CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

WHEN “IT” HITS THE FAN
WHAT NOT TO DO

• BP CEO Tony Haward (2010)
  – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTdKa9eWNFw

• Malaysia Airlines (2014)

• NFL (2014)
  How on Earth Is Roger Goodell Still the Commissioner of the NFL?

• United Airlines (2017)

• Ryan Lochte (2017)
  – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I
PANEL INTRODUCTIONS

• Devra Ashby, APR
  Colorado Springs School District 11
• Danielle Clark, APR
  Poudre School District
• Allison Cortez, MA
  Academy District 20
• Catherine Foster
  Mesa County Valley School District 51
• Christy McGee, APR
  Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8
CRISIS
EXAMPLES
ACTIVITY
WHAT IS A CRISIS?

• An emotionally-charged significant event or radical change
• An unstable or crucial time of affairs in which a decisive change is impending
• A situation with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome
• A situation that has reached a critical phase
• Ask: is it an incident or a crisis?
CRISIS PLANNING: ARE YOU READY?

• In a crisis situation, you will react as you are organized and trained.
• Knowing what to do can be the difference between chaos and calm, or even life and death.
• Make a checklist now!
• Train self and staff – walk through table-top scenarios, stage real-life situations in your building, work with partners
TIMELINE OF A CRISIS

• First 10 minutes
  – Operational response to incident/situation
  – Gathering initial (confirmed!) facts about incident
  – Sending initial communications to impacted communities with as much information as possible
  – Responding to media, parents, and other callers

• First hour
  – Following up on evolution of situation, confirming more facts to communicate
  – Generating statement(s)

• First three hours
  – Possible press conference
  – More of the above

• First day

• Beyond
CRISIS CASE STUDIES
D11 CRISIS CASE STUDY: WALDO CANYON FIRE

• Saturday June 23, 2012—Waldo Canyon Fire
• Evacuations started with 2,000 and peaked with 32,000 people displaced
  – Seven D11 schools impacted
  – Nearly 100 students and at least 20 staff lost homes
• Regularly updating communications, established partnerships, being a part of the same community and having the ability to assist families with crisis counseling and resources
• Establish a volunteer phone bank to handle questions, ask for outside help, have the ability to say no graciously
D20 CRISIS CASE STUDY: TWITTER ACCOUNT HACKED

• What happened?
  – Three weeks before the beginning of school year – and the kick-off of a $230 M bond campaign – the Superintendent's Twitter account was hacked/mimicked.

• What went right?
  – Not much.

• What went wrong?
  – Untrained, unprepared, caught on our heals and slow to understand severity of situation.

• What would you do differently? Get in front of the media!
  – Dedicate resources to social media: create social media trainings & policies, centralize responsibilities, implement tracking systems,
D51 CRISIS CASE STUDY: STUDENT SUICIDE ON CAMPUS

• What happened?
  – Student completed suicide on campus, immediately following school release

• What went right?
  – Crisis team and other District staff were ready and responded immediately
  – Students remained safe
  – Collaboration between District and law enforcement and other partners
  – District and local partners faced the issue (mental health & suicide) immediately and head-on
**D51 CRISIS CASE STUDY: STUDENT SUICIDE ON CAMPUS**

- **What went wrong?**
  - Most of the communications department was out of town
  - During the event, coordination with law enforcement was not effective
  - Social media monitoring
  - Family of deceased student
  - Media coverage

- **What would you do differently?**
  - Ongoing mental health education
  - Ongoing conversations with media about reporting guidelines
  - Communications member present at all times
  - More multi-agency training
POUDRE CRISIS CASE STUDY: FOOTBALL JERSEY MILITARY NAMES

• Parents bought camouflage uniforms for football team. One parent was a USAF Colonel and wanted to honor military veterans. Coach took kids on “ruck walk” overnight in lightening storm (without permission). Kids studied names of fallen soldiers wanted to put them on backs of uniforms. No rubric for selection of names or veterans. Colonel selected them.

• What worked: our communication strategy was right. Unfortunately, the message was wrong.

• What went wrong:
  – Changing stories from administrators – district was put in position of answering questions we did not have context for
  – Coach didn’t want to participate - conflicting loyalties – used kids as leverage
  – Students protested
  – Parents stormed board meeting

• What would you do differently?
  – Get legal involved sooner
  – Get everyone in the room together to talk it out – phone calls were not enough
• Devra Ashby, APR  
  Communications Director, Colorado Springs School District 11  
  (719) 520-2286 | devra.ashby@d11.org

• Danielle Clark, APR  
  Executive Director of Communications, Poudre School District  
  (970) 490-3427 | daclark@psdschools.org

• Allison Cortez  
  Communications Director, Academy School District 20  
  (719) 234-1200 | allison.cortez@asd20.org

• Catherine Foster  
  Communications Specialist, Mesa County Valley School District 51  
  (970) 254-5112 | catherine.foster@d51schools.org

• Christy McGee, APR  
  Public Information Officer, Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8  
  (719) 382-1318 | cmcgee@ffc8.org