously, with heads of other agencies.

- Referring news media to identified PIOs/spokespersons ensures that information and talking points are consistent with the first message delivered by the superintendent.

DRAFTING THE FIRST MESSAGE

The school district’s initial statement should:

- Express compassion for staff, students, and families affected.

- Summarize what is know (so far) about the incident.

- Instruct families where to reunite with students (provide a map if possible) and how to navigate the reunification process.

- Announce where continuous updates will be posted and when to expect the next news conference/update as police respond.

- Make sure a Spanish-language communication specialist/interpreter is part of the Communications team to quickly make messaging available in Spanish. Messages should also be distributed in a district’s top three languages.

COMMUNICATING TO DISTRICT STAFF

For a crisis at a specific school, the district should communicate to staff at that school through phone/text/email or mass notification systems such as Finalsite, Parentlink, etc. Depending on the situation, a principal might use the intercom system within their building. The intercom is an important tool to remember, as sometimes teachers don’t have their phone with them, or their email pulled up. Something as simple as “staff, please review your outlook email immediately for an important information update.”

Here are several actions districts can take during a crisis to communicate to staff in other buildings:

- The district’s security dispatch center should have a distribution email list to which they send each 911 call that is made to a school. This is often the first trigger PREs use to begin developing strategic messages for a building.

- Districts should have a cross-functional district crisis team in which crisis team members know their responsibility.

- Use the district’s messaging system (email, phone, text) to communicate to all district staff to make sure they’re aware and have at least a few key talking points.
MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

There was a time when PREs could easily distinguish between social media and traditional media. In the digital age, however, newspaper, TV, and radio reporters are posting news stories and updates on their digital platforms just as quickly as citizen journalists are posting on an increasing number of instant messaging and social media platforms.

PRIORITIZE MESSAGES

• Practice with staff beforehand who will serve in specific roles during a crisis.

• Attend to your own information gathering first.

• Focus first on messaging to your staff and families, while assigning members of the team or an outside consultant to manage and prioritize media requests in the order they come in, sending a statement and updates to your media list.

• Reduce the number of one-off requests and ensure media members are receiving the same information at the same time.

• Monitor, 24/7, what’s being posted on local and national media platforms, in print publications, and on social media sites about the incident.

• Remember, students are sharing information in real time, some of which may not be accurate. You may wish to emphasize that the only dependable, accurate source of information will come from the school district and law enforcement.

• Provide timely and accurate updates, and correct misinformation as it arises.

• In addition to providing communications support for the impacted school(s), share information, and talking points with other school leaders to share with staff and families.

FINALIZE HOLDING STATEMENTS

• All holding statements, including the initial statement issued within the first 10 minutes before information is known, should include contact information, phone numbers, and email addresses for media questions.

• Include links to a district crisis communications website where all statements, messaging, and updates are posted.

GATHER SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

• While waiting for updates, PREs and their teams can gather demographic data for the school affected, including the grades and number of students enrolled, number of staff employed, which classes are housed in the impacted wing of the building, etc. You will be asked for this information.

• Create an FAQ page on the website and add these fast facts for those seeking additional information.

• If your district has a family engagement hotline, ensure those in charge have information and talking points so that they can respond to questions from families who call in.
MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

TRIAGE CALLS

• Prep your communications team and add additional staff to monitor email, answer phones, record on-hold messaging, and quickly respond to callers.

• If there is a need to evacuate a school, ensure that one of the PREs is at the reunification site to assist and respond to questions from families and news media or direct reporters to the appropriate spokesperson.

• Email these staff members the prepared statements and instructions on where to access the most timely, accurate, updated information as it is received.

• Add updated information to your “on hold” messaging in key offices.

• Post an alert banner on your website directing information seekers to a designated page with the latest statement, information updates, superintendent messages/videos, news releases, the time of the next press conference, etc.

• Do **NOT** post a message apologizing that you are unavailable or overwhelmed with calls.

RESPECT LOCAL MEDIA

It’s important to remember that local reporters cover your school district every day. PREs should not give more weight or more attention to calls from “big names” in cable news and from producers of shows hosted by nationally-recognized media personalities. They are, too often, put at the front of the line.
PRESS CONFERENCES

With news assignment desks monitoring police scanners, PREs should expect media outlets to call the district and to deploy cameras, reporters, and live trucks to the area within minutes. In drafting your holding statements for the media, it’s important to estimate that your first news conference will be held within the first 30-60 minutes.

It is here that you can take advantage of any positive relationships you’ve developed with reporters, news directors, and assignment editors. Expect news outlets to reach the school or as close to it as possible within 10-15 minutes of an incident.

- Announce the time and location of the press conference as soon as possible.
- Designate a spokesperson, ideally your superintendent. However, if the crisis is still unfolding at the school, the communications director should be the spokesperson.
- Brief speakers on information being reported and posted on social media.
- Equip spokespersons with talking points drafted and approved in cooperation with the JIC and post them on social media.

MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

PREs SHOULD:

- **Take care of local reporters first.** That is a basic rule in building good media relations. Local reporters will be on the story longer than the outsiders, and they will remember how you attended to their needs and referred national media outlets to them and to their local affiliates for the information, documents, and interviews you provide.

- Be as open and honest as possible from the start of a crisis and you will be better positioned to assure reporters you will continue to support their work as the “why” becomes clearer in the aftermath of the crisis.

- Keep communicating, even when the information has not changed. “Here’s what we have (repeat what’s already been told). We have nothing to add at this time, but we expect an update shortly.”

- Determine when and where press conferences are held, and when/what information is released.
- Communicate the gravity of the event and emphasize sensitivity to victims and their families.
- Clarify errors of fact or rumors that persist on social media.
- Announce where information is posted and updated and when the next press briefing will occur.
- Show sympathy toward victims and their families.
- Include signers and translators to ensure messages are clear to all stakeholders.

Depending on the demographics of the district, PREs may wish to provide Spanish language interpretation in written updates and at news conferences. Ideally the superintendent, if fluent, may be asked to share all or part of the news in Spanish. If that is not possible, a district administrator or spokesperson may be called up to address the Spanish speaking audience, both at the news conference or during interviews with Spanish language media.

If not provided by city government, the school district could provide live ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation at the news conferences.
CRISIS RECOVERY

Acts of mass violence will cause extreme disruption. Caring for the mental health of the community is critical for promoting resilience and recovery. Crisis experts advise that every school community has its own culture. Communications professionals can contribute what is known about that culture to support crisis recovery.

Expect community gatherings, memorial services, and candlelight vigils in the aftermath of a shooting event. Counselors attest that while these measures are comforting in the moment, what is really helpful is assisting students and families move forward and return to familiar routines as quickly as possible.

The balancing act PREs face is to help people recover and move on without keeping their traumatic experience at the forefront. For this reason, the most effective intervention supports in the wake of a crisis are local strategies implemented in cooperation with local service providers, counselors, and agencies that already have relationships with the grieving school community.

National crisis experts can also be helpful. They can provide training and consultation to local providers and extend programs and additional interventions families may need in their immediate, intermediate, and long-term recovery. Those interventions often promote the principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) and include: safety calming, self- and community-efficacy, social connectedness, and restoring a sense of hope/optimism. These principles should be foremost in the messaging of PREs during the school community’s recovery.

“It felt like the CVPA way today, the way we do business. It was a productive day. I feel like everyone was in good spirits. We had smooth transitions. At this point I’m focusing on the mental health of the students and staff. It was good having counselors available. We had some good connections made with the therapists who were here. I feel really good about the support we have received.”

--Dr. Kacy Shahid, Principal of Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, after the reopening of school following an incident where a student and teacher were killed.

ACTIVATION TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Occurs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Reunification Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within 2-7 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Assistance Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 48-72 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~3+ weeks</td>
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</table>
We know from experience and from observing poorly managed crisis response and communication that our primary goal is to eliminate, or at least minimize, complications that result when panic and confusion reign.

For example, first responders warn that for every child in a school, as many as 10 people will be inclined to drive directly to the campus. This will confound rescue efforts. Emergency workers should not have to abandon their vehicles and rush long distance on foot, carrying stretchers and medical gear. Police are key to traffic flow. PREs are in the best position to convey to families how they can best support the rescue effort.

The time to anticipate such complications is now. A proactive communications plan will include holding statements, sample messages, and other tools recommended in this guidebook. With this plan in place when a crisis occurs, PREs and senior leaders can focus on 1) securing students and staff, 2) keeping the entire school community informed of progress, and 3) leading an effective emergency response.

What we also know from experience is that we are not alone when the unthinkable happens.

- Our city and county agencies are trained and ready to support us before, during, and after a crisis event or school shooting.
- Our CEO/Superintendents, our safety and security teams, senior leaders, and the PREs in the CGCS network have, at our fingertips, the supports needed to guide teams through a crisis.

**Proper planning ensures that crisis communication is:**

- **Immediate**, to calm fears, provide direction, quell rumors, and redirect anxiety toward reunification and recovery.
- **Informative**, not only for communicating the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the event, but to guide a panicked community toward rational and reasonable actions that aid, rather than hinder, response.
- **Honest**, in ways that give no hint of understatement, obfuscation, omission of facts, or “spinning” a negative situation into a positive one. People just want and need the truth.
- **Compassionate**, to let people know their personal feelings matter as much as, or more than, the desire of the entire school community to know what’s happening.
- **Interactive**, in ways that:
  1. Acknowledge the opportunity in the digital age to provide information and answer questions through multimedia platforms.
  2. Quell rumors when they start.
  3. Answer questions as they are raised.
  4. Engage the community and the media, as much as possible.

Truth and compassionate concern for others is the bottom line in Crisis Communication.
In conveying the importance of pre-planning for an active shooter event, the safety and security team in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District uses school surveillance video to remind staff how quickly things can move from normal to nightmare in a school.

These sobering images underscore the importance of readiness and the need for crisis communicators to engage regularly in thoughtful planning.

By working with crisis responders and managers, we are better able to ensure that none of our efforts complicate what may be a chaotic, anxiety-filled situation.

PREs are best prepared to communicate effectively in a crisis event by:

• Knowing the plans and actions of first responders.
• Preparing in advance for the flow of information from the site to PIOs of related agencies.
• Developing a communication plan that considers the proactive measures outlined in this guidebook and/or in the additional resources provided in the Appendices.
• Ensuring your communication, reunification, and recovery efforts:
  » Demonstrate confidence and control;
  » Show responsibility with effective strategies for diffusing fear and anxiety; and
  » Reflect an empathetic, compassionate response to families’ need to reach their children when they are in danger.

PREs must demonstrate preparedness, responsibility, and concern for those impacted and be ready to keep the public and the media informed. By doing this, PREs can meet fear, anger, and anxiety with the calm, thoughtful and compassionate response needed in every crisis situation.
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE

HOLDING STATEMENT

UPDATED: ______

Police have responded to a report of (a possible/unconfirmed) active shooter at _______school. The school is in lockdown, and our crisis response plan has been activated. School staff and security officers are working to keep students isolated and safe. Families and media are asked to stay away from the school and from roads leading to the school to avoid blocking access for police and emergency workers responding.

At this point, let’s place our faith and trust in the quick-acting police and rescue workers who are at the scene, as we await confirmation that the threat has been eliminated and our school can be safely evacuated.

In the meantime, we will keep you fully informed by posting and updating information on the district website and social media platforms as we receive it.

Here’s what we know at this point:

• the alleged shooter is [in custody / is isolated/ has been disarmed / has been injured/killed
• #___ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported for examination/treatment.
• Families of victims have been/are being notified.
• Evacuation of the school is underway / will begin shortly
• Unless personally directed otherwise, parents and caregivers should report, with identification, to the reunification center at _____.
• As we gather more information, our thoughts are with the students, families and staff affected by this tragic turn of events at ____school.
• Our next news conference and update will be at ____ a.m./p.m.
• We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated on our website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.
“This is (NAME), superintendent of (School District), with an urgent message for families of students who attend _____ School.

SCHOOL NAME has been placed on lockdown while police respond to reports of an active shooting incident in or around our school. Our emergency response plan has been activated in (___ school/all schools) to keep staff and students isolated and secure. Police are working to keep all roads leading to _______ school clear, to enable police and emergency workers to respond quickly.

Families of students and staff can help by reinforcing this guidance, keeping the areas around ___school clear, keeping phone lines open, and following instructions as we receive and share them with you.

Our goal right now is to ensure our students and staff are safe, the threat is eliminated, and our families are fully informed.

I will be joining [emergency response officials if known] in a news conference at ____o’clock to provide the most accurate and complete information as it is available. I will continue to keep you updated today through similar messages and website alerts. Thank you.

Drafting holding statements with as many points as are likely to be known in the first 10 minutes, will enable you to:

• quickly establish direct points of communication and information
• demonstrate preparedness and calm, deliberate action
• provide critical information to enable first responders to secure the scene and keep access roads and entrances clear for rescue and evacuation
• release information on casualties, and on notification of families affected
• direct all other families to reunification centers (and add a map if possible)
• allay fears and communicate empathy
The ______ School District’s Emergency Response Plan has been activated, as police respond to reports of a possible active shooting situation at ________ school. We have locked down the school to enable school officials and staff to keep students isolated and protected while the report is investigated and the threat addressed.

[The District] has activated our emergency communication protocols to alert families of the police response underway, and the need for families to stay away from the school and nearby streets to enable police and emergency workers to access and respond quickly to the site.

We are in communication with staff and families through our routine email/text/voice recorded message system, social media accounts and a website designated for crisis communication updates at ______.

The superintendent/CEO is monitoring updates from emergency management officials and will brief the community in a news conference at ______, scheduled at or about ____o’clock.

Add (if known):

• the alleged shooter is [in custody / is isolated/ has been disarmed / has been injured/killed].

• #___ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported for examination/treatment.

• Families of victims have been/are being notified.

• Evacuation of the school is underway / will begin shortly

• Unless personally directed otherwise, parents and caregivers should report, with identification, to the reunification site at ______.

