

Characteristics of Effective Superintendents

**A study to identify qualities essential to the success of school superintendents
as cited by leading superintendents**

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Purpose

This research project was designed to determine the contribution of good communications practices to the success of superintendents who have been honored by their state or national peers as outstanding superintendents and to gather the perceptions of these outstanding superintendents regarding the value of communications to increased student achievement and superintendent success.

Background

In 2004, prompted by the need to measure, assess and promote accountability in school communications, the National School Public Relations Association established the Communications Accountability Project, a many-faceted communications research project. In July, 2005, three research studies were launched. This report is the result of one of those research studies.

The goal of the research described in this report was to interview or survey superintendents who had been identified within the past five years by their peers as outstanding superintendents through being named a state or national superintendent of the year or cited in an equally prestigious manner with the goal of gathering their perceptions of qualities and practices that contribute to their success as superintendents.

The personal and written interviews that comprise this research were administered from September 2005 through June 2006.

Survey methodology

The research team compiled a list of superintendents across the nation who had been named superintendent of the year by their states or on a national level. Seventeen superintendents were interviewed by phone and/or e-mail.

Questions asked in the interviews included:

- List three to five skills you define as the most important to your success as a superintendent, and rank each of these skills in order of importance, with one being very important, two being important, three being unimportant and four being least important.
- How important is communication to each of these skills?
- Do/did you have a professional communications leader on your senior leadership team? If you do not have a professional communications leader, from whom do you get your advice?
- How important is it to you to have someone to provide strategic communications advice?
- What impact does communications have on the success of moving your district's vision forward? Significant, some or none?
- Can you give one or two examples of when communications had a significant impact on the success of your district?
- Does communication play a role in improving student achievement? If yes, tell me why? If not, why not?

All questions were open-ended with no responses suggested to the respondents. Interviewers used prepared scripts and took copious notes. Fifteen superintendents were interviewed in person or over the phone and two of the superintendents chose to respond to a written survey instrument and complete the survey via e-mail. Open-ended questions were analyzed, categorized and ranked from most-frequent to least-frequent response. Questions that asked respondents to weight importance of an item were placed on a scale that corresponded with the possible points for the question. Responses were ranked in the following areas: skills for superintendent success; the importance of good communications; importance of communications advice; and the impact of communications on student achievement and moving the district forward.

Survey results/key findings

The need for good communications as an integral ingredient in superintendent success was cited by every superintendent in this study. Although leadership, vision, and strategic thinking were listed as the most important skills for superintendent success, every superintendent in the study ranked good communications skills as a "very important" component of each of those skills. Several exceeded the top choice for the importance of communications by using terms like "critical", "crucial", or "essential."

Every superintendent in the study said good communications is essential to high student achievement.

When these award-winning superintendents were asked in an open-ended question to list three to five of the most important skills to succeed as a superintendent, 14 of the 17 specifically named communications or community relations. The only item listed more than communications was a combination of leadership/vision/ability to inspire staff/problem solver category, which was cited 16 times. Those who listed leadership and vision areas went on to say that good communications was a vital element for success in those areas.

Most important skills to success as superintendent

Skill named	Number of times named
Leadership/vision/strategic thinker/problem solver	16
Communication (10) Community Relations (3)	13
Interpersonal Skills	11
Character	10
Competency - curricular areas- support for public education	9
Supervisory Skills	3
Budget/finance	3
Organizational abilities	2
Flexibility/sense of humor	1
Continuous learner	1
Goal accomplishment	1
Intuitive-culture	1
Multi-lingual	1
Right staff in place	1

When asked how important communications is to each of the skills noted above, the only answers given by these superintendents were that communications is very important, most important, critical, crucial and absolutely essential to the success of nearly every skill or quality named.

Importance of having a professional communications staff member

Fourteen of the 17 superintendents interviewed for this study have a professional communications leader on his or her senior leadership team or cabinet; two did not have a communications staff member and one has been in districts with and without a professional communications staff member.

One superintendent who did not have a communications staff member at the time of the interview was in the process of conducting a search for the right person. He said, "I need someone to report directly to me who is not a 'yes' person, but someone willing and able to provide a different perspective - someone who sees everything from the community perspective. This is very important to me. Good PR people are not on every street corner."

