

Superintendent's Toolkit

February 2013



**Legislative
& Communications
Issues & Talking
Points**



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Welcome to revamped Superintendent's Toolkit

On behalf of the IASA Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the revamped Superintendent's Toolkit. Similar to the IASA Annual Report and our monthly newsletter *Leadership Matters*, we have gone to an online format that utilizes "flipping book" technology.



By using this technology, not only can we go "green," but we also can update and add to the content at any time. We will change the cover date each time we update the toolkit. You can access a topic either by flipping through the publication like a magazine, or by simply clicking on an item in the Table of Contents.

The material in this toolkit is divided into two major sections: Legislative and Communications. The Legislative section contains tips on how to work with legislators as well as white papers on legislative topics of current interest. Each issue paper contains sections on the background of the issue, an explanation of the issue, suggested talking points and a list of resource links for members that wish to research a topic more in depth. The Communications section includes a brief template for putting together a school communications plan as well as general talking points related to issues that superintendents face on a regular basis.

We will continue to add to the content as needed. We welcome your suggestions for new issues or topics and any materials you have to offer as a resource.

This revamped Superintendent's Toolkit not only is the work of Chief of Staff/Director of Governmental Relations Diane Hendren and Director of Communication Mike Chamness, but involved a steering committee from the IASA Board of Directors that included Diane Robertson, Brad Hutchison, Dr. Catherine Finger, Dr. Jason Henry, and Dr. Thomas Bertrand.

We hope that this Superintendent's Toolkit provides you the necessary "tools" with which to help meet the ever-increasing demands of being a school superintendent.

Yours for better schools,

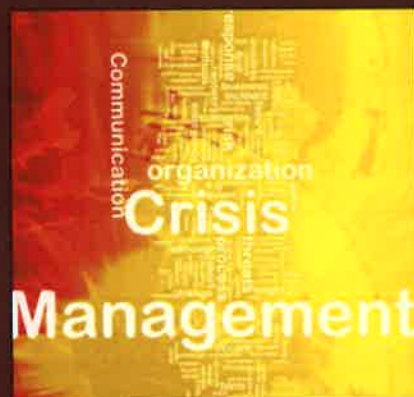
Dr. Brent Clark
IASA Executive Director

School Communications Template

Step 1: Assemble a Communications Planning Team

Who should be on that team might differ from district to district, but it should include:

- ♦ Superintendent
- ♦ Assistant superintendents
- ♦ Communications director
- ♦ Principals
- ♦ Board member
- ♦ Subject matter experts, such as school safety officer, head custodian, transportation director



Step 2: Logistics

Logistical issues include:

- ♦ Who the chief spokespeople will be for the district, going at least three deep in priority order, and making sure they are properly trained
- ♦ Where media inquiries should be directed
- ♦ Identifying a site and an alternate site for conducting on-site press briefings at each school (considerations include number of media that cover your district, background for TV shots or photos, acoustics and your exit path when the briefing is concluded)
- ♦ Identifying a working area and an alternate working area for the media – away from access to students -- in case of an ongoing major event (considerations include number of media expected, access to power, restrooms, food service)
- ♦ Developing and keeping current a list of media contacts and contact information
- ♦ Developing method(s) to immediately get your message to parents

Step 3: Identifying issues

The Communications team should identify potential issues for the district based on high probability or high consequence. Some examples of high probability issues might include:

- ♦ Contract negotiations/strikes
- ♦ RIF of teachers/staff
- ♦ Budget cuts/deficits
- ♦ Staff or student discipline
- ♦ Bullying
- ♦ Test scores
- ♦ Bomb threats
- ♦ Transportation incidents

Examples of low probability but high consequence might include:

- ♦ School shooting or violence
- ♦ Tornado
- ♦ Fire
- ♦ Location-specific threats like nuclear power plant accident, earthquake, flooding

School Communications Template

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Step 4: Creating messages for issues identified

The goal is to be prepared to immediately respond to media and parents when something occurs. By drafting messages for each issue and placing them in a "playbook," you can very quickly tweak them with specific details for a particular incident or occurrence.

Tips for creating messages include:

- ♦ Be succinct. The media typically will use only short sound bites 10-20 seconds in length.
- ♦ A good goal is no more than three main points, each no more than 10-15 words in length with supporting sub-points if necessary.
- ♦ If your message is much longer, you allow the reporter or editor to determine which sound bite or quote to use.
- ♦ Once the message is drafted, prepare a list of potential follow-up questions the media might ask and draft suggested responses. You almost always can anticipate what might be asked. This will help ensure that your spokespeople do not get surprised by a media question and are well prepared to respond as opposed to trying to respond off the cuff. It also will help ensure that everyone who has access to the information can be saying the same thing.
- ♦ Practice the messages – and staying on message – even using staff to conduct mock press briefings.
- ♦ Stay on message using bridging techniques with phrases like "As I said," "The real issue is," and "I can't answer that because of (ongoing investigation, legal issue, privacy issue), but what I can tell you is..."

Step 5: Identifying people for jobs and tasks

The list of jobs and tasks associated with a Communications Plan will vary from district to district and some of them will flow from the plan itself, like being a spokesperson, being assigned to stay in the media room and others.

Jobs and duties that might be part of a comprehensive Communications Plan include:

- ♦ Developing the messages to go with the issues identified and developing the message "playbook."
- ♦ Writing press releases.
- ♦ Writing messages from the superintendent to parents or for regular media use
- ♦ Writing columns and Op Ed pieces for the superintendent.
- ♦ Managing message content on the district website.
- ♦ Developing and updating the media contact list and developing, along with the superintendent, professional working relationships with the media that cover your school district.
- ♦ Writing summaries of school board meetings to get the district message out as opposed to depending solely on the media to cover the meetings.
- ♦ Reviewing local media coverage each morning and summarizing coverage related to the district for the superintendent and others on the Communications Team to make sure everyone has situational awareness.
- ♦ Providing media training for members of the Communications Team if appropriate. If not, then outside training needs to be provided for those who have a role in the Plan as well as others who might be contacted by the media (principals & board members, for example)

Step 6: Good news plan

This is a separate listing because it often is overlooked as a component of a Communications Plan. The components include:

- ♦ Developing a system by which administrators, staff, teachers and even students can submit story ideas and information about innovative programs and success stories.
- ♦ Developing a way to get those stories to the appropriate media outlets, understanding that every media market is different and within each market there are media outlets that probably would use the district's "good news" items.
- ♦ Developing a plan for a district to use its own resources (website, direct email, Twitter and other social media) to spread the good news to