• As we gather more information, our thoughts are with the students, families and staff affected by this tragic turn of events at _____school.

• Our next news conference and update will be at ____o’clock.

• We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated on our website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.
INFORMATION UPDATE

[District] CEO/Superintendent [Name] will continue to brief the [District] community as more information is known about a school shooting incident at ______school at ______ o’clock today.

We are grateful for the swift response of ¬[police/rescue] who arrived at our school within ______ minutes of being notified of an active shooter in/around our school.

At this time, we have confirmed that

Select from any that apply:

- Evacuation protocols are in place and students are being transported to ______, the location designated as the family reunification site, at [address].

- Unless contacted directly by school personnel or other agency to do otherwise, parents should report, with identification, to (reunification location).

- #___ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported to hospitals. Those parents have been notified.

- The alleged shooter [is in custody/ has been isolated/disarmed/injured/killed].

- An evacuation of the school is in process/will begin shortly.

- Information and instructions will be continuously updated on our school district website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.

- We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated.

- We expect to provide another update at ____o’clock.

- All of us are grieving [with the families of students injured/killed], and we will be working together, in the difficult days ahead, to support our students, staff and families through this crisis.
This quick resource guide was created by the Wichita Public Schools’ Strategic Communications team to highlight the critical action items that come into play for every crisis no matter the type or scope. With a full crisis communications plan behind this document, this QRG is on a clipboard at every staff member’s work station so it can be easily accessed whenever the plan needs to be enacted.
INCIDENT/DATE

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN OUTLINE

STEP 1: Verify Crisis Situation, Assignments, Team Members (“At A Glance”)  
STEP 2: Management and Logistics Considerations  
STEP 3: Develop Key Messages  
STEP 4: Approve and Release Key Messages  
STEP 5: Monitor and Provide Feedback  
STEP 6: Conduct Communications Debrief and Analysis After the Crisis

DEBRIEF NOTES - WHAT WENT RIGHT, WORKED WELL, DIDN’T WORK

ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS:

LOCKOUT – Lock exterior doors, limit access from outside. Activity inside continues as normal.

LOCKDOWN – Lock internal and exterior doors, no one enters or leaves building. Access to classrooms and hallways also secured. Activities may continue in classrooms, but no one enters/leaves internal spaces.
### ASSIGNMENTS/TEAM MEMBERS “At A Glance”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE / CHANNEL</th>
<th>RESPONSIBILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather Team / Crisis Team</td>
<td>Primary: Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A, Maria K <strong>Spanish</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Staff</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In the absence of both Wendy and Susan A, Suzy will be responsible for overseeing execution of action steps in the office.</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early morning:</strong> Ashley <strong>Cable</strong> (Jennifer as back-up), Maria K <strong>Spanish</strong> (Brenda Torres and Fabian Armendariz as back-ups)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frontline Communicators</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Suzy, Alicia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ZALLFrontlineComm, add ZALLPrincipals, ZALLClerical if necessary</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOE / Email, Text, Phone</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Staff will engage BOE at request of Supt., who may choose to handle those communications directly</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A, Suzy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ZALL Email</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A, Suzy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media / Students, Parents, Staff</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Susan A (early AM, late night), Maria L / Maria K (daytime)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A, Maria L and Maria K will back up each other, Brenda Torres is back up for Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ParentLink / Parents, Staff</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>Students)</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Susan A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>See appendix for info on what groups for what message types</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Suzy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOTE:</strong> Support provided to principals if notification is localized</td>
<td>For both: Support from Maria K <strong>Spanish</strong> (written/phone), backed up by Maria Palacios and Denisse Cadena-Wright, <strong>Vietnamese</strong> support from Tan Tran (written/phone) and Mai Sullivan (written), <strong>Sign language</strong> support from Veronica Frambers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web Updates</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Susan A (early AM, late night), Maria L / Maria K (daytime)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pop up, ALL sites for weather, targeted for other emergencies, content on web headline</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Suzy, Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Susan A, Maria K <strong>Spanish</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Wendy, Maria K <strong>Spanish</strong>, Maria L, Fabian Armendariz <strong>Spanish</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fielding Frontline Phone Calls</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Alicia, Chelsea, Kayla, Carla*, Shawn*, Kowonia* (*situational, would come to StratComm office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Monitoring / Traditional, Social, Web</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Kayla, Ashley, Chelsea, Maria L, Maria K,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Jennifer, Michael, Brenda Torres <strong>Spanish</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documentation</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Suzy, Jennifer BS, Chelsea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Important to capture ALL communications disseminated and referenced, and create Microsoft Team</em></td>
<td>Back-up: Kayla, Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donation, Community Partner Support</strong></td>
<td>Primary: Suzy</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Back-up: Kowonia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitor Information @ Email
info@usd259.net

Primary: Alicia
Back-up: Chelsea

Crisis Scene-to-Strat Comm Office Liaison
Primary: Maria L

Graphics
Primary: Kayla
Back-up: Jennifer

Media Briefings
Primary: MPS Team

Team Checkup as crisis evolves
Primary: Kowonia

Situational roles / audiences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>LIAISON</th>
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<tr>
<td>Crisis Team Leader, Assistant Leader</td>
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<td>Leadership (Superintendent/BOE, DLT, Department Heads)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spokesperson</td>
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<td>Family/Reunification Liaison</td>
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<td>Employee Liaison</td>
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<td>VIP/Partner Liaison</td>
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<td>School Liaison</td>
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<td>Student Liaison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Liaison (UTW, SEIU)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire/Police PIO Liaison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawmaker Liaison</td>
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<td>Media Base Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Facilitator (technical)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications Ops Center Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accident Liaison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counseling Liaison</td>
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### MESSAGING – Write It Down!

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<th>Key Message 1</th>
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<th>Key Message 3</th>
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<tr>
<th>Support Point 1.1</th>
<th>Support Point 2.1</th>
<th>Support Point 3.1</th>
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<th>Support Point 1.2</th>
<th>Support Point 2.2</th>
<th>Support Point 3.2</th>
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<table>
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<th>Support Point 1.3</th>
<th>Support Point 2.3</th>
<th>Support Point 3.3</th>
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**When to Send:**

**How to Distribute:**

**Message Recipient(s):**

### Essential Definitions:

**Lockout** – Lock exterior doors, limit access from outside. Activity inside continues as normal.

**Lockdown** – Lock internal and exterior doors, no one enters or leaves building. Access to classrooms and hallways also secured. Activities may continue in classrooms, but no one enters/leaves internal spaces.
October 12, 2022, 1:22 pm

Today, the Saint Louis Public Schools family has been devastated by news of an active shooter who injured six and killed one adult and one teen at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School before being shot and killed by an officer.

Students at two neighboring campuses, CVPA and Collegiate, were immediately placed on lockdown before being evacuated to a safe place to reunite with parents.

Counselors are on site and will continue to avail themselves to students, staff and families for as long as needed. Administrators and counselors are meeting with families.

NEW UPDATE: In an abundance of caution, all SLPS schools are on HARD lockdown, which means that for the remainder of the day there will be limited movement in and outside the schools. At dismissal, all scheduled buses will leave at the appointed time.

We are asking that any parents who want to come to school and pick up a student, please call the school in advance and let the office know when and who will be picking up the student. The student will be walked out to them.

Please NOTE: All after school classes and athletic activities are cancelled for this evening.

We will remain in touch with our families and community. Please rely on SLPS communications and the Police Department updates for your information.

Thank you.

George Sells 
Director of Communications and Marketing 
Office of Institutional Advancement 
Saint Louis Public Schools 
george.sells@slps.org 
g (c) 314.332-7035
VIDEO MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD ABOUT THE TRAGIC EVENT AT HARDING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9phwAl7Mh0Y

Dear Saint Paul Public Schools Community,

I am devastated to share some tragic news with you this evening. A student was seriously injured today at Harding High School and did not survive. A suspect is in custody. Due to student privacy and the police investigation, there are not many other details I can share at this time. Like all of you, I am grieving that this happened in one of our schools today.

The school went into lockdown and dismissed students early. Activities at Harding were canceled this evening and through the weekend. We will keep you informed of other cancellations or events that may be impacted by this tragic event.

We are doing everything we can to support the students, staff, families and community this evening and in the days and weeks ahead. Trauma resources are available at every school and through Ramsey County outside of school hours. Please find a few resources here:

- Resources for Students and Families: spps.org/Domain/14350
- Resources for Staff: spps.org/Domain/13967

Right now our focus is on supporting the Harding High School community and those who were directly impacted by this horrible incident, especially the family of the victim. Our young people need us more than ever. Please continue to support each other as we all grieve this tragedy and work together on healing and moving forward.

In Partnership,
Joe Gothard, Superintendent
Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, Richmond Public Schools’ Superintendent Jason Kamras, and Interim Police Chief Rick Edwards give an update on the June 2023 deadly shooting after Huguenot High School’s graduation in Richmond.

View video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ph2BVzl59s
MESSAGES ABOUT GUNS/WEAPONS FOUND ON CAMPUSUS

Here are some examples of messages/statements from districts where weapons were found on campuses:

Earlier today a Booker T. Washington High School student and the student’s mother alerted administrators that another student at the school may be in possession of a weapon. That student was located immediately and a weapon was recovered. The student was arrested and faces both criminal and disciplinary charges in accordance with the Atlanta Public Schools/Atlanta Board of Education zero-tolerance policy for possession of a weapon on campus. Parents were notified as soon as all of the facts of the situation were ascertained.

The safety and well-being of students and employees is, and will always be, a top priority in Atlanta Public Schools.

_____________________________________________________________

Weapon/Gun at school template

Voice:
Good Afternoon, parents. The safety of our students and staff is a top priority at _________. Today we had a student in possession of a gun at school. There were no threats made and no one was hurt in regards to this incident. Our Security Officers, Administration and SRO got involved immediately and took the student into police custody. We followed all district safety protocols in this matter to ensure the safety of our school community.

Parents, please discuss with your student the far-reaching and serious consequences of bringing inappropriate items to school.

I want to thank those who shared the information. We take these matters seriously and our students and parents know about See Something, Say Something in order to maintain a safe school environment.

Thank you for your continued support of ________________.

Email:

Good Afternoon, parents.

The safety of our students and staff is a top priority at _________. Today we had a student in possession of a gun at school. There were no threats made and no one was hurt in regards to this incident. Our Security Officers, Administration and SRO got involved immediately and took the student into police custody. We followed all district safety protocols in this matter to ensure the safety of our school community.
Important Update from Los Angeles Unified on Van Nuys High School Incident

The Van Nuys High School campus will remain on lockdown until law enforcement gives the “all-clear” to re-open the campus. The safety of our students and staff remains our top priority. There is no current threat to our campus and all student and staff remain safe.

We are informing you of a stabbing incident that involved multiple students which took place on our campus. Los Angeles School Police Department and LAPD are on scene investigating. Students are safe, and LASPD will stay on scene and continue to provide safety and support to students and employees. Parents of students involved have been notified.

All appropriate procedures were implemented according to District policy. In addition, our staff is well trained and regularly reviews all emergency procedures. We will continue to keep you informed throughout this process.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and patience.
Cott Media Group - Dr. Roseann Canfora trains and supports K-12 higher education executives and communications teams in crisis mitigation, support, and recovery. Her expertise in crisis and media management proved invaluable to Broward County Schools in the weeks following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Author of the Crisis Communications & Active Shooting Incident Guidebook distributed to CGCS member school districts, Dr. Canfora provides valuable training for school district leaders and Public Relations Executives to effectively manage critical incidents and crises in their schools. Formerly Chief Communications Officer in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Dr. Canfora also provides training and executive coaching for entry-level PRE’s.

Contact info: rcanfora@kent.edu

The Council for School Safety Leadership provides crisis communications support in the immediacy and aftermath and helps guide districts on communication as part of the recovery process. John McDonald, the organization’s chief operating officer, is recognized internationally as the architect of the post-Columbine tragedy safety, security, and emergency management plan.

Contact info: John McDonald, mcdonald@mosba.org

DGD Communications - Daisy Gonzalez-Diego, President, DGD Communications, was the Chief Communications and Community Engagement Officer for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the nation’s third-largest school district. She oversaw all communications, public relations, marketing, and outreach for various priorities. She now leads DGD Communications, utilizing her 30 years of experience navigating the public and private sectors to assist organizations with their communication needs.

Contact info: dgdcommunications.com, 305-607-1432

Enlighted Consulting - Eileen Houston-Stewart has been a passionate advocate for public education for 27 years and has worked as a communications/community engagement chief in urban school districts in four states. Her expertise includes crisis management, public and media relations, project and events management, video script writing and voiceover narration, and executive coaching for individuals transitioning into school public relations.

Contact info: https://enlightenedconsulting.net/, eileen@enlightenedconsulting.net, 816-379-0385

The Grayson Agency - Founder Justin Grayson is an award-winning public relations and communications expert who has established a national reputation for his crisis management skills, marketing prowess, and ability to shape an organization’s public perception. Justin has spent over a decade as a leader in the field of public school communications, successfully navigating communications challenges in some of California’s largest and most diverse school districts, including Long Beach, Fresno, and Riverside Unified.

https://www.thegraysonagency.net/contact-us

Barbara Griffith Communications - With a career spanning several decades, Barbara Griffith brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the field of communications. Barbara served as Senior Communications Officer for the Fort Worth ISD for 17 years, where she shaped the district’s public image and communication strategies. Barbara's education consulting services include crisis communications, developing strategies to boost and sustain enrollment, facilitate smooth superintendent transitions, and lead successful bond election information campaigns.

Contact info: Griffith.barbara@att.net, 817-602-5011

Horan Communications - Chris Horan is a former Chief Communications Officer for the Boston Public Schools. Since 2010, he has worked with school districts across the country as Managing Partner of Horan Communications. Chris provides coaching, training, and consulting services to School Boards, Superintendents, Communications Directors, and Administrative Teams in K-12 strategic communication. Expertise includes crisis communication, messaging, marketing, writing and editing, media relations, social media strategy, and communications assessment.

