

Meet the Moment

Strategies for strong communication and powerful leadership



Welcome.

- Me.
- News, public safety communications, disaster relief communications, K-12 “queen of crisis.”
- My team and I love to strategically support you behind the scenes.



You wear many hats.

- School leader
- Human resources director
- Safety & security lead
- Risk assessment manager
- Communications strategist
- Social media manager
- Snow shoveler
- Plumber



And you have (and continue to) face hard things.

- McCleary, strikes, COVID, remote learning, mask and vaccine mandates, more strikes, parental rights movements, swatting, immigration, political division.
- Day-to-day crisis, too: lockdowns, suicides, cyber attacks, medical emergencies, threats, staff illness or death...
- The list goes on, and on, and on...



An invitation to reframe challenges...

*"In the middle of every
difficulty lies opportunity."*

- Albert Einstein





Challenges can be opportunities in disguise

Opportunities to:

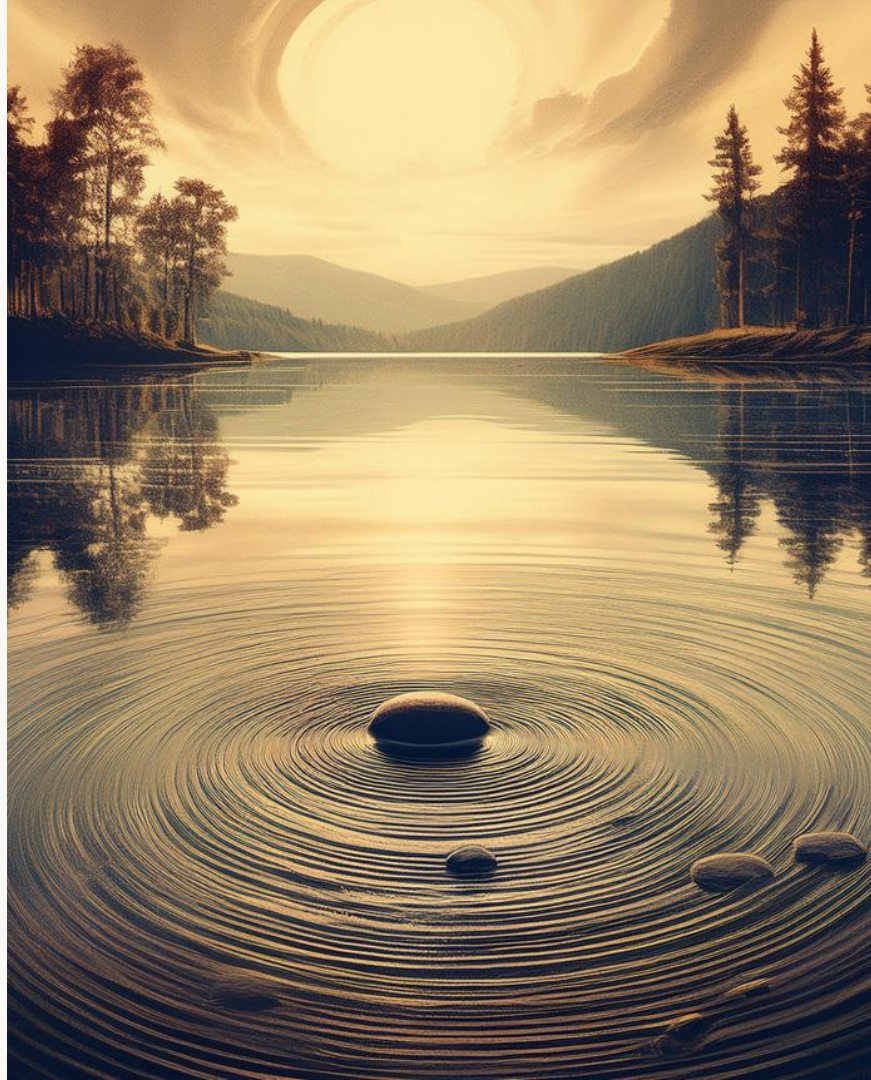
- Build trust
- Be consistent
- Offer empathy
- Be honest

As long as leaders...

