“We’re on TV, Now What?”: Rising to the Challenge of Effectively Leading Your District During Times of Controversy

Damien Pattenaude
May 6th, 2019
Check-In

• What is an issue/controversy in your district that got into the media (or you were “lucky” enough that it didn’t get into the media)?

• What were the strategies you used to “manage” the issue/controversy? To what extent were your strategies effective?

• What are your reflections on the issue/controversy and your response?
What We Will Cover

• Review a Case

• Discuss Lessons Learned

• Share an Issues Management and Communications Protocol
Where is Renton?
Renton School District

• Serve Over 16,000 Students
• Rich in Diversity
• Serve 7 Municipalities (Renton, Seattle, Bellevue, Kent, Newcastle, Tukwila, Unincorporated King County)
• Home of the Seahawks, Boeing, Kaiser, Providence
• Feeling the Impact of Seattle’s Growth and Change
Route to Superintendency

- 1974-2012 vs. January 2013-Present
- Non-Traditional
- “Home Grown”
- Superintendent-Elect
- Long and Formal Transition Plan
- Finishing 2nd Year as Superintendent
Before a Controversy Arises

Be Clear about Who You Are and What You Believe (Also Your District Beliefs)
Before a Controversy Arises

Have a Leadership Framework from Which You Operate
You Never Know When

Over 400 homeless Renton students ‘not a crisis’ say school officials

BY CAROLYN OSSORIO
APRIL 18, 2019 AT 2:48 PM
When It Hits

• Thursday, November 9th at 4:05 p.m. Facebook Video

• Need to Investigate

• Flood of E-Mails

• What’s your Board Protocol?

• Statement to Staff on Friday, November 10th
Renton school video mocking slavery goes viral; district investigating

By: Deborah Horne

Updated: Nov 10, 2017 - 6:13 PM
When It Hits

• Emergency Meeting on Saturday, November 11th

• Keeping the Board in the Loop

• Monday, November 13th: Best Laid Plans

• Tuesday, November 14th: Communication to LHS Families

• Meetings, Meetings, Meetings
When It Hits

• Visits to the School

• Legal Considerations

• What happened in November and beyond?
Getting to the Balcony

• “Don’t do it alone.”

• “... in organizational life, particularly in times of stress or crisis, pressure mounts to take quick action.”

• “... embodying an issue in your authority role ties your survival, not just your success, to that of the issue.”
Getting to the Balcony

• Notions of Race

• Distinguishing Technical Problems vs. Adaptive Challenges
  • “Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.”

• “Once unleashed, you cannot control the outcome of an adaptive issue.”
Getting to the Balcony

• Restore Order (Technical) vs. Expose Conflict or Let it Emerge (Adaptive)

• Lowering the Temperature

• Localizing the Issue
• Importance of Context

• “The deeper the change and the greater amount of the new learning required, the more resistance there will be and, thus, the greater the danger to those who lead.”

• Does everyone know?
Action Steps

• Right People?

• Bar Rescue

• Need for Formal Protocol
Creating a Protocol

Issues Management & Communications Protocol

Issue Identification: Label the level of urgency

**GREEN:** No signals that this could cause concern at this time
- Keep revising to assure who this might impact or who needs to be involved
- Community Relations monitors the situation

**YELLOW:** Causing questions or concerns; could become unfavorable over time and needs to be managed
- An appropriate Issues Management Team convenes
- Develop key messages for internal and external use
- Creation of materials
- Superintendent shares information with Board of Education and communicators with key partners and interested parties
- Internal Communications
- Trading communications and community response
- Planning discussions and decisions are chronicled

**RED:** Needs immediate attention; may become a communications challenge
- Alert Executive Director of Community Relations & Superintendent's Office to initiate assessment
- Alert Executive Director of Community Relations & Superintendent's Office

Post Mortem: Evaluation of issues management protocol, message, response and results is conducted to improve processes
• While community and staff will look to you, don’t do it alone.

• “Arrogant Humility”

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