Contact: chris@horancommunications.com, 617-852-1340, Twitter @chrishorancomm
ACTIVE SHOOTER RESOURCES

https://www.schoolsafety.gov/resource/active-shooter-preparedness


Fast Facts, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed August 12, 2021:  
https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=54

Federal resources to help youth cope after a mass shooting. Youth.gov.  
https://youth.gov/feature-article/federal-resources-helping-youth-cope-after-school-shooting

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-disaster-strikes-inside-disaster-psychology/201802/school-shootings-how-respond

Resources in Response to the High School Shooting. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.  

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-disaster-strikes-inside-disaster-psychology/201802/school-shootings-how-respond


Kowalski, P. (2022) School Shootings: What we know about them and what we can do to prevent them. The Brookings Institute.  
https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/01/26/school-shootings-what-we-know-about-them-and-what-we-can-do-to-prevent-them/
In recent years, school districts across the country have experienced an increase in cyberattacks. According to the White House, in the 2022-23 academic year alone, at least eight K-12 school districts throughout the country were impacted by cyberattacks.

Two of those districts were members of the Council of the Great City Schools: Los Angeles Unified School District and Iowa’s Des Moines Public Schools.

In September 2022, the Los Angeles school district experienced a ransomware attack that disrupted the nation’s second largest school system’s access to email and key systems and applications they needed to operate schools. And on January 9, 2023, a ransomware attack on Des Moines Public Schools led the district to cancel classes.

When a school system experiences a ransomware attack it is vital for the district to effectively communicate with students, families, and employees during that time.

Here are the announcements, press releases, and notices communications departments in the Los Angeles and Des Moines
News Release

Los Angeles Unified Targeted by Ransomware Attack

Los Angeles, CA (September 5, 2022) – Los Angeles Unified detected unusual activity in its Information Technology systems over the weekend, which after initial review, can be confirmed as an external cyber attack on our Information Technology assets. Since the identification of the incident, which is likely criminal in nature, we continue to assess the situation with law enforcement agencies. While the investigation continues, Los Angeles Unified has swiftly implemented a response protocol to mitigate Districtwide disruptions, including access to email, computer systems and applications. This communication is being published after extensive, required vetting and approval by a number of entities and agencies.

Despite this significant disruption to our system’s infrastructure, schools will open on Tuesday, September 6 as scheduled. We are working collaboratively with our partners to address any and all impacted services. While we do not expect major technical issues that will prevent Los Angeles Unified from providing instruction and transportation, food or Beyond the Bell services, business operations may be delayed or modified. Based on a preliminary analysis of critical business systems, employee healthcare and payroll are not impacted, nor has the cyber incident impacted safety and emergency mechanisms in place at schools.

Los Angeles Unified is committed to delivering high-quality instructional programming, and we are benefiting from an immediate and comprehensive response from the federal government. After the District contacted officials over the holiday weekend, the White House brought together the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to provide rapid, incident response support to Los Angeles Unified, building on the immediate support by local law enforcement agencies. At the District’s request, agencies marshaled significant resources to assess, protect and advise Los Angeles Unified’s response, as well as future planned mitigation protocols.

Furthermore, Los Angeles Unified is immediately establishing a plan of action, informed by top public and private sector technology and cyber security professionals, to determine additional protections for the District, and to provide an independent opinion on system-wide protective measures. We will continue to benefit from the declared assistance of federal and state law enforcement entities to assist with investigative procedures and technical deployment and solutions. Presently, federal investigative and technical experts are working on-site, collaboratively, with the Information Technology Division.

Los Angeles Unified has initiated immediate adjustments to ensure this District is able to deliver what our Board, community, teachers, students and parents have come to expect, an excellent educational experience for all. In response, the following actions have been taken, will be taken immediately or will be implemented as soon as feasible.
Press Conference at Edward R. Roybal Learning Center: Cyber Threat September 6, 2022
https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/dpcm61yr7r

Press Conference Cyber Attack Follow-up Oct. 3, 2022
https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/0jkcbjx4uv
UPDATES: DMPS Network Outages and Interruptions

11:00 AM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Des Moines Public Schools preemptively took the school district’s internet and network services offline this morning in response to unusual activity on the network. At this time, the matter is being investigated by our IT staff and consultants.

Access to the internet, WiFi, and various networked systems, at school buildings and district offices, will be either offline or intermittent throughout the day. Telephone service is working.

We apologize for any inconvenience. An update will be provided later today.

NOTE to DMPS families and staff: To receive instant updates on your mobile device, download Snap! Connect and enable notifications.

4:30 PM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Classes are canceled at Des Moines Public Schools for Tuesday, January 10. Offices will be open although staff may be working remotely, and services will be limited. Athletics and activities are currently scheduled to take place.

Earlier this morning, DMPS was alerted to a cyber security incident on its technology network. As a preemptive measure the school district’s internet and network services were taken offline as the matter is currently being investigated and assessed.

Because many technology tools that support both classroom learning as well as the management and operation of the school district are not available at this time, the prudent decision is to close the district for the day.

We apologize for any inconvenience this situation has caused. Updates will be posted as more information becomes available.

6:00 PM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Classes are canceled at Des Moines Public Schools for Tuesday, January 10. Offices will be open although staff may be working remotely, and services limited. Home athletics and activities are cancelled; away athletics and activities will continue as scheduled.
Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbzj3aPdQy0&t=8s

The district will share another progress update tomorrow morning. Please check the email address you provided the district during registration for a message from Interim Superintendent Matt Smith.

8:00 PM – Tuesday, January 10, 2023

DMPS information technology professionals have made significant progress tonight in restoring our systems. School will resume for students on Thursday, January 12. Students should expect an offline learning experience.

What has changed:

- Access to Infinite Campus student information is now available.
- Phones are operational.
- A limited number of building staff will have access to the internet, though it is not yet accessible to all classroom teachers. WiFi will not be available.
- Operations and building staff will be taking appropriate measures to keep the buildings safe and secure.

We appreciate that there are more questions to be answered (athletics, activities, etc.) We will have additional information to share tomorrow morning.

A reminder that updates can be sent directly to the Snap! Connect app on your phone.
BERNARD HARRIS SCHOLARSHIPS
Congratulations!
2024 CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship Recipients

Alyssa Almaguer
Charleston County School District

Angel Gabriel Hernández
Puerto Rico Department of Education

Emerie McCann
Houston Independent School District

Joshua McLeod
Norfolk Public Schools

Scholarship Recipient

Alyssa Almaguer

District: Charleston County School District
School: Lucy Garrett Beckham High School
University: Clemson University Honors College
Major: Biomedical Engineering

Alyssa was salutatorian, a founding member and president of the pre medicine club, a founding member of the Spanish Honor Society and president of a HOSA-Future Health Professionals Chapter.
Emerie McCann

District: Houston Independent School District
School: Young Women’s College Preparatory Academy
University: University of Texas at Austin
Major: Environmental Engineering

Emerie was a member of the National Honor Society, AP African American scholar, valedictorian and completed more than 300 hours of community service.

Angel Gabriel Hernández Hernández

District: Puerto Rico Department of Education
School: Escuela Especializada en Bellas Artes Anita Otero Hernández
University: University of Miami
Major: Biomedical Engineering-Mechanical

Angel participated in the Chemistry Olympics, was captain of the baseball team, co-captain of the soccer team, and played the lead saxophone in his school’s band.
Joshua McLeod

District: Norfolk Public Schools
School: Norview High School
University: Georgia Institute of Technology
Major: Electrical Engineering

Joshua was the president of his school’s National Honor Society and graduated as valedictorian.
Transition in school district

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INTRODUCTION

Transition in school district leadership is inevitable. The good news? From a communications point of view, the naming of a new superintendent is an opportunity to build goodwill and community partnerships. It can be a fresh start. It can be time to engage students, parents, and educators with new and exciting ideas about student achievement and stakeholder collaboration.

The not-so-good news? In today’s climate, a shift in school leadership can prove a much more sensitive topic. It can spark unwanted news coverage. Negative stories about a superintendent’s departure can impact the district’s image and make the search for a new leader much more difficult.

However, by embracing transparency and utilizing tried-and-true strategies, the communications team can position their district and a new superintendent for success.

Over the past few months, we’ve talked with several school communicators about their own recent changes in district leadership. They have generously shared best practices and lessons learned. Drawing from their experiences, we will share their thoughts on a variety of topics, including:

• The importance of a close relationship between board leadership and the communications team
• The role of the communications department in the search and selection process
• How to maximize positive coverage of “the announcement”
• Embracing the new superintendent’s style
• Sharing the superintendent’s vision and “100-day plan”

Additionally, these communications professionals share more than a dozen innovative tactics they successfully used to introduce their new leader.
MORE LEADERSHIP CHANGE THAN EVER

Public education is seeing more leadership change than ever.

Of the 78 Council of the Great City Schools member districts, 60 have seen a leader transition in the last three years.

Most everyone believes the pandemic had an impact. As district leaders grappled with school closings, abrupt shifts to remote learning or hybrid instruction, and health and safety concerns, every day brought a fresh set of challenges. Learning loss compounded a sense of frustration for all stakeholders.

“Some of it was exhaustion, some of it was just the normal churn, some of it was the boards themselves turning over – I think it was a whole combination of things,” says Michael Casserly, Strategic Advisor for the Council of the Great City Schools. “But, at the heart of it, it was the pandemic.”

Some of those dynamics are still at play. Chances are if you’ve not yet been through a leadership change, someday you may.
SEARCH AND SELECTION

The process begins from the moment the decision for change is made – either when the current superintendent announces he or she is leaving, or the board of trustees makes a decision that change is coming. Communications and the board of education need to be on the same page. It’s important that the communications director has at least a professional and direct relationship with the board chair.

“If not, this is certainly a good time to develop one,” says Michael Casserly.

Most school district communications departments report to the superintendent, not to the board. In fact, over the years communications teams have played a very secondary role with the boards – a lack of connection that can lead to a failure to communicate with and receive feedback from the public. It can also impact the district’s image when it comes to securing the best possible applicants for the top job.

“The board might think just because they are elected officials, they have all of the tools they need to communicate with the public,” Casserly continues. “But, having communications from the Board be as uniform and seamless and cohesive as it can be is not only important for the community, it’s important for attracting top-notch candidates. Because candidates are going to be looking at how the board and school district comport itself, and what kind of signals it is sending to inform the candidates whether or not this is a good school district to pursue.”

In laying out their search strategy to the community, board trustees must first be clear with themselves what they, as a board, deem as priorities are for the future. That includes articulating what the district’s direction and broad goals will be for the next few years. That also means being clear about what challenges the new superintendent is likely to face and how do these facts inform the skills and values the next superintendent will need to have.

The most successful searches will communicate this beforehand. The communications department can then assist the board in sharing this information and eliciting feedback from the public. It’s up to Communications to help trustees set the stage, be inclusive of many voices, and establish a tone of transparency and trust in the community.

“As communicators, our jobs are to look outside. Most of our colleagues look inside the system. We look outside -- all the time,” says Wendy Johnson, Division Director for Strategic Communications for Wichita Public Schools. “People in our position understand the community and the system differently than a lot of other folks do. That input is really valuable when you’re building a prospectus of voices and understanding what the community wants out of their next leader.”

Superintendent Search News Release

Working closely with board leadership, the communications team should share with all stakeholders as quickly as possible the scope of what is planned. Let the public know not only the timeline but what processes will be used. And keep them informed. If during the search there are changes in the timeline, let everyone know that, as well.

Ex. Superintendent Search News Releases (PDF)

The Superintendent Search Website

It’s critical to immediately establish a platform where news about the superintendent search is posted – and updated often. Although you will want to share significant developments on all of your school district platforms, a superintendent search website offers a quick and easy way for stakeholders to keep up with the process. When appropriate, add other visuals – a graphic showing the timeline or a photo of the community search advisory committee – to keep the process transparent and easily understood. On the website, no detail is too small.
Different Processes

The candidate pool for qualified superintendents can be slim, depending on the circumstances. Many job seekers insist on secrecy as they don’t want to put their current situation at risk while they explore other opportunities. A new level of secrecy and discretion can be a part of the process.

Director of Communications and Public Affairs Phil Roeder talks about the most recent superintendent search in Iowa’s Des Moines Public Schools.

“They didn’t do the usual … dog and pony show of interviewing two or three finalists in public and having receptions and things like that. More and more school districts are going toward that approach. You are going to lose good candidates if they know the process is public.”

Despite the current trend of confidentiality about applicants, some boards may share the names of finalists and allow them to be queried by the public. While another board may follow a policy of absolute secrecy until the sole finalist is named. Or they could direct that all early-round candidates be vetted by a search advisory committee, while only the finalists are interviewed by the entire board.

The Search Advisory Committee

Typically, a search advisory committee will be comprised of diverse representatives of every district stakeholder group — educators, parents, officials, business leaders, non-profit representatives, and, in some cases, students. They may decide on a “profile” for the ideal candidate – what leadership qualities the community is looking for in a new leader. Or, as mentioned above, they could in some instances help pre-screen applicants. The school district needs to share who is on the committee and their bios, (with photographs of each, if possible,) how often they meet, what their role is, and what they discuss – and, eventually, their recommendations to the board. This information should be posted on the superintendent search website.

However, it’s important to note that they are an advisory committee. The final selection of a new superintendent is a responsibility that belongs to the board – and only to the board.

The Search Firm

The use of search firms to find new superintendents has steadily increased.

“At one point districts tried to do it on their own, but I guess because there’s such a limited pool of candidates and because of the potentially tumultuous nature of that job, consultants are now part of the package,” says Albuquerque Public Schools Executive Director of Communications Monica Armenta. “It doesn’t seem to matter what district you look at. They all have similar templates for bringing someone in.”

Search firms can aggressively recruit qualified candidates whose backgrounds seem to match what the school district is looking for. They also may help the board design and manage a public input plan and keep to a promised timeline.

