

**AN EXAMINATION OF K- 12 SUPERINTENDENTS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF  
MANAGING THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

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# **AN EXAMINATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON MANAGING THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

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The premise of this study was to determine if Pennsylvania superintendents understand the fundamental media relations competencies as those competencies relate to their leadership roles and if current superintendents feel as if they are well equipped to handle the demands of a media relations program in their districts. Each of these competencies requires a set of skills in order to execute a media relations program for an entire organization. Perception surveys were distributed to 121 superintendents from a convenience sample. They responded to familiarity, familiarity origin (how they became familiar), and frequency of use for each competency. Forty-four survey respondents offered feedback that conveyed their familiarity with the competencies came from “personal experience” and not from a formal training format. Based on the research and the data gathered, the recommendation of establishing a formal training response is needed in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania both to prepare future leaders and to close the learning gap within the group of current district leaders and those who have already completed superintendent training programs.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This study presents the current research on communications expectations for school superintendents, and within the scope of communications, explains how media relations is a part of an overall communications skillset. The research presents a standard set of established competencies presented by Kowalski (2011) and supported by additional research. The competencies support the expectations of superintendents in Pennsylvania to have these skills based on the assessment system used for superintendent certification in the Commonwealth (Educational Testing Services, 2013). The literature establishes a need for additional information regarding superintendents' perceptions on preparedness to manage interactions with the mainstream media for their districts.

The dissertation research focused on the current literature related to communications, media relations, expectations of superintendents as spokespeople for their districts, the methods and study of these perceptions, and the implications and reflections on the research conducted.

Superintendents in Western Pennsylvania assessed themselves on the perceptions of their skill level to use or implement these competencies by using a survey. The survey data were analyzed to understand current Pennsylvania superintendents' perceptions of familiarity with each competency, the frequency of use of each competency, and where superintendents who feel proficient in the competencies have received training.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of literature shows that communication is an essential skill for school superintendents. In addition to communication with the community and employees, the literature states that superintendents must also be deft communicators with the media (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005 Kowalski, 2011; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). The literature is written on a national level with implications for Pennsylvania superintendents and shows that media relations skills such as writing press releases, giving interviews, and coaching staff, faculty, and community on communicating with the media is all within the scope of the superintendency (National School Public Relations Association, 2017).

#### **2.1.1 How this literature review is organized**

The literature review is organized into sections that start with the broad definitions of communications in the superintendency and the definition of media relations within the context of K-12 education. The review narrows into the specifics of this study by explaining the expectations of the superintendent when handling media relations and the media relations standards for superintendency in Pennsylvania using national and other states' standards.

## **2.2 KEY TERMS USED IN THE FIELD**

The National School Public Relations Association recommends public relations programs as part of running a school district and identifies media relations as one part of that program. The NSPRA defines media relations as someone who, “writes news releases for all local newspapers/TV/radio; works to get media coverage of school district news, [and] serves as the media's liaison with the school district” (National School Public Relations Association, 2017). However, in the larger context of communications, the terms below are defined by the more widely accepted context of general media relations, public relations, and communications.

### **Communications**

While school communications may seem specific, Kowalski's (2011) explanation offers a broader definition:

Communication is the act that people use to give meaning to their organizational lives by sharing perceptions of reality. A negotiated order evolves from both internal and external interactions among individuals and groups, and this interplay occurs in the informal as well as the formal organization. (p. 21)

The definition, though, still applies to the K-12 educational environment when establishing a communications plan for districts and skillset for superintendents.

### **Public relations**

“At its core, public relations is about influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across a myriad of platforms in order to shape and frame the public perception of an organization” (Public Relations Society of America, 2017, para. 4). Within the context of this paper, public relations encompasses media relations.

## **Media relations**

According to Ron Smith, a consultant and practitioner in public relations, “Media relations is a significant element of the wider field of public relations. It involves time-honored approaches to the relationship between an organization and the media, amid new opportunities and new challenges associated with the emerging media” (2017, para. 1). The emphasis is that media relations is part of a larger context of public relations and deals specifically with the established media.

## **Media**

The media is defined as traditional models of news media, the press, or broadcasting – television, radio, and print (which could mean Internet) – with professionally trained journalists. The literature review is limited only to these types of interactions, since the broader category of social media includes more than just trained journalists, and according to a Pew Research study (2016), the general population gives significantly more credence to reporting from local and national news than social media.

## **Internal and external communications**

As shown in the definitions above, internal and external audiences and exchanges are a part of communications. Internal is defined as those people within the organization and external is defined as anyone outside of the organization (Kowalski, 2011).

## **2.3 COMMUNICATIONS AS A KEY ROLE FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT**

Kowalski (2005) argues that communications in school administration has increased in importance since 1980. As the leader of the leaders, the school superintendent is not exempt

from an increase in importance of communications as part of the job. Porterfield and Carnes (2014) stress that the changing role of the school leaders incites a necessity to adapt to a changing society, which has a communications environment changing as quickly as the next new phone or tablet is released. Therefore, even experienced superintendents must adapt to the changing needs of communication in the educational environments that they are leading and understand what impact these changes have on their districts.

Being a district leader who can communicate openly and honestly with community, parents, employees, and students will enhance the trust and relationships needed to make changes and bring schools into the future. Porterfield and Carnes (2014) see specific roles and responsibilities of the superintendency as crucial to communicating that a leader is trustworthy and open with communications. The superintendent must act as coach, caring listener, truth teller, risk taker, storyteller, and relationship builder. The onus of all of the “jobs” is on the chief school leaders in order to “create a sturdy network of support for their schools and districts” (p. 14). This support is integral for pushing a school district forward in terms of overall improvements and student achievement.

Superintendents perform these jobs day in and day out, which leads to building trusting relationships with all parties. As mentioned, the audiences who interact with the superintendent or the schools are the ones who will need to trust the districts and the superintendents. Part of establishing this trust as a leader is by building relationships within and outside of the organization through strategic communications (Grunig & Grunig, 2011, p. 23). Including internal and external communications plans as part of the development, a well-rounded organizational communications plan will help address all audiences of the plan. Internal plans affect all members of that organization who are “in-house,” while external plans focus

specifically on the communications with people and organizations outside of the school district. Kowalski (2011) explains that creating a plan for communications is only one part of executing internal and external communications. He defines the totality of communications as school public relations. Kowalski (2011) adds that defining the meaning of public relations within the district – deliberate, planned, performance, public interest, two-way communication, and management function – will help in attaining the goals of the desired communication. When a public relations plan is developed in a district, it becomes central to the district as a whole and is important beyond crisis situations. The public relations plans should be a continuous part of the school district's day-to-day operations as well as with strategic thinking and planning.

## **2.4 SUPERINTENDENTS AS COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST**

The superintendent, in most cases, will be the person who the media seeks when looking for a statement or getting a spokesperson for the district. Their role is also as a planner of communications, internal and external, for their districts. As crucial as communications planning is in a school district, budgeting across districts may impede the hiring of a communications specialist or even contracting with a public relations firm in order to support a superintendent who may not have either the time or the experience in handling media inquiries. With finite funding and research showing that the teachers have the largest impact on student achievement, resources for “ancillary” services to the district are limited if not nonexistent, and school boards may be reluctant to carry the cost of something that, on the surface, appears to have little or no impact on student achievement.

According to the American Association of School Administration, in 2006-2007, school districts allocated 28.8% of the budget to funding that was not directly related to student achievement (operations and administration). In Pennsylvania, non-instructional uses go down to 14.1% (Commonwealth Foundation for Public Policy Alternatives, 2013). With the average school district having a budget of roughly \$59 million, which would equate to a budget of \$8 million for non-instructional uses, facilities, and other financing uses, that leaves very little for what could be considered ancillary services. In smaller districts, this \$8 million could go down to \$1 million or less, meaning that there is no room for communication specialists or even the ability to contract in time of crisis. What this implies for superintendents is that they need to be cognizant that their role is one of chief communicator for the district. Since the budgeting in many Pennsylvania districts is not supportive of having this role, the sole responsibility of understanding when and how to use strategic communications within a school district falls entirely on the superintendent.

Strategic communications within a district is a carefully planned process, and one that takes expertise outside of a basic understanding of general communications. Small-district superintendents may be the only “expert” on staff, particularly in Pennsylvania. Veltman (2003) spoke to a specific district in her research that developed a communications plan and the need for superintendents to understand communications strategies for their districts. Veltman (2003) detailed the importance for communications throughout the district, and the specificity of each type of communication requires strategic planning to enhance the district’s support among stakeholders. However, Veltman (2003) recommended hiring two communications experts for the California district she researched. With its more than 10,000 students, it eclipses most Pennsylvania districts. This recommendation demonstrates why (particularly in Pennsylvania

where districts are much smaller and may not have the resources to hire a communications specialist) the superintendent must possess communications skills and strategic planning for communications.

As the chief communications strategists, superintendents will need to impress upon their boards and staff the importance of a consistent, deliberate, and organized communications strategy. In addition to communications planning, Howard and Mathews (2013) recommended that superintendents establish a communications policy within the organization:

The communications policy not only determines the content of the media and the responsibilities of the communications professional, it also provides guidelines on the way the leadership on all levels must deal with communications to ensure engaged internal and external stakeholders. (p. 3)

The superintendent leads policy changes through the board. Not only must superintendents know how to establish a communications policy, but they must also know how to analyze a current one and recommend changes if necessary and portray the importance and necessity of the recommended changes to the school board.

