

The 5 W's of Key Communicator Networks

Why?

A key communicator network can be a valuable tool for a district that is interested in communicating with its community. The network provides a cadre of individuals who serve as a consistent, strong link to distinct groups of people. This network can help to foster communication and to dispel rumors that may crop up in the community. All they need is appropriate, factual information from a trusted source. As people realize they have more credible knowledge, they are more confident in the source of that information.

Who?

Who are the people who should be included in a key communicator network? The answer—anyone who has contact with a group of people in your district. A few suggestions are:

- PTO/PTA leaders and members
- Senior citizen representatives
- Business leaders
- Chamber of Commerce representatives
- Parent representatives of home schoolers
- Day care representatives
- Health care representatives
- City government representatives
- Representatives of special populations
- Representatives of minority groups
- Parochial school representatives
- University representatives, if applicable
- And don't forget, include those who do not agree with positions you have taken in the district—those dissenters who can provide valuable information to you!

One superintendent sent out color-coded surveys to each school in his new district. At the end of the survey, he asked each respondent to name 5 individuals who were influential in some way to the educational community. He aggregated the data and then called those individuals whose names appeared numerous times. He asked them for their opinions—both positive and negative. Immediately he had the beginnings of a Key Communicator Network.

What?

Now that you have a group of communicators, what exactly do you give them? That's easy...give them the information you want communicated to the groups they represent. For example:

- budget information

- negotiation information (both good and bad)
- new curriculum initiatives
- new program ideas
- crisis communication
- rumor abatement
- board of education decisions
- honors and recognitions of the district

Where?

Where do you communicate? Wherever they are willing to come!

- Meet them on their turf—service club meetings, businesses, PTO/PTA meetings, etc.
- Meet them on your turf—breakfast meetings, afternoon coffees, etc.
- at service club meetings
- in small groups
- in large groups
- through letters through information packets
- on links to the web site
- by e-mail

When?

When do you communicate with your network? Easy...whenever you need essential information to be disseminated by a trusted group of individuals in the community.

- during times of crisis to get the correct information in the hands of the community
- during times of referendum to disseminate necessary information
- during times of construction
- during budgeting periods
- during negotiations—both amiable and difficult
- when new programs are being discussed
- when there are safety issues
- when there are curriculum changes on the horizon
- when staff/students/district have earned awards or recognitions

Yes, the Key Communicator Networks are a viable and valuable method for districts to communicate. Implementing them is a "simple matter" of remembering the 5 W's.