How closely does the communications team work with the search firm? Depending on the terms of the consultant’s contract with the district, the answer could be quite a lot – or not at all.

Frequently, the communications team will support the search firm’s work by promoting the public meetings to gather input from parents, employees and others about what they want in a new superintendent. They may use school district platforms to push a consultant-designed opinion survey for stakeholders. They’ll also collaborate on supporting the superintendent search website.

Sometimes, they’re tasked with other duties.
George Sells, Director of Communications and Marketing for Saint Louis Public Schools, describes how he and his team were asked to promote the job to prospective candidates. At the search firm’s behest, the comms department shot a “pitch” video about the school district and the city of St. Louis.

Then when the search had been narrowed to the finalists, his comms team recorded on-camera interviews.

“[We shot the videos...] with three questions for each of them. They had to answer in front of a camera and the videos were then posted for the public to see.”

Keeping the Community Informed

If there are to be public meetings to gather input from the community about what they want in a superintendent, they may be run by the Communications team or the search firm or perhaps a combination of both. The gatherings should be relentlessly publicized using all available platforms. You cannot overcommunicate information about this opportunity for the public to weigh in.

Then, the superintendent website should offer more detail both before and after the gathering. That means not only where and when the meeting will be, but who attended and what they said.

The school board will also need to decide who will speak for trustees before news media. Reporters may attempt to get individual board members to share inside information about candidates. The board will need to be very disciplined about these situations. Here, also, is a situation where the communications director can advise the board chair on establishing a protocol.

“It’s important that throughout the process to share what you’ve learned, to publish the feedback of stakeholders, says Wendy Johnson. “People need to know that school districts are listening to their communities and, as stakeholder findings from community engagement come to pass, publish them on your website. Present them at your board meeting. Have the conversation so that in every way possible, you allow people to hear what you’ve heard. And hear what you’re going to do with what you’ve learned.”

Having superintendent finalists make presentations to the community is a practice many school district use. But some administrators – even highly gifted ones – are better than others in an extended stint in front of a live microphone. That live performance skill doesn’t necessarily correspond to what the board and the school district want or need.

“Sometimes the public can back the board into making a bad choice of a superintendent after candidates make presentations to the community that capture their attention,” says Michael Casserly.

Reaching Out to All Stakeholders: Make Translation a Priority

As with any public event for school district stakeholders, but especially during the search for a new superintendent there should be easy and accessible translation for the audience. There should also be a mechanism in place for non-English speaking participants to convey their questions and comments to the board and forum organizers.
In Austin, Texas, where the student population is 50 percent Latino, all messaging is translated into Spanish. In Minneapolis, when the two final candidates were interviewed by the board, the event was live streamed with simultaneous translation in Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.

Every communicator with whom we spoke made translation a priority. Most used any and all resources to secure the highest quality possible translation.

**The Interim**

Timing is everything. Sometimes circumstances – the time of year, an imminent election that could change the make-up of the board – don’t allow trustees to immediately begin the search for a new leader. An interim will likely be appointed from the district’s community. Very few will come from the outside.

The interim often serves as an administrator to keep the trains running on time, especially if rapid change is impacting stakeholders’ trust in the district. Sometimes, however, an interim is named to do difficult things that the board does not want its permanent superintendent doing. Communications can offer support and communicate information about and for the temporary boss, whatever his or her role may be.

In Des Moines Public Schools, when the superintendent resigned in the middle of the school year, a popular associate superintendent was tapped to be interim. It helped quell some of the anxiety associated with the rapid departure of the previous leader.

“The superintendent is, in a lot of ways, the mayor of a small town,” says Phil Roeder. “Well, the second mayor of a town. It was a good transition with our interim, and it afforded the board some time to conduct their search.”

The Austin Independent School District had seen the departure of two superintendents and an interim in the space of about three years. Cristina Pena Nguyen, Director of Communications and Marketing, says there was a sense of “unease and anxiety” among stakeholders, especially the internal audience. Then, a second interim was named. With the help of the communications team, he made weekly reports on his plans for the week ahead. He also shot short, frequent but impactful videos in which he faced the camera head-on and provided updates on district business. Through his honest – and frequent – communication, especially with the internal audience, he was able to restore stability to the system.

As the selection process ends, it will be important to acknowledge the contributions of the interim superintendent and set the stage for new leadership. [See TACTIC: “Bookends” on page 9.]

In some cases, the interim will also be a candidate for the permanent position. If chosen for the job, the interim’s accession can be a very positive story to tell.

Communications should also do a Google search on the winning candidate before the announcement – just as every other stakeholder, news media included, will do when the name is made public. You will then know what they are learning about the superintendent-elect. Make clear to board leadership that you are doing this and will share this information.
THE ANNOUNCEMENT/THE DAY OF THE ‘ROLLOUT’

The day your school board announces the name of the new superintendent or lone finalist can be one of the most potentially positive experiences you will ever have.

Because so many people are involved – either as the district support team or as people interested in the outcome – it’s imperative to have a detailed plan for the announcement.

Think of it as a military exercise from morning until the conclusion of the rollout. Working with the board, decide how and when the announcement will be made. Commit to a timetable for the day. Make sure everyone has an assignment and knows clearly what his or her responsibilities are. There will always be last-minute hitches and unexpected developments. However, advanced and detailed planning will give communications leaders the flexibility to make quick decisions when circumstances change.

If the communications team – or a subset of the team – are privy to the identity of the new superintendent prior to the big announcement, they may want to prepare some special collateral ahead of time. Even when operating with a high degree of secrecy, do as much advance work as possible before the announcement. In addition to a biography and photograph, some districts pre-shoot a short video in which the new leader says hello and affirms his or her excitement and positivity about the future.

You may want to create a little (positive) drama by keeping the superintendent-elect in an ante room and “under wraps,” until the board reveals a name.

Prepare a tightly written news release with the most basic information at the very top, bold-facing names, a simple resume and a timetable for the new superintendent to sign a contract or assume leadership. You may add additional, more detailed biographical information on a second page or as an attachment.

- Ex: Board Unanimously Votes to Name Lone Finalist

Share the news release immediately after the board votes and do it in more than one format.

**TACTIC**

Send via email but also send a shortened version – with a link to the district website – via text message to news assignment editors and reporters, and to employees and parents (if you have a database for the latter.)
**TACTIC**

Flip the superintendent search website immediately.

Post the news on your website landing page, along with a photograph or video if you have one and follow with simultaneous posts on the district’s social media platforms. However, also flip the superintendent search website to one that distinguishes the superintendent-elect as the “winning candidate.” Remove photos and information about other finalists. Your new boss is now the star of the show. Also, update the process information to a “how we got here” outline, perhaps even changing the tense of some of the narrative. When possible, post a copy of the new superintendent’s contract. It’s a matter of public record and the sooner you share it, the more transparent you are being. (You may be required by law to post it elsewhere on the website, possibly on the school board or legal department pages.)

- Ex: (Flipped) Superintendent Search Web Page:
  - https://www.dmschools.org/superintendent-search
  - https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/domain/14536
  - https://www.pps.net/supsearch
  - https://www.washoeschools.net/SuperintendentSearch
  - https://www.mpschools.org/about-mps/school-board/supt-search

**TACTIC**

Hold a news conference immediately after the new superintendent is announced or when a contract is signed.

This is a great time to hold a news conference. If the announcement occurs during a board meeting, you may want work with the board president to pre-plan a short recess. Or, if this is the only agenda item or it’s a relatively short board meeting, have the news conference immediately after the final gavel falls.

**IMPORTANT:** The new superintendent or superintendent-elect should be joined by the entire board of education in front of the microphone. Prep both the new leader and trustees by sharing questions they will likely hear.

- Choose a setting in an area adjacent to or very near the room where the announcement is made.
- Alert assignment editors, reporters, and photographers to the plan ahead of time – when the news conference will happen and where it will take place. TV stations may elect to lay down cable to do a live shot and that will need to happen prior to the board meeting.
- If the new superintendent is bilingual, suggest to reporters that he or she receive a question in Spanish or other language.
- Brand the setting with a dramatic backdrop – a step and repeat or a retractable banner – displaying the district logo.
- For the convenience of reporters and photographers, pre-light the area and have a mult-box that connects several microphones in order to provide clean, high-quality audio for everyone.
- Even if you are emailing all of the elements – bio, photos, video – to the newsroom, have handouts – both in print and on jump drives – for reporters and photographers. You can never OVER communicate support information and visuals.
- Depending on the circumstances – the superintendent-elect’s desires, the schedule for the rest of the day – consider the possibility of the briefest of one-on-ones with key reporters. This is another instance where having a plan ahead of time can make the process go much more smoothly. Brief the new superintendent earlier on who may want to do a short interview – a written list with names and the news outlets they represent is ideal. Decide who goes first and advise each reporter how much time he or she has. Then stay at the new superintendent’s side making introductions before each interview begins.
When an interim superintendent has been in place for a while, it’s important to close that chapter in order to clear the way for the new superintendent.

In Minneapolis Public Schools they made a farewell music video tribute.

“I call them bookends—and they really matter,” says Donnie Belcher, Executive Director of Communications and Engagement, Minneapolis Public Schools. “It was a thank you, here are the highlights of your year. And we closed that chapter, and we did it in a really intentional way while also opening a new chapter for our current superintendent.”

Ex: ‘Bookend’ Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpLQL6zoQQ4

INTRODUCING THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS
The communications team plays a vital role in helping to introduce the new superintendent to the community. The time period just after the hiring is a “honeymoon period,” and most people are ready to embrace the new leader.

Building A Communications Partnership
The first step is to create a working partnership and understand how the new superintendent wants to communicate. It’s not your style, it’s the new superintendent’s style.

“I’ve had to remind myself in every transition I’ve been in—it’s not a matter of what you, as the communications director, wants,” Wendy Johnson says. “You have to be prepared to switch gears, let go of things that you may love doing that you thought were super cool. You have to put yourself in that individual’s shoes, and you have to be able to represent their dreams, goals and desires.”
Meet with the new boss to collaborate on a communications strategy. Ask questions and listen. Understand what platforms are preferred. Learn about his or her communication strengths and (possibly self-perceived) areas of vulnerability. This will not be a short-term process and for a while may prove challenging.

Several veteran communicators shared the strategy of talking with the communicators from the new boss’s previous district. You may gain some important insights. What worked there? What tactics were especially effective? Which ones could be adapted for the new district?

On the other hand, part of building a new partnership is ensuring the new superintendent understands what tools you have to offer, and how they can support new messaging and goals. In Minneapolis, Donnie Belcher met with her new boss and listened then presented her with an outline of communication assets. Again, this was a two-way street.

“We shared this with her because we wanted her to understand the resources that were available to her. Also, we wanted to give her the opportunity to ask questions.”

- Ex: Minneapolis Marketing and Communications Overview (PDF)

**Meet the News Media: control the timing and construct a timetable**

After the bright splash of the announcement and the first opportunity to see and hear the new superintendent, the news media will want to deepen their understanding of who this person is and what he or she is bringing to the district and the community. They will want to know what is going to change and when. This is where the communications team can lay out a plan, constructing a timetable that makes sense for everyone.

Reporters will request one-on-one interviews. Decide what is workable and what is to everyone’s—especially the new superintendent’s—advantage.

In Des Moines, Phil Roeder bought some time.

“When he got on the job, of course, we had a lot of media requests. We ended up putting those off a little bit, and the media was actually understanding. He’d just started, and we explained ‘he barely knows where to park his car at the office.’”

George Sells in St. Louis arranged a series of Zoom calls for Dr. Keisha Scarlett, who was not yet in town.

“I sent out advisories to everybody and had them reserve times. I then made a calendar and walked her through a ‘round-robin.’”

As time goes on, the new superintendent will want to visit the newspaper editorial board, and perhaps do a round-robin of interviews on a particular subject. It’s important to keep those lines of communication open—perhaps through one-on-one breakfast meetings or a holiday lunch for reporters hosted by the superintendent and the board.

Visiting news reporters on their turf or during their meetings is also a way to connect with an even larger audience.

“Maybe it’s the [longer] morning news segments, maybe it’s the weekend interview shows,” says Monica Armenta. “You make those opportunities where there’s more time, where the general public can get to meet the Superintendent without ever having to leave their house.” The ongoing relationship with news media will be a long-term process and trust will be built on a policy of honesty and transparency.
Meeting District Employees

Don’t push the new superintendent to set unreasonable goals. Michael Casserly discourages a frequent practice by new superintendents—one, he says, that is often promoted with the best of intentions by the communications director.

“I don’t think it’s necessary to visit every school in the district within the first 100 days,” he says. “They are often superficial visits that are largely ‘drive-bys.’ They are of very little substance, and don’t allow meaningful conversations. And don’t really benefit anybody very much.”

Instead, he advises it’s more important for the superintendent to develop direct and personal relationship with the principals of the district, and there are other ways to make those introductions. He also says the superintendent can use that time to ask the communications director and other senior administrators: who are the most respected people on staff, who is known for getting things done? And whom do I need to know in this community who will help this district going forward?”

Play to Your New Leader’s Strengths – and Understand Your Role

Not all superintendents are gregarious, outgoing personalities. That’s another point to remember when getting to know your new boss.

George Sells of Saint Louis Public Schools recalls his first meeting with the superintendent who hired him.

“The funny story is when I was being interviewed for the position. I had all these great ideas and, not really knowing him well, I ticked off my plans to book him on regular radio interviews and TV appearances, to really get him out there. He let me finish my whole spiel and told me, ‘Mr. Sells, I am an introvert. That is why I’m hiring you.’”

Telling The New Superintendent’s Story

Playing to your new superintendent’s strengths also means sharing his or her story. Every leader has a story — a story that can inspire admiration and/or make that person relatable to the audience.

“We try to integrate storytelling,” says Donnie Belcher of MPS. “And encourage our Superintendent to integrate storytelling into her own messaging and remarks.”

