Communication on a Shoestring Budget

A MinnSPRA Presentation
Spring 2010
Welcome! MinnSPRA Presentation: Communication on a Shoestring Budget

- Introductions
  - Speaker Introduction
  - Group Introductions
    - Name, School District, Role & Responsibilities
    - Primary communications challenge

- Housekeeping
  - Format
  - Timeframe
  - Breaks

- Ice Breaker –
  What are your Hopes and Fears about the Future of Public Education?
About MinnSPRA:
Minnesota School Public Relations Association

- Award-winning, nationally recognized organization of more than 100 Minnesota public relations professionals, superintendents, and district personnel dedicated to strategic communications in education

- Member Benefits
  - Network of support
  - Professional Development
  - MinnSPRA Online Resources (www.minnspra.org)
  - Star Awards
  - Member Request Network
  - Opportunities for Leadership Development

- Membership Year is July 1-June 30
  - $75/regular membership & $10/student membership
  - Join before July 1st and receive 2009-10 and 2010-11 membership for one price

- Local chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)
What’s In Store …

Presentation Agenda

- Why communicate?
- PR Best Practices Overview
  - ACTIVITY: Content Analysis
  - ACTIVITY: Audiences
- Developing Key Messages
  - ACTIVITY: Writing Key Messages
- Sample Strategies & Tactics
- PR: It’s EVERYONE’S job!
- Internal Communication
- Feeding the Grapevine
- Working with the Media
- Crisis Communications
  - ACTIVITY: Crisis Scenarios & Crisis Clock
- Interpersonal Communications
- Visitors Welcome
- Creative PR Staffing Solutions
- Print, Website & Other Electronic Communication
- Evaluation
- From Learning to Practice
  - ACTIVITY: Writing a Communications Plan
Communication on a Shoestring: Why communicate?

- Confirm existence to the world
- Familiarize stakeholders with your “brand”
- Maintain and/or boost enrollment and staffing
- Build relationships with audiences
- Reduce advertising
- Proactively deal with negativity/rumors
Communication on a Shoestring: Best Practices

- Communicate ... COMMUNICATE ... and then Communicate some more ... you CANNOT over communicate!
  - “Rule-of-thumb” ... communicate 10 times in 10 different ways and then start again!

- An everyday activity – Research shows most community members have little understanding of public education

- Define in simple terms

- Always show direct connections to student learning

- Communications spectrum – start internal and move external

- ACTIVITY: Content Analysis – How do you currently communicate to staff, students, parents and community?
Communication on a Shoestring: Best Practices continued …

- Use multiple strategies, tactics and communication channels to reach all audiences

- ACTIVITY: Who are your audiences?
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Staff
  - Non-parents
  - Business Leaders
  - Legislators
  - Others?
Communication on a Shoestring: Developing Key Messages

- Tell the story
  - Impact on schools and children

- Be specific
  - Target messages to audiences
  - Title is critical – Grab the readers attention!
  - Use plain language and avoid education jargon
    - Would your Grandmother understand?

- Use images when possible
  - Charts & Graphs
  - Audio/Visual

- ACTIVITY: Writing Key Messages
Communication on a Shoestring: Sample Strategies

- Communicate factual information in a timely manner
- Increase awareness of ALL stakeholders
- Involve stakeholders in decision-making process, when possible
- Keep the focus on current & future program quality
- Maintain the District’s reputation
- Balance by-the-numbers information with personal stories
- Develop a branding strategy
Communication on a Shoestring: Sample Tactics

- Job #1 = Messages that are open, honest & direct
- Public Comments at School Board Meetings
- Face-to-Face Meetings
- Small-group gatherings
- Public Meetings/Forums
- Print communications: newsletters, newspaper columns, Letters-to-the-Editor, News Releases, Flyers

- Electronic communications
  - Website
  - E-newsletters
  - Blog
  - Social Media
  - Automated Phone Calls
  - Television – Local/Cable Access & Network

- Rumor Control
  - Website
  - Response to Letters-to-the-Editor
Communication on a Shoestring: It’s Everyone’s Job!

