2021 NSPRA Gold Medallion Award Entry

ENTRY TITLE
Leveraging Emotional Analysis to Inform Pandemic Communications

ENTRY CATEGORY
Public Engagement/Parental Involvement Campaign

ENTRANT INFORMATION
Bloomington Public Schools Community Relations Department
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TEAM MEMBERS (3)
Rick Kaufman, APR, Executive Director of Community Relations & Emergency Management
Kate Martin, Marketing & Communications Manager
Andrea Allis/Jaylen Lyles, Communications Specialist

DISTRICT SIZE/TYPE
PreK - 12 suburban public school district
Enrollment: 10,200
When the first cases of COVID-19 hit Minnesota in March 2020, students, staff and families were thrust into a state of anxiety, fear and distress. Within a week, public schools were closed by an emergency executive order, and mandated to provide distance learning for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

As we initiated planning for the 2020-21 school year, our student, parent and staff (stakeholder) surveys revealed high degrees of emotions, fears and anxiety, a divided community thanks to shifting state guidance that delayed state leaders in making a decision to end the distance learning mandate, and an erosion of trust in public schools. In short, the pandemic created a state of crisis among our key stakeholder groups.

We pressed the reset button on return to school planning to focus first on understanding our stakeholders’ human experience - their perspectives, emotions and needs - how they were managing their lives amidst the pandemic, and specifically their interactions with their children’s school, and the district. Our stakeholders’ human experience were revealed in a number of periodic surveys and virtual engagement events.

A parent and corporate research analyst introduced us to an innovative emotional analytics platform to extract emotions and themes from thousands of open-ended survey responses, not simply quantitative data. Use of “emotics” allowed us to more accurately measure our stakeholders’ experiences and emotional intensity. In turn, we could prioritize decisions, address concerns, increase engagement, and tailor communications to create an emotional connection.

From the start of the pandemic, all decision-making was driven by data, public health guidance and engaging staff and families with the goal of maintaining their trust and confidence. Understanding stakeholder emotions throughout the pandemic helped school and district leaders to plan and continually adapt a response that addressed the concerns and worries of our community.

Additionally, we aligned our communication strategies and messaging with the reality of how we make our stakeholders feel. The more we understand their frame of mind, we can communicate to them in a way they will hear.
Bloomington (MN) Public Schools is a diverse, suburban district of 10,200 EC-12 students, serving the City of Bloomington, Pop. 83,350.

We administered 11 stakeholder surveys (students, families and staff) eliciting responses and comments on communications (2020 and 2021), learning models, preferences for in-person, hybrid or remote (distance) learning, and related issues. Each stakeholder survey provided options for open-ended questions and responses.

In addition to quantitative analysis of the survey responses, we conducted qualitative analysis on the more than 2,000 responses to open-ended questions using the Adoreboard’s Emotics software. Adoreboard is a human experience framework for extracting emotions and themes to better understand survey responses. The approach is based on leading neurobiological scientists and research that indicates emotions drive more than 80 percent of our decision-making; logic makes up the rest.

Qualitative analysis activities:

- Measured the intensity of emotions across eight emotion indexes - joy, trust, interest, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger and apprehension. Three dominant themes from stakeholders emerged: 1) Family Concerns; 2) Social/Emotional; and 3) Health Concerns.

- Each dataset was measured on a scale of -100 to +100. The higher the number the greater the level of positive emotions, the lower the score the greater negative emotions. We used this “adorescore” to focus our key messages using the positive emotions to highlight our pandemic response work, and negative emotions to address stakeholder concerns.

- Conducted a SWOT and emotional intensity analysis to better understand key emotions our stakeholders felt when they engaged with school and district leaders. We relied on this data to coach leaders on best approaches to responding to and engaging stakeholders. Additionally, we aligned communication strategies and messaging with the reality of how we make our stakeholders feel.

The initial K-12 check-in family survey for families helped district teams target pandemic-related planning to respond to student and family needs and gaps, and tailor communications to meet the needs of stakeholders.

These key findings from our research influenced planning, decision-making and strategies:

- Non-English speaking families needed more direct engagement and communication
- Providing childcare for staff would help ease a primary concern with respect to returning to the classroom
● School and district leaders needed to be visible, even if virtually, to help provide a sense of consistency, and effective leadership.

