

Effective Communications for Successful Governance Teams

From concepts and roles to practical tips on what you can and cannot do as an elected school board official

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION MARCH 13, 2023



Effective Communications for Successful Governance Teams

Presentation by

Communications/Intergovernmental Relations

San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

March 13, 2023

Agenda

- The role of government and elected officials in communicating with constituents and responding to requests for information
- Effective communications and media relations strategies for board members
- Common policies for community relations and media relations
- A few don’ts
- Panel discussion



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The role of government and elected officials in responding to information requests

- Government agencies have a duty to provide the public and media with information that is timely and accurate
  - This duty is both implied and legislated
  - Climate of transparency and accountability while respecting confidentiality of privileged information
  - Facilitate and build relationships and credibility
- The question is *how* should this duty be performed?



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How best to provide the public and media with information that is timely and accurate

- The district needs to be the official source for news and information
- Why? For a common message that is timely and accurate
- Review local district policies on media relations
  - If the district has a communications professional, refer the inquiry
  - If the superintendent has that role, refer the inquiry
  - The Board President may have some role (check district policies)
  - Good practice to inform district of media inquiry and topic



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Understanding the Mindset of a Journalist

- Journalists are tenacious
- Journalists always have a deadline
- Journalists most likely working for a news group with more than one news outlet
- Education stories most likely assigned by editor who wants local angle to regional or national news
- Journalists may have limited knowledge about public education
- Journalists are looking for news (i.e. conflict) not fluff
- Journalists can be very tenacious



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Understanding the Mindset of a Journalist

Joe Journalist's assignment

Get Board quotes before controversial action at the next meeting



Calls Board Member A
"I'm for it"

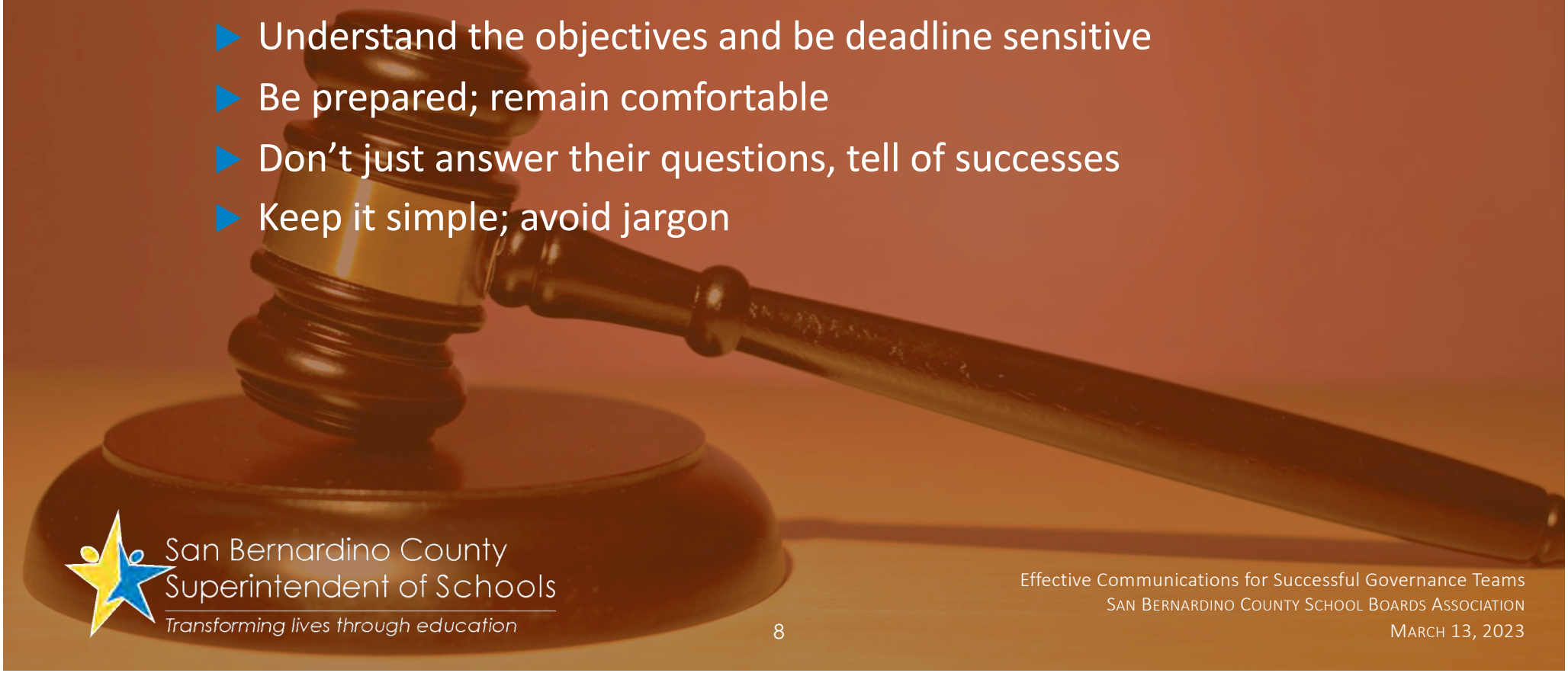
Calls Board Member B
"I'm for it"