While much of a communications plan is considered “off-stage” or behind closed doors, because it requires careful planning, the other part is the “on-stage” appearances that deliver the carefully planned messages. As the chief communicator for the district, the superintendent is the positive spokesperson and head of marketing for the district. Creating a public image of the school and what the district stands for is essential to communications. Districts have visions and missions that they strive toward achieving, and these messages must be communicated effectively in order for them to be considered crucial to the community. The district must establish a reputation that community members can associate with positive, worthwhile, and

trustworthy transactions and ultimately monies-spent. This aspect of the communications plan is what can help a district stay ahead of any negative press or have a favorable presence in the community.

When public opinion about our school is negative, when editorials and op-ed pieces in the local press decry school policy and practice, it is harder to persuade the city council, the county board of supervisors, and the taxpayers to vote monies for new and expanding programs. The first reason schools should care is our own fiscal bottom line. (Porterfield & Carnes, 2014, p. 96)

Without an initial positive image of the schools, any subsequent action that might cause either disagreement within the community or a question of the current reputation will result in a damaging blow to the reputation and potentially critical funding for students. However, as Porterfield and Carnes (2014) contend, “You can’t market a poor product, (and) … you can’t market a poorly aligned product” (p. 97). Therefore, superintendents must also be chief marketers of their school districts.

This idea of having a communications plan that markets the school is newer to K-12 education. Pennsylvania schools having to pay for positive press, marketing, or even advertising has only been around since charter schools have started in Pennsylvania in 1997. If the charter schools are using monies to advertise their programs, public schools now have legitimate competition and must adapt to this type of market. A study by the Pennsylvania School Board Association (2016) found that of the 134 charter schools that responded to the request for information, 127 of them spent at least some money on advertising, or creating a positive image of their schools. The amount spent per child on advertising varied from \$42 per student to more than \$75 per student. One charter school stated that they spent more than 1% of total

expenditures on advertising. It is crucial that superintendents understand the necessity for positive-image creating, relationships with media, and organized communications plans in order to compete in a now competitive K-12 education market.

#### **2.4.1 The role of social media**

Social media has become an important part of an overall communications strategy for school districts. Cox and McLeod (2014) found that the use of social media is now considered an expectation for district leaders, allows for transparency, and allows for “more immediate and more frequent interactions between school superintendents and their stakeholders” (p. 858). While anyone can participate in social media, trained journalists are also up against the deadlines created by this more immediate response platform.

Social media has also impacted the work of journalists. As Porterfield and Carnes (2014) explain, social media posts do not require fact-checking or corrections from an editor. A story can build, take on a life of its own, and create an impression of the district without credibility or the ability to correct incorrect facts. The immediacy required by the journalists means that they are the ones making the critical decisions as to what is credible, and to have a superintendent’s or district’s official perspective to balance that, would only help them create a more accurate picture of the story.

Social media has also repurposed the traditional journalist. Newton (2009) explains that the journalists are increasingly using their audiences to help tell a story. While he found that social media’s impact on journalism was great, he also concluded that:

Social media, blogs and UGC [user-generated content] are not replacing journalism, but they are creating an important extra layer of information and

diverse opinion. Most people are still happy to rely on mainstream news organisations to sort fact from fiction and serve up a filtered view, but they are increasingly engaged by this information, particularly when recommended by friends or another trusted source. (p. 2)

What this conclusion means for superintendents is that not only is it important for the district leader to understand the impact of social media and how it impacts traditional media, but that every person in their organization has the power and ability to become a contributing factor to a news story. Educators and district leaders are as much a part of the community as anyone else, and they must also understand that they can be considered a “trusted source” when it comes to proliferating information regarding the district or newsworthy events.

## **2.5 SUPERINTENDENTS AS MEDIA RELATIONS SPECIALISTS**

Superintendents are charged with every facet of education – instruction, leading, safety, and so much more. A common thread that can bring all of these pieces together is being a strong communications strategist who appreciates the importance of using popular communications tools – including the media – as a part of a strategy. With the media still recognized as the most used source for information (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016), superintendents need to use this resource to control the information flow to and from their districts. With the immediacy of information flow (accurate or inaccurate), the public can become on-the-scene reporter quicker than a news station. “The goals of the school public relations team were to get the story right, get it out first, and control the damage. All good goals, but these days often not

possible. Everyone can now be their own reporter” (Porterfield & Carnes, 2014, p. 107). Videos and pictures have become the norm when dealing with newsworthy situations, but now these videos and pictures can come from anyone, anywhere. As a trusted source of information, the ability for superintendents to understand and manage the role of the media within the context of their districts is critical.

The news media are still people, and knowing how to build relationships with this type of professional is crucial to managing the media. As Jay Mathews, the Washington Post education reporter, has explained to educational leaders, “You may not let me in your building, but I am already in your schools. All I have to do is stand across the street when school dismisses, and I can find out what is going on” (Porterfield & Carnes, 2014, p. 110). However, without a relationship built with the media, the reporter has only one side of the story, and “no comment” does not help with clarifying the situation or building a trusting relationship with the community. Superintendents must understand the importance of cultivating relationships with the media in order to be portrayed as a reliable and trustworthy voice of education when speaking about their districts or other educational issues.

The media is still seen as the most reliable source of information (Mitchell et al., 2016), so superintendents must capitalize on this in order to relay any messaging. As much as social media has taken over as a source of information – biases or not – the Pew Research Center released data showing that most Americans still get their regular news from television. While print journalism readership has dropped in the younger age brackets, overall, two in 10 adults still get their news regularly from newspapers and almost 60 percent get their news from television (Mitchell et al., 2016). School superintendents must understand the impact that working with news outlets can have on their organizations. The news media’s audience is still

larger than the audiences of other sources of information, and the ability to work with news outlets will only enhance the district's image in external communications.

Although media relations should not be an "only-in-times-of-crisis expertise," superintendents who utilize and create effective school crisis plans rely on communications as part of these plans. Included in these communications plans is an essential step of notifying the media of the events that occurred or are occurring within the district. With effective media relations, administrators make the first move to build a relationship with the local media and when a crisis occurs, the media is prepared to cover the event or issue with an already established background of information from which to pull. Kowalski (2011) states, "Poor or nonexistent relationships between administrators and journalists intensify tensions that surround unpleasant situations when administrators must respond to criticism or a crisis situation" (p. 171). In essence, media relations is like a savings account. The more deposited into the account, the better off the account holder will be when a time of need comes around. "Banking" these established relationships with the media will cushion a blow that may have come up if the relationship were not there.

Crisis or not, superintendents must continually engage with media representatives. Districts and schools can be strategic with these interactions to enhance the relationship between themselves and the media. As part of a public relations plan, one of the most important tasks is determining who serves as the point of contact for media inquiries. Kowalski (2011) notes, "In districts without a PR specialist, the last duty almost always falls on superintendents and principals. Reporters usually contact them first when they need information" (p.175). Because the superintendent may not be the most informed person on the topic, communications must occur between all members of the district in order for the superintendent to be able to represent

the district on a topic. This communications issue of superintendent not holding all of the knowledge can be resolved by preparing others within the district to be able to speak on topics that are known to them, meaning the superintendent then becomes communications trainer. Kowalski (2011) points out that having a board member as spokesperson is ill advised, but that they should be prepared to give an interview should that need arise. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to have spokespeople prepared. Having an administrator who owns the communications is as important as the plan itself, because this person become the point of contact or spokesperson if necessary.

Unless a district has a public relations or communications coordinator, the sole responsibility of media relations belongs to the district superintendent. Media relations within a district is more than just writing a press release; knowing how to write a release along with what makes something newsworthy is what will help get the district coverage.

## **2.6 SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TRAINING IN MEDIA RELATIONS**

While there is plenty of research to support training school administration and superintendents in communications as a whole, there is little evidence that possessing the skills of media relations as part of communications has been established as a core competency in superintendent preparation programs. Lumetta, Thomas, and Vendelin (2014) argued that superintendents are the primary communicators in their districts. However, their research also showed that the training of superintendents on communications in the position is inconsistent across the country.

Lumetta et al. (2014) researched states' policies and what superintendents needed to be successful in communications, and then developed communications standards and indicators to

articulate what a superintendent would need to be an effective communicator as the leader of the district. The standards are listed below.

Standard #1: In effective school district public relations, superintendents are the chief communicators in a district (Ascough, 2011).

Standard #2: With effective preparation in the area of communication, superintendents should be equipped to communicate with stakeholders: internal and external public (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Standard #3: In regards to effective communication in school public relations, it is crucial for the superintendents to work in the political arena and possess the necessary skills to navigate the national, state, and local political landscapes (AASA Standard 2, 1993).

Using these standards, Lumetta et al. (2014) studied policies across the country to determine if superintendents were trained, had required professional development, or if the training was part of the education programs for the certifications. The analysis included all 50 states, but 19 states were eliminated altogether based on having no information on standards or indicators. Twenty states were included in the policy study based on those states having enough information on standards that could be analyzed. Another 11 states mentioned in the study have some standards for communications in the superintendency, but the state did not provide enough information for the researchers to analyze the standards. The researchers' analysis showed the disparities across the United States in communications standards used for superintendent training and preparation.

## **2.7 MEDIA RELATIONS SKILLS NEEDED AS SUPERINTENDENT**

As discussed earlier in this paper, building a relationship with the local media is an essential piece of media relations in general, but it is also important for the role of superintendent. Kowalski (2011) contends that for school leaders to communicate effectively and continually with the community, a relationship must exist; mutual respect between the schools and media representatives is indispensable. In addition to building this relationship, there are a number of competencies recommended for superintendents to have a satisfactory understanding of media relations.

