

Layers of Leadership

Leveraging Executive Internal Communication for Stronger Brands

While schools have not always had to view marketing as essential to their survival, this clearly isn't the case anymore. The reality is that every school district, from the largest urban ones to the smallest rural ones, must contend with increased competition at every level. No district can afford to miss any opportunity to create positive sentiment for their brand. For schools to thrive—or at least survive—in this rapidly shifting environment, they must find a way to establish themselves as safeguarded, valuable parts of their communities.

Discussion Guide



"In the constellation of school administration, principals have a uniquely powerful position. They are privy to top-level conversations about the district while also interacting regularly with students and families."

- How do principals in your district communicate with families?
- Are principals acting as spokespeople for their schools?



"Both principal and superintendent interviewees were frustrated by how difficult it can be to justify marketing expenses to the broader community. One superintendent from the Midwest who had recently embarked on a district rebrand lamented that families were quick to question the increased costs associated with a new marketing campaign. 'I've experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly of this,' the superintendent explained. 'Unfortunately, it took a while for everyone to understand the value of marketing and begin thinking about it as an investment in our district.'"

- Why is marketing and branding important to your district?
- What role does marketing and branding play in meeting district goals?



"Most principals said that the hardest part of school communication was simply finding the time. 'It's not that I'm not interested in digging into the work. It's a time factor,' explained one principal. 'There's no one else in my building who can help me with it, and I don't have a lot of leftover time to think deeply about it.'"

- How do principals in your district balance ensuring learning outcomes with communicating how they are reaching those outcomes with families and the larger community?
- What ways could your district-level administrators and principals partner to create a consistent school communications strategy that includes marketing and branding?



“Your brand isn’t just your mascot or values; it’s the way people in your community think and feel about your schools. In many ways, your reputation is your brand, and almost no one influences that reputation as much as your employees.”

- How would you describe your school’s reputation?
- Does your reputation match your brand goals?
- What changes would you make to improve your district’s reputation—and therefore your brand?



“Many principals expressed how difficult it was to represent one school while also contributing to their district’s collective story. This makes sense, especially given that principals don’t often receive regular training around school communication and marketing.”

- What would be the ideal communication strategy for principals and superintendents in your district? How does this differ from your current communication strategy?
- Why is it important for principals to be trained on marketing and branding communication strategies?



“Experiential marketing means creating an experience for your audience that is so good it serves as its own form of marketing. When we use this term, we’re not specifically talking about events; we mean every experience your community has with a school, from registration to graduation.”

- How does experiential marketing help the district and schools meet their goals?
- What uniquely allows principals to be experiential marketers?
- How might a principal engage their staff in experiential marketing?



“In our conversations, most principals with access to school comms professionals were quick to tout their benefit—and those who didn’t have them wished they did. “In our district, all of the principals are responsible for communicating about what’s going on in their own schools. But it feels like we’re all our own puzzle pieces,’ one principal said. ‘What could it be like if there were someone linking us together?’”

- Who makes up the communications team in your district?
- What connects your communications team?
- How does your communications team incorporate experiential marketing?



“Superintendents must not only build a clear vision for their district brand, but make that vision crystal clear to all stakeholders—especially building-level leaders.”

- How does internal communication affect external communication?
- What does your district need to do to incorporate principals and school-level staff to incorporate experiential marketing into your communication strategy?



For more information on Layers of Leadership:

<https://www.schoolceo.com/a/layers-of-leadership/>