Tom Strickler

Superintendent of Schools

Over the past several months, I've spoken about transparency, communication, and rebuilding trust across our school community. Tonight, I want to address another important part of that conversation — accuracy, fairness, and the shared responsibility we all carry when communicating about our schools, our families, and most importantly, our students.

We welcome questions. We welcome scrutiny. Our families, community members, and the news media have every right to examine our decisions and expect answers. But accountability works both ways. Just as we have a responsibility to provide accurate information, those sharing information about our schools have a responsibility to represent the facts fairly.

The Measles Incident at Bainbridge Elementary

When we received confirmation of the case, we followed our standard practice of sharing planned family communication with employees in advance — so they are prepared to answer questions and support families when the information is released.

Unfortunately, that internal communication was shared outside the District without authorization, before our planned family notification. The timeline tells the story. At 1:00 p.m., the information was shared internally. By 1:01, it had been forwarded outside the District through a District email account. By 1:45, it appeared on a media outlet — including a claim that a student contracted measles in an Elizabethtown classroom, which has no basis in fact.

That created confusion for families who questioned why they hadn't heard from us directly, and it generated hours of additional work for administrators and staff — time diverted from supporting students and schools. We are investigating this disclosure and will address our findings through appropriate internal processes.

Whatever the intentions behind the sharing of information, the consequences are real. Inaccurate information can create uncertainty and division within our school community, potentially affecting the sense of safety and belonging that every student and family deserves. We must recognize that words and actions have consequences, particularly when information is shared without a full understanding of the facts. As a community, we have a responsibility to approach sensitive matters with accuracy, compassion, and respect.

The Vaccination Numbers
In our **InFocus** communication, we reported that approximately 99 percent of Bainbridge students had received at least one dose of the MMR vaccine. Some community members questioned that figure because it differed from information on the Pennsylvania Department of Health website.

The difference is straightforward. The Department of Health figure reflects Bainbridge kindergarten students only, for the 2025-2026 school year, with both doses of the MMR vaccine. The figure we reported — as required by the Department of Health in response to this specific situation — reflects all Bainbridge students for the 2026-2027 school year with one or more doses. These are not the same populations, and they are not the same metric. For context, one dose of the MMR vaccine is approximately 93 percent effective against measles; two doses are approximately 97 percent effective.

Our Health Services team spent hours reviewing individual student records and verifying that information before it was shared. I have tremendous confidence in our nursing and health professionals and our communications team. The information we release is developed by the employees closest to the situation, reviewed by District leadership, and carefully prepared to be accurate, balanced, and timely. We ask that their work be evaluated on that basis.

I also want to clarify that our School Board serves in a governance role. Board members establish policy and provide oversight, but they do not prepare our day-to-day communications. That responsibility rests with administration.

The Football Game Incident
We experienced a serious incident at a football game involving a single Airsoft pistol. Our staff responded promptly, supported the students involved, contacted families, and communicated with our community. In subsequent correspondence, a reporter repeatedly referred to "rifles" — in the plural. When we raised that concern, we were told the terminology appeared only in correspondence, not in the published article. But accuracy matters in both places. Describing one Airsoft pistol as multiple rifles creates a very different impression of what occurred. The incident was serious. An accurate description of it is equally important.

What Is Happening Every Day in EASD
Difficult stories deserve coverage. So do the remarkable things happening across this District every day. Our students are participating in mock interviews, exploring college opportunities through Instant Decision Week, earning National Merit recognition, performing at the Susquehanna String Summit, and developing career skills through

community partnerships. As students on our high school Advisory group told me directly, we have amazing teachers and staff, and we are not short on opportunities. We serve more than 3,200 students and approximately 400 employees who come to work every day committed to helping young people succeed. Their work deserves to be represented fairly.

A Final Word

Differences of opinion will always exist in a community, and that is okay. What I ask is that we all remember our words have consequences. Whether speaking at a Board meeting, posting on social media, or reporting the news — accuracy and fairness matter.

Behind every headline and every public debate are real students, real families, and real employees affected by the words we choose. We will continue to communicate through Bear Briefs, our District website, email, and all EASD social media platforms, providing accurate, fair, and timely information. This is the Elizabethtown Area School District, and this is our story.

Whether you work for this District or are part of the community we serve, we all deserve the same things: accuracy, fairness, and respect.

Kelly Carter

School Board President

We all agreed to lead by PSBA's Principles for Governance and Leadership back in December. It is a list of ways to help guide us as we lead and states at the top:

> "Pennsylvania school boards are committed to providing every student the opportunity to grow and achieve. Our actions, as elected and appointed board members, ultimately have both a short- and long-term impact in the classroom."

As board members, we are trained to always ask: *"What impact will this have on student achievement, growth, and success?"* While we are elected officials who must uphold strict standards, policies, and procedures, I hope our community shares our goal to improve the district by asking similar questions before making decisions that could impact Elizabethtown.

The continual negative press we are receiving—which often presents inaccurate information—is actively hurting our community. We must ask ourselves:

- Is this media coverage actually attracting new families to our community, or is it having the opposite effect?
- What is the strategic goal of sharing this internal information with the press?
- Is it helping local businesses or the district recruit quality employees?
- How is leaking this information to the media helping our students?
- What is the total cost to taxpayers for the additional administrative hours required to manage these media issues?

I fully understand the need for facts and accountability. However, accountability should start by coming directly to us first and waiting for the full context.

Our administration goes above and beyond what most districts offer by regularly updating our website with clear, high-quality information. They frequently send out updates, announcements, and maintain the I**n Focus** page under the "Community and Family Communications" tab.

As the district officially states:

> "The Elizabethtown Area School District encourages stakeholders to seek information through official communication channels, including the District

> website, social media accounts, and the *Who to Call* resource. To further support transparency and informed decision-making, the District created *InFocus* as a communication tool to address topics of public interest, answer frequently asked questions, clarify misunderstandings, and provide accurate information on issues affecting our schools and community."

The website also outlines the proper process for addressing issues, questions, and concerns, noting that: *"In most cases, concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively through direct communication with the individuals closest to the situation."*

I strongly encourage everyone to look for the facts and communicate directly with those closest to the situation first. Let's resolve issues constructively rather than providing hot-topic headlines that bring negative spotlight to our Elizabethtown Community.