Control Your Message
2020 txEDCON
Presenters

**Lindsey Campbell**  
Public Relations & Crisis Communications Manager - The DeBerry Group  
San Antonio, Texas

**Mike Adkins**  
Communications Officer - Ector County ISD  
Odessa, Texas
Agenda

- Three phases of crisis communications: Preparation, Action, Optimization
- Best practice tips for leaders
- Crisis communications toolkit
- Case Study: How Ector County ISD Led the Conversation
Downloadable Toolkit

thededeberrygroup.com/edu-crisis
Phase One

Preparation
Preparation

1. Develop a crisis communications plan that parallels your emergency management plan

2. Conduct media training for key administrators and school board members - refresh every two years

3. Start building your story - values, policies, programs, improvements

4. Monitor the conversation
Best Practice Tip #1

Make connections with relevant area service providers

- Serve as the “hub of the wheel” for your community
- Identify the gaps in your in-house expertise
- Understand what resources and/or service providers exist in your area and begin developing a relationship with those entities
Phase Two

Action
When there’s an elephant in the room, introduce him.

- Randy Pausch
Action

1. Lead the conversation
2. Develop strong, consistent key messages
3. Don’t neglect your internal audience
4. Be responsive - respect deadlines
5. Take responsibility - admit fault when needed
6. Communicate with compassion
You should always have something to say

- Saying nothing is never the best course of action in a crisis
- “No comment” is a damaging response that implies guilt
- Follow the crisis communication pillars
  - Empathy
  - Values
  - Policies
  - Updates
Phase Three

Optimization
The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

- George Bernard Shaw
Optimization

1. Create Once Publish Everywhere (COPE)
2. Engage in two-way dialogue
3. Monitor and follow up
4. Provide resources
Best Practice Tip #3

*Think Outside the Box*

- Dedicated landing page on your website
- New and emerging technologies
- “Live” conversations with Superintendent and/or Principal
Case Study

Ector County ISD

Midland-Odessa Shooting
When their communities were attacked, these superintendents stepped up. We name them finalists for Texan of the Year

El Paso and Odessa should be proud of these leaders.
The Situation

Saturday, August 31 - Labor Day Weekend 2019

- DPS officer shot during traffic stop on I-20 in Midland County
- Suspect flees west toward Odessa, heads north on East Loop 338
- Turns west on 42nd St., shooting at cars indiscriminately
- Hijacks a van near Wilson & Young Middle School and returns east on 42nd St., continuing to shoot people as he drives
- One hour later, stopped and killed in the parking lot of Cinergy Entertainment Complex
Preparation

- All ECISD schools placed in lockdown and events suspended. As the situation cleared, all athletics teams escorted back to campus and students released to parents
- Phone call with El Paso ISD leaders
- Email, Facebook, Twitter communication - acknowledging the loss of a student
Leadership team, counselors and principals begin devising strategy
- Developed website with information
- Coordinate with City & County officials - check on everyone every day
- Counselors develop script to be read to staff and students upon their return
- Superintendent phone call to staff and phone call to parents; video message to staff and community at the end of the week
- Principal phone calls to staff and parents
- Prepare for national media; Prepare for hoax threats; Support, support, support
Could you have prepared better?

- You can **always** be better prepared
- Learned to think beyond the school walls - this did not happen at a school, but it still impacted the entire community
- A lot of students, families and staff were in need of help and support in the aftermath of this tragedy
What Worked?

- Communication, communication, communication
- Started the night of the shooting and continued to make sure our people were hearing from us regularly
- Experienced hoax threats and gun-related incidents in the aftermath
- Saw a void in the organization and delivery of trauma response resources in the community
- Worked with local crisis response organizations
- Counselors organized a community night of healing
Optimization

- Transitioned from talking about mental health to a focus on overall wellness
- Utilized The DeBerry Group to gather resources and keep the website updated
- Developed a safety/security communication campaign
- Hosted regular on-campus meetings for parents
Downloadable Toolkit

thedeberrygroup.com/edu-crisis
Thank you!