In Minneapolis, the communications team touted the hiring of Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams as a return to her roots.

“Our new Superintendent actually started in our district as a teacher 20 or so years ago. And she taught in a school building that is now our district central office,” says Donnie Belcher. “She also was an administrator and worked in other districts, including St. Paul Public Schools, which is very close and with whom we often partner. It really was a homecoming and we thought it was the thread that we could weave through everything.”

▸ Ex: Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams Celebrates a ‘Homecoming’
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxgsCdu73rs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxgsCdu73rs)

In Austin ISD, Matias Segura’s hiring also had a homecoming theme. Growing up, he attended Austin ISD — and his mother taught there for 45 years. But there was an even more personal part of the story, and one he was willing to share. Segura recounted how he struggled as a student.

“He talked often about how he was not the perfect student. He needed support from teachers, he needed support from his counselors,” says Cristina Pena Nguyen.

Segura dispelled the idea that a school superintendent must have been the perfect student growing up. “He said ‘I almost didn’t graduate and if it weren’t for my teachers’ and my counselor’s support, I wouldn’t be here today.’ I think his authenticity allowed other people to feel comfortable.” It also helped him connect with the teachers and counselors of Austin ISD.
Dr. Roberts ran in the 2000 Olympics and a raffle prize at a school fun night was a race against the Superintendent. The boy who won didn’t want to run alone and recruited a few students to join him, including one girl who was active in a track club and won the race. The photo of the race itself got some national attention; NPR did a story and a piece by our CBS station got picked up by lots of affiliates around the country.

In Des Moines, the new leader made history as the district’s first Black superintendent.

“The fact he was a groundbreaker was very positively accepted,” Phil Roeder says of Dr. Ian Roberts. “He has a big personality. His family is from Guyana. He grew up in Brooklyn and he competed in the 2000 Olympics for Guyana.”

The former Olympian is also known for his personal style and sartorial excellence and his ability to connect with others.

**TACTIC**

Roberts’ Recap

Dr. Roberts regularly posts a video in which he recaps the most recent board meeting by sharing the most important agenda items. Each “Roberts’ Recap” video is no more than three minutes. It is then posted to DMPS’s social media accounts, embedded in the e-newsletter and on their district’s cable station.

- Ex. Roberts Recap
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VGNfIwaR3g

**TACTIC**

“Three Questions with Kelly”

In Wichita Public Schools, new superintendent Kelly Bielefeld was an internal hire, but not well-known. So, he invited the audience to ask him questions on camera which he then answered – also on camera. The video series – called “Three Questions with Kelly” – initially focused on the internal audience but grew to include other stakeholders.

Among the questions he received: “How would you describe your leadership style?” “How will you combat truancy and absenteeism in the district?” “Why did you get into education?”
Because of the way his name is spelled, people struggled to pronounce it properly. An elementary school student asked: “How do you pronounce your name?” [Answer: Bielefeld is pronounced BEE-LUH-FELD.]

His video responses were short – no more than 1:30 each – and project an informal, accessible tone.

Then, after the communications department felt the segment had run its course, they intentionally switched the format to one where Dr. Bielefeld was the one asking the questions.

Traveling to different locations, Dr. Bielefeld asks: “Why would a parent come to our WPS Magnet School?” Or he queries, “What’s unique about the opportunities that you provide students at the Future Ready Center?”

And in talking with a teacher who is part of a new program, “What’s the excitement level of your kids?”

“So now he goes out into the field, and asks questions of others, maybe of students, maybe of staff, maybe of community partners,” says Wendy Johnson.

You can view all of the Three Questions with Kelly segments by visiting the Wichita Public Schools website and clicking on the Superintendent and Staff Leadership page.

▶ Ex.: Three Questions with Kelly
https://www.usd259.org/Page/23350
INTRODUCING THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT’S IDEAS

Branding the Superintendent’s Plan

Many if not all new superintendents walk in with a 60-day, 90-day, or 100-day plan. Or they develop a transition plan after talking with district leaders and staff and, in some instances, city and staff leaders – or consulting with their transition team, if one exists.

The communications team will want to visually redesign the plan with elements of the district’s brand – logos, colors, font – and ensure it is distributed to all stakeholder groups.

They may also suggest ways to streamline the language – veering away from academese or jargon – so it’s more accessible to parents and students.

“If engagement and participation are the goal, we have to be very realistic. Just because we work in education doesn’t mean that we are going to communicate as educators,” says Monica Armenta. “Know your audience; respect your audience.”

And, in communicating with the internal audience, help ensure the new leader’s expectations of teachers and staff in this plan are clear.

Kathryn Block recalls the strategy presented by her new boss.

“[Dr. Tony Watlington] walked in with a 100-day plan sketched out on paper, and part of our responsibility was to convert that into a document we could then make public,” she says. “Our job was more about making sure the 100-day plan was presented in a way that was well-articulated, that it was easy to understand, and help set the expectation of what he was going to do in the first 100 days so that he could be held accountable for that.”

Dr. Watlington’s 100-day plan also included 30-day milestones. The communications team was charged with “accountability updates” – establishing a website that showed the plan and accountability for each stage. They assisted the superintendent in holding a news conference every 30 days specifically to lay out what had been accomplished and answer questions about next steps. For those 30-day touchpoints, they used all of their communications tools – email, social media, robo-calls – to alert stakeholders to an accountability update.

Ex.: First 100 Days and Accountability Website for The School District of Philadelphia
https://www.philasd.org/100days/

The new superintendent in Minneapolis Public Schools decided she wanted a number of listening sessions as part of her 100-day plan. Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams touted it as her “listening tour” and made it clear that these events would inform her vision and mission for the district by asking three questions: “What excites you about MPS?” “What is one thing that is working well at MPS?” And “If you were superintendent, what would be the first thing you would do?”

Thanks to a deep collaboration between the communications and the research evaluation and data teams, the sessions yielded a lot of information. Not only did they track who came – staff, parents, community members – they also recorded the demographics of attendees. They took note of their ethnicity, language, age, and other information – as well as their responses to the three questions. They also posted the immediate feedback on their 100-day plan website. Dr. Sayles-Adams then incorporated what she learned from these sessions in her district-wide plan.
Saint Louis Public Schools’ new leader Dr. Keisha Scarlett hosted a virtual town hall-type meeting at the end of her first 100 days. She updated what she had done and revealed what she wanted to do next. It was a combination of pre-recorded and live, but it was posted on YouTube so people could make comments.

The district “publicized the daylights out of it,” says George Sells and was rewarded with an attendance of several thousand.

“We tried to be very deliberate with what we did with Dr. Scarlett. She was doing so much. What we had to do was hit the areas that were important and make sure that we were clear in communicating well in those spots. At the same time, give her room to start a new job and take over the school district.”

Austin ISD, the communications department decided to highlight their new leader’s words and ideas by creating a specific brand just for him.

“This was subtle, but I would say it’s important,” says Cristina Pena Nguyen. “You have the Austin ISD brand, but then you have a brand within a brand which is uniquely him. It uses his tagline of Strong Schools, Stronger Austin. That is something that only he can use.”

Communication Tools

The new superintendent may want to communicate on one or two platforms or in a variety of ways – simultaneously.

- NEWSLETTER/E-MAIL: E-mail is still a vital and trusted tool. A newsletter from the superintendent can establish a regular point of communication. But emails can get overlooked in an already saturated market. You may no longer be able to count on e-mail alone in sharing an important message.

- ROBO-CALLS: The use of district-wide robo-calls may be defined by policy and practice. Federal law determines what hours they can be made. However, new superintendents may wish to add this tool when conveying an especially important message or alert.

- VIDEOS: Videos, especially short videos, offer an opportunity to instantly connect with the audience.

In Austin ISD, video messages from Superintendent Segura in which he talks directly to the camera and his audience continue to be a big hit. His communications team believes his sincerity is palpable. Posted on social media, engagement numbers have “skyrocketed,” says Cristina Pena Nguyen. “He’s 42 years old. He’s a pretty
young leader and so having him align to the way his generation communicates through video and social media was really important in our communication strategy.”

- Ex: Austin ISD Superintendent’s Video Message To Staff In Lieu of E-Mail
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUrXEmcXLcs

- PODCASTS: Podcasts are the fastest growing platform for communication; they offer both flexibility and a way to learn without demanding our full visual attention. One CGCS district used it as a way to introduce their new leader and his new approaches to district priorities.

  “To start with, we had been looking into setting up a podcast early last year,” says Phil Roeder. “Getting the pieces pulled together (equipment, platforms, etc.) coincided with Dr. Roberts’ arrival as well as the start of the 2023-24 school year, which seemed to make for a logical time to launch.”

  Called the Become Here Project, the podcast’s name is a play on the Des Moines Public Schools brand and marketing slogan “Come Here. Become Here.”

  Topics have included the challenges of chronic absenteeism and the expansion of preschool instruction. The podcast also features timely events and live audiences, such as the DMPS’s State of the Schools event and audio excerpts from various commencement speakers.

  New episodes are dropped at the first of each month and are hosted by DMPS’s Communications Officer Amanda Lewis, who is a former TV news reporter.

  - Ex: ‘Become Here’ Podcast

**THE INTERNAL AUDIENCE**

Never underestimate the importance of communicating with the internal audience: they can make or break a new superintendent.

The most powerful marketing is still word of mouth. Despite strong and consistent messaging and engagement from the school district, most people in the community base their opinions of the school district – and a new superintendent – on their interactions with a district employee.

“So much of what we do and so much of what people will ultimately feel is influenced by what our employees say,” says Kathryn Block. “Unless we get our internal employees on board and talking positively, we are constantly fighting rumors that are coming from our staff.”

“The whole internal communications thing is absolutely critical,” says Michael Casserly. “The respect that he or she shows and the value he or she places on the work of the staff is really important.”

Many districts put the internal audience first when sharing information, especially if it comes from the superintendent.

It’s the “cascade” of information which first flows to employees, then to parents, then to news media and the community at large.

“Anything we share always starts with a message that goes out first to all of our employees,” says George Sells.
That protocol is one way for a new superintendent to send a clear message that district employees and their contributions are respected.

That is in sharp contrast to a mistake that can be made by rookie superintendents.

“One signal that staff is not respected – superintendents who come in and demand the resignations of all of the top people or who bring in too many people from the outside,” says Michael Casserly. “The new leader may want to bring in a small number of people but hiring an army of folks or asking employees to just blanket turn in their resignations is a real tactical mistake on the part of the new superintendent.”

Casserly continues: “It sends the message ‘my default position is not to trust you and not to think you have done very good work. I am coming in with that assumption.’

This puts the communications team in a difficult position and may not be something to which they can easily respond.

**What if it Doesn’t Work Out**

It happens. Trustees announce the name of the person they’ve selected to lead the district. Biographical information and a photo are shared on the website and with the news media, and all that remains is affixing a signature to the contract. Then, unexpectedly, the superintendent-elect withdraws.

The public will want to know: “what happened?”

Any number of things could have gone wrong. Sometimes the candidate’s current district sweetens the pot to entice him or her to stay or other times a closer examination by both parties has revealed this is just not the right fit.

Once again, this is where the board chair and the communications director must work in tandem and share – quickly – what comes next. In the best possible scenario, the search will begin again – immediately. Then, it falls to the communications team to explain the plan to the public.

**CONCLUSION**

Change is difficult – for everyone. Even a transition that offers a renewed sense of direction and purpose will still bring some level of anxiety. Kathryn Block reminds us not to “underestimate the impact or potential stress” a new leader and administration will have on some stakeholders, especially employees.

It falls to communications professionals to bridge the gap and to assist new leadership in building trust. That will take both time and consistency. It will also demand looking at new ways of sharing information and perhaps letting go of other, more comfortable past practices.

Wendy Johnson sums it up nicely: “I think the most important thing that communicators have to remember during a transition or any other time, is that our work supports and allows leaders to lead.”

Our work has never been more important.
APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Superintendent Search News Releases

APS Board Sets Blueprint for Superintendent Search

Under a preliminary timeline, next APS leader could be selected by Jan. 31

As Albuquerque Public Schools prepares to formally launch a search for its next leader, board members outlined key qualities they’re looking for.

They want a knowledgeable educator who puts kids first. A reformer with a track record of improving student outcomes. An individual with dogged determination who respects the workforce. Someone committed to equity and willing to challenge racism in all its forms.

Those were among the qualities board members prioritized during a workshop on Oct. 18 as they worked with Dr. Walter Cooper, a facilitator, to come up with a blueprint for the superintendent search. The board has retained McPheron & Jacobson, LLC, to help with the search.

“I feel very confident with the search firm we selected,” Board President Yolanda Montoya-Cook said after the meeting. Among the issues the board tackled were the timeline for the search, public input, advertising venues, and a possible salary range.

The person selected will replace Superintendent Scott Elder, who will be leaving APS when his contract expires on June 30, 2024. The board expects to have a new superintendent in place by July 1.

Cooper presented a draft timeline, although he and the board stressed that the listed dates could change, depending on circumstances.

Under the preliminary timeline:

- The position will be posted and advertised nationally in the coming weeks, and the posting will remain open for about seven weeks. Among the places where the opening will be posted are The Schools
  Superintendents Assn., the Council of the Great City Schools, Education Week TopSchools.blogspot, the Association of Latino
  Administrators & Superintendents, and the National Alliance of Black
  School Educators.
- An online survey of families, staff, and other community members will be conducted in November, with town hall meetings also being held in
  November to gather input from the community.
- The deadline to submit an application will be Dec. 12.
- Board members will meet in executive session to discuss candidates and conduct interviews shortly after new board members take office in
  January.
- Finalists would participate in public town halls and be interviewed by the
  board in executive session later that month.
- The board will select a candidate on Jan. 31.

The search process is taking place as voters decide three school board races. Two of the three board members whose terms are expiring opted not to seek reelection. The board discussed ways to include the prevailing candidates in the search process so that they’re up to date when they take office on Jan. 1.