As the district communications expert, the superintendent must understand each part of the communications program for the district. Part of communications is media relations. Howard and Mathews (2013) endorses media relations skills for communications experts or communications managers. Their approach to media relations breaks down media relations into subcategories – from spokesperson to ethics to crisis planning. Kowalski (2011) specifically delves into media relations for school districts and superintendents. While Kowalski (2011) defines each competency, they are all supported by research of general media relations as shown below within each competency. The following information is organized according to the competencies cited by Kowalski (2011).

### **2.7.1 Organizing a media program**

In the onset of a superintendent's career, at the start of a new job or when starting to recognize media relations as a key part to the job, assessing the current situation and establishing a media relations program is the first step. As is true in many aspects of the position, it is true with media

relations as well, “before you determine where you’re going, you must first figure out where you are” (Fitch, 2012, Section 1.4, para. 1).

### **2.7.2 Building and maintaining positive relationships**

As previously discussed, the relationships that a superintendent can build with the media can become an invaluable asset throughout the tenure of that superintendent and even the district. Being available and honest is key to establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the media as well as repeating the vision or mission in order to ensure that the message is being conveyed correctly (Porterfield & Carnes, 2014). Establishing a relationship with a reporter also means understanding what their profession is about and what their expectations are at their job, including meeting deadlines and creating a sellable story – essentially, respecting their role (Howard & Mathews, 2013; Porterfield & Carnes, 2014).

As much as the idea of media relations is about broadcasting for public consumption, the real media *relations* is in building relationships. As stated by Howard and Mathews (2013) “This is a people-to-people business. A media relations person deals with writers, editors, bloggers, producers and photographers – not with newspapers, television stations, radio microphones and websites” (p. 62).

### **2.7.3 Gaining an understanding of journalists**

It is critical for superintendents to know with whom they are talking in order to build a relationship and mutual respect. Along the lines of building relationships with reporters is superintendents understanding the fundamentals of journalism in order to appreciate the

perspective of the professional who is writing about a school district. Journalists work with deadlines. Being appreciative of the timing of communication with the media or in releasing information is demonstrating an understanding that their deadlines are important and are valued. As Porterfield and Carnes (2014) point out, “reporters are human . . . A lot of them on the school beat are very young. Many of the ones who show up don’t know a lot about education, but they have to get a story for their editor” (p. 111). While this may not be a true statement for all education writers in a specific region, it helps superintendents understand that the journalists they may deal with are coming from varied backgrounds and experience levels within the context of education reporting.

#### **2.7.4 Answering media inquiries**

Media inquiries can come in many forms: interviews, written statements, data collection, or short responses. Kowalski (2011) points out some general guidelines that apply to all of these situations: “Make yourself accessible, honor deadlines, and never lie. When you cannot answer, provide an explanation instead of saying ‘no comment’” (p. 188). Porterfield and Carnes (2014) also suggest having the reporter in the school or office and agree that “no comment” does more damage to a situation.

#### **2.7.5 Speaking to the reporter off the record**

Kowalski (2011) advises that superintendents should never go off the record with reporters. He continues by stating that school officials should never repeat something that they would not want to see in print. However, media relations and public relations manuals spell out a different story.

Finch (2012) suggests that it is acceptable to go off the record with a reporter if it is someone with whom a long-standing relationship has been built and the definition of what off-the-record means is clear between both parties. Howard and Mathews (2013) align themselves more with Kowalski. They state that there is no legal defense called “off-the-record” when it comes to a legal matter over an interview, and the whole point of a reporter interviewing someone is to get comments on the record. The nuances that come with dealing with the media are part of what a superintendent may face regardless of the size of the district.

### **2.7.6 Dealing with negative news**

Superintendents must also understand the relationship of media relations within the context of a crisis or negative situation. Boin, Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2017) impress the importance of using and controlling the narratives about a crisis that can be told to the media and implore a collective action by the community after a crisis has occurred. The ability to create a frame, or a story, is what will push the leader into a positive light and establish themselves as trustworthy within the community. This concept relates closely to Kowalski’s (2011) conveying the message but is slightly more specific to responding to a crisis rather than having a general message that may relate to the district’s vision or mission.

### **2.7.7 Issuing news releases**

News releases or press releases are common media relations tools that superintendents can use to relay information to reporters. The idea of creating a press release seems simple enough, but as Fitch (2012) explains, the press release’s purpose is to “convince reporters to do a story . . . [and]

should tell a reporter in one or two sentences whether the story is worth pursuing” (Section 2.4, para. 1-2). The type of writing needed for a press release is different from that of an academic focus, so the need for superintendents to understand how to do this with positive as well as negative news will be an advantage to the district.

### **2.7.8 Holding news conferences**

While a news conference may only occur for superintendents who are in more scrutinized or larger school districts, understanding protocol for a news conference is part of understanding media relations as a whole. Conferences should be used under certain circumstances for schools:

1. They need to communicate with multiple media outlets simultaneously.
2. Reporters indicate that they need to ask them questions about breaking news.
3. The district’s or school’s most knowledgeable source needs to be available to the media, but this person has only a limited amount of time to devote to reporters.

(Kowalski, 2011, p. 183)

### **2.7.9 Conveying the message**

Conveying a message does not just mean discussing the current topics of the district. It also refers to a general message or a strategic vision that a superintendent may want to convey about the district. For example, a school that is looking to start a large renovation project or is looking to build a new school may want to create a public relations strategy surrounding the new construction. In addition, they would also incorporate the mission and vision of the district into that messaging in order to support the rationale of the construction being aligned with the best

interest of students. Fitch (2012) argues, “developing a strategic message is inextricably linked to crafting strategic goals themselves, and the two processes occur simultaneously to be most effective” (Section 3.4, para. 1). While it is crucial that superintendents can convey a message to the media and other audiences, they must do so with the understanding that the media will then take that message and communicate it as part of a larger, newsworthy story in which the reporter has control over the message being conveyed.

### **2.7.10 Correcting errors**

Managing errors in a reporter’s story is about managing whether or not a correction needs to be issued and to what extent. As Kowalski (2011) stresses, both sides of the story – reporter and school – can make errors that lead to errors in reporting the story. Correcting an error is a judgment call that superintendents must determine whether it is worth the work to do.

### **2.7.11 Working with electronic media**

As with traditional media, electronic media has a goal of getting out the news, but the deadlines are shorter and faster. Superintendents need to appreciate the differences in types of media to understand how to work with each type of reporter. Electronic media can mean anything that is not on a print deadline (e.g. newspaper or magazine), so it would include television, radio, and Internet reporting. Like print journalism, electronic journalism relies on a quick turnaround to tell the story and wants to engage the viewer. One key difference is that the interview may be taped or recorded and played word-for-word. This type of media requires a tighter type of interview where superintendents or designated spokespeople must know how to give an

interview in order to get the message out. As Kerr (2009) points out, “an interview is *not* a conversation” (p. 73). Interviews are more skill-based and even require practice if an interviewee is not familiar with reporters’ tactics.

Within the realm of electronic media is the understanding of journalists’ reliance on social media as a part of their profession. Superintendents must engage with journalists, who then in turn must engage with social media and digital forms of media. According to Wagner (2017), in order to translate from print to digital media, journalism has become faster, “clickier” (relating to the number of clicks to get advertising), and more personal. It is not enough for superintendents to be on social media themselves; they must also understand how the journalists use social media for their profession.

### **2.7.12 Summary of the literature**

The basis of the study was to determine if Pennsylvania superintendents understand the fundamental media relations competencies as those competencies relate to their leadership roles and if current superintendents feel as if they are well equipped to handle the demands of a media relations program in their district. Each of these competencies requires a set of skills in order to execute a media relations program for an entire organization, and as stressed earlier, without a communications specialist handling these issues, the brunt of the work falls onto the superintendents’ office.

## **2.8 ESTABLISHING A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR SUPERINTENDENTS IN MEDIA RELATIONS**

Not only is this specific to Pennsylvania superintendents, but the necessity to communicate openly with external parties is crucial in maintaining a superintendent position. In Melver's (2012) study of turnover in the superintendency, he cites communication as a key factor to longevity in the position. He says that long-term superintendents, defined as having served at least 12 years, "believed open communication with the school board and community to be an important leadership attribute. Lack of open communication was found to be a main reason for [a] superintendent leaving the position" (p. 25).

As he concludes later in his study, "the ability to communicate effectively with the board, school administration, parents, and community is paramount to ensure longevity of tenure" (p. 74). Within this scope would be external communications with the media.

It would also be naïve to assume that today's leaders will not face some sort of crisis within their tenure. As media becomes timelier with the use of the Internet, the need to understand how to respond to a situation is essential to being seen as a trusted leader for the community. In times of crises, leaders are expected to:

construct a crisis narrative.... An effective frame does at least five things: it offers a credible explanation of what happened, it offers guidance, it instills hope, shows empathy, and suggests that leaders are in control.... In order to be effective, rhetoric is instrumental. (Boin et al., 2017, p. 87)

Alongside the necessity for communication from the leader is the assurance that all those around the superintendent will be adequately trained to carry out their roles in communicating information.

Based on the research, superintendents have the least amount of impact on student achievement (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014; Hough, 2014) compared to that of teachers and building leaders. However, the role of superintendent is defined elsewhere – in facets that indirectly support student achievement through maintaining a high-functioning learning organization. If the role itself has the least impact on improving student achievement, then what is the role for the superintendent? An argument can be made that at least part of this role is to be the chief marketer and public relations spokesperson for the district, as well as trusted community resource on education topics, as this would encompass the facets of the job that relate to the culture of the district and the community in which it is located. It also contributes to a successful and positive culture of learning that the superintendent can foster in a district.