Meet the Moment

Lean in to communication during difficult and high-stakes situations.

- Uncertainty, pressure, or crisis –also present an opportunity to lead with clarity, honesty, and purpose.
- Communicate to build trust, influence perception, and impact outcomes.



Today's Discussion

- Pivotal moments and missed opportunities
- When a leader has met the moment.
- Trusted strategies to lead with communication, clarity, and unity.



CASE STUDY:

Threats, Social Media, and Silence

- Online made by a student.
- Investigated and determined not to be credible.
- District did not communicate.
- Student in question photographed near school; posted on social media.
- Chaos ensued.





Where was the disguised opportunity?

Communication could have addressed about 99% of the challenges.

ANOTHER SCENARIO: Accusations Online

- Allegations of inappropriate conduct involving a former, now-retired educator (John Doe) posted on a social media community forum in Gotham.
- Alleged inappropriate behavior took place at a different school district (not Gotham)
- Misinformation was spreading online.



Leadership *is* communication

Transformational leaders are also exceptional communicators.





You cannot over-invest in communication skills—both written and oral. If you cannot simplify and communicate a message compellingly, you cannot sway the masses.”

FORMER PEPSICO CEO INDRA NOOYI

Simplify the complex.



If you care about being thought credible and intelligent, do not use complex language where simpler language will do.

NOBEL PRIZE WINNER DANIEL KAHNEMAN



Consider your audience

*Who are you communicating
with and what do they need?*

Don't just share data.

- Share the story the data tells.
- Help people to connect with the story so they care about the outcome.
- Understand the “why.”

After Fleeing Violence in Guatemala, Their Child Was Killed in a U.S. School

A week after a 16-year-old was shot at her high school in Nashville, her parents made the wrenching decision to send her body back to Guatemala.



Listen to this article · 4:29 min [Learn more](#)



By Christina Morales and Emily Cochrane

Christina Morales reported from New York. Emily Cochrane reported from Nashville.

Jan. 31, 2025

Josselin Corea Escalante was 9 when she and her mother and younger brother left Guatemala to seek asylum in the United States, believing it would offer them safety.

They ended up in Tennessee, where Josselin — whose family calls her Dallana, her middle name — celebrated turning 15 in 2023 with a spring quinceañera in a Nashville ballroom.

But last week, another student shot and killed Josselin, 16, cafeteria. Now her family, still waiting for an asylum decision whether it is worth staying. The main reason they made the United States — on foot, nearly two months — was fear that her brother would be kidnapped or killed by gangs in Guatemala.

“We had a dream for a better life,” her father, German Corea, said last week. “But the reality is that it’s not better anywhere. In Guatemala, we heard of someone killing someone in school.”



Make It Visual

People remember up to 65% of the information they see alongside visuals, as opposed to only 10% of information heard without visuals. [TrueList](#)

Budget Corner: Responding to a \$3M budget shortfall for 2024-25

Like other school districts across the state, Washougal is facing a budget shortfall. In our district, we have a projected budget shortfall of \$3 million for the 2024-2025 school year. Our budget challenges are caused by several factors which include the state underfunding education, inflation, declining enrollment, and a levy rollback required for next year.

In response to the projected budget shortfall, district leadership began making reductions in this year's spending, including reducing school budgets, implementing a hiring freeze, and salary concessions by administrative staff.