● Messaging needed to be timely, transparent and truthful. In the early stages of the pandemic, messaging focused on education, our processes and calming initial fears. Additional survey findings required a shift to reassurance, provide self-care information, and more frequent updates on return to school procedures, and safety and mitigation strategies.

● The accessibility to a broad expanse of communication mediums created a fragmentation of noise (news and information) overload. The pandemic led to more social connectedness (e.g. video/zoom calls, social media, phone texting) as stakeholders had more time to “surf the net,” and less time to pay attention to messaging.

● COVID-19 information coming from employers (and employees) was seen as more credible than that provided by government and mainstream media. Public health guidance early on was a trusted source for a majority of stakeholders, but waned as the pandemic lingered. Key finding: Over communicate with employees; tell them what you want them to know and do.

● No factor had a bigger or more profound impact than social media. Social sharing was a cathartic release of emotions, especially with persons most connected to the crisis (note previous bullet). This led stakeholders to seek more information to gain a sense of personal control over how the pandemic was affecting their families, and a desire to restore personal balance.

**Surveys 2020-21**

04.02.2020 COVID Communications - parents, staff
04.26.2020 K-12 Check-in - parents
05.19.2020 Fall Intent to Return - staff
05.19.2020 School Reintroduction - parents
06.04.2020 K-12 Follow-up - parents
07.09.2020 Fall Intent to Return - staff
08.06.2020 Learning Model Preference - parents
09.24.2020 Elementary Hybrid Learning Preference - parents
12.22.2020 Elementary and ELS Learning Model Preference - parents
02.09.2021 Secondary Hybrid Shift Preference - parents
06.02.2021 Communications follow-up - parents
The Bloomington Public Schools COVID-19 Response and Communications Team was created in early March 2020 by the Superintendent of Schools. The team, under the direction of two COVID-19 Coordinators - Executive Director of Community Relations and Emergency Management, and Director of Health Services - was charged with coordinating the overall district response to the pandemic, including mitigation strategies, public awareness and communication, and other COVID related initiatives. The team consists of members of districts Community Relations and Health Services teams.

The community relations team - Manager of Marketing and Communications, and Communication Specialist - served a critical function in all pandemic response planning and decision-making matters, including the development of a comprehensive communications plan for key stakeholder groups, and two one-year response plans Return to Learn Plan (2020-21) and Refocus and Reconnect Plan (2021-22).

The community relations team’s overriding goal and work focused on the importance of engaging families and staff to understand their needs and concerns as decisions were made.

The goals of the Return to Learn Communications Plan were to inform and educate stakeholders in a timely manner, including:

1. BPS plans for returning to school (DL, Hybrid or Traditional), including learning model shifts due to COVID-19 impacts.
2. Frequent reminders of learning, technology and mental health support available to students, staff and families.
3. Updates on MDH and CDC’s guidelines as they pertain to school programs and the 2020-21 school year.
Central to the plan to inform, educate and engage stakeholders was ensuring students, families and staff had a voice in decision-making around all aspects of the district’s educational learning models, layered prevention strategies, and operational plans.

In addition to a robust communications plan that provided weekly parent/caregiver messages, and the internal e-newsletter, a series of events and activities were developed to meet the objectives of informing, educating, engaging and gathering feedback.

Communications
Uncertainty, fear and overwhelmed stakeholders required streamlined district communications.

Communications tactics were designed in response to these emotions and to offer a sense of consistency and predictability.

- A dedicated web page served as a “one-stop” location for ongoing updates, guidance, resources and communications archive. The page transitioned to the Reconnect and Refocus site for the 2021-22 school year.
- Key communications pieces included a Staff Preparedness Guide and Return to Learn Guide
- Staff asked to be informed earlier in the week, Inside Page shifted from Thursday to Tuesday.
- We communicated weekly COVID-19 updates to parents via email, text and voice.
- Social media was reserved as a platform to share good news and positive stories. We intentionally refrained from using SM as a tool for pandemic communications.
- Managed a centralized email for questions and feedback to allow for personalized responses.
- Leaders responded by phone rather than email, a strategy that helped maintain personal relationships with staff and families at a time of physical isolation.

Community Engagement
A key focus of our planning was creating a virtual outreach format to maintain the trust of parents and foster personal connections. We created a series of “live” virtual community engagement events, each with an electronic form provided in advance for questions. Reviewing submitted questions in advance provided a barometer of community emotions around often controversial topics.