### **3.0 A STUDY OF SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS ON SELF-EFFICACY OF ESTABLISHED MEDIA RELATIONS STANDARDS**

#### **3.1 ESTABLISHING A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR SUPERINTENDENTS IN MEDIA RELATIONS**

While Pennsylvania has one standard related to general communications, in order to obtain a letter of eligibility from the department of education, prospective superintendents must take and pass the Educational Testing Services (ETS) Praxis assessment for superintendents. Within the standards on the assessment are communications standards under the larger headings of I. Educational Leader, C. Communications, and Collaboration is item 9 that reads:

Understands how to develop a public relations program to foster community and media relations

- a. identifies communication sources and outlets
- b. establishes positive working relationships with the media
- c. establishes a communication plan
- d. establishes collaborative communication channels (Educational Testing

Services, 2013, p. 14)

These standards are assessed as part of the test to ensure that superintendents understand all of the components necessary for leading a district. However, these standards do not match

what the Commonwealth expects from superintendent candidates coming out of a preparation program. Of the 48 practice questions provided by ETS to the users of its study guide, three of those questions correlate to the standard listed above. As is commonplace with curriculum development, as cited in the basics of creating curriculum-based assessments, if the material is assessed, then it must be covered within the instructional program (Jones, Southern, & Brigham, 1998). This does not appear to be the case with Pennsylvania's standards for preparation programs.

### **3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSED STUDY**

Pennsylvania's standards did not provide enough information to be analyzed in the Lumetta et al. (2014) study: "Pennsylvania does have a framework for evaluating superintendents that includes a component of communication and mentions policy management. Due to insufficient details regarding these components, the team did not analyze Pennsylvania" (p. 71). Essentially, Pennsylvania has standards, but the lack of specificity of the standards did not allow the researchers to analyze them.

For the purposes of this study, the work by Lumetta et al. (2014) highlighted the lack of specificity of the Pennsylvania standards for superintendents in the area of communications in general. Pennsylvania has one standard that relates to communications, "Pennsylvania Corollary Standard Three: The leader collaborates, communicates, engages, and empowers others inside and outside of the organization to pursue excellence in learning," which is demonstrated by a superintendent who "knows how to communicate effectively orally and in writing" and "demonstrates effective communication abilities" (Pennsylvania Department of Education,

2008). These standards are what the Commonwealth expects graduate schools to use as a guide for curriculum development by Pennsylvania-approved superintendency preparation programs. These programs then grant letters of eligibility for superintendency.

Essentially, the literature has shown that Pennsylvania requires that superintendents possess a certain amount of knowledge specifically related to media relations and/or public relations but does not have matching curricular standards for preparatory programs to use to ensure that superintendents are prepared to handle media relations for their districts. With the establishment of the expectation that superintendents are indeed the chief public relations and media relations strategists for their districts, the question arises of whether or not Pennsylvania superintendents believe they are prepared to take on this role based on their previous training or experiences, or that they know this is a critical and expected part of their role.

If superintendents serving in Pennsylvania were trained in a Pennsylvania program, do they believe that they are prepared to handle all of the media relations for their districts? The research has established a set of competencies that would make a media-relations capable superintendent (Howard & Matthews, 2013; Kowalski, 2011; Porterfield & Carnes, 2014), but are superintendents familiar with these competencies, roles, and responsibilities? In a time where media and public relations helps bolster enrollment, increase funding, and support communities in times of crises, superintendents are held to a standard for which they are not prepared.

### **3.3 RESEARCH GOALS AND QUESTIONS**

The premise of this study was to determine if Pennsylvania superintendents understood media relations competencies as they relate to the superintendency and if they feel they can manage their own media relations programs for their districts. In addition, the study can help inform future iterations of superintendency standards required by Pennsylvania for certification of superintendents. The research questions are as follows:

1. How familiar are Pennsylvania superintendents with the competencies needed for interacting with the media?
2. How do superintendents become familiar with media relations competencies?
3. How often do superintendents use the established media relations competencies?

#### **3.3.1 Statement of the problem**

Communications in the superintendency is an integral part of successful and effective leadership. Media relations is a part of an effective communications system and is therefore a necessary communication skill that a superintendent will need to run a district. Moore emphasizes the importance of the specific interaction with the media: “[Working closely with journalists] might even seem unnecessary in a time when anyone with a smartphone can report the news. But newspapers and television news still play an important role in [the] community” (2017, para. 1). Because of this, the research specifically focuses on the interactions and programs that superintendents have with trained, professional journalists. In order to lead the district, the strategic communications of the superintendent will help create a more district-controlled communication that the media may put out.

Social media was not considered as part of this study for two reasons. The first reason is that superintendents' presence on social media is within their role as a community member and trusted expert in their profession. Journalists can pull information from them as part of their information gathering and crowdsourcing, but the role of the superintendent is not one of writing the news through social media. Goldstein (2018) recommends ways to engage reports via social media, but for the purposes of having a journalist pick up the story of interest. Just as social media has made journalism a more personal experience, it can do the same for superintendents. However, just as with a news release, social media, as defined by this study, is for getting the attention of the experts in the news industry. The second reason is that the intention of this research is to look closely at the relationship between superintendents and professional journalists. Journalists are still the ones who create the narrative or lens through which many people receive the news (Newman, 2009), and journalists spend a significant part of their days (i.e., more than 60% saying up to two hours per day) on social media as part of their job (Cision, 2017). As the people who are trained to provide information to the masses, their approach to using social media comes with more experience around the platforms. Superintendents are therefore considered a reliable and trusted source from which journalists can pull information to create their stories.

### **3.3.2 Choosing an instrument**

The survey format (see Appendix A) was chosen for this descriptive research study, because the information that is gathered is a small look into the perceptions of a specific community. Kelley, Clark, Brown, and Sitzia (2003) recommend that a descriptive research survey be “used to estimate specific parameters in a population” (para. 3). In this research, the parameters represent

the backgrounds, familiarity, and perceptions of the specific population of Pennsylvania superintendents. Kelley et al. (2003) also recommend a survey to gather larger amounts of information in a short amount of time. The survey designed in this study went to a large number of participants, but the time spent on the survey did not exceed 12 minutes unless participants chose to expand on answers in the open-ended section.

### **3.3.3 Defining the construct**

A review of the literature provided a list of research-based media relations competencies with which school superintendents should be familiar in order to execute an effective strategic communications plan. Each of the competencies as listed originally by Kowalski (2011) and supported by additional research provided an opportunity for superintendents to self-assess on their own familiarity of each of the competencies.

In Pennsylvania, unlike some other states, these competencies are not part of the expected standards for superintendents' licensures, even though the literature supports these competencies as being critical to a communications plan for school districts. The examinations for superintendents to obtain licensure also require some knowledge specific to public relations and/or media relations, even though the Commonwealth's standards do not address communications to that level of specificity.

### **3.3.4 Measures**

The survey was organized into three sections. Superintendents were informed about the time of completion in both the survey and in the promotion of the survey to increase respondent rate.

The questions were condensed into the 11 competencies and two follow-up questions per competency, all identically formatted to increase the speed at which respondents can complete the survey. Walonick (2010) explained that if a questionnaire is concise and not time consuming, then the response rate to the questionnaire will be higher.

Section One had superintendents rate their perception of their own familiarity of the established media relations competencies. For consistency within the construct of knowledge in media relations, all items were preceded by “How familiar are you with.” Each competency had its own question, and an unbalanced rating scale (i.e., 0 = not at all, 1 = a little bit, 2 = somewhat, 3 = quite a bit, 4 = very much) was used instead of a balanced scale (e.g., very unfamiliar, very familiar) to avoid a negative context to the items (McCarty, 2012).

The follow-up question to each competency skill asks the respondents to respond to how often the competency is used on the job, “How often do you utilize … for your district?” The options relate to the estimated number of times that a district leader uses the aforementioned competency: (1) weekly, (2) monthly, (3) annually, (4) other. In establishing a “how often” for each competency, a correlation can be drawn about whether or not the literature-recommended competencies are used by the respondents.

Each competency item then has a categorical follow-up question asking, “What contributed most to your familiarity with.” The options are related to various training opportunities that might influence their perceived familiarity: (1) undergraduate degree, (2) master’s degree, (3) superintendent’s letter program, (4) other college coursework, (5) in-service training, (6) intermediate unit training, (7) other training/workshop, (8) personal experience, (9) N/A. This particular information was used to establish how superintendents believed they gained familiarity of each of the media relations competencies. According to McCarty (2012),

“presenting the same item stem in both contexts . . . allow[s] for direct relationships to be drawn between the two” (p. 52).

This process will create an ordinal scale, so measures of central tendency were computed with median and mode scores. The Superintendents Perception Survey (see Appendix A) shows the entirety of the survey.

### **3.3.5 Characterizing the sample**

The sample is characterized through a set of five items in the second section: (1) years of experience in superintendency (or equivalent), (2) from where superintendent training was received, and (3) highest level of education, and two district-related questions (4) the funding of a communications/public relations position and (5) why or why not follow-up. Using McCarty’s (2012) survey processes as an example, “These data helped to evaluate the diversity of the sample without collecting identifying information that might inhibit responses” (p. 54).