Community input guides planned reductions

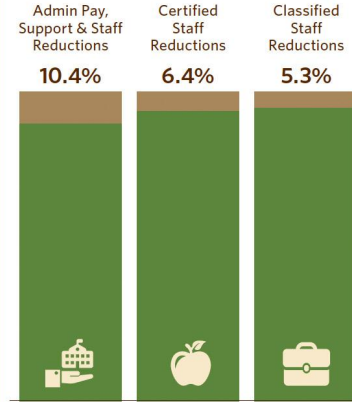
District leadership gathered feedback from our community through:

- two Board Listening Tours
- four Superintendent Roundtable events
- a community survey that gathered 750 responses from students and their families, our staff, and the community

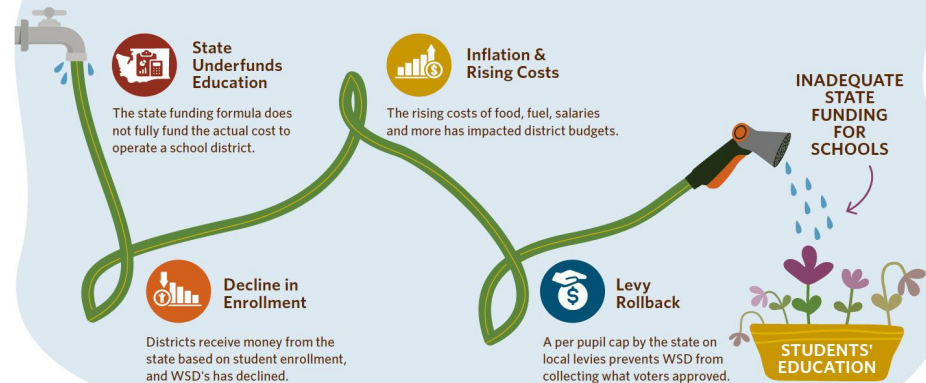
The survey results include themes around reducing more from administrative and district office expenses, and asking the district to consider program reductions, office consolidations, and maintaining student programs.

District leadership used the feedback to guide development of a planned reduction that has the greatest percentage of reductions in administrative pay, support, and staff, and maintains excellent programs for our students.