Sources of communications advice

The fourteen superintendents who have a communications staff member indicated throughout the survey their appreciation for the role of that person as an advisor and strategist. The three superintendents who did not have a professional communications staff member at the time the survey was conducted were asked who they turn to for advice. Rather than answering the question, one superintendent responded he intended to "fight to get one" (a communications staff member). Another superintendent, who now has a communications specialist on staff, said during the time she did not have a communications staff person she went to representatives from professional organizations and business leaders for advice. The third superintendent who did not have a communications staff member did not answer the question.

Importance or strategic communications advice

Sixteen of the 17 superintendents responded to the question, "How important is it to have someone to provide strategic communications advice?" All of those who responded to the

question expressed a need for strategic communications advice. They used language such as “very important, extremely important, essential, really important and critical.” Typical responses were:

- “...best to have someone at the table – then it’s integrated.”
- “You must have strategic communications advice. Without it the vision goes nowhere.”
- “Without it in an urban environment, it will kill you.”
- “It is more than important, because you can’t do without it. The superintendent can’t be the only one doing the communicating. Everyone in the district needs to be trained to deliver the message.”
- “The communication leader has the duty to be part of the decision-making process, providing informed input to how decisions will be perceived and what should be done to accomplish the goal.”

The role of communications in realizing vision

The sixteen superintendents who responded to this question all said effective communications has a “significant” impact on the success of moving the district’s vision forward. Although the superintendents were not asked to comment on this answer, one superintendent who had not had a communications specialist in the leadership team said, “Our failures, when we did the autopsies, were caused by not having someone (communication specialist) inside.”

Specific contributions of communications

When asked to give one or two examples of when communications had a significant impact on the success of their districts, the item most cited by these superintendents who had been identified by their peers for excellence (by being named Superintendent of the Year or honored in another manner), was success in getting voter approval for bond referendum/levies. This was followed by communicating during times of change, with superintendents citing changes such as No Child Left Behind and other accountability requirements; changes in curriculum; redrawing attendance boundaries; grade configuration changes; and closing schools.

One superintendent responded, “Critical need for effective communications. Everything we do and did was about communications. I have to align what I say with what I do. We needed to let voices from all subpopulations be heard.”

Nearly 50 percent of the superintendents who talked about the importance of communications in terms of marketing schools cited developing and carrying out complete communications/marketing plans; marketing plans for magnet schools; improving internal communications; and developing and maintaining Web sites.

The superintendents who credited communications with the success of strategic plans cited actions such as “identified all essential audiences and how to communicate with each of them” or “process allowed an external group of stakeholders to own the message, process and outcome.”

Response to crisis situations and the critical role of communications in that situation were named by nearly one third of the superintendents.

Other specific contributions of good communications cited in this open-ended question were student achievement and performance, building trust, and media relations. Communications during bargaining with employee groups and “political struggles” each received one mention.

One superintendent said communications had a “huge effect on moving the vision forward on the state writing test. The communications strategy is attached to the effort. We designed a huge public engagement initiative.”

Significant impact of communications

Named as ways communications had a significant impact of district success	Number of times item was named
Bond referendum/levy success	9
Communicating changes such as curriculum, attendance boundaries, NCLB and accountability	8
Marketing/communications	8
Crisis communications	5
Student performance/achievement	3
Communicating strategic plan	2
Building trust	1
Media relations	1
Bargaining with employee groups	1
Political struggles	1

The role of communications in improving student achievement

Every superintendent interviewed (100%) responded affirmatively when asked if communications plays a role in improving student achievement. Although not asked to, every respondent enlarged upon his or her answer to name ways communications had helped improve student achievement. They noted the importance of communicating student achievement goals, requirements and expectations with staff, parents and students; community engagement; the role of communications in effective organizational structure; identifying and addressing problems; celebrating successes; communicating goals and vision; student attendance and many other areas.

“Communications is the basis of good organization,” said one superintendent.

“Effective teaching and learning requires effective communication among staff and between staff and students,” said another.

Yet another said, “You cannot separate good communication from anything that your school system does.”

