

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES for PRINCIPALS

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ABOUT

Principles for Principals offers key information and messages for principals to consider in communicating the basics and getting parents involved. It is written and published by the DoDEA Communications Office.

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DISCONTINUATION OF SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

This issue of PR for Principals is designed to help you address the recent decision to discontinue DoDEA's Summer Enrichment Program. The program was important and valuable to the many families who used it. However, in recent years, a decline in participation combined with an operational cost increase made this difficult decision necessary.

As the principal of a school where this program has been offered, you may encounter a variety of reactions from your stakeholders about this change. Some people may be upset, others may not, and some may be indifferent. Whatever the reaction, you will be the primary communicator and being prepared to address the topic will meet the information needs of everyone in your community.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT DIFFICULT TOPICS OR DECISIONS IS NEVER EASY.

Explaining something that has the potential to be unpopular or controversial can be complicated and possibly emotional. When a leader can present the topic in a reasoned, rational, and evidence-based approach, it can help the audience to better understand and eventually accept the news. That's not to say that a leader can gain everyone's support and understanding, but reasoned, rational, evidence-based information can help address even the strongest emotions and reactions.

Putting a difficult topic into perspective helps the audience understand different points of view and the concerns and facts that go into making decisions. When the audience understands the facts, where you're coming from (your perspective), and that you are aware of their concerns, it builds

If your audience has an awareness of the background and perspective the next step is providing evidence-based reasoning about the decision to discontinue the Summer Enrichment Program.

a healthy environment where communication about any issue can thrive regardless of whether the issue is good, bad; popular, unpopular, controversial or uncontroversial.

BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVE.

Before you talk with your stakeholders – parents, teachers, student, community commanders it's helpful to have the background on DoDEA's Summer Enrichment Program.

Summer Enrichment Program Basics:

- ◆ Four-week, three-hour daily program
- ◆ Created to meet the needs of 10% of the DoDEA K-8 students located on military installations
- ◆ Offers a multi-age academic environment with an integrated curriculum
- ◆ Offered at 58 DoDEA sites worldwide
- ◆ Total of 255 classes offered

Summer Enrichment Program History:

- ◆ Began in Europe in response to increased deployments in 2004
- ◆ In 2005, expanded to include Pacific and DDESS
- ◆ In 2004 and 2005, program was funded by the Services
- ◆ Funded by DoDEA from 2006 to present—cost was \$1.7 million annually

INCREASING AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDING THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING.

If your audience has an awareness of the background and perspective the next step is providing evidence-based reasoning about the decision to discontinue the Summer Enrichment Program. The following three points provide insight into why the decision was made:

2013 Program Performance:

- ◆ Total enrollment of 5,829 (6,410 would have been 10% of the population served and the target enrollment number)
- ◆ Enrollment declined across the board in all three areas from 2012 – 26% decline in Europe; 20% decline in the Pacific, and 35% decline in DDESS. Total enrollment decline was 27%
- ◆ Enrolled students were absent an average of 5.5 days of the 19-day program – 25%.

Decision to discontinue program:

- ◆ Decline in initial enrollment
- ◆ Decline in attendance
- ◆ Increase in per-pupil expenditure

ESTABLISH AND STAY ON YOUR MESSAGE.

The background, perspective, and evidence are critical to building the content of the information you are communicating about this decision. The most important element of your communication effort about the discontinuation of the summer enrichment program is to ensure your audience receives and understands that DoDEA is aware this is a valued program, but given the decline in participation and the cost increases, it isn't feasible or practical to continue the summer enrichment program.

Here are some messages you might want to include in your communication efforts:

- ◆ Decision to discontinue Summer Enrichment Program was not an easy one to make
- ◆ We realize the importance of this program to families who used it
- ◆ In the current climate of identifying and realizing efficiencies in light of reduced budgets we strive to make decisions that do not impact the classroom, however, in this case, we think our resources are better directed toward funding programs that would benefit more students across DoDEA for the long-term
- ◆ We will be glad to provide assistance to parents to identify other enrichment programs or offerings in the community that would benefit students' learning experience over the summer

Begin communicating now and repeat your efforts regularly.

Many families will be making summer plans soon. Their plans may include having their child attend a summer enrichment program in their community. It's a good idea to begin communicating the news now, through your newsletter, or a letter or e-mail to families. Follow up regularly to ensure the information reaches the widest audience over a period of time.

Use the bulleted information above in all of your communication tools and strategies – newsletters, parent coffees, PTO bulletins, installation staff meetings, or the school section of your community newspaper. Be sure to include your messages. Above all, make sure that you maintain an open door policy and encourage those families with concerns to contact you. You and your staff may be able to help them locate a similar summer enrichment program that may be offered near your community.