### **3.3.6 Qualitative data points**

The final section was open response, and superintendents added information to the survey that they felt was relevant and would help the researcher’s study. According to McCarty (2012), an open-ended response can allow a participant to qualify their responses and give additional information using their own words. An open-ended response may also increase the willingness of participants to respond in order to have additional information added to the survey. The “open question at the end of structured questionnaires has the potential to increase response rates, elaborate responses to closed questions, and allow respondents to identify new issues not

captured in the closed questions” (O’Cathain & Thomas, 2004, para. 1). The open-ended question was used as a qualitative allowance for participants to share additional perspectives or perceptions that were not specifically asked in the survey.

### **3.3.7 Sampling**

This research study will ask Pennsylvania superintendents to rate themselves on how familiar they are with each of the established competencies on media relations. Based on convenience, superintendents involved in the Western Pennsylvania Tri-State Area School Study Council, the Western Pennsylvania Forum for School Superintendents and the Beaver County Intermediate Unit were surveyed. At the time of the survey distribution, this sample represented 121 districts or organizations in the geographical area. Superintendents or organizational heads that are involved with these entities were invited to participate.

Superintendents were recruited through the Tri-State Area School Study Council, the Western Pennsylvania Forum for School Superintendents and the Beaver County Intermediate Unit via email (see Appendix B). The director of each entity helped by distributing the survey to participants. Superintendents or the equivalent (e.g. chief executive officer and executive director) within their districts were given the link for the survey and four weeks to complete and submit the survey. The survey was sent once from each organization head; however, some received it more than once because membership overlaps occurred within the organizations.

### **3.3.8 Respondent burden**

The survey was administered through web-based Qualtrics using the University of Pittsburgh's platform. While web-based surveys can reduce the time to take a survey and ease distribution, the rate at which web-based surveys are completed compared to other methods is lower (Fan & Yan, 2009). However, the questions were limited to 11 competencies with identical sub-questions about the where familiarity was obtained, three sections for the entire survey, and an estimated completion time of 12 minutes.

### **3.3.9 Consent**

Consent for information and participation was included in the beginning of the survey and in the recruitment email sent to superintendents with the survey link. The consent (see Appendix B) was written within the email.

## **3.4 ANALYSIS**

The research questions were exploratory in nature, and, therefore, the researcher's focus was to describe the data obtained on media relations familiarity and how the familiarity was obtained (i.e., familiarity origin). The data described the sample population and set baselines so that future researchers may use the survey, select samples from other geographical areas, and gain a better understanding of media relations competencies within the context of K-12 superintendency.

### **3.4.1 Qualitative analysis**

The qualitative feedback was collected from the open-ended question at the end of the survey. The feedback was provided in two questions at the end of the survey. The first qualitative question was a follow-up question to whether or not the district funded a communications and/or public relations specialist within the district and asked, “Why or why not?” The second qualitative question allowed participants to provide any additional feedback that they felt would improve the survey or would be helpful to use in the study.

### **3.4.2 Quantitative analysis**

The Qualtrics data analysis platform provided an analysis for each of the questions. For additional analyses, the survey yielded (1) nominal values from the 11 categorical items on familiarity and the items used to characterize the sample (i.e., familiarity obtainment), (2) ordinal values from the frequency of using each competency (i.e., frequency obtainment), (3) ordinal values for the familiarity data obtained from the 11 scale items, and (4) nominal and ordinal values obtained through modeling the survey data. The overall familiarity score is considered interval data. The nominal, ordinal, or interval data types determined what statistical summaries and tests were performed on these data.

### **3.4.3 Nominal data**

Each of the 11 “familiarity origin” (i.e., “What contributed the most to your familiarity with”) items provides nominal data. These data are only described as frequency data, as “calculating a

mean or median provides no useful information for categorical data” (McCarty, p. 57, 2012). The data obtained from how superintendents gleaned the familiarity were pooled together and created a most-common origin of the 11 competencies.

#### **3.4.4 Ordinal data**

Each of the familiarity items was quantified by using a number ranging from zero to four. These data are considered ordinal, because they follow an order or logical sequence. However, the interval between each familiarity response is not equivalent or directly equal to one. For example, “Not at all” to “A little bit” is not equivalent to the difference between “Quite a bit” and “Very much.” These data were analyzed using nonparametric statistics and can only be described using mode, median, and frequency.

The frequency of using each competency is also ordinal data, despite it referencing a time. The intervals between each are not a consistent range of time (e.g., weekly, monthly, annually, other) and were analyzed by ranking the frequency of using these competencies.

The 11 competencies stood alone in the analysis.

#### **3.4.5 Interval data**

The familiarity scores are considered interval scores. The data can be used to find central measures of tendency more usefully than ordinal data. Years as a building level administrator, whether or not a communications or public relations position is funded, and level of education are all interval data.

### **3.4.6 Describing the data**

Frequencies and measures of central tendencies were analyzed for the familiarity items and the level of education. Frequency tables were used to analyze the familiarity origin, overall origin, and frequency of use. Summaries and patterns that emerged were extracted with the purpose of determining potential relationships between familiarity items, familiarity origin, and frequency of use of the media competencies.

## **4.0 FINDINGS**

### **4.1 MEDIA RELATIONS COMPETENCIES**

A review of the literature provided the construct for the media relations competency questions used in the survey tool. The competencies were established using one primary resource in Kowalski's (2011) listed competencies, and then additional support and resources were provided for each competency. Each competency stands independent in the analysis, so none is grouped for a group analysis other than for an "overall familiarity."

### **4.2 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Of the 121 district-level leaders contacted, 44 completed the survey. The respondent rate was 36.4%. Of the 44 included respondents, 29.5% ( $n = 13$ ) responded within three full days of the survey distribution through email. The majority of responses, 88.6% ( $n = 39$ ) were completed within one week of the initial invitation. The last response was recorded 18 days after the initial email was sent. Nine participants were excluded, because they began the survey, but completed less than half of the survey. Forty-two respondents offered the number of years of service. The average number of years was 6.82 (min = 1, max = 30, SD = 5.36). Of the 44 included participants, 34 have doctorate degrees, nine have a master's degree plus additional credits, and

one participant did not respond. Three respondents were educated out of state and the remaining 41 were educated at Pennsylvania superintendent programs. Of the districts represented by the district leaders who responded to the question of funding a specialist, 24 do not fund a communications or public relations specialist and 19 do employ one. Seventeen respondents offered additional comments, with four of those being N/A or the equivalent.

#### **4.3 HOW FAMILIAR ARE PENNSYLVANIA SUPERINTENDENTS WITH THE COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA?**

For each of the 11 competencies measured, the responses tended toward the middle and some to upper levels of familiarity. All items being equally weighted, the average familiarity for the media competencies is 2.46 ( $n = 483$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ), which is between “Somewhat” and “Quite a bit” familiar on all of the familiarity items.

Each of the 11 competencies yielded varying results. Table 1 describes the response rates in each of the competencies. Each of the competency questions have been truncated for simplicity in reporting the data: (1) media relations program, (2) journalist relationships, (3) media relationships, (4) media inquiries, (5) off-the-record conversations, (6) negative news, (7) news releases, (8) news conferences, (9) conveying messages to media, (10) correcting errors, (11) electronic media.

Table 1. *Percent of Responses for Each Familiarity Item*

Item #	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	% Not at all (0)      A little bit (1)      Somewhat (2)      Quite a bit (3)      Very much (4)				
				(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	42	2.21	1.09	-	<u>36.4</u>	20.5*	29.5	13.6
2	42	2.30	1.21	6.8	22.7	22.7*	<u>29.5</u>	18.2
3	42	3.05	1.01	2.3	4.5	20.5	31.2*	<u>40.9</u>
4	42	3.32	0.74	-	2.3	9.1	43.2*	<u>45.5</u>
5	42	2.36	1.33	11.4	15.9	22.7*	25.0	25.0
6	42	2.71	0.98	-	13.6	25.0	<u>38.6*</u>	22.7
7	42	2.64	1.14	4.5	11.4	27.3	<u>29.5*</u>	27.3
8	42	1.50	1.17	22.7	27.3*	<u>36.4</u>	4.5	9.1
9	42	2.59	1.15	2.3	15.9	18.2	<u>38.6*</u>	22.7
10	42	1.98	1.06	9.1	22.7	<u>36.4*</u>	25.0	6.8
11	42	2.39	1.22	9.1	11.4	<u>34.1*</u>	22.7	22.7

*Note:* Underlined numbers correspond to modal values and \* correspond to medians.

The 11 competency responses show that there is not consistency in familiarity with all 11 competencies. While two competencies stood out as having the most familiarity in both the mode and median, (3) media relationships and (4) media inquiries, two competencies scored lower in both mode and median, (1) media relations program and (8) news conferences. Holding news conferences showed the least familiarity with 50% of respondents stating “not at all” familiar or “a little bit” familiar. The competency that showed the most familiarity overall was

(4) media inquiries, with more than 88% of respondents being “quite a bit” or “very much” familiar with this skill.

The other competencies had modes and medians that were somewhat consistent with the averages, which were between “somewhat” and “quite a bit.” The overall spread of the data across each familiarity measure showed that the survey performed as an overall measure of media relations familiarity.

#### **4.4 HOW DO SUPERINTENDENTS BECOME FAMILIAR WITH MEDIA RELATIONS COMPETENCIES?**

“Personal experience” was the most often cited source for obtaining familiarity with a media relations competency. This response accounted for more than 60% of all of the responses to each familiarity origin ( $n = 483$ ). In other words, for all of the competencies, most superintendents received their training on these competencies from personal experiences. The resource that provided the least amount of training was undergraduate courses. No superintendents cited this as a training point. The other overall least-cited options were “intermediate unit training” (2.5%), “other college coursework” (2.1%), “master’s degree” (1.2%), and “in-service training” (3.1%). The “undergraduate degree” was omitted, since no respondents chose this in any competency. Table 2 shows the breakdown in each competency.