Demographics of respondents

The superintendents interviewed or surveyed for this study were from every part of the country and every size of school district and setting, from small community to urban setting. All of them were cited as outstanding superintendents, either being named a superintendent of the year on a state or national level or receiving another prestigious award to recognize their work as a superintendent of schools. Some of them currently work for state or national organizations and focus their work on helping school districts reach student achievement and other strategic goals.

Implications of the findings

The findings in this study correlate strongly with similar studies conducted by the Communications Accountability Project of the National School Public Relations Association and other research groups. Every superintendent participating in this project has been named within the past five years by a professional organization as an outstanding superintendent, and, like other successful superintendents who have responded to similar studies, each of them reaffirms the importance of good communications to their professional success, the success of students, and the success of their school districts.

Although the top skill named as being critical to superintendent success was vision and leadership, each of the superintendents went on to say that good communications was an integral part of successfully leading a district toward its vision. They, like successful superintendents in other studies, seem to see good communications as a pre-requisite to success rather than a distinct, isolated element of success.

These superintendents repeatedly name skills related to good communications or dependent upon good communications as those elements that determine their success as a superintendent. All of them talk about interpersonal skills such as good listening and building positive relationships.

These results are very similar to those found by another Communications Accountability Project team that studied the communications skills and qualities most desired by superintendents who have a professional communications person on staff. Like the superintendents in this study, those superintendents placed a high value on getting voter approval of bond referendums and operating levies. The superintendents in both groups also gave high rankings to avoiding or mitigating a controversy or crisis, with the superintendents in this study giving more concrete examples such as boundary changes, accountability, curriculum changes and the demands of No Child Left Behind. The difference between the responses of the two groups of superintendents is that this group of highly successful superintendents named occurrences that lend themselves to good communications planning to avoid controversy and crisis rather than the type of crises that are unavoidable, such as a violent occurrence in a school.

Responses to this survey clearly demonstrate that award-winning, superintendents believe good communications are vital to student achievement. Every superintendent in the survey said good communications is critical to reaching that goal. They cited community engagement, communications with students and parents and other strategies and tactics that are part of the type of comprehensive communications plan formulated and carried out by a communications strategist.

Every superintendent in this group of recognized superintendents said it is very important to have a professional communications person on staff and 14 out of the 17 said it is important for that person to be on the senior leadership team or superintendent's cabinet. When asked about having someone to provide strategic communications advice, all of the superintendents rated it as a necessity. This clearly speaks to the importance of school districts of every size having a professional communications person on staff with the knowledge and expertise to formulate and carry out a comprehensive communications plan that supports and contributes to student achievement. It is equally important, as expressed by these superintendents, for the success of the superintendent and the realization of district goals, that the communications professional be part of the leadership team and in a position to devise strategies and provide strategic advice.

These results also correlate well with findings of yet another study by NSPRA member Katherine Collins, which involved a survey of 63 school leaders from 45 states. (See complete Collins study at www.nspr.org/cap.htm).

Like this group of survey respondents, all of the respondents in the Collins survey acknowledged the significant role of public relations to the success of a school district. One hundred percent of these 63 school leaders agreed that communicating with stakeholders directly helps their districts accomplish their missions. Eighty four percent of the respondents in the Collins study said trust is an important characteristic for a leader to have, a thought that is echoed by many of the respondents in this survey as they talk about their success as a superintendent. In both studies, the respondents talk about trust, working with the community and the importance of

strategic communications plans. Every one of the 63 school leaders surveyed by Collins said communicating with stakeholders directly helps their districts to accomplish their mission, while the 17 superintendents in this survey cited vision, mission and goals as the most important skills for a superintendent, and all of the superintendents in the study followed that up by saying good communications is vital to vision and mission. In answering a subsequent question, 16 out of 17 of the respondents to this survey said communications has a significant impact on the success of moving the district's vision forward.

Conclusions

The responses of this group of highly successful superintendents clearly and consistently point to the critical contribution of communications to student success, realizing the district's vision, and successful leadership of a school district. These superintendents see communications as an integral part of every important component of their success and express the critical, indispensable role of strategic advice and a professional communications staff person on their leadership team.

