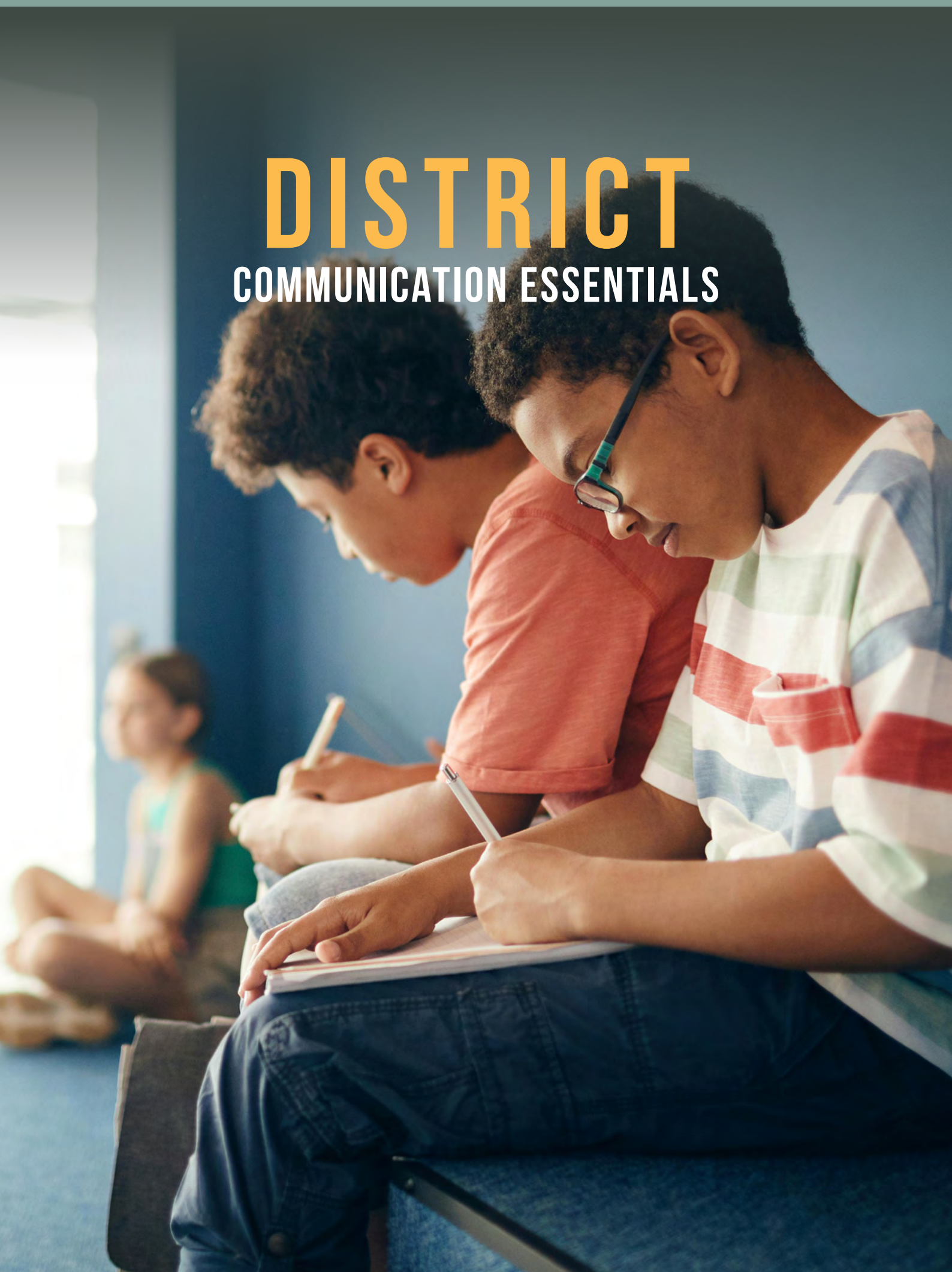


COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

DISTRICT

COMMUNICATION ESSENTIALS



--- CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

School district and community leaders are being asked to communicate in an increasingly complex environment. Superintendents, principals, treasurers, and board members must respond to rising public scrutiny, political polarization, misinformation, staffing pressures, financial concerns, and rapidly changing community expectations, often while balancing dozens of competing responsibilities each day. In this context, effective communication can easily feel overwhelming. Yet strong communication does not require districts to become marketing firms or social media influencers. At its core, meaningful communication is about building trust, strengthening relationships, and helping communities understand the vital role public schools play in local life. The following principles are intended to simplify that work. Rather than offering rigid scripts or one size fits all strategies, they provide a practical framework to help district leaders communicate more clearly, consistently, and authentically with the communities they serve.