ROUND 1 REDUCTION SUMMARY



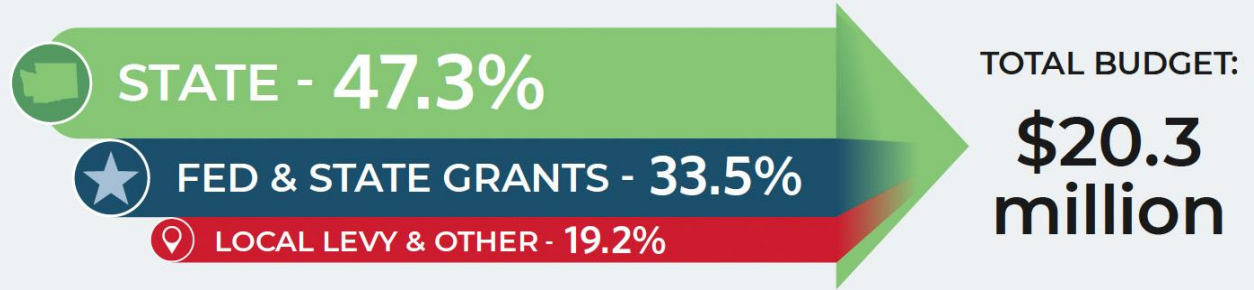
THE SOURCES OF THE BUDGET SHORTFALL



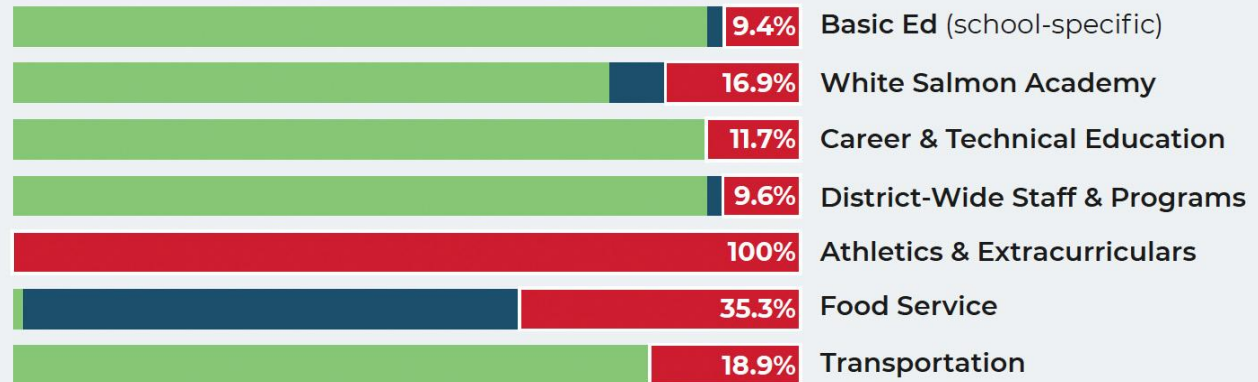
Make It Visual

BUDGET & FUNDING SOURCES

Budgeted funding sources for the 2021-22 school year.

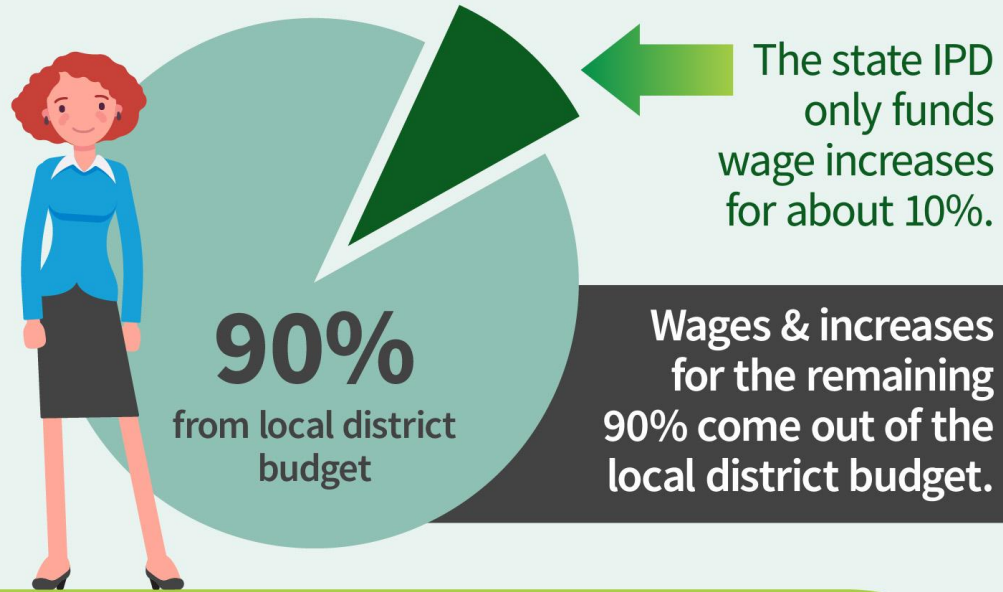


% OF PROGRAM FUNDING SUPPORTED BY LOCAL LEVY:



Make It Visual

The state only funds approximately 10% of Port Angeles paraeducators.



The bottom line?

A wage increase beyond the district's current offer would mean cuts to other school programs and services.

Learn more at: portangelesschools.org/labor



Put Care First

"In times of crisis, people want to know that you care before they care what you know."

– John C. Maxwell, Leadership Expert

Gold Standard: Tylenol poisoning crisis of 1982, seven deaths from cyanide-laced Tylenol.

- Public safety over profit
- Radical transparency
- Direct engagement with public
- Took action to prevent further crisis
- Ethical leadership



Never are these communication strategies more important than during critical moments.

*"Silence is not an option during a crisis.
If you do not speak for your
organization, others will—and they
won't have your best interests in mind."*

W. TIMOTHY COOMBS,
CRISIS COMMUNICATION SCHOLAR



Meet the moment.

The moment when a leader must
choose between

withdrawing or responding,
withholding or communicating,
avoiding or engaging.

Lean in to communications
during difficult times.

