



## PROACTIVE COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

**WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?** This guide summarizes the key steps for moving from reactive to proactive communication in telling the story of what is happening in your school district. The recommendations below particularly apply to communicating with your local media outlets. This resource will be a helpful tool to share with your communications and leadership teams. Additionally, it could be a great idea to share this during an upcoming board retreat or meeting with your administration team.

### TEN STEPS TO SHARING OUR COLLECTIVE STORIES

*The following insights<sup>1</sup> can help your team shape the stories you proactively share about what is happening in your school district. Proactive planning can turn your communications into a springboard for reciprocal communication with your community:*

1. **No surprises and the place for the truth.** You want to be the source that people go to for the true story. Create opportunities to tell your story to your community before people see an alert on their phone or on the local news.
2. **If you don't tell your story, someone else will.** Someone outside your team can craft the narrative if your team does not. A void in communication creates room for community members to speculate about what is happening.
3. **Journalists are not friends or foes; they are messengers.** What's your message? Reporters want to know what your message is, so you need to provide them with a one-pager to explain your story.
4. **No comment is a comment.** Instead of deferring entirely, explain what you can explain. You can hold certain issues to be private, while also highlighting what you are committed to and stand for.
5. **Culture eats strategy for breakfast.** Regardless of your five-point strategic plan, you need to pay attention to how the people working in your school district feel and how they perceive what is happening. A toxic culture will prevent internal acceleration for your messaging points.
6. **Everyone is connected to your schools.** The adults working for your local media are connected to children within your community. Assume that everyone has a personal connection to someone within your school district when you consider your messaging.
7. **Internal communications: The left hand should know what the right hand is doing.** The "left hand" refers to media relations (print, broadcast, social media, etc.) and statements you make on key issues to the public. The "right hand" is your internal communications: create internal systems so that the people within your organization are receiving clear instruction and perspective from your team.
8. **Create ambassadors for your messages.** When community members talk to your educators, you want them to be prepared to share your messaging with friends, neighbors, fellow church members, etc.
9. **Can people sing your song?** A new initiative is like the release of a song from an album. Is everyone hearing and understanding your message? The first time your educators hear the message they may not

---

<sup>1</sup> This resource has been adapted from our friends at LLRM Creativa. To learn more or contact LLRM Creativa directly, visit <https://www.llrmcreativa.com/>

be able to “sing” it back, but the more they hear it, the better they’ll be able to repeat it.

10. **Go out on tour.** Ensure that members of your team are meeting with civic, faith-based, and other community groups. This gives you ample opportunity to circulate the message you want to be sharing.

**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:** Dr. John Combs, Superintendent of Tipton County Schools, TN, along with his team, recently launched a proactive communications campaign: #EndlessPossibilities. Through this campaign, they consistently share proactive communications, spotlights and graduate highlights to shine a light on the great things their students and alumni are doing in and around the community.