As for the advertised salary range for the superintendent position, board members agreed that the low end should be a certain percentage above the next highest paid APS employee’s salary, with the top end being about $250,000. That range is still being finalized.

Atlanta Board of Education to Select New Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent

Atlanta Board of Education to Select New Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent

Community Panel selected to participate in the new hire search and recommendation process

ATLANTA (March 5, 2024) – The Atlanta Board of Education (ABOE), under its new leadership of Board Chair Erkia Mitchell and Board Vice Chair Javonne Hill, announced today a permanent Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools (APS) is place by July 1, 2024. During a specially-called meeting on Feb. 26, the board held its first discussions about the candidates, as well as discussed a proposed panel of community members to provide their insights on each potential candidate.

Today, the ABOE is announcing the community panel selected to meet with the Superintendent candidate finalists. These community members were chosen for their investment in and commitment to the success of the APS community and understanding of the critical role leadership plays in the future of the system. The panel is a combination of a variety of important community members, including PTA members, parents, teachers, staff, community leaders, alumni, business leaders, clergy and more. This panel will ultimately determine who is ultimately hired and will provide an important role in providing feedback and insight to the board. Each panelist will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement in protection of the diverse list of candidates, agreeing not to share any information with parties outside of the ABOE.

The following individuals comprise the community panel:
- Arthur Carter
- Danielle Loder
- Jacoba Davis
- Deitra Goodman
- Elizabeth Hildard
- Jennifer Scurlock
- Joe Rutsch
- Kind Carter
- Nate Dukes
- Rachele Welling
- Kathy Hill
- Marci Hardy
- Margaret McGowan
- Mark Weinstein
- Nihal Lute
- Omar Ali
- Deitra Goodman
- Sara Page
- Susanna Roberts

(Alternates: Alicia Crespo, DeAndre McPhail, Lydian Ramos, Kamala Bobb, Nathaniel Smith, Stephanie Benjamin, Tameka Riverman)

“The Atlanta Board of Education is excited to share that the search for a new Superintendent is already well underway,” said Board Chair Erkia Mitchell. “We believe it’s important to keep the faculty, students, and general public informed throughout the process and look forward to providing regular updates. At this stage, we are pleased with the quality of the candidates, as well as the community members who have joined a special panel to provide recommendations on the future direction of APS. We look forward to ensuring that the new Superintendent and the ABOE work together to ensure we continue on the path towards educational excellence.”

In advance of the meeting and in full transparency on major decisions, each candidate has been vetted through extensive background checks by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates before hiring decisions are made. The city’s Office of Management and Budget is providing an initial salary range of APS employee’s salary, with the top end being about $250,000. That range is still being finalized.

About the Atlanta Board of Education

The Atlanta Board of Education (ABOE) is the state-appointed board that governs the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) system. The Board consists of nine members, representing six geographical districts and three “at-large” districts. Eight members are elected per district to represent the schools in a given district for a four-year term. The remaining member is selected by the ABOE to fill the “at-large” seat. The current members are:

Marlene Austin
Flowers, Terriyln Rivers-Cannon
(Alternates: Alicia Crespo, DeAndre McPhail, Lydian Ramos, Kamala Bobb, Nathaniel Smith, Stephanie Benjamin, Tameka Riverman)

About Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta Public Schools is one of the largest school districts in the state of Georgia, serving approximately 50,000 students across seven geographical districts, 87 learning sites, including 59 neighborhood schools, five partner schools, 19 charter schools, two citywide single-gender schools, and two alternative programs. To learn more about Atlanta Public Schools, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram or visit www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/17672.
Columbus City Schools Board of Education Hires Consultants for District Superintendent Search

March 9, 2023 – At its meeting last night, the Columbus City Schools Board of Education approved hiring search firm Ray and Associates and communications firm Fahlgren Martin to facilitate the search for a new District superintendent.

This search follows the announcement in December 2022 that Superintendent Dr. Talisa Dixon planned to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year, after nearly four years serving as superintendent of the largest school district in Ohio.

On December 9, 2022, the Board of Education named Dr. Angela Chapman the Interim Superintendent, effective January 1, 2023. At the same time, the Board announced that a national search would be conducted for a permanent Superintendent.

In January 2023, the Board of Education retained law firm Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP to oversee the search and ensure the integrity of the process. Taft will also collaborate with our in-house, key stakeholders to engage key stakeholders and identify the best candidates.

"As a Board, we believe that by starting a community-driven, transparent, and inclusive search process now, we can attract high-quality candidates, ensure we have time for community input and have a new leader in place by the start of the school year in the fall," said Board President Jennifer Adair.

After reviewing proposals and hearing presentations from several qualified search firms, the Columbus City Schools Board of Education selected Ray and Associates, based on their extensive experience recruiting outstanding leaders for large urban districts.

"Ray and Associates brings a strong team with school district leadership experience and a strong knowledge of Ohio and the Columbus area," said Board Vice President Christine Vera.

In addition to working with Ray and Associates, the Board of Education approved an agreement with Columbus-based firm Fahlgren Martin, to facilitate communication about the search process.

"By working with these consultants, the Board and district staff can focus on the critical business of educating our students while the experts pave the way for this important work," added Board Member Dr. Tina Pierce.

KCPS Kicking Off Superintendent Search

The Kansas City Public Schools Board of Directors is committed to conducting a robust and transparent search for its next superintendent of schools. The board will hire a national executive recruiting firm, with deep experience in attracting and recruiting public education superintendents.

The board appointed an internal superintendent search committee, made up of three board members to manage the process and make recommendations to the full board throughout the search. The process will include opportunities to garner insights from a broad range of stakeholders, most notably students, families and district staff and will be conducted through a variety of mediums. A decision is anticipated in early 2023.

Board Chair Nate Hogan said, “As a board, we remain determined to conduct a thoughtful, thorough and engaging search to produce the best candidates possible. The board pledges to seek a diverse candidate pool that will produce highly qualified candidates to leverage the momentum of our district. As always, our students, families, staff and the Kansas City community deserve a superintendent who can build on a strong foundation of accreditation and accelerate learning in alignment with Blueprint 2030, the district’s long-term strategic plan.”

A webpage is being developed to serve as a source of all public information, along with updates during board meetings related to the search. The webpage will provide a timeline and updates on each phase of the search process.

Earlier this year, Kansas City Public Schools regained full accreditation from the State Board of Education. Dr. Jennifer Collier is leading the district as the 2022-23 Interim Superintendent.
COLUMBUS CITY SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION NAMES FINAL CANDIDATES FOR SUPERINTENDENT

May 4, 2023 – The Columbus City Schools Board of Education has named the finalists who will advance to the next round of interviews for the position of superintendent.

The Board is committed to an inclusive and transparent search process. As the Board shared on Monday, May 1, 2023, thirty-one (31) candidates submitted complete applications to its search consultant, Ray & Associates. Each application was reviewed based on the candidate’s experience, background, and the input from the community and the Board. Ray & Associates investigated each candidate, contacted references and others familiar with each candidate, and assessed each candidate’s professional strengths and weaknesses.

The search consultant identified nine (9) candidates who best aligned with the Board’s and the community’s criteria and presented them to the Columbus City Schools Board of Education. Ray & Associates facilitated detailed presentations on each of the nine candidates. Following those in-depth reviews, the Board of Education discussed the merits of each candidate and reached a consensus on six (6) candidates to be interviewed for the superintendent position.

The Board conducted one-on-one Zoom interviews with each candidate. These interviews allowed the Board to assess how each of the candidates measures up to the qualities that our community believes are important in a new superintendent, primarily, their leadership experiences and approaches to communicating with diverse audiences, their abilities to balance the need to consider input and to act decisively, and their commitments to justice and equality in their work.

Following the interviews, the Board reached a consensus on the finalists who will advance to the final round of interviews. The finalists for the position are (in alphabetical order):

- Dr. Angela Chapman
- Dr. Brian McDonald
- Dr. George (Eric) Thomas
- Dr. George Lerner
- Dr. Mark Hess
- Dr. Mary A. Henry

The finalists will visit Columbus for a “Day in the District” on Thursday, May 11, 2023. Each finalist will meet with Columbus City Schools students, teachers, and labor groups; city and county leaders; members of the business community; faith leaders; partner organizations.

On Thursday evening, May 11, the Board of Education will host a “Meet the Finalists” community forum, where members of the community can hear from the finalists in a moderated question and answer format. The event will be held from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. at 3700 S. High Street and will also be livestreamed on the Columbus City Schools Facebook page.

The Board of Education expects to conduct final interviews the week of May 15, 2023. Photos and biographies of each finalist can be found here.
SLPS Board Selects Three Finalists in Superintendent Search

MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 31, 2024

SLPS Board Selects Three Finalists in Superintendent Search

The search for the Saint Louis Public School District's (SLPS) next superintendent is in its third phase with a selection of three candidates to be brought before the Board and the school community this week.

The final three candidates for superintendent are:

Dr. Jermaine Dawson, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer, Birmingham City Schools
Dr. Keisha Scarritt, Chief Academic Officer and Assistant Superintendent of Academics, Seattle Public Schools
Dr. Nicole Williams, interim superintendent, Saint Louis Public Schools

According to Board President Matt Davis, each candidate will spend a day in the District. “We are excited to host these three very impressive career educators and introduce them to our community. On their visits, they will have opportunities to visit classrooms and meet and interact with students and staff members individually and in small groups.”

Each candidate will record a brief introduction and interview video for the public, moderated by Dr. Karien Hall, National Search Director with Ray & Associates. The interviews will be posted on the District’s YouTube channel on Thursday, January 26th.

Ray and Associates reports that 1,715 leaders from across 50 states were contacted by the firm regarding the SLPS opportunity. Forty-nine submitted applications. Those applicants were then screened for experience and academic background and matched against the results of community engagement focus groups and surveys that the firm conducted in September 2022.

“With Ray and Associates, we created a strong pool of candidates and surveys gave us a clear idea of what makes the ideal leader for SLPS,” Davis said. “We have assembled a group of candidates who are qualified, dedicated, and who would be a good fit for the Saint Louis Public Schools.”

The Board will select a superintendent by January 31. The new Superintendent will begin in July. Presently, SLPS is led by interim superintendent Dr. Nicole Williams, also a candidate. Dr. Williams follows Dr. Kelvin Adams who retired on December 31, 2022.

For Immediate Release
Contact: Victoria Campbell
775.333.3789
775.772.2907
vcampbell@washoeschools.net

WCSD Announces Finalists for Superintendent Position

Community invited to meet candidates at upcoming event

Reno, NV (April 15, 2024) — After an extensive national search, five individuals have been identified as finalists to be considered as the Superintendent of Schools for the Washoe County School District. The finalist candidates will meet with the Board of Trustees and key constituent groups this week as the final selection from the board expected in mid-May.

“We have recruited and identified candidates who are qualified, dedicated, and who would be a good fit for the Washoe County School District,” said Dr. Walter Cooper, each candidate will spend a day in the District. “We are excited to host these three very impressive career educators and introduce them to our community. On their visits, they will have opportunities to visit classrooms and meet and interact with students and staff members individually and in small groups.”

Each candidate will record a brief introduction and interview video for the public, moderated by Dr. Karien Hall, National Search Director with Ray & Associates. The interviews will be posted on the District’s YouTube channel on Thursday, January 26th.

Ray and Associates reports that 1,715 leaders from across 50 states were contacted by the firm regarding the SLPS opportunity. Forty-nine submitted applications. Those applicants were then screened for experience and academic background and matched against the results of community engagement focus groups and surveys that the firm conducted in September 2022.

“We have assembled a solid profile of what kind of leader we were looking for and we are thrilled that we received such a tremendous response from educators locally and across the country.”

The Board will select a superintendent by January 31. The new Superintendent will begin in July. Presently, SLPS is led by interim superintendent Dr. Nicole Williams, also a candidate. Dr. Williams follows Dr. Kelvin Adams who retired on December 31, 2022.

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“We have recruited and identified candidates who are qualified, dedicated, and who would be a good fit for the Washoe County School District,” said Dr. Walter Cooper, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer, Birmingham City Schools. The five finalists will meet with Trustees and engage in interviews during a series of events from April 24-26. The public is invited to meet the finalists at an event at Wooster High School on Thursday, April 25 from 5 to 8:15 p.m. Community members, families, students, members of the media and WCSD employees and leaders will have an opportunity to ask questions of the candidates at the event. The community rooms at the event will be live-streamed and questions can be submitted in advance (deadline: 5 p.m. on April 24) via email to WCSD_Communications@WashoeSchools.net.

Participants in the public event will be encouraged to provide feedback and comments to Trustees as they make a final selection. Details, including language interpretation, parking and a schedule for the public event, will be posted online prior to the event. More information on the search process and the five finalists is available at www.WashoeSchools.net/SuperintendentSearch.

The district is scheduled to announce the successful candidate for the superintendent position on May 14 and welcome the new superintendent at the beginning of July.

The five finalists are:

• Christopher S. Bernier, Ed.D.
• Joseph M. Ernst, M.Ed.
• Elizabeth Fagen, Ed.D.
• Charles R. McNulty, Ph.D.
• Joseph M. Ernst, M.Ed.
• Elizabeth Fagen, Ed.D.
• Charles R. McNulty, Ph.D.

The five finalists will meet with Trustees and engage in interviews during a series of events from April 24-26. The public is invited to meet the finalists at an event at Wooster High School on Thursday, April 25 from 5 to 8:15 p.m. Community
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Announces Dr. Crystal Hill as Permanent Superintendent

Dr. Crystal Hill is an experienced school administrator and servant leader with a proven track record of success related to student academic achievement,” said Elyse Dashew, chair of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education. “I know that it’s our responsibility to make sure that we work as a community to better our student outcomes and achieve the goals.”

Hill earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in instructional technology, both from North Carolina A&T State University. She currently serves on the Leading on Opportunity Council.