Research indicated our non-English speaking families needed more direct outreach. The community relations team collaborated with the district’s educational equity team to better serve these families. We created a format for the events to be simulcast in English, Spanish and Somali. With technical support from our local education cable TV and staff language liaisons who interpreted the 90-minute program, the format improved our non-English speaking families’ access to the COVID-19 updates and return to school planning. In all, six virtual community engagement events were held.
Evaluation

When faced with uncertainty, our students, families and staff looked to the district to provide transparent and consistent information. Throughout the pandemic, stakeholder reaction to and support of district decisions was often divided but in general the district held the community’s strong support.

Using Adoreboard’s emotional analysis informed school and district leaders to be highly sensitive and empathetic to stakeholder concerns in planning, decision-making and communications. We found when we were mindful of our respective stakeholders’ emotional state and what they were experiencing, the more receptive they were to receiving information and responding. Our team was instrumental in using the emotional analysis as a tool to inform and educate leaders, specifically to make a connection between their “stakeholders’ experience” and our decisions. The more informed we were of what our stakeholders were saying, thinking and feeling, the more our leaders were connected with their parents and staff.

The Adorescores increased significantly from a -18 (poor) to +29 (good) from surveys we conducted in 2020 to 2021. This was an indication that our stakeholders responded more positively based on their emotions improving over time, and less negative intensity found in their responses.

In a June 2020 School Reintroduction survey of all BPS households, 26 percent out of 3,791 responses favored a fully online option for students returning to school in the Fall. New Code Academy is the district’s K-12 online school, certified by the Minnesota Department of Education as an online provider. Building on several years of success with online classes at the high school level, the school expanded during the pandemic. Program development was accelerated in response to parent’s desire for a permanent online option when the district began shifting from distance learning to hybrid and returning to in-person learning. 2021-22 enrollment is 432, including 218 students in K-6; 111 middle school students and 103 high school students.
Enrollment gains reflected the trust and confidence our community had in the district, as revealed in the January 2022 community survey. While 2021 projections indicated a continuing decline, enrollment surpassed projections. Families returned when we could again offer in-person learning, or they enrolled in our new K-12 online school which also attracted new out-of-district students.

### Enrollment Information Summary - 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oct. 1 2020</th>
<th>Oct. 1 2021</th>
<th>Projected 2021</th>
<th>Diff. from Projected</th>
<th>Diff. from Last Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GR. K-5</td>
<td>3,993</td>
<td>4,032</td>
<td>3,998</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>GR. 6-8</td>
<td>2,280</td>
<td>2,270</td>
<td>2,197</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>GR. 9-12</td>
<td>3,372</td>
<td>3,503</td>
<td>3,393</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>9,645</td>
<td>9,805</td>
<td>9,588</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community Survey 2022

Community feedback represents a key source of information to guide decision-making. In addition to the 11 pandemic-related surveys conducted over the past two years, we sought to gather a broader community perspective on the state of Bloomington Public Schools as we move to the endemic phase of COVID-19.

We commissioned the Morris Leatherman Group to conduct a community survey to gain insights into a larger stakeholders view of our school district’s strengths and opportunities for improvement. Telephone interviews of 400 random sample Bloomington households were conducted between Jan. 31-Feb. 11, 2022. An additional survey of 400 random sample of parent/caregiver households was also conducted at the same time. The survey was projectable within +/- 5.0 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.

Key findings relevant to this entry include the following:

- **Community: 75% / Parents: 81% approved of the District’s handling of the pandemic (This 5-1 favorable ratio compares to the metro norm of 3-1)**
- **Community: 81% / Parents: 92% trust the district to do right by students (Metro Norm: 70%)**
- **Community: 77% / Parents: 88% believe the District does a good job of involving stakeholders in decisions about the school**
- **Community: 83% / Parents: 92% believe the District does a good job of communication (Metro Norm: 73%)**
- **Community: 58% / Parents: 77% satisfied with District’s overall decision-making**
  - Most favorable decisions: COVID (20% agree / 6% disagree) and mask guidance (14% agree / 2% disagree)
Supporting Material

Staff COVID-19 Preparedness Plan - Ongoing updates as guidance changed.