Table 2. Percent of Responses for Each Origin Item

Item #	N	% Intermediate								Personal Experience	N/A
		Master's Degree	Superintendent's Letter Program	Other College Coursework	In-Service Training	Unit Training	Other Training/Workshop	Personal Experience			
1	42	-	15.9	2.3	2.3	9.1	25.0	<u>34.1</u>	11.4		
2	42	2.3	9.1	2.3	2.3	-	18.2	<u>56.8</u>	9.1		
3	42	-	4.6	2.3	4.6	-	11.4	<u>72.7</u>	4.6		
4	42	2.3	11.4	4.6	2.3	4.6	9.1	<u>65.9</u>	-		
5	42	-	4.6	2.3	4.6	2.3	6.8	<u>70.5</u>	9.1		
6	42	-	13.6	2.3	2.3	-	13.6	<u>65.9</u>	2.3		
7	42	4.6	6.8	-	6.8	-	15.9	<u>63.6</u>	2.3		
8	42	2.3	13.6	2.3	-	4.6	11.4	<u>34.1</u>	31.8		
9	42	-	6.8	6.8	2.3	4.6	13.6	<u>63.6</u>	2.3		
10	42	-	4.6	-	2.3	-	4.6	<u>75.0</u>	13.6		
11	42	2.3	2.3	-	4.6	2.3	11.4	<u>59.1</u>	18.2		
Total	482	1.2	8.5	2.1	3.1	2.5	12.0	<u>60.1</u>	9.5		

Note: Missing values were excluded from analysis, so item responses = 100%. Underlined responses correspond to modal values.

#### **4.5 HOW OFTEN DO SUPERINTENDENTS USE THE ESTABLISHED MEDIA RELATIONS COMPETENCIES?**

In order to help establish a need for the competencies, the superintendents were asked how often they use each of the competencies. Two competencies with modes of weekly or monthly were (3) media relationships (monthly, 44.2%) and (4) media inquiries (weekly, 36.4%). All other competencies had modes in the “other” category. However, other competencies with lower modes in the “other” category had a disbursed use. “Media programs” had higher weekly (27.3%) and annual (22.7%), and “news releases” had higher uses “monthly” (29.6%). “Conveying a message” also had higher numbers for weekly (29.6%) and monthly (27.3%) usage. “Electronic media” had a high weekly use (36.4), and most superintendents answered either “other” or “weekly” for that competency.

Table 3. *Percent of Responses for Each Frequency Item*

Item #	N	% Weekly      Monthly      Annually      Other			
		Weekly	Monthly	Annually	Other
1	42	27.3	13.6	22.7	<u>36.4</u>
2	42	4.6	9.1	6.8	<u>79.6</u>
3	42	18.6	<u>44.2</u>	18.6	18.6
4	42	<u>36.4</u>	34.1	4.6	25.0
5	42	6.8	18.2	20.5	<u>54.6</u>
6	42	4.6	22.7	29.6	<u>43.2</u>
7	42	13.6	29.6	20.5	<u>36.4</u>
8	42	2.3	2.3	9.1	<u>86.4</u>
9	42	29.6	27.3	9.1	<u>34.1</u>
10	42	2.3	18.2	13.6	<u>65.9</u>
11	42	36.4	11.4	2.3	<u>50.0</u>

*Note:* Underlined numbers correspond to modal values.

#### 4.6 PATTERNS AMONG ITEMS

In analyzing each competency, a few patterns emerged from each of the three questions within each component. Item 1 asked how familiar superintendents were with organizing a media relations program in their districts and had the lowest mode (a little bit, 36.4%). This item was the broadest competency that was listed. The responses also stated that this competency was used somewhat frequently with 40.9% of respondents stating that they use this weekly or

monthly. The respondents stated that with this competency they had the most formal training with 54.6% stating that they had some sort of training other than personal experience.

What is clear in the data is that superintendents expressed that they gained their familiarity with the media relations competencies from personal experience rather than from any other formal resource or planned educational experience.

#### **4.7     QUALITATIVE DATA**

The survey provided two options for qualitative responses. The first responses were from the question asking if superintendents funded a communications or public relations specialist in the district. Of the 24 districts that did not fund a specialist, 22 provided a comment, and all of those comments cited cost or funding as a prohibitive factor. Of the 19 superintendents who stated that they did fund a specialist, 12 of them provided feedback on why they funded the position. Most responses showed that the position was invaluable to their districts. “Expertise in this area is unsurpassed and no employee within the district has time or understanding to complete these tasks so successfully,” one respondent stated. Others used common words stating that the position is “essential” and “necessary.”

The last open-ended question asked superintendents to add additional information that may be relevant to the survey itself or the research. The 14 comments in this section were divided again among the ability to fund a specialist or not. Four superintendents who did not fund a specialist made comments. Of those four comments, three shared the sentiment that they did not receive enough training in this area. “The Principal and Superintendent courses that I

took provided very little training in dealing with the media. This would be a great addition to any certification program,” stated one respondent.

Of the 14 districts that employ a communications or public relations specialist, seven added comments in the final question. The comments from these districts varied, but most added additional information about their communications programs, how they function, and the value of them. For example, one respondent stated, “You must tell your story first to drive the comments that result.” Another offered the importance of relationship building: “The most important thing is being honest with [the media] about what you can and cannot share.” The following quote conveys the summative message of most of the comments from the districts that employ a specialist:

We employ a public relations consultant one day per week to update our website, manage our Facebook page, write copy and get information to news outlets. She is also masterful when negative things occur. She responds immediately and appropriately in all situations that require a skilled communicator who understands media and its' [sic] impact on schools. As the superintendent, I frequently write copy and she reviews and edits the work. In one year, she has made an enormous positive impact on the image of our district.

#### **4.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Considering that this study was exploratory and a newer area of research, limitations were present. The survey tool itself was a limitation, as there is subjectivity in the responses to the familiarity levels. The level or increment between each response is not consistent, reflecting

subjectivity. For example, the difference between “quite a bit” and “very much” could have different meaning for different people.

The frequency of use of each of the components proved to have limitations as most of the modes fell into the “other” category, which could be interpreted as having different meanings. For example, “other” for the frequency of use of a news conference could mean that the respondent has never had to hold a conference, but “other” for the frequency of managing negative news could mean twice a year or even every other month.

The sample used was a convenience sample of 121 superintendents, or the equivalent, from Western Pennsylvania. The respondents – 44 – would represent only 8.8 % of the district leaders across the Commonwealth.

Nine respondents did not finish the survey, which would account for 17% of the respondents not finishing the survey. Five of these respondents spent less than one minute on the survey. Superintendents are heads of organizations, so a potential limitation to this and similar studies is that they may have “survey fatigue” from being asked for their opinions and experiences as the heads of learning organizations.

Another limitation is the self-perception piece of this survey. Since nine respondents did not finish the survey and only read to the opening page, the survey topic may have been an inhibiting factor if respondents did not feel comfortable in the communications role.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Through the use of the media relations skills listed by Kowalski (2012), Western Pennsylvania superintendents were given self-perception surveys to gauge their personal perspectives on familiarity with the media relations competencies deemed pertinent to the position. Through this survey, 44 superintendents provided insight into their familiarity with the media relations competencies, how often they used them, and how they gleaned their familiarity. The superintendents had an opportunity to share qualitative data at the end of the survey and respond to whether or not their districts funded a communications or public relations specialist. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How familiar are Pennsylvania superintendents with the competencies needed for interacting with the media?
2. How do superintendents become familiar with media relations competencies?
3. How often do superintendents use the established media relations competencies?

After distributing 121 surveys through three western Pennsylvania superintendents' organizations, 44 surveys were completed within the four-week timespan to contribute to the results to the corresponding research questions and implications. The following sections discuss the data collected as responses to the research questions.

## **5.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: FAMILIARITY WITH MEDIA RELATIONS COMPETENCIES**

The first research question posed how familiar superintendents felt that they were with the media relations competencies suggested by research. The self-perception questions were framed so that these skills were defined by the research and superintendents could refer to the definition when responding to the questions. While the majority of respondents felt familiar with most of them, few had formal training on these research-based strategies needed to effectively run a media relations program.

### **5.1.1 Media relations competencies and personnel**

One piece of information uncovered in this study was from the qualitative data of the respondents who did not fund a communications or public relations specialist. These data revealed that respondents felt the least prepared for the media relations competencies. In other words, those who feel least prepared to manage media relations within their districts are also the ones who do not have the personnel to manage media relations for their districts.

Superintendents who have the personnel to support them also have an expert with them to help with their learning and experience in this area. These superintendents may have learned from personal experience, but their personal experience was most likely alongside or guided by a media or communications specialist.

### **5.1.2 Active versus reactive media relations**

While superintendents expressed overall familiarity with the competencies, the extent to which they feel familiar or the perceived expertise primarily comes from personal experiences. The components of media relations are mostly active communications, meaning that the superintendent must proactively work to integrate these competencies into the day-to-day operations of running the district. None of the responses had overwhelming familiarity, but the one competency that would show the most familiarity would be handling media inquiries. Responding to media inquiries is a reactive approach to media relations, meaning that the media initiates contact with the district, rather than the superintendent or district representative becoming an active participant in their media relations program.

