

Communication PRinciples for Principals

ISSUE THREE | OCTOBER 1, 2007

COMMUNICATION: GETTING STARTED



IDEA

Key communicators help you to make sure the right information gets out quickly and effectively – especially in a time of crisis or change.

Getting and Keeping Key Communicators “In the Loop”

The new school year brings an opportunity to identify key communicators in your school community. Who are these people? What are their communication needs? How can you establish an effective two-way communication system and keep them informed? It seems like a daunting task, but it’s so important to your ability to help your students achieve to their potential.

IDENTIFY AND FORM A KEY COMMUNICATOR NETWORK.



Key communicators in the school public relations arena help you to make sure the right information gets out quickly and effectively – especially in a time of crisis or change. Often these people are formal or informal opinion leaders – people who others turn to for information. They’re commanders, senior enlisted advisors, PTA/PTO representatives, school advisory committee members, union leaders, key staff members, or involved parents. People listen to what they say, and in the process, they can shape community perception of your school.

To help you identify these people, ask people on your staff at school, community residents, or installation leaders who they turn to for information when they hear rumors or have a question about what’s going on. Think about the people in your community who are leading discussions or having dialogues with others – and consider that when people in these networks are informed, they can become your advocates for supplying accurate information quickly, whether it’s good news or bad news or just plain information.

ORGANIZING A KEY COMMUNICATOR NETWORK AT YOUR SCHOOL.

STEP 1: Don’t overreach. Start small and grow. It’s better to start and communicate effectively with a few key groups and expand later.



DoDEA HQ Communications Office

4040 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203
USA

Telephone: 703.588.3030
Facsimile: 703.588.3000

Frank O’Gara: 703.588.3260
Frank.O’Gara@hq.dodea.edu

Elaine Kanellis: 703.588.3265
Elaine.Kanellis@hq.dodea.edu

Visit the DoDEA website
for more information.
<http://www.dodea.edu>

STEP 2: Try to establish a routine with key communicators. Try inviting key communicators to coffee or breakfast once a quarter. Keep meetings short and establish a consistent time limit – 30 minutes or 45 minutes. Remember their time is valuable and so is yours – everyone will appreciate a short meeting that stays on track. Allow time for presenting what’s happening at your school, how they can help, discussion, feedback and questions.



STEP 3: Follow-up and coordinate by using monthly e-mails. Keep correspondence concise and to-the-point. Be sure to encourage their feedback and ideas to keep the communication lines open between meetings.

➤ EXPECT CONSENSUS AND DIVISION.

Key communicators won’t agree with you all of the time. That’s the value of identifying and working with key communicators. They will give you food for thought and bring fresh opinions and perspectives to the table. Healthy disagreements, compromise, and collaboration can lead to better relationships and improve the learning environment at your school.

HOW TO REACH OUT TO KEY COMMUNICATORS:

Start and keep the relationships personal. The more personal contacts you make, the more key communicators will be able to enhance your program. Keep up the Key Communicator coffees or breakfasts and try to follow up with specific individuals on a more frequent basis – an office call, a coffee break, tea, etc.

WHAT TYPES OF INFORMATION SHOULD KEY COMMUNICATORS RECEIVE?

Your school’s situation and the issues you face will drive the type of information you provide to key communicators. You may want to consider providing them with:

- Crisis communications plans and information.
- School safety plans and updates.
- Key policy information (homework, attendance, behavior, etc.).
- Planned curriculum changes or major initiatives.
- Information on assessments and test scores – what they mean.

Content adapted from Principals in the Public, published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).

Start and communicate effectively with a few key groups and expand later.

- Establish a routine with key communicators
- Follow up!

TIPS

