Communicating to Engage Stakeholders in School Improvement

What can you expect to get from this module?

In high-performing schools, everyone is "singing the same tune." This requires a strong, well-articulated communication plan. With whom do you communicate? What messages are you sending and receiving? How do you communicate? What is the best way to refine your messages, identify key parties with whom to communicate and choose the best methods? This module explores these questions at the individual and organizational levels as participants analyze and plan communication strategies that lead to improved student achievement.

Who should take this training?

This module is for school leaders and potential school leaders. The audience may include school teams of principals, aspiring leaders, teacher leaders and others who are members or potential members of the school's instructional leadership team. **NOTE:** In order for this training to have significant impact, the principal **MUST** be part of the school team being trained.

Other SREB Leadership Curriculum Modules that support this module:

This module is most appropriate for those who have a strong background in data analysis, curriculum, assessment and instruction, and culture (SREB foundational modules).

What will you have to do to get the most from this module?

Participants must commit to attending as a team, completing the prework, attending three training days and completing homework assignments. It is important for teams to have time to reflect and apply what they have learned between the training days.

Big Ideas in This Module

- A good number of studies identify communication as a key leadership responsibility that, when combined with other leadership responsibilities, has a strong impact on student achievement. Successful school leaders encourage meaningful dialogue around student achievement.

- Although school leaders say that they believe communication is two-way, and that communication between the school and the community/parents is just as important as that within the school, they *act* as if they don't believe these things.

- The first step in effective communication is understanding what it is that you wish to communicate.

- Successful school leaders get all members of the school community focused on high expectations for all students. A high percentage of communications reflect this focus.

- Successful school leaders use a variety of venues (meetings, discussions, staff development activities and school visits) to make their points and to reach out and involve others.

- Successful school leaders have a clear, consistent message.

- Successful school leaders let members of the school community know what is going on, sharing both good news and bad news.

- Everyone in the school community should be able to state (in their own words and in a way that is meaningful to them) the school's vision, goals and key current priorities.

- Listening is arguably the most important communication skill.

Module Design. *Communicating to Engage Stakeholders in School Improvement* is a three-day workshop. It also includes prework and homework assignments. Each section is described below.

Prework (about four hours). Prework includes organizational communications surveys, a personal communications survey, reading assignments, a communication log and gathering of communication artifacts. Some assignments are completed as a group and others are completed independently.

Introduction (one hour). Participants reflect on their communication goals as a springboard to introducing themselves to the group.

Communications in High-Performing Schools (one hour, 50 minutes). Participants learn communication practices that are associated with high-performing schools. Through a series of small-group activities, they identify these practices, as well as ones that detract from student achievement.

Key Messages (two hours, 35 minutes). Participants identify key messages that are important to student achievement. They also work on identifying which methods are best for various messages and various people/groups. Finally, they reflect on their own personal and organizational practices.

Day Two Introduction (20 minutes). Participants review the content of Day One in a fast-paced activity.

What Good Communication Looks Like (two hours). In study groups, participants identify characteristics of effective communication as presented in the prework readings and then work in their teams to create a single list that combines the learning points from all the articles. They evaluate communications in several scenarios, and then they create their own communication plans.

Analyzing Personal and Organizational Communications (three hours, 10 minutes). Participants work through a series of reflective team activities to identify strengths and weaknesses in organizational communications. Activities include an exhibit of their school's communication artifacts, an analysis of survey results and completion of the communications grid. They select a key message, identify strategies to communicate it and then reflect on personal strengths and weaknesses.

Improvement Planning (50 minutes). Participants create a plan for improving their personal communication skills.

Day Three Introduction (30 minutes). Participants complete an activity that helps them to see that a wide variety of characteristics and experiences influence their ability to understand others and the way they see others and the world.

Active Listening Skills (three hours, 15 minutes). Participants learn the fundamental skills required for excellence in communication: active listening skills. They focus on how good listening skills can enhance communication. For each active listening skill, participants learn what it is and how to do it. This section includes six valuable role plays.

Dealing With Challenging Communication Situations (two hours). Participants synthesize information they have learned and apply it to situations they can expect to face in their schools, such as parent conferences and team meetings.

Portfolio assignments (20 minutes). The portfolio assignment for this module involves implementing a plan for improving school and individual communications.