### **5.1.3 Recognizing an area of need in media relations**

Without formal training, it is difficult for superintendents to self-assess their experience levels. The familiarity scores did not reach any high levels of expertise, because the prevailing method for learning came from themselves. This revelation could result from the actual lack of formal training. In order to gauge oneself against a set of skills, there would need to be some sort of training or level of understanding – recognizing what an expert looks like compared to a current level of understanding. Without formal training, this litmus test would be nearly impossible.

#### **5.1.4 Competencies and district image**

Superintendents who responded also showed lower familiarity with two critical competencies that could salvage or damage a district's reputation: correcting errors and holding a press conference. As established earlier, the media is a primary source of information from which the community gets its information. Therefore, an error may be taken as fact and a press conference can lead to a poor perception of the leadership within the district if mishandled. Once a news story is mishandled, public perception has already been affected.

Porterfield and Carnes (2014) explain that education reporters no longer "break hard-hitting news stories" (p. 89). Because students, faculty, staff, parents, and anyone else involved in the community have access to social media, the likelihood of the media being the one to break the news is incredibly low. However, district superintendents who understand the impact of both social media and the news media's role in reporting on news events will be able to better manage the message that is being conveyed. As the trusted expert of the school district, the superintendent's message is one that is regarded as a well-informed opinion or fact. They should be the ones who help the media convey a message that is accurate, well-defined, and timely.

#### **5.1.5 Familiarity and use of the competencies**

The survey respondents expressed that they felt familiar with how to use most of the competencies. However, in the frequency of use, the most common answer was "other." In an era where media reporting is more immediate, has greater access through "man-on-the-street" videos and quicker deadlines to keep up with social media, it is necessary now more than ever for superintendents to understand the importance of managing a public message about their

districts. While the “other” category can take on multiple meanings, the frequency in which superintendents used the skills was inconsistent. More research in this area is suggested to further clarify the importance of the use of these media relations competencies.

## **5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: MEDIA RELATIONS TRAINING FOR SUPERINTENDENTS**

### **5.2.1 Personal familiarity versus education or formal training**

The results of this study suggest that superintendents receive most of their familiarity with media relations competencies from personal experience. The familiarity of the items also shows that there is a disparity in the familiarity amongst the established media relations competencies. The implication is that superintendents become familiar with most, if not all, of the media relations competencies through personal experience and not through direct training, instruction, or formal education. The Commonwealth is requiring that superintendents know this information before becoming a superintendent as established by the use of the Educational Testing Services exams (Praxis). However, it does not require any sort of formal education of these competencies by certificating institutions. Therefore, the only method by which superintendents can glean this information is by on-the-job or informal training, or by seeking formal coursework outside their educational leadership programs.

While advantages exist with on-the-job or informal training, incoming superintendents should, at minimum, be afforded a formal, structured, and consistent skillset of managing media relations for a district from which they can build upon through their own personal

experiences. Without a structured introduction on the media relations competencies, superintendents could cause inadvertent repercussions to the district with each *preventable* error that is made. Just within the competency of organizing a media relations program for a district, Kowalski (2008) cites four variables, four attributes, and four procedures to construct a program. While respondents may feel as if they are familiar with constructing a media relations program, the specificity to the details needed within the program and fidelity of the program will be lacking without a formal education process for this knowledge.

Essentially, if the research supports the necessity of these competencies, and the Commonwealth supports it through assessing future letter of eligibility holders, it is incumbent upon the Commonwealth to provide the necessary skills for these competencies within their standards, certification programs, and professional development opportunities for current superintendents.

### **5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: THE USE OF MEDIA RELATIONS COMPETENCIES**

Superintendents use the media relations competencies on the job, whether or not they are trained, and whether or not it is proactive, such as developing positive relationships, or reactive, such as responding to a media inquiry. While it is expected that not all competencies would be used with the same frequency, because the responses were spread across these categories in terms of frequency of use, this could indicate inconsistencies between understanding what the competencies really are, and how superintendents should use them to best help their districts.

### **5.3.1 Superintendents must be prepared to train others**

Communications is a small component of the overarching standards for Pennsylvania superintendents (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008). Media relations is just one part of larger, strategic communications plans. As Kowalski (2008) states, “developing a media relations plan is one of the most important leadership responsibilities” (p. 268). Part of structuring these plans is gathering teams, developing resources, and training others on proper execution of these plans.

As an educator of educators, the superintendents are responsible for informing their employees of their media relations plans. Kowalski (2011) states that the superintendents, when they do not employ a specialist, must also prepare others within the district to speak with the media as part of their plans. As shown in this study, the knowledge that superintendents are pulling from is their personal experience. Familiarity through personal experience is not enough to build, sustain, and educate others to the extent necessary to run a school district or media relations program.

All of the respondents had at least a master’s degree plus additional coursework, and the majority (77%) had doctoral degrees; overall, they are a highly formally educated group. However, specific to media relations, the majority of this experience is only on-the-job. Of all of the respondents’ comments, the majority of respondents expressed the importance of media relations to their district but expressed only informal training for this function of their job. As stated in the comments section, the superintendents expressed these skills as essential, but also showed very little formal training.

## **5.4 IMPLICATIONS**

While the research shows that media relations literacy is essential to a district's communication strategy as well as to superintendent competency (Ascough, 2011; Kowalski, 2012), the lack of training provided to superintendents in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania demonstrates a need for restructuring superintendent training programs, intermediate unit trainings, and Pennsylvania standards for the superintendency. The study has shown that inconsistencies exist in the training of media relations for the surveyed superintendents in Western Pennsylvania. Within this context, the implications of this research extend to the training opportunities afforded to both existing superintendents and future letter of eligibility applicants. Therefore, the implications and recommendations focus on recommending new or revised standards for future superintendents as well as filling in training gaps for current letter of eligibility holders and/or practicing superintendents.

### **5.4.1 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania letter of eligibility standards**

The Commonwealth asks superintendents to perform proficiently on a nationally standardized assessment to obtain certification, but it does not have corresponding instructional educational standards that match this required component. This study supports the need for a reevaluation of the Commonwealth standards. A careful review of the current standards along with the desired media relations and communications competencies would allow for a more strategic approach to preparing superintendents for a role that was shown to be important, but also not formally addressed in their preparation for their positions.

### **5.4.2 Additional training development in media relations**

Superintendents expressed the value perceived in hiring a media relations or public relations specialist, but budgets were an inhibiting factor. Therefore, for those districts who cannot afford a specialist, current superintendents must have access to training opportunities to help prepare them for this known entity of media relations.

Since the study has established the need for additional training, the response for how to begin to train individuals is dependent upon the varying circumstances. Current superintendents and those who have a letter of eligibility have already completed a program. Therefore, training for these individuals must accommodate their needs differently from those who have yet to complete a certification program.

The varied work that a superintendent performs would require expertise in many areas. Typically, superintendents reach the top job by having expertise in one or two areas. However, as described by Holstein, CEOs work in a similar fashion: “The normal pattern is that CEOs work their way up the ladder through engineering, finance, sales, manufacturing, or other routes. ... But not communications” (p. 21). Similar to CEOs, as described by Holstein (2008) superintendents will work themselves through to the leader of a district by mastering one or two silos of work. The most likely prior experience of a superintendent is expertise in teaching and leadership – not communications.

A final recommendation from this study is the development of high-quality trainings for district leaders based on the media relations competencies. At minimum, the study established that there are inconsistencies in familiarity, training, and frequency of use of these competencies. Moreover, the overall comments provided insight into the importance of needing this type of expertise in districts, as well as additional training for smaller districts that cannot afford

personnel in this area. While trainings need to be offered, that does not necessarily mean that they do not currently exist. The surveyed superintendents either do not access these trainings or are not gaining knowledge from them.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The literature supporting this study shows strategic use of media relations as part of school superintendency. The present study shows that surveyed superintendents perceive themselves as familiar with the competencies, but only at a personal-experience level. The misalignment of Pennsylvania superintendent standards for training programs with expectations of superintendents reveals gaps in superintendent preparation programs and their delivery of needed skillsets.

### **5.5.1 Replication of study on a state-level or national basis**

This study was a small sample size compared to Pennsylvania's 500 school districts (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). However, the competencies established for media relations translate across the district and the country. The specificity of this study was limited to Pennsylvania, because the Commonwealth does not have definitive standards that superintendents needed to meet within the communications or media relations standards that are research-based or used in other states.

Since other states have different standards for their superintendent preparation programs, the study could be used to either audit the consistency of the current program or determine the

need for additional training. Larger sample sizes, either state-wide or nationally, would allow for more in-depth statistical analyses.

### **5.5.2 Impact of school funding**

Another research area that could stem from this research is the implications of school funding in Pennsylvania on the public relations or media relations support in a district. With the increase in competition for students (between private, public, charter, and online schools), the need for public relations and even marketing of school districts becomes necessary. Since superintendents in this study who had a communications specialist felt that it was invaluable, additional research regarding the impact of that position could help make funding decisions.

### **5.5.3 Social media and media relations**

Since social media has a large impact on both media relations and school districts, one possibility for future research is the relationship among the three. Social media has increased the speed at which information – correct or incorrect – is relayed to the public, so how does this speed impact the schools and superintendents? Additional research regarding the superintendent position as an expert position within the realm of education and as a news media resource could help shape the role of social media for the superintendent. Does a school superintendent's activity on social media affect news stories about the district?