THE 4 ESSENTIALS OF DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS

1

**Be Strategic,
Consistent,
Present and
Authentic**



STRATEGIC



CONSISTENT



PRESENT



AUTHENTIC

2

**Center
Community
Values**



Align communications
with what matters most
to our community.

3

**Elevate
Community
Voices**



Share stories
and amplify the
perspectives that
reflect our community.

4

**Emphasize
Tangible Local
Impacts**



Connect our work to
real outcomes that
strengthen our schools
and community.

1

BE STRATEGIC, CONSISTENT, PRESENT AND AUTHENTIC

Priority Area	Why It Matters	Example Communication Moves	Suggested Frequency	Impact
 Build Trust and Visibility	Communities are more likely to support schools when they feel informed, included, and connected to district leadership.	- Regular superintendent updates - Listening sessions - Attendance at community events - Short video messages - Consistent talking points	Weekly communication with monthly in-person engagement	 Helps community members feel heard and strengthens long-term trust.
 Showcase Student Opportunities	People connect more strongly to real student stories than institutional statistics.	- Student spotlights - Classroom stories - Career pathway features - Extracurricular highlights - Senior profiles	Weekly or biweekly storytelling	 Demonstrates how schools create opportunity and prepare students for the future.
 Strengthen Rural Workforce Connections	Schools play a critical role in sustaining local economies and helping young people remain in the community.	- Feature local employer partnerships - Internships - Career technical education programs - Alumni career stories	Monthly features with quarterly business outreach	 Connects schools directly to economic development and workforce needs.
 Communicate During Challenges and Change	Difficult conversations require proactive, clear, and consistent communication.	- FAQ documents - Town halls - Community forums - Direct outreach - Repeated messaging across platforms	Increase communication frequency before and during major decisions	 Reduces misinformation and builds credibility during periods of uncertainty.
 Highlight Community Partnerships	Public schools are deeply connected to families, organizations, and local identity.	- Recognize volunteers - Alumni - Businesses - Nonprofits - Community partners through stories and events	Ongoing throughout the year	 Reinforces the idea that schools belong to the entire community.

Effective communication is rarely accidental. In today's environment, district leaders benefit from approaching communication as an ongoing strategy rather than a response to isolated events or crises. Communities need time and repetition to internalize messages, particularly when districts are addressing complex issues such as funding, student achievement, facilities, safety, or change initiatives. Clear talking points, consistent messaging across leaders and platforms, and sustained communication over time help build familiarity, credibility and community understanding.

At the same time, effective communication must remain personal and authentic. Families and community members are more likely to trust leaders who are

visible, accessible, and willing to listen. Community listening sessions, small group conversations, and outreach beyond school walls can help leaders identify trusted opinion leaders and community “connectors” who influence local perspectives. Communication should not begin only during moments of controversy or crisis. Districts build credibility through steady, visible engagement over time. Regular attendance at community events, listening sessions, and informal conversations can strengthen relationships long before difficult decisions emerge. See the table above for an example of how district leaders can create their own strategic communication plan.

[Download the planning template here.](#)