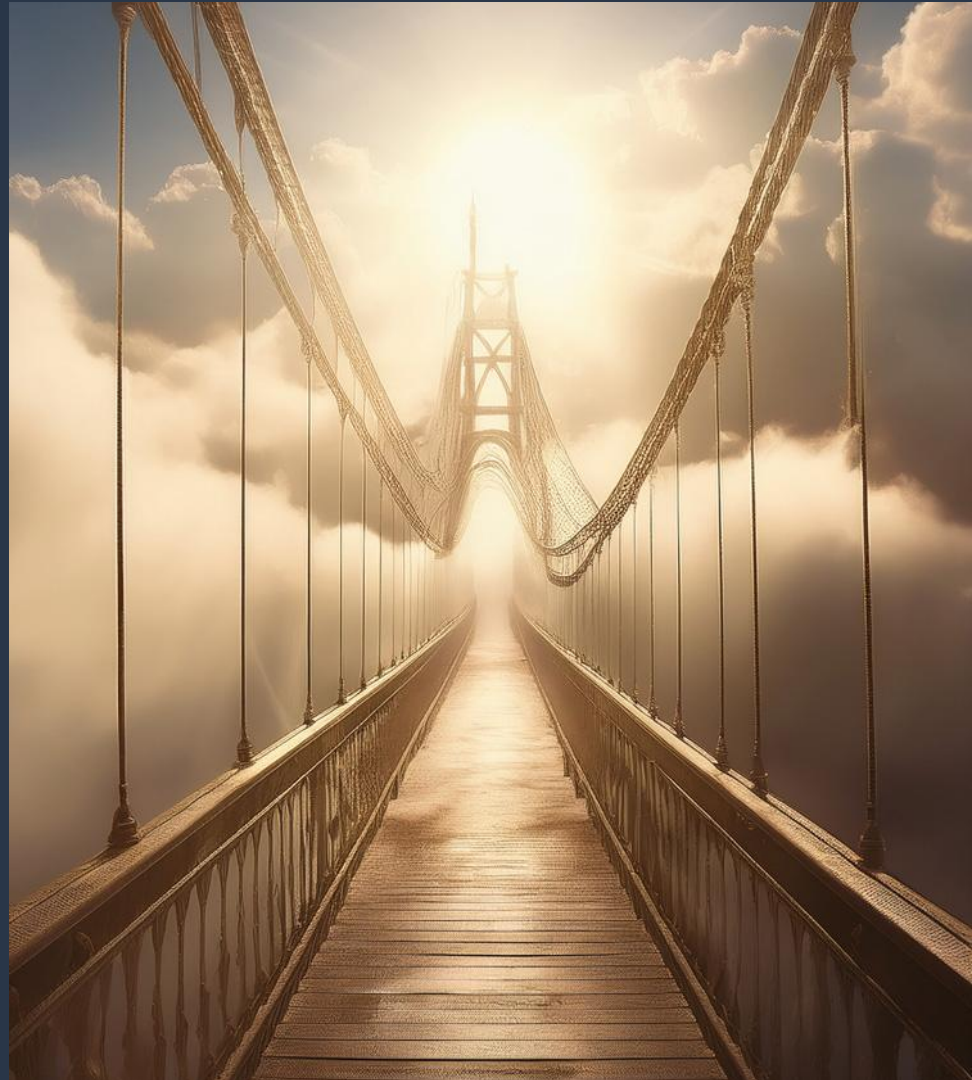


When you meet the moment, remember...

- Timeliness
- Clarity
- Transparency (not over-sharing)
- Empathy
- Consistency
- Follow-through