## **5.6 CONCLUSIONS**

The media has been a consistent presence in K-12 education and will continue to play a role for school systems into the future. Superintendents must manage a multitude of responsibilities, but none may be as public as media or public relations. Media relations and public relations experts have established detailed competencies for districts to use as part of comprehensive communications plans. The misalignment exists in the formal training or education of the district leaders in the Western Pennsylvania area.

As has been shown, the research exists to support educating superintendents on media relations competencies. This research, therefore, is not publicized enough to superintendents, is not readily available, or has not yet been made a priority by traditional facilitators of training or education. Since the Commonwealth does not have explicit standards relating to more in-depth communications training or media relations training, the approved preparation programs have no need to prioritize these competencies as a part of their programs. There is also little or no advocacy from superintendent-represented organizations for more education in this area.

While personal experience can be a legitimate method of learning, the respondents still did not have “very much” familiarity with any of the competencies. A research-based educational program needs to be offered either within preparation programs or as supplemental programs for new superintendents. Then a new, more standardized familiarity of the media relations competencies would become apparent for district leaders. Since the media is an anchor in our society in terms of delivering information to the masses, and social media has pushed it into new, quicker, and more immediate reporting, it is even more critical that superintendents feel prepared to manage mainstream media for their districts.

What we have established is that understanding public relations and executing a media relations program is essential to the function of school superintendency. The practitioners, however, are not gleaning their knowledge of these competencies from formalized training opportunities and do not have a consistent frequency of their use. This study can launch research that enhances the training opportunities for school superintendents and their relationships with the long-standing profession of journalism.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **SUPERINTENDENTS PERCEPTION SURVEY**

#### **Media Relations Survey**

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##### **Start of Block: Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information that you provide is valuable for our understanding of the preparation that educational leaders have - and need - for managing media relations. We are especially interested in what kinds of training contributed to your media relations skills.

This survey is comprised of questions about media relations components. For the purposes of this survey, media relations are defined as communications that happen between an organization - your district - and professional and/or mainstream media personnel.

You will have the opportunity to provide clarification or additional details at the end of the survey.

Providing information asked about you or your district is optional. We will not share or disclose any information that would identify you or your district.

##### **This survey has three sections.**

**Section 1:** These questions ask about components used for media relations in a school district, how often you use the component, and how you learned to use this skill.

**Section 2:** This section is a demographic section. These questions are optional.

**Section 3:** This section is open-ended to allow for additional comments that you may have. These questions are optional.

## Introduction

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### Section 1

#### Section 1 - Media Relations Skills

For each question in this section, respond with how familiar you are with each component listed. Each component is defined using research from Kowalski (2011) to provide a common understanding of what the question is asking.

### Section 1

1) How familiar are you with **organizing a media relations program** for your district? Organizing a media relations program is defined as establishing a protocol through a needs assessment, problem analysis, goal setting and strategy selection that is purposeful and can be executed by the district.

Not at all (1)

A little bit (2)

Somewhat (3)

Quite a bit (4)

Very much (5)

How often do you utilize a media relations program for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with organizing a media relations program for your district?

Undergraduate Degree (1)

Master's Degree (2)

Superintendent's Letter Program (3)

Other College Coursework (4)

In-Service Training (5)

Intermediate Unit Training (6)

Other Training/Workshop (7)

Personal Experience (8)

N/A (9)

2) How familiar are you with **gaining an understanding of journalists?**

Gaining an understanding of journalists is defined as recognizing media deadlines and the audience to which reporters must appeal.

Not at all (1)

A little bit (2)

Somewhat (3)

Quite a bit (4)

Very much (5)

---

How often do you research journalists' priorities, roles and responsibilities for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with gaining an understanding of journalists?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

3) How familiar are you with **building and maintaining positive relationships with the media?**

Building and maintaining positive relationships with the media is defined as actively and intentionally meeting with reporters or journalists - even for non-newsworthy discussions - to help build a trusting relationship.

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
-

How often do you intentionally improve your relationship with the media for your district?

- Weekly (1)
  - Monthly (2)
  - Annually (3)
  - Other (4)
- 

What contributed most to your familiarity with building and maintaining positive relationships with the media?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

4) How familiar are you with **answering media inquiries**?

Answering media inquiries is defined as responding to any specific request by the media for information about a school, the district, or an incident.

Not at all (1)

A little bit (2)

Somewhat (3)

Quite a bit (4)

Very much (5)

---

How often do you answer or respond to media inquiries for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with answering media inquiries?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

5) How familiar are you with **speaking to a reporter off the record**?

Speaking to a reporter off the record means that a previous, trusting relationship has been built with a reporter and you can give information to that reporter as an anonymous source or without fear of attribution.

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
-

How often do you speak to reporters off the record regarding your district or education?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with speaking to a reporter off the record?

Undergraduate Degree (1)

Master's Degree (2)

Superintendent's Letter Program (3)

Other College Coursework (4)

In-Service Training (5)

Intermediate Unit Training (6)

Other Training/Workshop (7)

Personal Experience (8)

N/A (9)

6) How familiar are you with **dealing with negative news**?

Dealing with negative news means that the report or article is primarily about a problem, conflict, or scandal that positions the district in a negative viewpoint.

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
- 

How often do you deal with negative news regarding your district?

- Weekly (1)
  - Monthly (2)
  - Annually (3)
  - Other (4)
-

What contributed most to your familiarity with dealing with negative news?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

7) How familiar are you with **writing and issuing news releases**?

This is defined as initiating contact with a news organization in the form of a written information release.

- Not at all (1)
- A little bit (2)
- Somewhat (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Very much (5)

How often do you write and issue news or press releases for your district?

- Weekly (1)
  - Monthly (2)
  - Annually (3)
  - Other (4)
- 

What contributed most to your familiarity with writing and issuing news releases?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

8) How familiar are you with **holding news conferences**?

Holding a news conference means that multiple news organizations are contacted in order to simultaneously present information and answer questions, usually about a specific topic.

Not at all (1)

A little bit (2)

Somewhat (3)

Quite a bit (4)

Very much (5)

---

How often do you hold news conferences for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with holding news conferences?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

9) How familiar are you with **conveying your message to a news/media audience?**  
To convey your message to a news audience is "pursue positive stories by capitalizing on media interests."

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
-

How often do you convey your message to a news/media audience for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with conveying your message to a news/media audience?

Undergraduate Degree (1)

Master's Degree (2)

Superintendent's Letter Program (3)

Other College Coursework (4)

In-Service Training (5)

Intermediate Unit Training (6)

Other Training/Workshop (7)

Personal Experience (8)

N/A (9)

10) How familiar are you with **correcting errors or misinformation in the media?**

Correcting errors or misinformation in the media is defined as bringing attention to an error to the media and determining if corrective actions are necessary.

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
- 

How often do you correct errors or misinformation in the media about your district?

- Weekly (1)
  - Monthly (2)
  - Annually (3)
  - Other (4)
-

What contributed most to your familiarity with correcting errors or misinformation in the media?

- Undergraduate Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Superintendent's Letter Program (3)
- Other College Coursework (4)
- In-Service Training (5)
- Intermediate Unit Training (6)
- Other Training/Workshop (7)
- Personal Experience (8)
- N/A (9)

11) How familiar are you with **working with electronic media**?

Electronic media is defined as television, radio, or digital media that have quicker deadlines than print or magazine media outlets and different formatting demands.

- Not at all (1)
  - A little bit (2)
  - Somewhat (3)
  - Quite a bit (4)
  - Very much (5)
-

How often do you work with electronic media for your district?

Weekly (1)

Monthly (2)

Annually (3)

Other (4)

---

What contributed most to your familiarity with working with electronic media?

Undergraduate Degree (1)

Master's Degree (2)

Superintendent's Letter Program (3)

Other College Coursework (4)

In-Service Training (5)

Intermediate Unit Training (6)

Other Training/Workshop (7)

Personal Experience (8)

N/A (9)

## Section 2: Demographic Information

**These questions will help understand your background. Please DO NOT provide names of persons (including yourself) or educational institutions (including current/past employers or colleges that you have attended).**

How many years have you been a superintendent (or equivalent)?

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Where did you receive your superintendent's training?

- Pennsylvania school (1)
  - Out-of-state (2)
  - Other (3)
- 

Your Highest Level of Education

- Bachelor's (1)
  - Master's (2)
  - Master's Plus (3)
  - Doctorate (or terminal degree) (4)
  - Prefer Not to Answer (5)
- 

Do you fund a communications and/or public relations specialist in your district?

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
-

Why or why not?

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### **Section 3: Open Response**

Please use this section as an opportunity to add information to any of your responses.

If you have any additional information that you would like to add for clarification or that you feel may have been left out of this survey, please add it below.

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **SUPERINTENDENT REQUEST FROM NETWORK**

Dear (Professional Network) Colleague,

A doctoral student, Meghan Murray, is surveying superintendents regarding her dissertation research on district leaders managing media relations. As a member of (Professional Network) we would greatly appreciate your participation in Meghan's survey. This topic is a very important topic in our field today, and the more we know about preparing district leaders for interactions with the media, the better it will be for future generations of leaders. Please use the following link (survey link) to provide your valued input.

The purpose of this research study is to determine school leaders' familiarity with a standard set of media relations competencies. If you are willing to participate, the survey will ask about background (e.g., years as a district leader), as well as familiarity with a set of media relations competencies, if training was provided, and how often you use this competency.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. This is an entirely anonymous questionnaire, so your responses will not be identifiable in any way. All responses are confidential, and results will be kept under lock and key. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. This

study is being conducted by Meghan Murray, who can be reached at (XXX)XXX-XXXX, if you have any questions

Thank you in advance for your contribution to the profession.

(Professional Network Director)

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