

Communicating with Stakeholders During Times of Transition and Crisis

State Charter Schools
Commission of Georgia

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Agenda and Goals

When faced with a challenge, the way we communicate with stakeholders can make all the difference in escalating or mitigating a potential crisis. The goal for this session is to help attendees think about how to communicate in challenging situations to prevent a crisis situation from arising.

Agenda:

- Share a recent charter school communications challenge.
 - Share best practices in crisis management.
- Collaboratively work through communications challenges with a focus on mitigating potential crises.
 - If time allows, discuss audience challenges.

GACA Renewal Challenge

Imagine that you are the school leader of a SCSC authorized charter school district serving 4,000 students in grades K – 12.

In the most recent board meeting, your Board of Directors has decided to close grades K – 5 for the upcoming school year due to academic performance history.

As the school leader, you are tasked with sharing this information to faculty, staff, and families.

Where do you begin?



How to Prevent and Respond to Crises

Michelle Wirth, Director of Communications,
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2/6/19

Agenda:

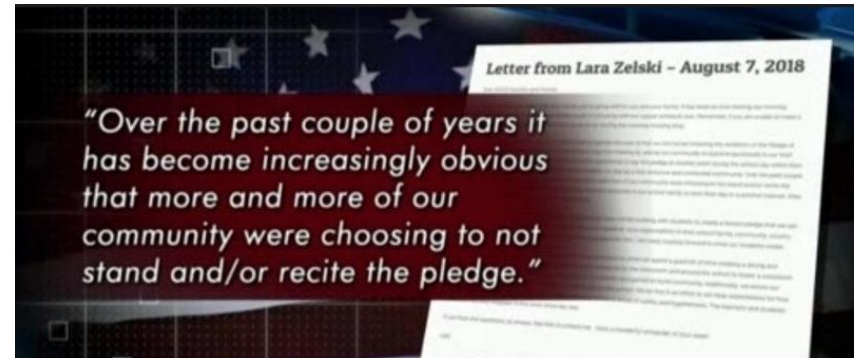
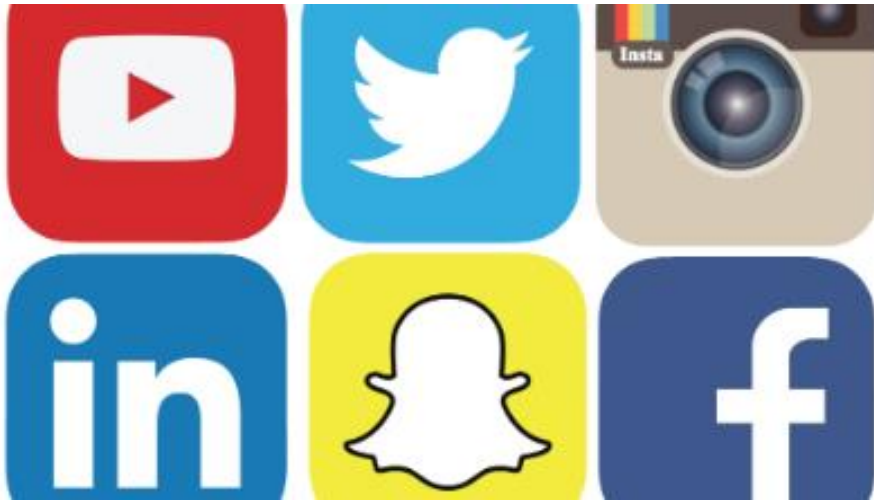
Best Practices for
Preventing a Crisis

Communicating in
Times of Crisis

How to Prevent a Crisis

- Have a plan – Try to anticipate possible crises and potential responses
- Prepare a holding statement
- Gather and keep information that could be helpful in times of crises (academic proof points, demographics etc...)
- Realize that whatever you send to parents or put on the Internet could end up in the news
- Do not over-communicate
- Build your reputation prior to a crisis
- If the situation turns into a media story, respond immediately. Say how you plan to address the situation or what steps you plan to take to improve.
- Tell the truth
- Correct any rumors or misinformation
- Select the right spokesperson
- Know the state and local political landscape

