

# Setting appropriate “Trust Targets”



# Is your school district trusted?

The answer to this question is a combination of three factors:

- Who you ask
- When you ask
- How those audiences define the word “trust” in the context of the school district

# Who you ask

Consider the different answers you would get on the “trust” question from, for example:

- Current parents vs. Non-parent patrons
- Current students vs. recent alumni vs. long-term alumni
- Traditional media vs. social media
- Staff vs. your Board of Education

# When you ask

Trust can ebb and flow, based on the news of the moment. How would your key audiences answer the “trust” question, for example:

- After winning the state football championship vs. after having to fire a popular coach?
- After opening a new school vs. after closing a much-loved (but underutilized) facility?
- After passing a bond issue vs. after failing a bond issue?

# How trust is defined

## What factors build trust?

- Academic performance? (They're turning out great kids...)
- Fiscal transparency? (They spend money properly...)
- Singular vision for the district? (They have a plan...)
- What other district "features" build trust?

# Some truths about trust

1. It is difficult, but not impossible, to measure (relationship issue/not scientific)
2. It is fleeting, but can be recovered somewhat, if lost (but takes time)
3. Is different for everyone (which makes it all the more challenging!)
4. It will never be absolute (reasonable targets are key)

# To set “reasonable targets”

1. Be honest about where you are today
2. Set reasonable, realistic “trust targets” for each audience
3. Work toward that target every day, with every action

# Audience: Current district parents

Reasonable trust target: Engagement, and more advocacy than antagonism

Evidence would include:

- Attendance at meetings, conferences, volunteer opportunities
- Letters-to-the-editor are mostly positive
- Satisfaction with the district's response to issues
- Appropriate participation at BOE meetings, public events



# Audience: Affinity groups (PTO, PTA, Booster Clubs, etc.)

Reasonable trust target: Active engagement, advocacy, and financial support

Evidence would include:

- Limited churn in membership (and preferably growth)
- Regularly identifying new, helpful ideas
- Steady (and preferably growing) financial support
- Creating activities that draw expected attendance – or better
- Willingness to accept district decisions

# Audience: Non-parent patrons

Reasonable trust target: Majority support of ballot issues; very modest engagement and advocacy

Evidence would include:

- Winning ballot issues
- Very occasional appearances at events and activities
- Very occasional public support for district issues

# Audience: Staff

Reasonable trust target: Engagement beyond the job description, significant majority being advocates

Evidence would include:

- Participation in events where attendance is not expected
- Willingness to volunteer for committees
- Healthy, mostly positive discussion at meetings
- Active sharing of ideas to improve the district, their building, their classroom, etc.

# Audience: Board of Education

Reasonable trust target: Routine ability to find common ground and to make decisions unemotionally

Evidence would include:

- Nearly all votes 7-0
- Limited use of Executive Session
- Regular desire to run for re-election
- Willingness to agree to disagree, when necessary, and move on

Audience: Local media (not including social media)

Reasonable trust target: Understanding of the issues, and slant-free reporting for most stories

Evidence would include:

- Interest in learning the background on issues
- Willingness to understand the basics of school decision-making, funding, etc.
- Balanced use of quotes and themes on stories dealing with contentious issues

# Audience: Social media

Reasonable trust target: Accuracy and fairness

Evidence would include:

- Minimal emotions in postings
- Correct information (or having incorrect information addressed by others on the site)
- Some positive chatter, advanced by several participants

# Audience: Students and recent alumni

Reasonable trust target: General advocacy  
and school spirit

Evidence would include:

- Attendance at school events
- Signing up for committees
- Wearing of school “gear”

# Audience: Long-term alumni

Reasonable trust target: General advocacy and extremely modest engagement

Evidence would include:

- Very occasional attendance at events
- Positive letters-to-the-editor
- Yard signs for ballot issues; willingness to work on ballot committees



# Audience: Key Opinion Leaders

Reasonable trust target: Interest and understanding, with general support on a majority of issues

Evidence would include:

- Willingness to accept a meeting invitation (or, better yet, soliciting meeting with district leader)
- Posing of questions that suggest interest and consideration of issues
- Willingness to say “Yes, I will support the district on this matter” a majority of times.

# The keys to building trust

1. Be honest about where you are today
2. Set reasonable, realistic “trust targets” for each audience
3. Work toward that target every day, with every action

# Thank you!

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