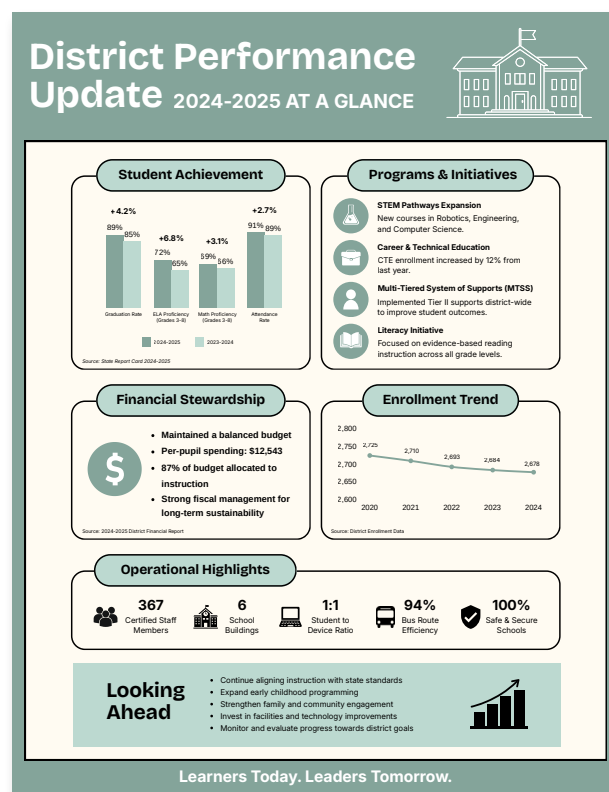
Practical Reminder

Strong communication is not about producing polished marketing campaigns. It is about building trust over time through consistent messaging, visible leadership, authentic storytelling, and meaningful community engagement.

2 CENTER COMMUNITY VALUES

Effective school communication is most powerful when it connects educational work to the values and priorities of the broader community. Too often, district messaging becomes overly data heavy, institutional, or generic, relying on technical language, statistics, or formal statements that feel disconnected from people's daily lives. While data has an important role, numbers alone rarely build trust or inspire support. Community members are more likely to engage with communication that feels personal, relevant, and grounded in shared local values. Instead of announcing a new career pathway program solely through enrollment numbers or course offerings, districts might highlight a local graduate who returned to work in the community through that pathway.

District leaders should strive to communicate in ways that reflect the identity, concerns, and aspirations of their communities. This often means using plain, accessible language, highlighting real people and experiences, and explaining why school initiatives matter beyond the walls of the school itself. Whenever possible, communication should connect educational efforts to values such as opportunity, safety, belonging, workforce development, civic pride, economic stability, or community well-being. Naming a student, family, teacher, employer, or community partner and illustrating how a decision or program affects their lived experience can make communication far more meaningful than relying on abstract institutional language alone (see example on next page). At the same time, effective communicators recognize that even within the same community, different groups may respond to different values, concerns, and priorities. Messages that resonate with parents of school-age children may not resonate in the same way with senior citizens, local business owners, or residents without children in the schools. For example, communication with rural voters without school-age



Example of Traditional District Communication

children may emphasize community continuity, local control, and the role schools play in sustaining the town's identity across generations. Messaging directed toward senior citizens may focus more heavily on community stability, intergenerational connections, and the ways schools contribute to keeping families and services rooted locally. Communication with local businesses may instead emphasize workforce development, economic vitality, and financial stewardship. These differences do not require districts to change their core values or mission; rather, they require leaders to frame those values in ways that feel relevant and meaningful to different audiences within the community.

WHY IT WORKS

- Makes communication feel personal rather than institutional.
- Translates complex educational issues into relatable human stories.
- Connects school initiatives to audience priorities.
- Helps broader audiences see the relevance of public schools.

3 BE STRATEGIC, CONSISTENT, PRESENT AND AUTHENTIC

“

I'm learning skills that build my future right here at home.

Through ag mechanics I'm getting certified, gaining real experience and preparing for a job I love, without having to leave my community.



**Strong schools.
Strong community.
Stronger future.**

*My future.
My community.
My choice.*

People are more likely to trust and connect with stories shared by people they recognize and relate to than messages delivered solely through institutional channels. Effective district communication should not position schools as speaking to the community, but rather as communicating with and through the community. Students, families, teachers, support staff, alumni, local employers, coaches, faith leaders, and community partners can all help tell the story of public education in ways that feel authentic and credible.

Elevating community voices also demonstrates that schools are deeply interconnected with the broader life of the community. District leaders should create opportunities for diverse voices to be seen and heard through testimonials, spotlights, videos, community conversations, social media features, and public events. Importantly, these voices should reflect the full range of the community, not only formal leaders or the most visible supporters. When community members see people like themselves represented in district communication, they are more likely to feel a sense of connection, ownership, and trust in the work of the schools.