- School Board, Superintendent, Business Manager, Principals/Directors, Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Office/Clerical, Custodians/Grounds, Transportation, Food Service, School Volunteers
Communication on a Shoestring: From the Inside Out

- Remember your internal audience
  - Always start here!
  - Employees are #1 community resource for school information
  - Staff Newsletters
  - School Board Briefs

- Be visible
  - In schools
  - In community
    - Local organizations
    - Service organizations
    - Participate in local events/celebrations
Communication on a Shoestring: Feed the Grapevine

- Supply District News
  - School newsletters
  - City newsletters
  - Civic newsletters
  - Local newspaper
  - Local television/cable news
  - Blogging
  - Social media

- Develop a Key Communicator Network
Communication on a Shoestring: Working with the Media

- “Never get into a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel” – Mark Twain

- Begin with Research via “Media Harvesting”
  - Local Media
  - State Media – Join MSBA Clipping Service
  - National Media – Suggested publications

- How to build a relationship with local media
  - Annual, individual meetings to discuss: news release preferences, deadlines, story pitches
  - Explore possibility of regular column/radio show/appearance
  - Open, honest, clear information in a timely manner
    - Invite them in to discuss issues before they become public
  - Create a reserved Media area/table for school board meetings; have background information packets ready to go at meetings
  - Beware of data privacy and communicate policies to local media
Communication on a Shoestring: Crisis Communications

- We have a crisis, now what?
  - Operations and communications occur concurrently
  - Key Messages & Spokesperson
    - “What we know at this time ...”
    - Additional information available ...
  - Beware of data privacy
  - What happens when you can’t control the message?
    - Get in front of message ASAP

- Work with the media – established relationships critical
  - Local media FIRST

- ACTIVITY: Crisis Scenarios / How to use a crisis clock
Communication on a Shoestring: Interpersonal Communications

- Oh Happy Day – Internal & External
  - Write Notes – Congratulations/Thank You
  - Send clips from local newspapers
  - Make Phone Calls
  - Make Personal Visits

- Other low-cost, high-impact options
  - Regular appearance at local establishments
  - Hosted Coffee Conversations
  - Attendance at local events
  - Shop local and service local
Communication on a Shoestring: Visitors Welcome

- Invite parents, media representatives, senior citizens, business leaders, etc. inside the schools
  - Consider “Superintendent for a Day Program”
  - Spend time in classrooms, meetings on busses, lunchroom, playground, reading to students, etc.

- Schools as community centers
  - Host community events/activities in schools
  - Leased space
  - Class Reunions

- Important to strike a balance of creating an open and inviting school community and a safe environment for students and staff
Communication on a Shoestring: Creative PR Staffing Solutions

- Need PR assistance? For general assistance or single program/project (i.e. New Student/Realtor Information Packets, District and schools Branding, Logo, etc.) consider:
  - Paid public relations/communications/marketing consultants
  - FREE labor:
    - Internships
    - Parent Volunteers
    - Community Volunteers
    - Service organizations
    - Alumni

- What to look for … MinnSPRA/NSPRA Membership, Professional PR/Marketing/Communications Education & Experience, Media Contacts, Chemistry, Energy, Flexibility, Creativity
Communication on a Shoestring: Print Communications

- Flyers
- Fact Sheets
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Letters
- Ads
- News Releases
- Presentations

- “Rules of the Road”
  - Ensure consistency
  - Multiple uses for ALL communication products
  - Consider distribution
    - Mailing isn’t always necessary
    - Backpacks
    - Electronic options
  - Leverage information through multiple channels
  - Available channels?
Communication on a Shoestring: Website

- District website is Front Door to the cyber-world!
- Start with a content analysis
  - How does your website compare to neighboring school districts?
  - Needed improvements?
- Research web software and hosting
  - Additional opportunities available?
- Post as much info as possible
- Have you “Googled” your school district lately?
- Reliable contact information
- Policies/procedures for photos and student work
- News archive
- Develop a plan for regular updates
  - Assign responsibility
- Consider school & teacher websites
Communication on a Shoestring: Other Electronic Communications

- Automated phone call and e-mail applications
- E-newsletters
- Blogs
- Social Media – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.
- Podcasts
- RSS Feeds
- Television – Network/Cable Access
Communication on a Shoestring: Evaluation

- Often overlooked, but important to overall success!
- Surveys – Internal and external
  - Mini-surveys at parent-teacher conferences
    - Communications
    - Customer Service
  - Formal opinion surveys
- Focus Groups

*After evaluation ... Refine and begin again!*
Communication on a Shoestring: From Learning to Practice

- Write a brief communications plan
  - Basic elements of a communications plan
    - Goals
    - Target audience
  - Action plan for each target audience
    - Key Messages
    - Message delivery
    - Message sender
    - Message timing
  - Budget – Estimate time & materials needed, in advance
  - Evaluation

- ACTIVITY: Write a Communications Plan
Communication on a Shoestring: Discussion

"The biggest difficulty with communications is the illusion that it has been accomplished."

– George Bernard Shaw
Communication on a Shoestring: Conclusion & Evaluation

- Thank you for your participation
- Evaluation
- Upcoming MinnSPRA Events & Activities
- Join MinnSPRA
  - Membership Year is July 1-June 30
    - $75/regular membership & $10/student membership
    - Register NOW through July 1st and receive 2009-10 and 2010-11 membership
- Join NSPRA
  - Variety of memberships available; beginning at $150 annually