Calls Board Member C
"I'm against it"

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When the Media Calls

- Field the call, listen, refer to superintendent/district spokesperson
- Understand the objectives and be deadline sensitive
- Be prepared; remain comfortable
- Don’t just answer their questions, tell of successes
- Keep it simple; avoid jargon



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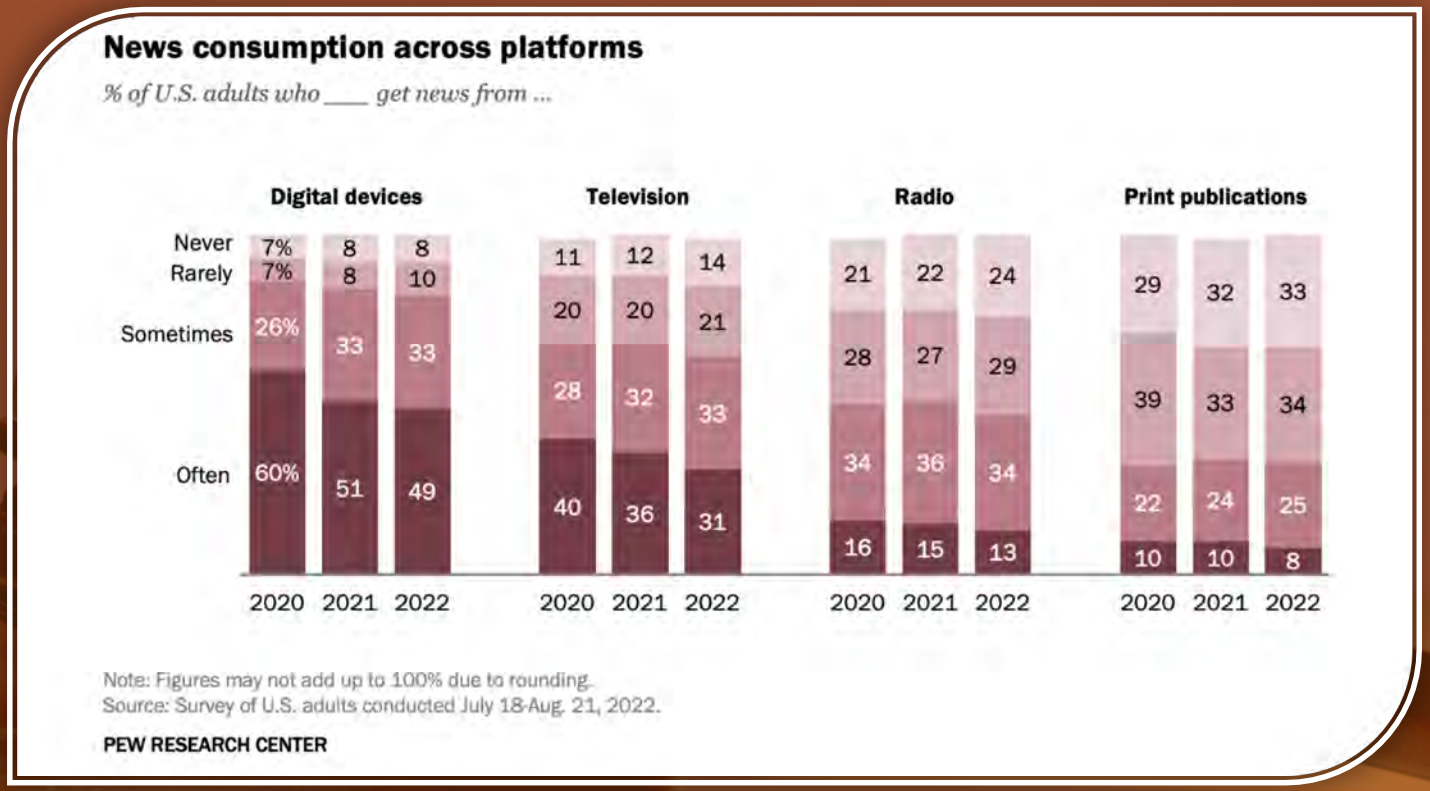
When the Media Calls (continued)

