

Sample Budget Communication Strategies Provided by members of CoSPRA

Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Is conducting focus groups with targeted stakeholders to get a sense of the community's values and priorities. The focus group data will provide guidance to craft a community survey to get broader input from the community. The intent is not to have the community vote on what to cut from the budget but to get an idea of what they value most. Adams 12 plans to communicate heavily about the process and about what they hear from the community.

Adams 14

Adams 14 has had numerous discussions with administrative staff about and their District Accountability Advisory Committee. They have discussed potential cuts with principals and solicited their input. The superintendent has communicated financial updates/issues through her blog.

Boulder Valley School District

BVSD has been communicating the budget crisis in the community for over a year. In the past 20 months BVSD has held nearly two dozen public and school-based meetings. Recently they announced the formation of the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee (BAC). They asked patrons to apply to serve and held their first meeting Jan. 6.

The BAC will "provide an opportunity for the superintendent to access internal and external stakeholders by seeking input, ideas, strategies and concerns regarding BVSD's annual operating budget, as well as short and long term budget planning. The BAC will focus on problem solving complex financial issues facing the district and advising the superintendent on administrative issues as well as recommendations that he is responsible for making to the seven-member Boulder Valley Board of Education."

Eagle County Schools

Eagle County has made a strong effort to communicate budget issues to district employees. Superintendent Sandra Smyser has presented financial updates through several video clips distributed in e-mail to all staff members. They have also met with employee groups in person for input on priorities and where cuts would have the least impact. Eagle County is planning some written communication pieces and to travel to each school to have additional conversations.

Douglas County School District

Douglas County launched two key tactics last week. A video created in about three days by staff members is being distributed via e-mail link and is posted on the district Web site. The video describes the financial situation in the district and how the district is addressing it.

In addition, Douglas County is conducting an online survey to get feedback from the public. The input will be used by the DCSD School Board, District Advisory Council and administration as they evaluate the best use of resources. Public meetings are also planned. The video and the survey are available at the link below.

<http://www.dcsdk12.org/portal/page/portal/DCSD>

Littleton Public Schools

LPS began informing employees and community members of the challenges as soon as the school year began. Throughout September and October, administration lead 27 separate budget conversations with all district- and school-level accountability committees. Parents, community members and interested staff members participated. In November, the Board was presented with the feedback from these 27 budget conversations. That, along with the previous year's work of the district Financial Advisory Committee (community members, parents, employees) shaped the recommendations for cutting \$7.5 million to \$9 million for school year 2010-2011. Those recommendations were presented to the Board in December and were made widely available to the public at that time.

Three additional Board meetings, which included public comment, about these recommendations took place in January.

Throughout this six-month time period, updates were provided at all school community meetings, at local service organizations, to local media, on our district website, to all employees, specifically to all principals with greater detail, and to all key communicators.

All of the recommendations, presentations, minutes, and summaries of the meetings are available on our district website, www.littletonpublicschools.net.

Poudre School District

- Webpage dedicated to budget information, launched Jan. 13 with all information and updates (local and state links); linked to front page starting Jan 13: www.psdschools.org
- Process explained in detail...web page process graphic and "Key" that explains each step in the process
- Budget Advisory Committee of parents and community members
- Video to staff and parents; new updated video each month
- Survey of public, staff on areas for budget cuts
- 1 public meeting, English and Spanish
- Small Schools Funding Options Public Forums (4) in Jan. and Feb., and a Small School Panel to review findings and create a summary that goes to the Board of Education

- Communicated with principals and district departments first about level of reductions; the schools will be meeting with their site-based management teams to determine areas for cuts and present their budget proposals (see process for steps).
- Ongoing employee negotiations (presidents and HR meet weekly), and collaborative negotiations with all three employee groups

St. Vrain Valley School District

Recently, the [St. Vrain School District Web site](#) has added a stakeholder input form requesting feedback on budget cutting priorities. St. Vrain also hosted a school finance forum Jan. 21 featuring Rep. Jack Pommer, the chair of the Joint Budget Committee. The forum was video recorded and is available on the [district Web site](#).

Another ambitious and multi-channel forum was held, Wednesday, Feb. 3 at Silver Creek High School in Longmont. Hosted by Aaron Harber, who has his own weekly show on Colorado Public TV, this live public forum features several ways for the public to participate. In addition to a live audience, the event will be streamed live on the Web sites of the Daily Times-Call newspaper and the local public access cable channel. The public access channel will also replay the meeting several times, and it will be posted on the district Web site as well. Other features of the event include live audience polling (through keypads at the site), external audience polling (through the Internet) and opportunities for patrons to call in questions or send them through a blog.

The "budget impact forum" has the dual goal of informing the community about the need for budget reductions and collecting input about the community's budget priorities. The panelists on the forum include the superintendent, board president, board vice president, district CFO, Rep. Pommer and a PTO representative. Director of Communications John Poynton admits some of his staff are struggling with relinquishing some control of the event over to the partner organizations: Daily Times-Call, Longmont Channel 3 Cable and RidgeviewTel broadband. John notes, however, that the superintendent is fully supportive and that this type of communication is expected to become more common in the future. An ad promoting the event is attached below.