

**Thursday, November 7, 2024**



# Shelter from the Storm: How to engage your district community after a crisis



**Joe Donovan**

Founding Partner, Donovan Group

# SHELTER FROM THE STORM:

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*How to engage your district community after a crisis*

Joe Donovan, Donovan Group



# Taking Stock of Our Current Situation

- People are angry
- Staff members are tired
- Board members are getting more than they expected
- Needs of our students have shifted
- The next election is always just around the corner



**As you consider your district, what makes you most nervous?**



# Taking Stock of Public Opinion

- According to Gallup in 2021, "73 percent of parents of school-aged children say they are satisfied with the quality of education their oldest child is receiving."
- Parents were more satisfied in 2021 than in 2013 and 2002.
- Overall, considering parents and non-parents together, only 46 percent of Americans are satisfied with schools.



# Our Work

Our work has always been challenging. It's even more so now.



# Our Work

We have an opportunity to provide value through effective communication.





# Our Work



*What do we do now?*



# Always Seek the High Ground



In everything they do, education leaders must seek to be the most professional, reasonable, and thoughtful people in the room.

Their ethics, professionalism, and values are their superpowers. They should always take the high ground.



# Be Principled

Focus on honesty, transparency and forthrightness.

Understand the responsibility we have in providing stakeholders — including staff, students, parents, other community residents and area businesses — information about the outstanding value public schools provide.



# Protect Children

Educational leaders' most important responsibility is to protect children.

This is true even if parents are willing to exploit children to make political points.



# Focus on Good Governance

- Engage the “silent 80%” by focusing on mission
- Demonstrate good governance
- Maintain governance and communications lanes



# Focus on Good Governance



We must remember that there will be times when administrators cannot defend themselves.

The school board must defend their administrators and the **role** of the administrators.



# Explaining the 'Why'

Leading requires providing a clear path forward, to anticipate and address challenges with a commitment to achieve an objective. We must explain the what, how, and when.

**But we need to lean into the *why*...**



# When Possible, Play Offense

If school leaders get a sense that bad news is coming, it's usually better to **go on offense and communicate directly** than to wait for others to share the information.



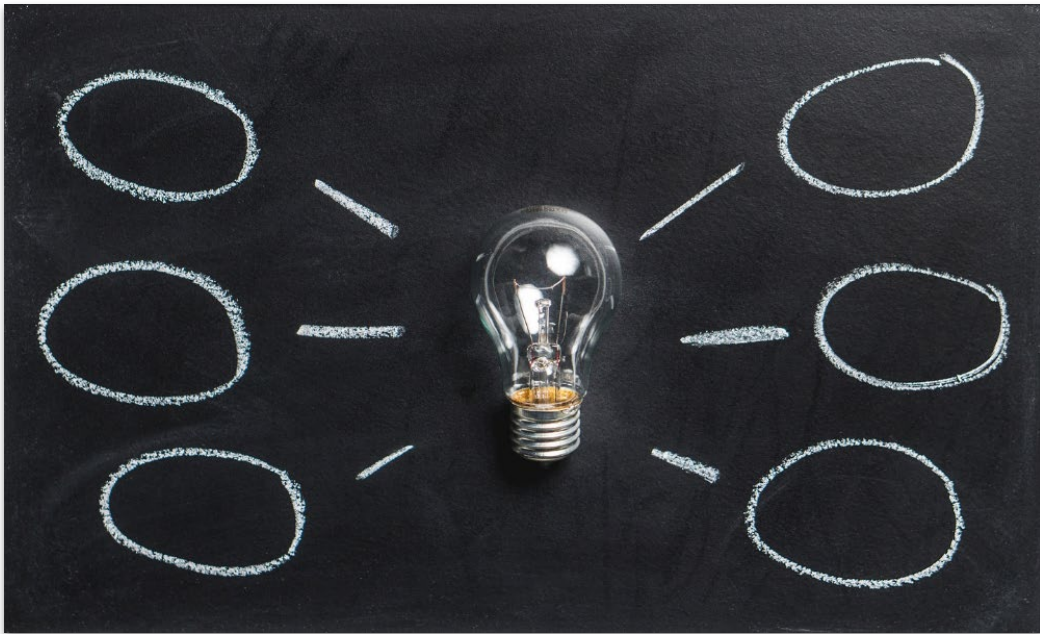


# Seek Greater Engagement

Continue working to broaden the focus to the entire school district community.