WHY IT WORKS

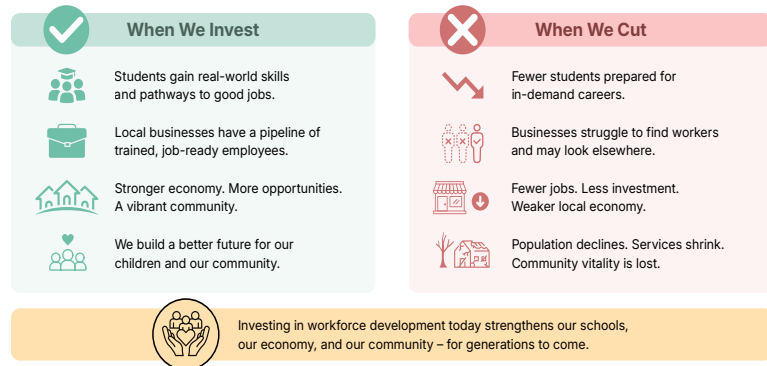
- Builds authenticity through trusted local voices.
- Creates stronger emotional connection and community ownership.
- Helps stakeholders see themselves reflected in district communication.
- Demonstrates that schools are interconnected with community life.

4

EMPHASIZE TANGIBLE LOCAL IMPACTS

Workforce Development: A Choice with Consequences

Every decision we make today shapes our students, our economy, and our community tomorrow.



Many community members evaluate public schools not only through test scores or state report cards, but through the visible impact schools have on everyday life in the community. Effective communication helps people understand how schools contribute to the economic, social, and civic well being of the places where they live. District leaders should consistently communicate the concrete ways schools strengthen communities, both now and in the future.

This means moving beyond broad educational slogans and focusing on specific local outcomes that residents can see and value. Communication might highlight how career technical programs prepare students for local industries, how partnerships with businesses create workforce pipelines, how schools support local families and employers, or how extracurricular activities contribute to community identity and pride. It may also

involve emphasizing the role schools play as gathering spaces, employers, service providers, and anchors of neighborhood stability.

Strong communication also helps make the future visible. Community members should understand not only what schools currently provide, but what is at stake for the future of the community. District leaders should be willing to communicate clearly about the long term implications of growth, investment, and opportunity as well as the risks associated with declining enrollment, workforce shortages, disinvestment, or the loss of community vitality. Framing schools as central to the future health and sustainability of the community can help stakeholders recognize that decisions about public education are also decisions about the future direction of the town, city, or region itself.

WHY IT WORKS

- Builds authenticity through trusted local voices.
- Creates stronger emotional connection and community ownership.
- Helps stakeholders see themselves reflected in district communication.
- Demonstrates that schools are interconnected with community life.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication does not require district leaders to become professional marketers, graphic designers, or social media influencers. In many cases, the most meaningful communication is simple, personal, and grounded in authentic relationships with the community. Clear messaging, consistent outreach, visible leadership, and real stories often matter far more than polished branding or expensive campaigns. The goal is not perfection. The goal is helping people better understand, value, and connect with the work of public schools. The following section provides practical, easy to use resources and tools designed to support district leaders in communicating more effectively with their communities, regardless of prior communications experience.

Disclaimer: The Miami CREATED communications toolkit is a publicly available educational resource created to support communication planning and stakeholder engagement. The views, examples, and tools included are intended to promote thoughtful communication practices and do not represent legal advice, official policy guidance, or endorsement of an organization, statement, or political position. Miami University, Miami CREATED, and project contributors do not assume responsibility for how toolkit materials are adapted or used in specific local contexts. Users are encouraged to review all communications for accuracy, accessibility, appropriateness, and compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and organizational policies. Users may not use any of Miami's trademarks, service marks, logos, trade names, names, or brand indicia (collectively, "[Miami Marks](#)") without first obtaining the written consent of Miami's Office of Trademarks and Licensing. The use of the Miami CREATED communications toolkit, and all related documents, agreements, or exhibits, and all disputes and other matters arising out of or relating to the toolkit, whether sounding in contract, tort, statute, or otherwise, shall be governed by, and construed in accordance with, the laws of the State of Ohio, without giving effect to any jurisdiction's conflict of laws provisions. Miami's liability shall be subject in all cases to the immunities and limitations of the Ohio Court of Claims Act codified in Chapter 2743 of the Ohio Revised Code and as provided in Ohio R.C. 9.86 and 9.87, as amended. Nothing in the Miami CREATED communications toolkit shall be construed as a waiver of the sovereign or qualified immunity of Miami, Miami's employees, and/or the State of Ohio.