Learn more about Superintendent Hill:

- New CMS Superintendent Lays Out Road Map for Improving District
- Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Names Dr. Crystal Hill as Superintendent
- New CMS Superintendent Crystal Hill Already Has Fans Among Community Leaders
- Meet new CMS Superintendent Crystal Hill. She wants to ‘keep that magic every school day.'

You can also follow Superintendent Hill on her social media channels: Twitter @CharMeckSupt and Instagram @CharMeckSupt.
Columbus City Schools Board of Education Selects Dr. Angela Chapman as Next Superintendent

May 16, 2023 — The Columbus City Schools Board of Education has selected Dr. Angela Chapman as its next Superintendent. Dr. Chapman has been serving as Interim Superintendent since December 2022, following the announcement that Dr. Talisa Dixon would retire at the end of the school year.

Dr. Chapman was one of three finalists being considered for the position. The other two candidates were Brian McDermott of Pomona, California, and Dr. Eric Thomas of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Board chose Dr. Chapman after an extensive national search that began on March 27, 2023. Input was sought from Columbus City Schools teachers and staff, students and parents, business and community partners, labor unions, and elected officials. Each stakeholder group was asked what characteristics they believe are important in a Superintendent. In addition, numerous meetings were held with these groups, and finalists participated in a moderated discussion that was broadcast on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

“Columbus City Schools is extremely fortunate to have an individual with the skills, experience and vision of Dr. Chapman to serve as our next superintendent,” said Christina Vera, Vice President of the Board of Education and co-leader of the search process. “Dr. Chapman exhibits the character and determination needed to uplift the great work of Columbus City Schools while addressing the challenges of the state’s largest school district and ensuring the best academic and personal outcomes for our students.”

Dr. Chapman joined Columbus City Schools in June 2019 as the Chief of Transformation and Leadership, where she served on the Superintendent’s Cabinet in charge of principal leadership and the regional support of school communities. This work included prioritizing school improvement, principal supervision, leadership development, and the administration of grant funds to support effective teaching and learning. She has also provided leadership in implementing a new 21st-century district model, led implementation of an $8 million Wallace Equity Grant, Principal Pipeline grant to support recruiting, retaining, developing and retaining school leaders, and been instrumental in implementing the district’s strategic plan.

Prior to CCS, Dr. Chapman spent five years in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) as an Instructional Superintendent and Interim Chief of Elementary, where she was responsible for leading and managing 99 elementary schools and the Early Childhood Education Division. Prior to her tenure at DCPS, she served as the Director of Curriculum for Massillon City Schools, as a principal in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools and in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District and as an assistant principal in Euclid City Schools. She began her career in education as an elementary school teacher for five years in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District.

Dr. Chapman holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Akron and a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from Ashland University. She also holds a doctorate of education (Ed.D.) in curriculum and instruction from Tennessee State University.

Dr. Chapman is an accomplished executive leader with a track record of empowering all students to reach their academic and personal potential. She has served as a principal and district leader in diverse school settings, including in Austin, Nashville, Cleveland, and Los Angeles. Dr. Chapman is a proven leader who is dedicated to creating an environment where all students are empowered to reach their full potential.

“Dr. Chapman is an experienced leader whose background and approach to leadership is a perfect fit for the Columbus City Schools family,” said President of the Board of Education and co-leader of the search process John Van Rossum. “She has a proven track record of creating equitable opportunities for all students to thrive, and she is committed to ensuring that every student is afforded an opportunity to reach their full potential. Dr. Chapman is a true believer in all students’ abilities and potential. She is a leader who is constantly looking for opportunities to improve the educational experience for all students.”

Dr. Chapman was selected based on her impressive qualifications and experiences, which include:

- Bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Akron
- Master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from Ashland University
- Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in curriculum and instruction from Tennessee State University
- Twenty years of experience in education, including time as a principal, district leader, and regional support officer
- Experience in diverse school settings, including urban, suburban, and rural environments
- Proven track record of creating equitable opportunities for all students to thrive
- Commitment to ensuring that every student is afforded an opportunity to reach their full potential

Dr. Chapman led several initiatives to improve the educational experience for all students, including programs to support English language learners, special education students, and students from low-income families. She has also been instrumental in implementing the district’s strategic plan, which focuses on improving student outcomes, increasing teacher effectiveness, and improving school facilities.

“Dr. Chapman is a leader who is committed to improving the educational experience for all students,” said Board President Van Rossum. “She understands the challenges faced by our students and is dedicated to providing them with the support they need to succeed.”

Dr. Chapman joins Columbus City Schools at a time when the district is facing significant challenges, including a growing student population, budget constraints, and a need to improve student outcomes. Dr. Chapman’s selection as Superintendent underscores the district’s commitment to providing all students with the best possible educational experience.

“Dr. Chapman is a leader who is committed to improving the educational experience for all students,” said Board President Van Rossum. “She understands the challenges faced by our students and is dedicated to providing them with the support they need to succeed.”

Dr. Chapman’s selection as Superintendent is a significant moment for the district, and she is poised to lead Columbus City Schools into the future. Her selection is a testament to the district’s commitment to providing all students with the best possible educational experience.
Superintendent

Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams Selected as Preferred Candidate for Minneapolis Public Schools

The Minneapolis Board of Education (School Board) is pleased to announce it has completed its search for the next superintendent. Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams, Superintendent of Eastern Carver County Schools in Minnesota, has been selected as the School Board’s preferred candidate to serve as superintendent. Her starting date will be determined pending contract negotiations and approval.

“We are thrilled Dr. Sayles-Adams will lead Minneapolis Public Schools into the future and are excited about her deep educational experience, passion for elevating student achievement, and proven track record of improving student performance at public schools,” said Board Chair Sharon Dr. “She will bring both a vision and a strategy for continued growth for every student at MPS regardless of their background or zip code.”

Dr. Sayles-Adams has 28 years of experience in education, including as a teacher and principal in Minneapolis, and as assistant superintendent in St. Paul, before moving to Eastern Carver County in 2020. A complete bio can be [Read More]

Throughout her career, Dr. Sayles-Adams has demonstrated a firm commitment to ensuring that schools are safe and supportive environments for all students, and a belief that all students can learn at high levels. “This is a full circle moment for me,” said Sayles-Adams. “I began my career in education working as a teacher in North Minneapolis and that’s where I learned that strong schools make a strong community. I am honored and thrilled to lead the School Board for our vision of excellence in every commitment to serve as the next superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools. I look forward to partnering with teachers, students, staff and the community to make sure every student gets the high-quality education they deserve.”

For more information about the Superintendent Search process, visit: [link to website]

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New Superintendent

Kansas City Public Schools Board Taps Longtime District Teacher and Administrator as New Superintendent

Dr. Jennifer Collier started teaching in KCPS 23 years ago. It’s a lifelong circle moment for me,” said Sayles-Adams. “I began my career in education working as a teacher in North Minneapolis and that’s where I learned that strong schools make a strong community. I am honored and thrilled to lead the School Board for our vision of excellence in every commitment to serve as the next superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools. I look forward to partnering with teachers, students, staff and the community to make sure every student gets the high-quality education they deserve.”

Dr. Collier was chosen from a pool of 17 applicants following a robust national superintendent search, which began in fall 2022. The district’s school board contracted with JG Consulting during the process, which relied heavily on engagement from parents, staff, students and a range of community stakeholders.

Hope Soriano-Kihara
Chief Marketing & Communications Officer
Kansas City Public Schools
communications@kansascityschools.org

Dr. Collier is a lifelong learner, having earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Kansas, Master of Arts in education from Avila University, an educational specialist degree in educational leadership from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a doctorate in educational leadership from UMKC. Collier is a certified National Institute for School Leaders trainer, has a Professional in Human Resources certification and participated in Harvard University’s “School Turnaround Leaders Institute.”

She will bring both a vision and a strategy for continued growth for every student at MPS regardless of their background or zip code.”

She will bring both a vision and a strategy for continued growth for every student at MPS regardless of their background or zip code.”
President Olin Parker: “It’s an historic and exciting day for our city as we formally appoint the first woman to serve as permanent superintendent in the District’s 181 years. It’s long overdue and on behalf of the board, we are thrilled to welcome Dr. Avis Williams to our NOLA-PS family.”

“The education field is overwhelmingly female, and we know NOLA-PS has had countless women who were capable of leading this district prior to today,” said OPSB member Katie Baudouin. “It’s a proud and exciting time in our history to have a woman leading the District who is a talented educator and beloved leader and mother who understands the needs of our children. I’m certain Dr. Williams is willing and ready to continue to fight for the best interest of our students and ensure they succeed throughout their educational journey with NOLA-PS.”

“I am truly honored, humbled, and excited to be part of this historic day for NOLA Public Schools. I look forward to listening and working with our dedicated teachers, families, the community, and our scholars to ensure academic success that will lead to bright, successful futures,” said Dr. Avis Williams. “I appreciate the trust and confidence the board has in me. I will work hard to gain the trust of our families and the community as I work to install the core values I live by in every facet of the District: Excellence, Equity, and Joy.”

Dr. Williams’ contract is commensurate with compensation packages of recently-hired superintendents both in similarly sized districts nationally and worldwide. The contract provides the opportunity for specific performance-based objectives that include:

- Leading the development and implementation of a comprehensive, long-term vision and strategy for meeting the educational needs of all students served by schools governed by the Board.
- Leading the central office personnel with the primary mission of continual annual growth in academic performance among all charter and district-run schools governed by the Board.
- Maintaining rigorous standards for charter school authorization recommendations that follow Board policy and are aligned with national best practices, as promulgated by the National Association of Charter School Authors and demographic trends of the District. The Superintendent shall implement comprehensive measures to hold those charter schools accountable to those standards.

In addition, the contract provides the opportunity for specific performance-based objectives in the areas of finance, accountability, and community engagement at its core.

In her current role as Superintendent of Selma City Schools in Alabama, Dr. Williams has successfully increased the district’s State Report Card by 8 points, from 68 to 76, the equivalent of raising it by a full letter grade. She also increased the graduation rate by 6%; reading scores by 6%; math, by 8%; and achieved the distinction as the only district in the state to earn the Pathway, Tier I and Tier II Performance Excellence Awards through the Alabama Performance Excellence Program (Baldrige Framework).

Advocacy and community engagement have been hallmarks of Dr. Williams’ service as the leader of Selma City Schools. She has written weekly articles in local publications, spoken to dozens of churches, civic groups, and other community members to discuss issues impacting education, as well as addressed state legislators to help improve children’s education. Prior to her superintendentcy in Selma, Dr. Williams served as the Assistant Superintendent of Tuscaloosa City Schools where she helped increase the graduation rate from 81 to 91% and developed a District Instructional Framework, which led to a 25-point increase in early literacy proficiency. In addition, she helped implement a $170M capital project.

Ultimately, the board believes Dr. Williams’ award-winning, proven instructional leadership and strategic planning will help increase student achievement and improve community support as NOLA-PS’ Superintendent of Schools.

###

About NOLA Public Schools: NOLA Public Schools is the public school district for Orleans Parish. It includes the district’s administration and elected school board, known as the Orleans Parish School Board. NOLA Public Schools currently oversees 76 public schools and is led by Superintendent Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr.
Dr. Wayne N. Walters Selected to Lead Pittsburgh Public Schools as Permanent Superintendent for Next Five Years

PITTSBURGH, July 21, 2022 – The Pittsburgh Board of Public Education selected Dr. Wayne N. Walters to lead Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) as its permanent Superintendent. This follows a national search where Dr. Walters depth of experience and unmatched level of validation through his role as the ideal person to assume the permanent top leadership role for the District. The Board is expected to approve Dr. Walters’ appointment for a five-year term at its next Legislative Session meeting on Wednesday, July 27, 2022.

“Dr. Walters brings an unwavering dedication to high standards in education along with unmatched integrity,” said Board President Sala Udin, noting Dr. Walter’s 30-plus year tenure with the District. “People also know him well that he has incredibly high standards for students regarding academic achievement and integrity.”

Dr. Walters has served in the District as a Teacher, Assistant Principal, Assistant Superintendent of K-12 Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Professional Development and Special Programming, and, most recently, since October 2021, Interim Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools.

“I remain unapologetically student-centered, committed, and passionate about our students, teachers, staff, and families of the Pittsburgh Public Schools,” said Dr. Walters. “I know firsthand the many challenges our District faces, but I believe competence, confidence, and collaboration go a long way toward improving the education experience for our students.”

“I am excited about leading the District back into its academic rigor and joy for learning and for the tremendous opportunities ahead.”

Dr. Walters assumes the permanent post on Monday, August 1, 2022.

National Search Validated Selection

The Board hired search consultant BWP & Associates (BWP) in March to lead the national search to identify qualified candidates to fill the post of permanent Superintendent for the District. There were 29 applicants who applied from 13 states and one other country. The insights garnered from the community outreach efforts helped to build the foundation on which BWP’s search process was guided.

Insights garnered from the community outreach efforts helped to build the foundation on which BWP developed the Leadership Profile, which was used in the recruiting process. The Leadership Profile identified the traits needed in a leader to lead PPS students, educators, and the community and was presented by BWP to the Board at a public meeting in May.

Community engagement was an essential part of this process, and we are grateful for the two foundations that stepped forward—The Richard King Mellon Foundation and The Pittsburgh Foundation—to support the national search that validated Dr. Walters as the best leader and the best candidate for our community.”

Specific terms of Dr. Walters’ contract will be highlighted next week at the Board’s Legislative Session meeting at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, July 27.

The first day of school for teachers in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is Tuesday, August 23, 2022. Specific terms of Dr. Walters’ contract will be highlighted next week at the Board’s Legislative Session meeting at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, July 27.

We are grateful for the two foundations that stepped forward—The Richard King Mellon Foundation and The Pittsburgh Foundation—to support the national search that validated Dr. Walters as the best leader and the best candidate for our community.”