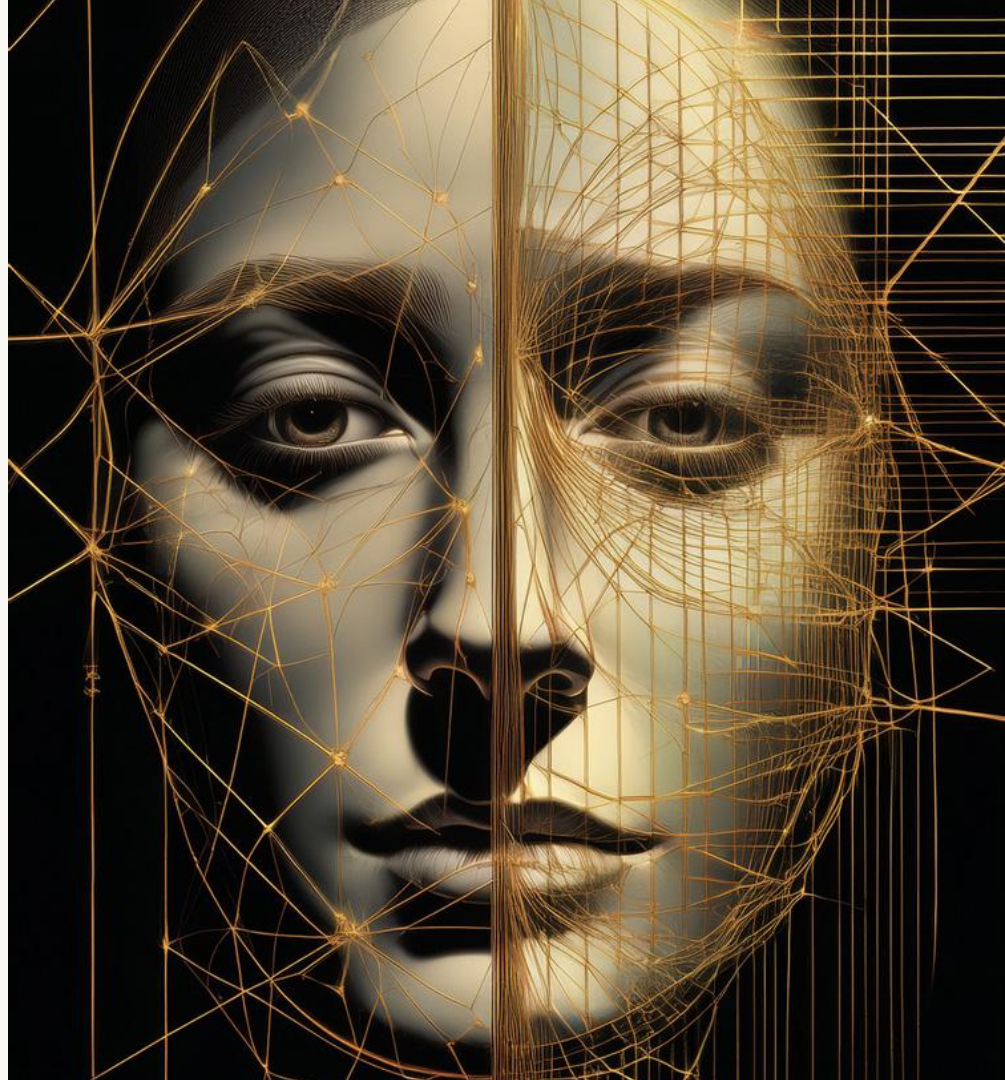
The Ultimate Goal? TRUST



The Neuroscience of Trust

It's only when we are safe
that we can open up to
cooperate and achieve
optimal outcomes.

More trust = better outcomes.



Don't give away the farm.