Consider Social Media & Smartphones



Proof Points & Demographic Information

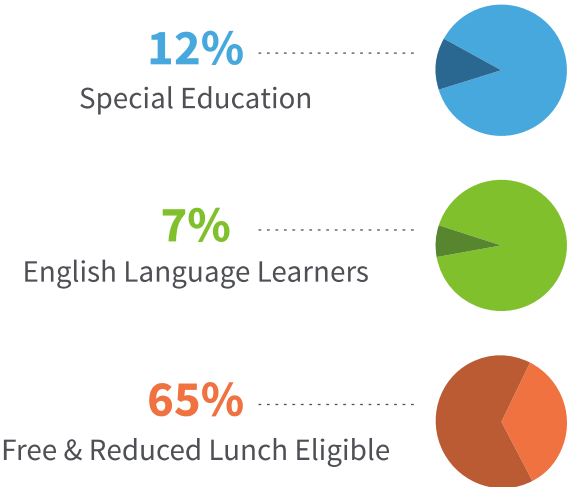
Number of Charter Schools: **113**

Number of Charter School Students: **86,549**

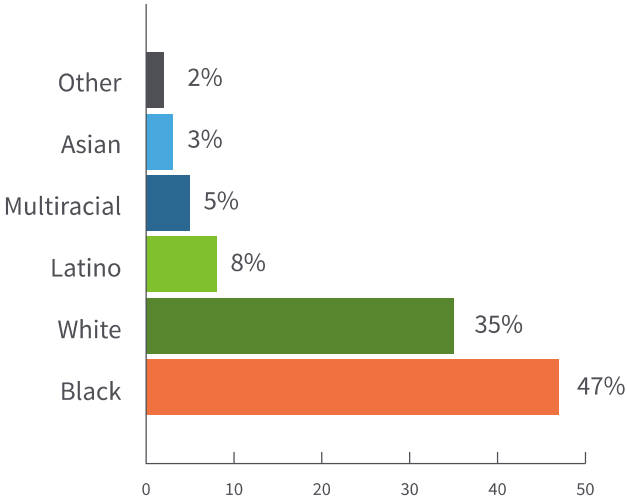
Charter School Students:
Nearly 5% of all Georgia students



Charter School Students:



Charter School Demographics:



Emphasize Ongoing Positive Efforts



Example: Anti-Bullying Program



Example: Plan to Increase Diversity

Seek Guidance

- Call or email the State Charter Schools Commission & the Georgia Charter Schools Association



Your advocate for better schools.

Communicating in Times of Crisis

- **Crisis Communications Plan**
 - Emergency Management Plan
 - Crisis Communications Checklist
 - Crisis Team
 - Media Training: who should receive training?
 - Audience / Media List
 - Primary and secondary spokesperson
- **Who should and shouldn't comment on a crisis?**
- **The organization's crisis telephone directory**
- **Evaluate and improve crisis communications**
- **When in doubt contact the SCSC, attorney & GCSA**
- **Town hall/press conference**

Crisis Communications Checklist

- Ensure all students are safe
- Immediately notify school leader, crisis team, board members, the SCSC and other key contacts
- Before going public:
 - Review situation and determine appropriate response with key staff
 - Draft potential press releases, talking points and other communications
 - Communications can include crisis status, school response and proactive steps to resolve if possible

Crisis Communications Checklist

- After going public:
 - Communicate with internal audiences
 - Notify parents (text messaging)
 - Communicate with media through press releases and other channels
 - Place information on website and social media
 - Provide periodic updates and resolution if applicable
- Evaluate and update your crisis communication plan as needed

Additional Considerations

- Do your best to get ahead of the situation by notifying key stakeholders (It's best to hear the message from you rather than someone else)
- Determine if you will allow access to spokesperson or use statements
- Factsheets and timelines are also helpful
- When you've said all there is to say move on to "the next steps."

Next Steps...

- What resources do you need to develop or improve a school-wide communications plan?
- Determine how your school can communicate more effectively

References

- <http://lacharterschoTols.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/LAPCS-Communications-Toolkit-2015.pdf>
- Campus Suite: School Communication Planning Guide,
<http://content.campussuite.com/school-communication-planning-guide>
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
- Cutting Edge PR

Challenge Scenarios

Break into three groups to work through
three challenge scenarios.

Challenge A

Challenge:

A group of anti-testing parents is displeased with a new interim assessment system implemented by the school administration. The parents have circumvented the school's complaint system and taken to social media to leave negative comments on the school's Facebook page. The group is slowly growing and causing additional parents to become concerned.

Questions:

What strategies should the school use to address the parent comments on social media? To address parents' general concerns around testing? To prevent the challenge from becoming a crisis?

Challenge B

Challenge:

Through the school's annual audit, it appears that a beloved school employee embezzled grant money. The school places the employee on administrative leave while an investigation takes place.

Questions:

What strategies should the school use to inform stakeholders about the alleged crime involving the teacher? To preserve the school's reputation? To prevent the challenge from becoming a crisis?

Challenge C

Challenge:

You learn a reporter plans to write a negative story about your school's inclusion on the Georgia Department of Education's Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools List due to your school's low graduation rate.

Questions:

What strategies should the school use to engage the reporter? To reframe the story in a positive light? To prevent the challenge from becoming a crisis?

Questions?