# Know the 3Ps



- Lean into the “3Ps”: Policy, process, and procedure
- This is always your safe harbor.



# What Does NOT Work?

- Using spin
- Being “slick”
- Not being focused on mission
- Not being willing to engage
- Not considering our most vulnerable students



The background is a solid green color. Overlaid on the right side is a faint, light green network diagram. It consists of several stylized human figures (silhouettes) connected by thin lines, forming a web. Some of these figures have speech bubbles next to them, suggesting communication or sharing of information. The overall theme is community and communication.

**Tell your “good news”  
story.**

*What happened in your  
district after the crisis that  
everyone should know  
about?*

# How to Tell Your Story



There are foundational questions that apply to every communication situation.



# Communications Framework

- 1) What is success?
- 2) Who are the stakeholders?
- 3) What are the messages?
- 4) What tools will we use?



# Communications Framework

## Step 1: What is success?

*What evidence do you need to prove that your efforts have been successful?*



# Communications Framework

## Step 2: Who are your stakeholders?

*If you try to communicate with "everyone," you will end up communicating with no one.*





# Communications Framework

**Step 3: Which messages do you want your stakeholders to know, understand and feel?**

*Keep them simple.*



# Communications Framework

**Step 4: Which tools can you use to take your messages to your stakeholders?**



# Communication Tactics

- Email
- Website
- Board updates/briefs
- Frequently asked questions
- Social media
- Media releases
- Individual phone calls, text messages
- Surveys
- Video



# Communications Framework

Then, bring it together as a plan. Share it.



# General Best Practices

## #1: Keep It Simple



# General Best Practices

**#2: Be honest and forthright about bad news.**



# General Best Practices



**#3: Do not be bashful about sharing your good news.**



# General Best Practices



**#4: Communicate the most when you feel like communicating the least.**





# General Best Practices

**#5: The apology is a great invention. Do not be afraid to use it.**



# General Best Practices

**#6: Create “frequently asked questions” documents, even if you do not intend to publish them.**



# General Best Practices



**#7: Understand that respect is often earned during crisis situations.**



# General Best Practices



**#8: Develop a stump speech.** Everyone should have a stump speech!



# Contact Information

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# THANK YOU

# QUESTIONS?

Learn more about the Donovan Group at [www.DonovanGroup.com](http://www.DonovanGroup.com)



# Response to Critical Incidents



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***THE world's leader in school-based policing***



# NASRO Training

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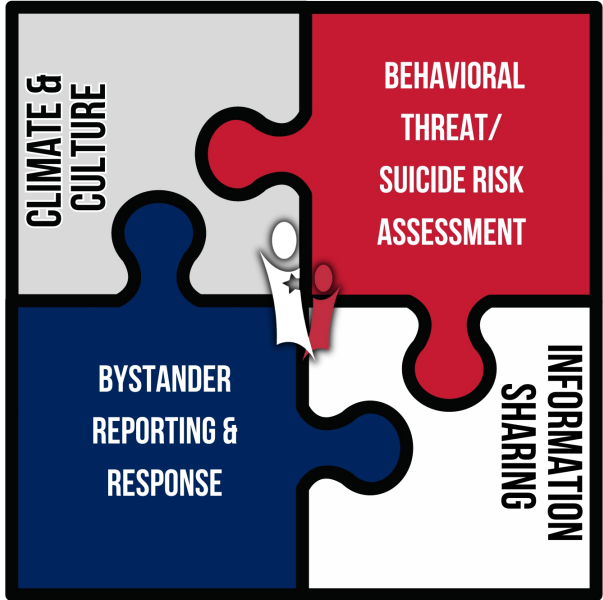


**GAYLORD TEXAN**  
**July 6 - 11, 2025**



## PROJECT **unite**

The Four Integrated Systems for School Violence Prevention





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