

## Community Relations Office Overview of Issues Management and Communications Protocol

### Goals

- Early identification of vital issues
- Ensure accurate, timely, and effective responses and issue management
- Reduce likeliness of negative repercussions and/or crisis response

**Strategy:** Develop and deploy a formal, clearly-defined channel of communications that engages appropriate staff at the right time to make key decisions and to provide clear and consistent messages to internal and external audiences that align with the articulated, desired strategic outcome.

**Identification of Issues:** The identification of potentially problematic issues is not always clear cut and can come from many sources including principals, central office staff, parents, media and/or other internal and external representatives. By providing training to core staff on how to identify issues and building in multiple and consistent ways to flag issues, we seek to identify and resolve issues before they become crises.

### Essential Organizational and Operational Steps:

1. Form a Cabinet-level Issues Management Team led by the Superintendent to meet *as major issues arise* and to include other staff as needed (communications, ombudsman, staff involved with issue at hand).
2. Develop an Issues Management Policy and Guidelines for distribution to all staff during orientation, in employee handbooks, at department and school meetings, and at trainings. To include overview of how to respond to vital issues or crises and key operational policies (e.g. who talks to the media, FOI-able materials).
3. Provide training to all principals and department heads on:
  - a. Defining what constitutes an emerging issues that may cause concern or has potential to escalate
  - b. The tiered Issues Management Protocol
  - c. The importance of identifying potential issues early
  - d. Establish expectations (e.g., refer media calls to Director of External Communications, FOI, use of Issues Management Team)
4. In developing department meeting agendas, Cabinet members incorporate the discussion of emerging or potentially unfavorable issues or concerns and possible implications.
5. In developing Cabinet meeting agendas, include a standing item that allows for the discussion of emerging or potentially unfavorable issues or concerns and possible implications.
6. Media training for key spokespeople and back up spokespeople (district-level and school leadership).
7. Crisis Communications training for Issues Management Team and other core staff.

## Issues Management Protocol

**WHO:** Leadership Team

**WHEN:** When a significant, potentially damaging issue or concern emerges

1. **Issue identification:** During department meetings and at every Cabinet meeting, the facilitator asks about emerging or existing concerning issues.
  - a. **Ask:** Does this issue have the potential to cause concern for any of our stakeholders and/or other interested parties (students, families, staff, media, other)? What are the basic facts that we know about this issue?
2. **Label the level of urgency for a particular issue or concern**
  - a. **Green** = no signals that this could cause concern at this time  
**Action:** keep reviewing to assess who this might impact or who needs to be involved.
  - b. **Yellow** = have received feedback that this topic/issue/project is causing questions or concerns; could become unfavorable over time and needs to be contained.  
**Example:** while planning for a new school design, families or community leaders express concern about the project and note that they will be reaching out to the media  
**Action:** Alert Executive Director of Community Relations and Superintendent's Office who will evaluate next steps, which could include moving topic to Issues Management Team
  - c. **Red** = unfavorable issue that needs immediate attention and could become a major concern for the district or a school and/or may become a communications challenge  
**Example:** unhappy with a district decision that affects a particular school, parents/students communicate that they will organize a disruptive presentation at an upcoming Board meeting.  
**Action:** Alert Executive Director of Community Relations and Superintendent's Office who will convene Issues Management Team
3. **Yellow and Red Issues: Issues Management Team conducts a situational assessment:**
  - a. What is our goal today?
  - b. What is the situation? What do we know to date: what happened, when, where, who was involved?
  - c. What could happen next? Explore different scenarios.
  - d. Who is or could be affected by this situation: students, families, teachers, principals, staff, partners, others? What is their current mindset?
  - e. Could the media/bloggers/others take an interest in this story?
  - f. Who knows what at this point?
  - g. What other staff members need to be involved in this discussion?
  - h. What partners, supporters or other people or organizations should we involve?
  - i. What immediate responses or steps do we need to take right now?
  - j. What additional information do we need and who can get that information?
  - k. Are there any security concerns, legal issues, privacy concerns, other sensitive considerations?
  - l. Should we consider a public response at this time?
  - m. Who will serve as spokesperson and backup spokesperson?
  - n. How will we communicate our responses: internally and externally? What audiences need special consideration Board, partners, legislators, other?
  - o. Confirm the key lead on this issue who will ensure all the steps required to assess, monitor, and respond to this issue are taken, will convene the Issues Management Team throughout the

process and will take notes during discussions to keep a record of activities and actions.

4. **Develop key messages** for internal and external use
  - a. Create clear, concise, accurate public statements and/or talking points that are responsive to the issue and able to be shared internally and externally.
5. **Creation of materials:** Executive Director of Community Relations, with support from Cabinet and other key Leadership Team members, creates and distributes appropriate materials. May include:
  - a. Talking points for all key participants, Cabinet, and Board
  - b. Press release or position statement and Q and A for media and website posting
  - c. Script for the receptionist and/or instructions where to send inquiries. Note: all media inquiries to Executive Director of Community Relations
  - d. Prep materials for media interviews
  - e. Materials for parent or community meetings
  - f. Other
6. **Superintendent shares information with Board** and key partners and interested parties as soon as possible and prior to any public announcement and with reminder that all media inquiries are referred to the Executive Director of Community Relations.
7. **Internal Communications:**
  - a. As needed, develop and engage a phone/email tree to alert key staff members prior to public announcement and/or to provide talking points.
  - b. As appropriate, alert staff through emails, meetings, Intranet posting and other vehicles with reminder that all media calls or other calls related to the issue are referred to the Executive Director of Community Relations.
8. **Tracking media and community response:** during issues management period, Executive Director of Community Relations tracks all media coverage including external blogs and reports to Issues Management Team to discuss response strategy.
9. **Planning discussions and decisions are chronicled** in notes to ensure implementation occurs as planned and to evaluate post-issue.
10. **Post-Mortem:** Following situation, evaluation of issues management protocol, message, response and results is conducted to improve processes.