

What can we expect to get from this module?

In high-performing schools, everyone is “singing the same tune.” This requires a strong, well-articulated communication plan. With whom do we communicate? What messages are we sending and receiving? How do we communicate? What is the best way to refine our messages, identify key parties with whom to communicate, and choose the best methods? This module explores these questions at the individual and organizational levels as participants analyze and plan communication strategies that lead to improved student achievement.

On Day One, participants explore best practices in individual and organizational communications. They also learn to define and refine their key messages. On Day Two, they complete an analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses in communication, as well as those of the school as an organization. On Day Three, they work on listening skills, the most overlooked and most potentially powerful of all communication skills, and extend this learning to “challenging situations.” After Day Three, they leave with a homework assignment to work on specific communication skills at their schools.

Who is the training for? This module is designed to be taught to school teams. The teams should *minimally* include four to five people, including the principal, teacher leaders, and other administrators. It may also include parents, support staff, and district staff.

Other SREB Leadership Curriculum Modules that support this module. This module is most appropriate for those who have a strong background in data analysis, curriculum, assessment and instruction, and culture (SREB core modules). This is because it is very important to have a good foundation in best practices in these areas in order to have something of substance and value to communicate.

What will we have to do to get the most from this module? This is a three-day training, and (unlike many of the other leadership modules) it *can* be completed in three consecutive days, because homework assignments between days are minimal. Participants must commit to attending as a team, completing the prework, completing about 30 minutes of homework each evening, and completing the portfolio assignment.

Big Ideas in This Module

- *A good number of studies identify communication as a key leadership responsibility that, when combined with other leadership responsibilities, has a strong impact on student achievement. Successful school leaders encourage meaningful dialogue around student achievement.*
- *Although school leaders say that they believe communication is two-way, and that communication between the school and the community/parents are just as important as those within the school, they act as if they don't believe these things.*
- *The first step to effective communication is understanding what it is that you wish to communicate.*
- *Successful school leaders get all members of the school community focused on high expectations for all students. A high percentage of communications reflect this focus.*
- *Successful school leaders use a variety of venues (meetings, discussions, staff development activities, school visits) to make their points and to reach out and involve others.*
- *Successful school leaders have a clear, consistent message.*
- *Successful school leaders let members of the school community know what is going on—both good news and bad news.*
- *Everyone in the school community should be able to state (in their own words and in a way that is meaningful to them) the school's vision, goals, and key current priorities.*
- *Listening is arguably the most important communication skill.*

Module Design. This is a three-day workshop. It also includes an extensive prework assignment and brief homework assignments. Each section is described below.

Pework (about four hours). This extensive prework includes organizational communications surveys, personal communications survey, reading assignments, a communication log, and gathering of communication artifacts. Some assignments are completed as a group; others independently.

Introduction (one hour). Participants reflect on their communication goals as a springboard to introducing themselves to the group.

Communications in High-performing Schools (two hours). Participants learn communication practices that are associated with high-performing schools. Through a series of small-group activities, they identify these practices, as well as ones that detract from student achievement.

Key Messages (two hours, 30 minutes). Participants identify key messages that are important to student achievement. They also work on identifying which methods are best for various messages and various people/groups. Finally, they reflect on their own personal and organizational practices.

Day Two Introduction (20 minutes). Participants review content in a fast-paced, humorous activity.

What Good Communication Looks Like (two hours, 15 minutes). In study groups, participants identify characteristics of effective communication as presented in the prework readings, and then work in their teams to create a single list that combines the learning points from all the articles. They evaluate communications in several scenarios, and then they create their own communication plans.

Analyzing Personal and Organizational Communications (three hours). Participants work through a series of reflective team activities to identify strengths and weaknesses in organizational communications. Activities include an “exhibit” of their school’s communication artifacts, an analysis of survey results, and completion of the communications grid. They select a key message and identify strategies to communicate it, and then reflect on personal strengths and weaknesses.

Improvement Planning (45 minutes). Participants create a plan for improving their personal communication skills.

Day Three Introduction (30 minutes). Participants complete an energizing activity that helps them to see that a wide variety of characteristics and experiences influence their ability to understand others and the way they see others and the world.

Active Listening Skills (three hours, 15 minutes). Participants learn the fundamental skills required for excellence in communication: active listening skills. They focus on how good listening skills can enhance communication. For each active listening skill, they learn what it is and how to do it. This section includes six valuable role plays.

Dealing With Challenging Communication Situations (two hours). Participants synthesize information they have learned and apply it to situations that they can expect to face in their schools, such as parent conferences and team meetings.

Portfolio. The portfolio assessment for this module involves implementing a plan for improving school and individual communications.