Return to Learn Guide for families and staff - Ongoing updates throughout the pandemic
Emotional Analysis for planning and communications

Understanding EMOTIONS

- Comments: 1284
- Themes: 92
- Subtopics: 509
- Adored: 32%
- Ignored: 32%
- Floored: 37%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Low Intensity</th>
<th>Medium Intensity</th>
<th>High Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Admiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Amazement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Anticipation</td>
<td>Vigilance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Pensiveness</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td>Loathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Annoyance</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Rage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Terror</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closing the Emotional Experience Gap

HIGH ACTIVATION EMOTIONS
- Ecstasy
- Vigilance
- Rage
- Loathing

MEDIUM ACTIVATION EMOTIONS
- Joy
- Anticipation
- Anger
- Fear

LOW ACTIVATION EMOTIONS
- Serenity
- Interest
- Acceptance
- Boredom
- Surprise
In all, five virtual community engagement events were held:

- July 14, 2020 - Return to School Plans
- Aug. 4, 2020 - Return to Learn Planning
- Aug. 27, 2020 - Shift: Start School in Distance Learning
- Jan. 12, 2021 - Elementary Model Shift
- March 2, 2021 - Secondary Model Movement
- Aug. 25, 2021 - Reconnect & Refocus
Graphics to help convey decision-making and model shifts

BPS School Models 20-21

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DASHBOARD: Key Readiness Indicators - Traditional Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health and Safety - Building/Classroom Preparation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health and Safety - State Guidance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Learning - Staffing Coverage</td>
<td></td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Learning - Programming</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and District Operations - Transportation and Meal Services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and District Operations - Childcare</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and District Operations - Communications</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting All Learners</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL and Mental Health Supports</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Elementary Schools

**ALL**

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<th>F</th>
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</thead>
</table>

- Focus on **CONNECTION & COMMUNITY** building.
- Planning for **STRUCTURE & CONSISTENCY** in our classrooms.
- We’ll take time to **RESET & REFOCUS** as students return from various school experiences.
- Students will return to school at varied academic levels. This is **NATURAL & EXPECTED**.
- Teachers will **DIFFERENTIATE** their instruction to reach students at their instructional levels.
- **IN PERSON** learning is priority. Hybrid & distance learning are not an option.
- Students out with illness, are COVID positive or quarantined:
  - Log into Seesaw each day to check for classwork
  - Parents & students can communicate directly with the classroom teacher via Seesaw

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**NEW CODE ACADEMY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Active Brain Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group Math</td>
<td>Whole Group Interdisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Math Stations</td>
<td>Differentiated Guided Reading &amp; Writing Stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group Read Aloud</td>
<td>Closing Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists (Art, Music, or PE)</td>
<td>1:1 Student and Family Check-ins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NewCodeAcademy.org
### MS Hybrid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>Th</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Home]</td>
<td>![School]</td>
<td>![Remote Learning]</td>
<td>![Live Virtual Learning]</td>
<td>![In Person Enhanced Supports]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Hybrid Cohort 1**
- **Hybrid Cohort 2**

### Distance Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>![School]</th>
<th>![Remote Learning]</th>
<th>![Live Virtual Learning]</th>
<th>![In Person Enhanced Supports]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Secondary Schools

**ALL**

- Excited to welcome back students to in-person, five days per week
- Planning for consistency in our classrooms this year
- No hybrid or distance learning (including recording & livestreaming) this year
- Plan is for students out with COVID positive, or required to quarantine is:
  - Students have access to their courses in Canvas
  - Students should connect with teachers for clarification on assignments via email
  - Support staff added to assist students
- Mental health support focus
Graphics to reassure parents schools are providing in-school reminders for students

**Mask up!  Back up!  Wash up!**

Providing meals during distance learning and during summer break filled a need for families who were helping students learn at home

**Summer Grab and Go Meals**

FOR ALL BLOOMINGTON STUDENTS AGES 18 AND YOUNGER

**Monday - Friday**

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.  
Kennedy High School
  • through Aug. 14

11:30 a.m. - Noon  
Smith Park
  • through Aug. 14

ALL SITES CLOSED JULY 3

• Pre-packaged meals include a hot lunch and a cold breakfast for the next day.

• Meals are delivered to vehicles or individuals while taking appropriate health and social distancing precautions.

• Students do not need to be present for parents to pick up meals for them. Students may also pick up meals without a parent present.