

CRITICAL COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

TASA/TASB Conference
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POWERED BY

TSPRA

TEXAS SCHOOL
PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

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PRE-PLANNING

- Make a list of your audiences ahead of time. Break them into internal and external. How you respond to each will be different.
- Work with district leadership to secure buy-in on plan in advance of crisis.
- Consider having scripts prepared that only need name/location updates.
- Consider using prepared holding statements before putting out misinformation in order to communicate as quickly as possible.
- Activate your "dark" website page with updated information.
- Have a recorded message and caller number for alerts to aid with the return calls following a Black Board or School Messenger robocall. (*"We have activated our alert system. For additional information, please refer to our district website and social media accounts."*)
- Have a firm framework procedure in place regarding the reporting and internal communication flow when a crisis occurs - emphasize time sensitivity.
- Back-up plan for down communication.
- Campuses/Departments have designated roles.
- Make sure everyone understands their roles.

DURING THE CRISIS/EVENT

- Understand the circumstances; define the problem.
- Create a brief summary for yourself and your team that details just the facts that can be used for all communications (Staff, Parents, Media, Board, Staff answering calls, etc.)
- Remember the three things people want to see from an organization in a crisis: authority, information and empathy.
- Coordinate with police, fire and emergency personnel to release accurate information.
- Own what you own, remember to address the response and what your district is doing.
- Remember to seek updates from your subject-matter experts every hour to keep community updated.
- Communicate to your audiences (Employees & Board, Parents, Media) and keep the news media informed, as needed. (Media will follow your social media accounts to gather information and details.) Utilize your crisis communication team roster, key communicator lists and media contact sheets.
- Anticipate needs: clerical support to answer phones. Utilize other staff members to monitor social media. Note trends, topics that may need to be addressed once things slow down.
- Note all incoming calls, including a media log.
- Identify press conference sites away from crisis location.
- Remind team members of their assigned roles.
- Expect chaos. Expect the unexpected. Stay calm.

AFTER THE CRISIS/EVENT

- Provide a timetable for future plans when possible.
- Debrief after to better prepare for the future.
- Have a recorded message and caller number for alerts to aid with the return calls following a Black Board or School Messenger robocall.
- Consider a universal statement or email letter so that you can save time not having to create a media statement vs. parent letter, etc.
- Don't make promises/policy in crisis mode. Stay true to what makes your district special.

Remember that *TSPRA members come first*. If you need anything; help, support, someone to lend an ear, someone to lend a hand, your TSPRA colleagues and friends are ready to help! Call the TSPRA Office at: (512) 474-9107

COMMUNICATIONS "FIRST RESPONDERS"



Melissa Tortorici is the Director of Communications for Texas City ISD, which is in Region IV. She is in her 23rd year of school communications. She is an active member of the Texas School Public Relations Association where she served as the Vice President for the Houston/Beaumont area for five years. She was the TSPRA President in 2017-2018. Melissa loves traveling with her family. Her daughter is a college sophomore and her son is a high school senior.

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Ian M. Halperin serves as the Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations for the Wylie ISD. He has more than 20 years of experience in public school PR. He has held numerous leadership positions in the Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA), including President (2016-2017) and is an active member of several civic and education related organizations. Prior to working in Wylie, Ian served in a similar role in the Mesquite ISD. He began his communications career in 1990 as a photographer and editor for Harte Hanks Newspapers in Plano and still works on a freelance basis for clients across the country. He and his wife have two daughters, one who proudly attends, and another who is a proud grad of Wylie public schools.

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Monica Faulkenbery, APR is a 40-year veteran of educational public relations, working as Director of Public Information/Communications in public and private colleges in Oklahoma and Texas and in the public school systems of Missouri and Texas. She is currently the Assistant Director of Communications for the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio. She serves as the Immediate Past-President of the Texas School Public Relations Associations (TSPRA) representing all school public relations professionals around the state. She is a past-president of both the San Antonio and Central Texas Chapters of the Public Relations Society of America. She has served on a variety of committees for the Governors of Missouri and Texas and is Accredited in Public Relations, serving as a mentor to candidates throughout the state who are seeking their Accreditation.

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Tim Savoy is the Chief Communication Officer for the Hays CISD just south of Austin. From 2004 to 2011, Savoy represented the Texas Youth Commission (TYC). Prior to joining TYC, Savoy was the chief media spokesperson for the Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD (SCUCISD). Savoy spent nearly six years as a reporter for the ABC News affiliate in Columbus, Georgia. He is the winner of two Associated Press awards for series reporting and spot news coverage, was nominated for a regional Emmy award for a series about child safety and abduction prevention, and was named Media Person of the Year by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Georgia and Alabama.

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Sylvia Rincon currently works for Southside ISD in a dual role as the Director of Communications and Marketing, and the Executive Director of the SISD Education Foundation. She has proudly been serving the students and families of Southside ISD for 6 years. Prior to her segue into education, Sylvia was a veteran TV/Radio Broadcast journalist who has dedicated nearly two decades to covering stories in Washington D.C., Phoenix, AZ, and most of South, Central and Eastern Texas. Always a devoted advocate for compelling and truthful story-telling, her tenacity led her to report on important stories of our time.

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Kristin Zastoupil graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Mass Communications from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Kristin then pursued her master's from Baylor University while beginning her 17 year journey in educational public relations. After receiving her M.A. and still working full-time, she also served as an adjunct professor in Baylor's journalism department for 10 years. Kristin says one of her greatest honors was to serve as the 2018-2019 Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA) President. Currently, she is as the Executive Director of Marketing and Communications for Forney ISD.

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Patti Pawlik-Perales is the Communications Coordinator for Alamo Heights ISD in San Antonio. She is in her 32nd year of a career built on her love for school communications, marketing, media production and web content management. She has served the communications and media productions needs of New Braunfels ISD, San Benito CISD, and Brownsville ISD. She has been a member of and served the Texas School Public Relations Association throughout her career, serving in numerous capacities, including President of the organization in 2013-2014.

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