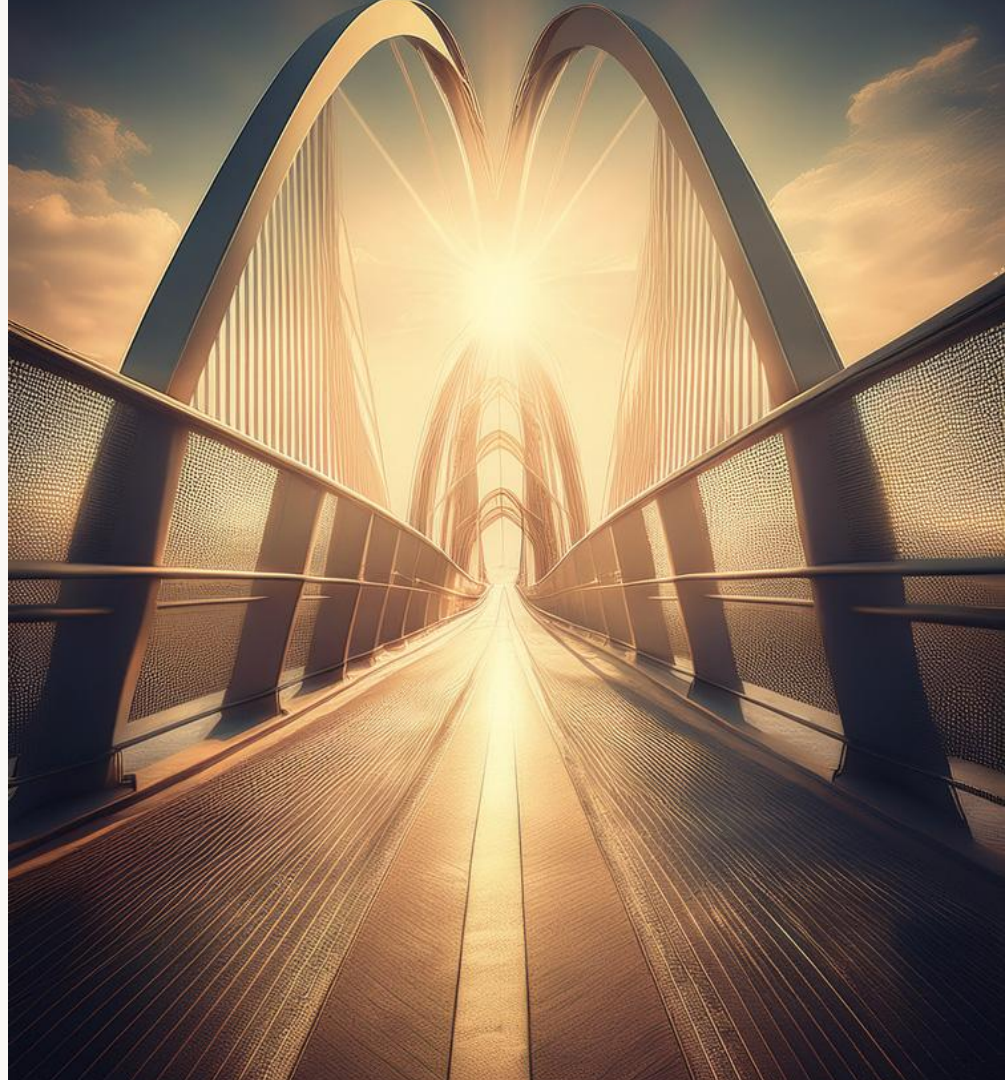
You can demonstrate care, responsibility, and action without sharing a lot of information.



Blocking & Bridging

Acknowledge and Bridge Statements:

- Bridge to your mission or your values
- Bridge to actions or outcomes
- Bridge to data or facts
- Bridge to community



Examples

Is the superintendent prepared to take a pay cut to account for the budget shortfall?

Acknowledgment and Bridge:

- That's an important question. The facts show that our superintendent's salary is consistent with state averages when compared to other districts our size.
- What's more important to focus on is that there is a 7% gap between what the state funds and the actual cost of educating students in our school district..



Examples

Families are increasingly dissatisfied with their public schools.

Acknowledgment and Bridge:

- I appreciate you sharing that perspective.
- It's important to note, that when asked specifically about their experiences and outcomes with their local public schools, the data shows that families are overwhelmingly satisfied with their student's teachers and the quality of instruction at their child's school.



Examples

Clearly there wasn't a thorough enough background check and vetting done on this employee.

Acknowledgment and Bridge:

- We understand the concern and are aligned in our belief of safety being our most important priority.
- Like school districts across the state, our standard process for hiring any new employee requires that they pass a thorough background check conducted by the Washington State Patrol, and that did occur in this case.



Communicate for Community

- The words communicate and community share a common latin root: communis, which means 'common' or 'shared.'
- Meet the Moment and lean into communications for your students, your families, your communities, and your trust bank.



THANK YOU.

Monique Dugaw Greenwell



Find Us Online



Blocking and
Bridging Resource