Recommendations:

- The results of this survey should be shared with current superintendents, aspiring superintendents and those who provide training for aspiring superintendents to make them aware of the type of skills and assistance that lead to student, school district and superintendent success.
- Superintendents and aspiring superintendents should be aware of and utilize the resources of the National School Public Relations Association to refine their communications skills and learn strategies for effective communications. NSPRA provides to superintendents, whether or not they are members of the association, a free e-mail newsletter, *Communications Matters for Leading Superintendents*. Superintendents are also welcome as members of the organization and at the organization's annual national seminar, both of which provide a wealth of information to help superintendents in their daily work.
- Professional organizations such as AASA, NSPRA, and NSBA and principals' associations should work to make superintendents and aspiring superintendents aware of the benefits of a comprehensive communications program for supporting and realizing district and personal goals. This will usually require a professional communications staff member who is well versed in strategies and tactics for carrying out a research-based, targeted communications program to engage the public and mitigate crises and controversies.
- Superintendents, aspiring superintendents and institutions of higher learning who provide training to potential superintendents should receive copies of this report and other research conducted by NSPRA and others which contain data-based indicators of elements of superintendent success including communications skill and knowledge and the presence of a strategic-well-planned communications program for reaching the district's goals. This recommendation is critical to the success of future superintendents, since most superintendent certification programs include little, if any, training in strategic communications.

**Superintendents interviewed or surveyed for this study:
(Named Superintendent of the year in their state or on a national level or received similar prestigious award)**

- Ted Adams – superintendent affiliated with the Stupski Foundation
- Dr. Gayden Carruth – Missouri Association of School Administrators
- Dr. Sue Cleveland – Rio Rancho Public School District, Rio Rancho, New Mexico
- Paul Doerrer – Superintendent Ritenour School District, St. Louis Missouri
- Ronald Epps – Named Superintendent of the Year by National Alliance of Black School Educators, currently Superintendent in Residence with Stupski Foundation
- Lew Finch – Iowa Superintendent of the Year, now staff member of AASA Leadership Center
- John Kriekard – Paradise Valley Unified School District, Phoenix, AZ.
- Jim Lewis – Blaine (Idaho) School District
- Bill McNeal – National Superintendent of Year, 2004, Wake County Schools, Raleigh, N.C.
- Sharon Patterson - Georgia State Superintendent of the Year 2006 and one of three finalists for National Superintendent of the Year 2006.
- Larry Price – North Carolina Superintendent of the Year 2006 and one of three finalists for National Superintendent of the Year 2006.
- James Ray – Michigan Supt. of Year, currently Superintendent in Residence, Stupski Foundation
- Larry Rowedder – Superintendent in Residence, Stupski Foundation.
- Ed Sadler – Gaston County Schools, Gastonia NC – N.C. Superintendent of Year
- Jim Sweeney – former Superintendent of Sacramento CA school district, superintendent in residence at the Stupski Foundation.
- Benjamin Soria – Washington State Superintendent of the year, one of three national finalists for Superintendent of the Year, 2006.
- Scott Taveau – Missouri State Superintendent of the Year; Missouri Association of School administrators

Response to questions:

Interview subject	Response to question 1: most important skills to success as superintendent (in priority order)	Response to Question 2: How important is communication to each skill?
Supt. #1	Ability to inspire staff—1 Ability to work with a variety of people—1 Ability to communicate issues and programs—1 Ability to work with business community—2	1 2 3 4
Supt. #2	Sensitivity—1 Communications—1 Continuous learning—1 Ability to take a wealth of info/data and create appropriate message—2 Persistence—2	Very important Very important Very important Very important

