Research: The Shawnee Mission Education Foundation, which supports the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD), regularly hosts a Distinguished Leaders Speaker Series. It is a fundraiser focused on thought-provoking conversation related to education. In light of the pandemic, the Foundation sought help from the Communications Team in producing a video event for the series, highlighting 2021 seniors. It was a way to help community members learn of the experience and achievements of SMSD students. Engagement with Board members, district administrators, and supporters determined there would be strong interest in the community to see this topic highlighted. The Foundation sought to exceed previous fundraising of about $23,000, and exceed previous attendance of a couple of hundred attendees. The team looked at models of televised virtual fundraisers to develop a plan. The collaborative teams set the goal to feature seniors from every high school sharing their school experience in their own voice.

Analysis/Planning Foundation and communications staff used direct email to prompt student video entries to be included. Consulting with Foundation Board members and Foundation staff, the Communications selected dozens of seniors to be featured. A variety of students were selected who represented all high schools, the diversity that exists within schools, and a wide range of experiences. An in-house videography team edited student submissions. The Communications Team also selected three students to feature in standout vignettes. To highlight the wide range of the senior class, the Communications team also included student visual artwork, filmed a musical performance (with necessary copyright), and highlighted a student’s original poem. The team made sure the students' stories and accomplishments connected to the district’s strategic plan objective: that every student will have a personalized learning plan that prepares them for college and career with the interpersonal skills they need for life success.

Communication/Implementation In addition to compiling the video, the team worked with student hosts and Foundation honorary hosts to provide scripted introductions. The event was promoted as “The Distinguished Leaders Speaker Series: Senior Portraits.” The Communications team created a promotional image and encouraged members in the community to watch live and on-demand through direct e-mails, the district and foundation website, personal invitations, a hyperlocal newspaper column, and on social media. The Foundation shared invitations and opportunities to donate through their network of supporters and parents.

Evaluation: This Distinguished Leaders Speaker Series event raised $43,246 for the Foundation. This was $20,000 more than previously raised. The Foundation staff expressed gratitude for support in well exceeding their goal. The Communications Team achieved the goal of featuring students from every high school, including the district’s alternative high school. Facebook live viewership reached 1,190. This well surpassed the Foundation’s previous attendance in previous years, achieving a set goal. Anecdotally, Foundation Board members, administrators, and members of the Class of 2021 thanked the Foundation and Communications team for the production. Many in the community who attended graduations expressed gratitude for this video which told the story of students that are often not known as they walk across the stage at graduation. The range of stories told of student achievement in a traditional academic sense, but also brought light to what many students overcame in order to graduate.
Support Materials

Watch the Distinguished Leaders Speaker Series:

Click here to view the Distinguished Leaders Senior Portraits: https://youtu.be/9Bxl8YIvpus

Promotional Image
Sample of Promotional Text
Promotion in local online newspaper (Also featured on the district website, Facebook, Twitter, and direct e-mailed to all staff and families through SMSD accounts and Foundation accounts).