Contact: George Sells
Director of Communications and Marketing
Pittsburgh Public Schools
George.Sells@pps.org
412.340.7053, ext. 104

Mr. Udin noted that the national search process validated that Dr. Walters is indeed the right individual for this critical leadership position. Throughout the search process, the Board recognized that Dr. Walters was superior in his expectations for academic achievement, staff and student accountability, and the well-being of the entire PPS family.

Dr. Walters’ significant experience, coupled with the reputation he has earned among teachers, administrators, students, and parents, made him the stand-out candidate in this national search.

“I am excited about leading the District back into its academic rigor and joy for learning and for the tremendous opportunities ahead.”

Moving forward, the Board and Dr. Walters will collaborate in developing goals and a strategic plan for the District. The Board said that having someone so intimately familiar with the District is a distinct advantage in that Dr. Walters knows how to get things done efficiently and effectively.

A Reset Strategy

Public input was vital in determining the kind of leadership that the District needs and deserves. All told, 1,716 people participated in community feedback activities via an online survey, interviews, focus groups, and community forums. In addition to a public hearing, Administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, community members, and community member constituent groups were represented throughout the process.

“The Board’s goal in conducting a nationwide search was to find a leader and a candidate who will energize our District, and we wholeheartedly believe we have achieved this goal by choosing Dr. Walters,” said Board President Sala Udin, noting Dr. Walters’ 30-year dedication to high standards in education along with unmatched achievement and integrity.”

“We are grateful for the two foundations that stepped forward—The Richard King Mellon Foundation and The Pittsburgh Foundation—to support the national search that validated Dr. Walters as the best leader and the best candidate for our community.”

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WRITER AND CONTRIBUTORS

WRITER

This document was written by Barbara Griffith, a communications consultant who served as Senior Communications Officer for the Fort Worth Independent School District for 17 years. Griffith’s education consulting services include crisis communications, developing strategies to boost and sustain enrollment, facilitate smooth superintendent transitions, and lead successful bond election information campaigns.

CONTRIBUTORS

Wendy Johnson, Division Director of Strategic Communications, has been with Wichita Public Schools for almost 24 years and has worked in communications and marketing for 35 years.

George Sells, Director of Communications and Marketing, Saint Louis Public Schools, has 32 years of communications experience. He was formerly a broadcast news reporter—both television and radio—for 24 years. He has also has experience in owning and running a production company.

Phil Roeder, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Des Moines Public Schools, has 40 years of communications experience. He has a background in politics having worked for Iowa Senator Tom Harker. He is also perhaps the only member of our PRE group to have been school board president for the district he now serves.

Kathryn Block, Marketing Officer for The School District of Philadelphia, has served SDP for five and a half years. However, she’s been in communications for three decades, previously working in the corporate setting with Fortune 500 companies like Kraft Foods and the Campbell Soup Company. She completed a two-year Broad Residency.

Monica Armenta, served for 15 years as Executive Director of Communications, Albuquerque Public Schools. At the end of July, she will become the Executive Director of the New Mexico Broadcasters Association. Prior to APS, Monica had a lengthy and respected career in TV news. We learned at our conference last year from another PRE colleague, she was considered the most popular TV anchor in New Mexico.

Donnie Belcher, Executive Director of Communications and Engagement, Minneapolis Public Schools. Ask Donnie how long she’s been with MPS and she’ll tell you since “9th grade” and that she is a proud product of her school district. She’s been with the MPS comms team for two and half years, but before that had lengthy experience working for a non-profit and as a high school English teacher.

Cristina Pena Nguyen, Executive Director of Communications & Community Engagement, Austin Independent School District, has 13 years of communication experience, serving both in the public and the private sector.

Michael Casserly is Strategic Advisor for the Council of Great City Schools. He previously served as Executive Director of the Council for 29 years. Before assuming this position, Casserly served as the organization’s Director of Legislation and Research for 15 years.
PRE MEETING
23rd ANNUAL PUBLIC RELATIONS EXECUTIVES MEETING

July 11-13, 2024

Hyatt Regency Bellevue
900 Bellevue Way, NE
Bellevue, WA 98004-4272
#PRE2024

Working Agenda

Thursday, July 11

6 – 8:30 p.m.  

Dinner
Daniel’s Broiler Bellevue Place
21st floor of the Hyatt Regency Bellevue

Sponsors:
Apptegy
Peachjar
PowerSchool
Qualtrics

Welcome
Tonya Harris, Director of Communications
Council of the Great City Schools

Ray Hart, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Bev Raymond, Chief of Staff
Seattle Public Schools

Guest Speaker
Sean Goode, Chief Executive Officer
Finding Goode
Sean is a speaker, facilitator, writer, executive coach, consultant and nonprofit leader driven by his mantra, “possibilities over problems,” born from his experience growing up in overwhelmingly challenging circumstances. Prior to operating the coaching and consulting practice “Finding Goode,” he served as Chief Impact and Learning officer at the Seattle Foundation, where he worked to move money back into the communities from which it was extracted as an act of repair. Sean began that work after stewarding the now nationally recognized nonprofit CHOOSE 180, where he worked to decriminalize youthful behavior and transform the very systems that have historically caused harm to marginalized communities. Before leading this Human Rights award-winning organization, Sean served as a chaplain in juvenile detention, championed gang and group intervention efforts, and worked to provide education and employment opportunities for youth in at-risk communities.

Friday, July 12

7:30 – 10 a.m.  
Registration (Cedar Ballroom, 2nd floor)

8 – 9 a.m.  
Breakfast (Larch Room, 3rd floor)  
Sponsor: Target River

9 - 9:30 a.m.  
Welcome & Introductions (Cedar Ballroom, 2nd floor)

9:30 – 10:15 a.m.  
Increasing Enrollment in St. Paul
Like most urban school districts, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) has experienced a steady decline in enrollment starting several years before the pandemic. In the 2023-24 school year, SPPS saw its enrollment begin to stabilize at just over 33,000 PreK-12 students. This stabilization can be attributed to strategic decisions to invest in the types of educational programs the St. Paul community wants. Add in strategic promotional efforts and a few proactive principals, and the district is on track to continue this trend into the future.

In this session, attendees will learn how St. Paul works with its stakeholders and partners, including SchoolMint, to positively impact enrollment at individual schools and districtwide for the 2024-25 school year and beyond.
Presenters:
Erica Wacker, Director of Communications, St. Paul Public Schools
Charli DeWhitt, Senior Marketing & Enrollment Consultant, SchoolMint

10:15 – 11:00 a.m.  Passing a Levy: How to Communicate When You Can't Advocate
Do you have an initiative on an upcoming ballot but need help acquiring support for it? This session will equip you with the tools and tips to balance educating an audience and advocating for your cause. Learn about the successful tactics that Columbus City Schools utilized for the recent November 2023 passage of Issue 11, which awarded the district a multi-million dollar tax levy.

Presenter:
Letrece Griffin, Chief Communications Officer, Columbus City Schools

11:00 – 11:15 a.m.  Coffee Break

11:15 - 12:15 p.m.  What Works! Sharing Best Practices/Breakout Groups
Round Robin discussion in which districts will be asked to share successful communication strategies and initiatives. We will also break out into groups to discuss the top issues/challenges facing urban school district communicators, including:
- Communicating school closings
- Messaging cell phone bans
- Student recruitment and retention
- Improving internal communications
- Messaging around financial transparency

Moderator:
Barbara Griffith, Communications Consultant and Former Senior Communications Officer for Fort Worth Independent School District

12:15 –1:30 p.m.  Lunch (Larch Room, 3rd floor)

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.  A Fireside Chat with Microsoft’s Steve Clayton: Transforming Communications with AI
On November 30th, 2022, ChatGPT broke cover and communicators worldwide wondered (and worried) what this meant for their work. Over the last year, Microsoft’s Communications team has been exploring how and where
to best apply generative AI across their work - from measurement and reporting through news operations, social media, content creation, and much more.

In this session, Steve Clayton, who leads this work as Vice President of Communications Strategy at Microsoft, will take you behind the scenes of how Microsoft has approached the use of AI across the discipline, best practices for applying AI to Comms and a sneak peek at some of the tools Microsoft has built internally to transform the work that over 250 communicators globally carry out for the company.

**Moderator:**
**Justin Grayson**, PR and Communications Expert, and Former Chief Communications and Community Engagement Officer for Long Beach Unified School District

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2:30 – 3:15 p.m

**Streamlining PR: AI Automation Strategies from the School District of Philadelphia**

Learn how the School District of Philadelphia leverages customizations and workflow automations from Let's Talk, K12 Insight's customer service and intelligence platform, to streamline inbound inquiries, transform community engagement, and centralize communications across 200+ campuses. Let's Talk has helped the Philadelphia team replace emails with custom forms and landing pages and improve interdepartmental communications thanks to automated keyword routing that sends every incoming inquiry to the right person or team.

Gain practical insights and strategies to elevate your district's PR and customer service efforts, as well as create seamless, celebration-worthy interactions with stakeholders.

**Presenter:**
**Alexandra Coppadge**, Chief of Communications and Customer Service, School District of Philadelphia

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3:15 – 3:30 p.m.

Refreshment Break

3:30 – 4:15 p.m

**Beyond the Logo: Reimagining a School District's Brand Identity Through Leadership Transition**

In this presentation, we explore navigating the shift in leadership of a legacy workforce that has been under
consistent leadership for 12 years. The plan highlights the strategic approach to introducing the District's new brand identity and voice while repositioning its recognizable logo and colors, aligning with evolving priorities and values. A key focus is guiding a legacy workforce through this transition, encouraging new ways of thinking, working, messaging, and reimagining the District.

This presentation also examines securing buy-in for the reimagined brand identity, reflecting the renewed direction and commitment to excellence, and discussing the importance of thoughtful leadership and communication.

Presenter:
Candice Grose, Deputy Chief of Communications, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

4:15 p.m.  Adjourn

5:00 – 7:30 p.m.  Cocktail Reception
Bake's Place Bar & Bistro
155 108th Ave NE, Ste 110
Bellevue, WA 98004
(A one-minute cab ride from the Hyatt Regency Bellevue)

Sponsors:
Finalsite
K12 Insight
ParentSquare
SchoolMint

Saturday, July 13

7:30 – 10 a.m.  Registration (Cedar Ballroom, 2nd floor)

8 – 9 a.m.  Breakfast (Larch Room, 3rd floor)

Sponsors:
The Grayson Agency
Barbara Griffith, Communications Consultant
9 – 9:45 a.m. **Humanizing Your Negotiations**
When negotiations with your labor partners get rocky, it’s human nature to want to take a step back to avoid becoming a target. However, in these trying times, your staff and families need you the most. They’re seeking information, humanity, and calm. By humanizing your district in peaceful times, you’ve built the foundations necessary to bring that human element to difficult negotiations.

Join this session to get the inside scoop on Fresno Unified’s communications strategy throughout 18 months of tough negotiations with the Fresno Teachers Association that ultimately averted a strike and ended in an agreement.

**Presenter:**
**Nikki Henry**, Chief Communications Officer, Fresno Unified School District

9:45 – 10:45 a.m. **Meaningful Connections: Communicating with Linguistically Diverse Audiences**
With approximately 25 million individuals in the U.S. speaking a language other than English at home, the educational landscape in the United States has never been more diverse. School districts must effectively communicate, engage, and connect with linguistically diverse students and their families.

This presentation explores the transformative potential of inclusive design, representation, and meaningful language accessibility. Throughout our discussion, we will unpack key components, including multicultural outreach, plain language, translation, inclusive design and language access strategies.

**Presenter:**
**Marifer Sager**, Director, Strategic Communications and Public Affairs, Multnomah Education Service District

10:45 – 11 a.m. Coffee Break
11 – 11:45 a.m.  All Means All - Expanding Parent Participation for Engaging Results
This session delves into the complexities of building meaningful connections between school and home. We'll share practical approaches and innovative solutions to foster inclusive and effective engagement, ensuring every family feels seen, heard, and valued in the educational journey. Attendees will leave with tips for building vibrant, engaged school communities.

Presenters:
Shayla Cannady, former Chief Communications Officer for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Anu Vaid, President & Founder, ParentSquare
Jay Klanfer, SVP Sales, ParentSquare

Noon – 1:15 p.m.  Lunch (Larch Room, 3rd floor)

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.  Your Social Media Content is Boring (but You Don’t Have to Be)
Spending hours on a video just for it to bomb on social media hurts. Fluffy content that gets likes but doesn’t move your strategy forward should hurt you just as much. School PR content hasn’t kept up with the rest of the world. Our audiences are right to reject rote, outdated content. Break out of the cookie cutter of what school PR should be with a content development pipeline that proves being strategic should never mean being boring.

Presenter Request: Boring mindsets need not attend.

Presenter:
Mikel Philippi, Communications Manager at 27J Schools, Brighton, CO
2:30 – 3:15 p.m.

**Effective Community Engagement: Insights from Detroit Public Schools Community District and Finalsite**

Join Chrystal Wilson, APR, from Detroit Public Schools Community District and Cristina Pawlica from Finalsite for an insightful session on maximizing community engagement in urban school districts. This presentation will focus on adapting to diverse demographics by considering socioeconomic status, language diversity, learning levels, and generational differences.

Chrystal will share best practices for effectively communicating with stakeholders in urban school settings based on her extensive experience. Cristina will address districts' challenges in accommodating families, regardless of their home situations, and advocate for an "everything-first" approach. This approach aims to mitigate common disparities such as varying access to devices and broadband internet, differing levels of technology familiarity, platform preferences, and scheduling constraints of working parents or caretakers.

**Presenters:**

**Chrystal Wilson**, Assistant Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools Community District  
**Cristina Pawlica**, Finalsite

3:15 - 4:00 p.m.

**An open forum for attendees to discuss any additional issues or challenges facing urban school district communications that have arisen during the conference or were not covered in previous sessions**

This is an opportunity to raise new topics and engage in a broader dialogue.

4:00 p.m.

**Adjourn**

**Attire for the Conference:** Business Casual. Please bring a sweater, blazer or wrap because the hotel meeting room may be chilly.