Supt. #3	Good communications—1 Trustworthy and honest—1 Leadership—1 Good Judgment—1 Organization--1	Communications is most important skill
Supt. #4	Competence in finance, curriculum legal—1 Conflict resolution/externalize conflict—1 Nurturing positive relationships –1 Passion-commitment to public education—1 Vision—1	Effective communications is essential to each
Supt. #5	Strategic thinker—1 Problem solver—1 Relater to people--1	Communications is critical to each of these
Supt. #6	Resilient attitude—1 Collaboration/consensus building—1 Clear communications—1 Delegation—1 Hiring good people--1	Crucial to all of these
Supt. #7	Communications—1 Leadership—2 Organization—3 Good judgment/problem-solving—4	Must communicate with all levels and groups
Supt. #8	Communicating/good relationships with teachers and parents—1 Communicating-good relationships with business leaders—2 Budget development and monitoring—3 Curriculum and instruction knowledge/skills—4 Multilingual—5	Must be able to communicate what you are doing
Supt. # 9	Credibility for teaching and learning—1 Good listener—2 Strong connection to community—3 Good relationship with school board—4 Flexibility and sense of humor—5	Priority order: 2 1 3 4
Supt. # 10	Vision-seeing where org. has been and needs to go—1 Trust/seen as trustworthy—1 Good judgment-makes rational decisions—1 Communication—1 Competency—knows his/her staff—1	Communication is at the root of all of these skills
Supt. # 11	Provide clear, positive direction—1 Develop individual people—2 Community building—individuals are part of groups—3 Accountable agent for student achievement, customer satisfaction—4 Know the business of instructional leadership—5	Absolutely essential. You can't diagnose or provide prescriptions unless you are listening for understanding
Supt. # 12	Being able to quickly read the landscape of the culture in	Communication is

	<p>context—1 Being a good listening—2 Being able to move the agenda of the district—3</p>	critical
Supt. # 13	<p>Ability to set and communicate a clear and positive direction—1 Designing a strategy for accountability—2 Exemplify instructional leadership—3 Ability to establish positive relationships with people—4</p>	Absolutely critical. Communication is a system: PR is a strategy
Supt. # 14	<p>Interpersonal skills—1 Honesty—2 Competency in knowledge of education field—3 Forward thinking—4</p>	<p>If you can't communicate, you will not be good at interpersonal skills You must be able to communicate how important this is to you. You can't just know your stuff. You have to communicate it to others to be effective. You can have great ideas, but if you can't communicate them to others, you will not be successful.</p>
Supt. # 15	<p>Leadership—1 Strategic thinker—2 Understanding of financial issues—3 Understanding of people—4 Understanding how children learn—5</p>	<p>Critical. Communication is a facet of each of those. How do you create high performing teams with your organization running on all levels? Communications is at the core.</p>
Supt. # 16	<p>Expertise in a variety of fields: teaching and learning, engaging staff—1 Budget and finance expertise—1 Understanding community—1</p>	<p>Communications drives how successful a supt. can be. If you can't communicate your vision to both internal and external audiences, you have a problem.</p>
Supt. # 17	<p>Staff in place with skills and tools necessary for the mission—1 Focus on quality approaches—1 Big picture, while paying attention to variables—1 Honest, open ethical—1</p>	<p>Most essential. Communicate the plan, check for understanding, share progress.</p>

	Commitment to continuous improvement—1	Communication needed for quality results. Big picture, vision must be shared. Need two-way feedback. We cannot continuously improve performance and results if we don't communicate.
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Question 3a: Do/Did you have a professional communications leader on your senior leadership team or cabinet?

YES 14

NO 2

Sometimes 1

Comments:

- Have been in districts with and without
- In some of the districts, or contracted out
- I have always had someone to advise me, but have not found the right person at this time. I am looking. If you know of someone, let me know. I need someone to report directly to me who is not a yes person, but someone willing and able to provide a different perspective - someone who sees everything from the community perspective. This is very important to me. Good PR people are not on every street corner.

b. If not, from whom do you get your advice?

- Fight to get one
- Professional organizations; business leaders

c. How important is it to have someone to provide strategic communications advice?

- Very Important –Ability of communicate the issues and programs of the day
- No answer
- Extremely important. I have an outstanding communications department and communications director. I depend on my communication person to advise me in all school system planning, matters of change, in working with the media etc. Whether we are talking about a new program and what impact it will have on the community or working with the media in a crisis my communications leader provides advice and planning to help us present the idea, problem, change or issue to our internal and external audiences.
- It is very important, however, as superintendent of a school district the community and staff expect the person in this position to demonstrate excellent communication skills.
- Communications director played a key role in strategic planning
- It is essential. It is more than important, because you can't do without it. The superintendent can't be the only one doing the communicating. Everyone in the district needs to be trained to deliver the message. It's a part of branding the district.
- Extremely important. Communication is where school leaders fail the most. Communication is the most critical day-to-day skill that a school leader needs to have.

