NSPRA Golden Achievement Award: Welcome Back Tour 2021-22

Overview
The Welcome Back Tour 2021-22 was an opportunity for San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) employees to mingle safely with co-workers and connect with the leadership team as they celebrated the start of the 2021-22 school and fiscal years. It was also a chance for the leadership team to show its appreciation for the employees and their hard work throughout the pandemic.

Research and Planning
We started the strategic process with research, using data from employee surveys about communication as well as qualitative feedback gathered during previous efforts. Throughout the planning process we made sure to tie the work to one of our Board of Education goals (“Maximize human and operational resources to strengthen the organizational culture of SDCOE”) as well as an internal communications and employee engagement communication plan. Two goals in the communication plan were especially important to this planning: “SDCOE’s workforce is informed, engaged, and feels a connection with co-workers and the students we serve, supporting the recruiting and retention of outstanding employees;” and “employees feel heard and valued by the superintendent and other leaders with opportunities for meaningful two-way communication.” Through research, we learned that employees wanted more engagement activities and additional chances to interact with leadership. We also learned that that many employees at sites other than the main SDCOE campus often felt left out in the past with events. Nearly half of our employees work at sites other than the main campus, so we used this data to focus our goal on making sure we planned an event that all employees could participate in. During the planning stage, we worked with principals, program directors, and managers to ensure that employees at all the worksites and those working remotely knew how they could participate.

Implementation
To boost engagement, connection, and understanding of SDCOE’s mission and goals, members of the leadership team visited eight worksites across the county in a festively decorated school bus along with a shaved ice truck over two days in August. Employees working remotely were invited to visit whichever administrative site was most convenient for them. Employees congregated at each of the sites, as the school bus and shaved ice truck pulled up. The leadership team then greeted the crowd and introduced themselves before the superintendent gave a brief inspirational school-year kickoff message. Employees were then able to either see what they missed or relive the event through photos, a video, and a newsletter feature that were shared afterward.

Evaluation
There were two overarching goals we set for this event: to have at least 300 employees participate and to ensure that most of the people who participated were those who couldn’t participate in similar events in the past. Our numbers far exceeded these goals. We estimated that 500 employees participated, nearly double our goal and more than double the amount that had participated in other in-person events in the past. Of those approximately 500 employees, more than 400 of them were at sites other than our main campus, far exceeding our goal of having at least half of them from other sites. The project cost $4,120, which is less than a previous event that reached fewer employees. One participant said: “That was such a creative way to kick off the school year. Thank you for including us in the planning proactively. Your actions made my remote team feel part of the larger organization.” Additional evaluation will be conducted as part of our annual internal communication survey.
Video produced during the event: https://stream1.sdcoe.net/wc/backtoschool090321/
IN THIS ISSUE:

- Launching a new binational school
- Bringing JCCS students to Cuyamaca Outdoor School
- Arts partnership expands opportunities for students
- Engaging in real-world building experiences
- Distributing personal protective equipment