- Don’t speculate on unknown facts
- Watch for questions that begin with “why”
- Don’t fall for question traps or the silent treatment
- Watch for reporters summarizing comments
- Everything you say is on the record



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Digital Doesn't Mean it's Digested



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Sharpen Interview Skills

- Use the **ABC**s—acknowledge, bridge and convert the question to your desired answer
  - **A**CKNOWLEDGE the reporter's statement ("That's certainly important in our school…")
  - **B**RIDGE away from the original question to the one you really want to answer ("…we are continuing to work on that…")
  - **C**ONVERT the question to your key message point or your answer ("…but the real issue today is…")



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What Makes News?

- Turmoil, controversy, conflict
- Timely and within proximity
- From an important source
- Prominent people, places, things
- An explanation of progress
- Unusual, astonishing and consequential events
- A matter of life and death
- Of significant social, financial or political impact



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The Changing News Landscape

Local has become regional



The Communications Mindset for Board Members

- Board members are key ambassadors
- Advocate for the district's students, staff and programs
- Build positive relationships with parents, district staff, the community and other school districts
- Demonstrate credibility and transparency for the Board and the organization



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The Communications Mindset for Board Members (continued)

- Send a clear and consistent message about the district and on key issues impacting public education
- Influence legislation and policy through professional associations
  - California School Boards Association (CSBA)
  - San Bernardino County School Boards Association (SBCSBA)
  - Riverside County School Board Members Association (RCSBMA)
  - San Bernardino County District Advocates for Better Schools (SANDABS)



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The Board Member as an Effective Communicator

- Responsible communication is embedded in CSBA Professional Governance Standards
  - Understand authority rests with the board as a whole and not individuals
  - Communicate a common vision
  - Operate openly, with trust and integrity
  - Support the actions of the board



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The Board Member as an Effective Communicator (continued)

- Look over your district Board policies
- Most districts follow the CSBA model
  - 9000—Role of the Board
  - 9000.1—Board and Superintendent Roles & Responsibilities
  - 9005—Governance Standards
  - 9010—Public Statements
  - 9012—Board Member Electronic Communications
  - 9271—Code of Ethics
  - 9323—Meeting Conduct



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Communications and Media Relations Policies

- School district policies and procedures
- **Generally, communicating with the media and responding to requests for information is an administrative function**
  - Who serves as the district spokesperson and point of contact for media inquiries?
  - Who is the official spokesperson for the board?
  - Who is the BEST spokesperson for a specific incident or inquiry?



The Top-5

Communication Tips for Board Members

- Speak with one clear voice — the board, the district, educational issues
- Demonstrate Board Governance Standards that are supported through effective communications
- Filter media inquiries and requests for information from the seat of a Board Member
- Be conscientious of upcoming agenda items and district specific issues
- Be prepared, be accurate and be credible



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Manage the Media Interview

- Everything is “on the record”
- Return calls and email
- Prepare to bridge
- Reporter and news outlet
- Okay to say “I don’t know”
- Don’t say “no comment”
- Never speculate
- Be concise
- Be concrete
- Avoid jargon
- Don’t volunteer information
- Don’t throw staff under the bus



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Schools and the Media (including Social Media)

- Being aware of the expanding media landscape
- Positive relationships with reporters/editors/bloggers/social media influencers and the education community can be beneficial
- Media serve an important role in communicating education issues and progress to our school communities
- Working cooperatively with the media is an opportunity to enhance public reporting of schools
- The district should be the one true source for accurate and timely information



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Effective Communications for Successful Governance Teams

- Communicate concerns to superintendent in advance of Board meetings
- Alert superintendent/district office of media inquiries and topics discussed
- Know your role as an individual Board member
- Know your role as part of a governance team
- Avoid serial meeting traps
- Remember the ultimate mission—put students first

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Panel Discussion

- Submit Questions via the Chat Box

Panel Members



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Thank you for attending

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Upcoming:
Spring Awards Program

April 24, 2023

2023 SPRING
AWARDS

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
EDUCATION MEDAL OF HONOR

Distinguished
Service Award

Effective Communications
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