- Very
- Really important – communications person is my sounding board and a lightning rod... Really important that she gives me advice – she does much of the work to getting out key points down. Board members must speak on one message – she helps make sure board is careful what they say. Tremendous value – ability to write and communicate well – legislative work – budget controlled by state, so legislation is critically important.
- Critical
- Best to have someone at the table – then it's integrated, not separated.
- You must have strategic communications advice. Without it the vision goes nowhere.
- Communications staff provides professional strategy.
- Very important
- Tremendously important. Without it in an urban environment, it will kill you. One reason is there are so many issues that need immediate response in terms of crisis communications. If the superintendent is the immediate response, you will lose credibility because you don't have the most accurate information.
- The communication leader has the duty to be part of the decision making process, providing informed input to how decisions will be perceived and what should be done to accomplish the goal.

Question 4: What impact does communications have on success of moving district's vision forward?

Significant Impact – 16 (one did not answer)

Comment: “Our failures, when we did the autopsies (reviewed everything) were caused by not having someone (communication specialist) inside.”

Examples of impact of communications:

- Bond referendum/levy – 9
 - Passing a bond referendum/levy
- Communicating changes – 8
 - Changes in curriculum /new programs (3)
 - Informing about NCLB and accountability
 - Attendance zones (8)
 - Change from Jr. Highs to Middle Schools
 - Closing schools
 - Building a new high school-academy program
- Marketing and communications – 8
 - Marketing/ communication plans for magnet schools
 - Development & oversight of marketing plans
 - Improving internal communications
 - Website development/continued work
 - Communicating strategic plan; Strategic planning; identified all essential audiences and how to communicate with each; process allowed an external group of stakeholders to own the message, process and outcome. (2)
 - Critical need for effective communications. Everything we do and did is and was about communications – must align what I say with what I do. Needed to let voices from all subpopulations be heard.
- Crisis communications – 5
- Student performance/achievement – 3
 - Achievement - making our 95%
 - District test scores
 - Huge effect on moving the vision forward on the state writing test. The communications strategy is attached to the effort. We designed a huge public engagement initiative.
- Building Trust – 1
- Media Relations – 1
- Bargaining/Unions – 1
 - Bargaining with employee organizations
- Political Struggles – 1

Question 5: Does communications play a role in improving student achievement? If yes, why?

YES: 17

Reasons communications plays a role in improving student achievement:

- In one of the districts where I was superintendent, a huge conflict was created over ELL issues. When we were able to improve communications and better communicate with our publics and got communications open, everything improved. If you really want to improve in student achievement, you have to communicate what you want to do and why.
- Yes – if people care they become more tolerant and understanding.
- There's no question. By moving the vision forward, we met student achievement goals. The message itself is important and communications strategies are attached to the effort.
- Yes – school and student success is so much more than test scores. We must be able to communicate the successes of our schools outside of the element of test scores.
- Absolutely. One of the things we did was a communications strategy to involve parents and encourage their accountability for student achievement. We designed our internet so parents and students could access vital information as to what was going on in schools and what the assignments were. It engaged that group in an effective way.
- Yes, we have a program in policy called *Mileposts* which assembles a team (lead teacher, parent, teachers, and others where necessary) to set goals for each at-risk student on a three year continuum. If the student shows more than adequate yearly progress and the parent is supportive, the student is allowed three years to make more than three years progress. If not, the student runs the risk of being held back at the end of those three years by the district to repeat any class they are not showing effort and improvement in. This takes a ton of publicity and constant reminders to both student and parent to be able to follow through on the intent of the policy. This is an area we depend on our PR/Communication person to provide forms, brochures, and continuous correspondence to our publics. It also makes a ton of difference in academic performance.
- It does – it plays a big role in student achievement on several levels. We have to communicate to students what our expectations are and why certain programs/courses are important...what students will benefit – for example, advanced placement...harder to get A but makes you better prepared, gives you credit, saves money for college ed...Must market to students why it's worth doing...
- Many of our students benefit. Got to do a good job of letting students know what is expected of them – especially if they have aspirations to go on to college...value of SAT/ACT. If they don't know, and get behind, discover need remediation – we have an obligation to communicate requirements.

- Elementary – communicate requirements for what you need to know and do at every grade-level. What do parents need to do to support students? We do parent conferences at all levels (called credentialing on secondary level) We bring in parents /teachers and show performance...We tell what we will do to help youngster – and we might ask parents to provide tutoring in summer, or help at home. Communicating expectations, particularly teacher to parent, is very important.
- Younger students need a real clear outline of what you need to learn in third grade...Required! Why certain content serves as foundation for algebra...what you have to know and why.
- Overall – communications is basis of relationships. Relationships are critical in education. Children need a good relationship with teacher; school district needs good relationship with community. Communications is the basis of good organizations.
- One of business members in community, a partner in accounting firm, during my evaluation noted that communications is the single hardest thing in any organization to accomplish.
- Yes, because when everyone (teachers, parents, community) knows what track you are on and what you are trying to accomplish, they help push the vehicle along. Teachers and parents will better understand their respective roles in helping students to succeed and the community will be motivated to support a well developed and implemented program.
- Yes. Good communication contributes to the overall perception of the school district. When students feel safe, nurtured, and valued, they will perform. When students are empowered with information, they are able to develop skills and perform well. When students know they are understood and they have support, they perform more.
- Yes. The district communicates in a myriad of ways that impact student achievement. For example, we have an online tool called Edline to allow parents to check their children's academics and attendance on a daily basis. This parent communication has a huge impact on student achievement.
- Yes. Community engagement is socially desirable. Our work is about connections, relationship and message. Student achievement is holistic in that words, pictures, symbols and focus are all tied together.
- Absolutely – effective teaching and learning requires effective communication among staff and between staff and students.
- Absolutely! You cannot separate good communication from anything that your school system does. If you don't create the environment for open honest good communication then it will be created for you. Communications is extremely important to student achievement. It is through your communication leaders that you can strategy plan your achievement goals and communicate those goals to your people inside the ranks and to

your parents and the community. Consequently everyone understands what you are trying to do and where you are going and what you need to get there. From community resources such as materials and volunteers, to parents understanding how they can help their child achieved the standards your communication person and department are the most vital people to ensure that everyone is on the same page in student achievement, attendance (which you must have if you are to increase student achievement.

- Yes – setting a focus on student achievement. Interpreting data and discussions. Motivational
- Yes. Strategy, mission and tactics need to be shared. Problems need to be identified, root causes addressed. Success needs to be celebrated, success builds more success
- Yes, communications plays a role in student achievement. If staff clearly understands what our targets are, they will be able to get the students there. We have a “roadmap” of our goals, visions, targets and focus that we refer to frequently. We have it posted everywhere and it is part of the culture of our school community.

Resources to help superintendents succeed:

Services of the National School Public Relations association that help superintendents succeed include:

Publications available from NSPRA (available at www.nspraprof.org)

Complete Crisis Communication Manual
Powerhouse PR for School Leaders
School Public Relations: Building Confidence in Education
Win at the Polls

NSPRA National Seminars

2007 – Phoenix, Ariz., July 6-9
2008 – Washington, D.C., July 6-9
2009 – San Francisco, Calif., June 28-July 1

Communication Audit Service

NSPRA’s Communication Audit process takes a snapshot of your current communication efforts, the climate for communication, the issues and image perceptions you are facing, and the communication needs and patterns of your target audiences. For more information, visit www.nspraprof.org/auditbrochure04.pdf

Raising the Bar for School PR: New Standards for the School Public Relations Professional

One of the hallmarks of a profession is the standards it sets for itself. Now, thanks to the work of many diligent members, the leadership committees, and the encouragement and insight of the NSPRA Board of Directors, NSPRA, too, can point to standards to be followed by school districts throughout North America. The booklet is a free download at www.nspraprof.org/standardsbooklet.pdf.

