



Webinar Transcript: Using Digital Tools and Social Media to Engage Families in School Improvement Initiatives

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CARRIE GERMEROOTH: All right. We will go ahead and get started. This is Carrie Germeroth. I am the deputy director of the Regional Education Laboratory Central. And welcome to our webinar on using digital tools and social media to engage families in school improvement initiatives. For those of you who aren't aware or not familiar with us at REL Central, we are one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories at Marzano Research. And we provide technical support and applied educational research services to a seven-state region—Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

So now I would like to introduce our presenters. So Ceri Dean of Dean Education Consulting will kick us off. And Ceri has a wealth of experience and expertise in providing training, coaching, and technical assistance to educators at multiple levels and has presented numerous workshops on a variety of topics, including those around parent and community engagement. And Ceri will kick us off to talk about two of the research-based resources we'll be discussing.

And then Tammy Mitchell is the elementary redesign specialist for the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) and has been an educator in Kansas for 29 years and most recently is working as a redesign specialist to help support elementary schools as they redesign teaching and learning. And Jay Scott is the secondary redesign specialist for the Kansas State Department of Education. And similar to Tammy, he is providing support to schools as they also learn to redesign and provide personalized experience to students, whether that be in a project-based or problem-based manner.

So I'm going to just turn it back over to Ceri to kick us off.

CERI DEAN: A pleasure to have you with us. And we will be discussing the use of digital tools and social media. And our goals for that you leave with knowledge of some strategies for engaging families in improvement initiatives, that you know about some resources that can help you engage families in school improvement, and that you have some real-life examples of that kind of engagement so that you can reference those when you're designing your own approach to engaging families.

Let's start with some reasons why schools might want to engage families in school improvement initiatives. Please respond to the poll, indicating which of the reasons you think is most important. We'll take about 30 seconds for responses.



Well, it looks like most of our responses are around family engagement as linked with indicators of student achievement. That's a really important reason for engaging families. All of the reasons you see there are valid. And for some schools, it could be that the legislative requirements are what motivate them to take the first steps to engage parents. And that's fine. The important thing is that you take those steps and that you do involve parents. Today we're going to discuss two resources. And I'll briefly overview each of them and their purpose and highlight some of their features.

The first resource is *The Dual Capacity Building Framework* for family-school partnerships. And the second is *The Strategic Communications Toolbox*. There's an assumption that educators have the skills that they need in order to engage families. As you think about your own preparation to engage families in education, you might realize that there have been few opportunities for you to engage in professional development in this area.

The purpose of *The Dual Capacity Building Framework* is to address that flawed assumption that we all know what we need to know in order to effectively engage families as partners. The framework helps schools form partnerships with families, in which student achievement and school improvement is seen as a shared responsibility. There are relationships of trust and respect. And families—and school staff see each other as equal partners. The framework lays out the conditions and the goals necessary to build the capacity of both educators and families. So that's a really good thing about this document—is that it helps you think about both families need as well as what educators need in order to have the kind of partnerships that really are effective in helping student achievement.

The Dual Capacity Building Framework has four components. The first lays out the challenge. That is, educators and families lack the capacity to engage in effective partnerships. The other components address the conditions, the goals, and outcomes for building the capacity of these partnerships. Let's start with the opportunity conditions, the process conditions.

These are the conditions that need to be met in order for the participants to acquire the knowledge and skills that they need, as well as the desire to apply them. And that last part is really important. So not only do they have the knowledge and skills they need, but they want to use them.

The process conditions help us understand the importance of linking what we do to learning so that all of our initiatives with families and community engagement are tied to the district achievement goals. And you're connecting families to the teaching and learning of students. Also that these build respectful and trusting relationships. That they build intellectual, social, and human capacity of the people who are involved. Also that they are collaborative and collective so that learning occurs in groups rather than with individuals. And that you're also building learning communities and networks so that you strengthen both the community, the relationships of families to families, as well as families to schools. And also that the activities



and programs are interactive. So the participants are given opportunities to test out and apply their new skills.

The organizational conditions—next slide—emphasize the importance that family engagement is not an afterthought. It should be part of the whole system, a core component of the educational goals of the system, whether those are student achievement or school readiness or school turnaround.

Also that these efforts are integrated. They're embedded in the structures and processes of the district, such as professional development, curriculum, and community collaboration. And also that they're sustained by adequate resources and infrastructure support.

On the next slide, we'll see what's important are the policy and program goals. And these are related to the four Cs. So this is one way to remember them, four Cs—Capabilities, Connections, Cognition, and Confidence. So as you're thinking about your family engagement policy and programs, think about the extent to which you attend to each of these four Cs.

So capabilities, of course, relates to staff knowing about the assets and funds of knowledge and skills within the community that they're working with. And families need access to knowledge about student learning and how the school system works. So the more diverse your school system is, the more diverse your student population, the more important it is that teachers and administrators understand the cultures of those students and that they help people within the community to connect with the school and understand how the school system works. That is sometimes something that keeps people from participating in family engagement opportunities. It's also important to have connections, to connect families to one another, to have networks that include family and teacher relationships, parent relationships, and also important connections with community agencies and services.

In terms of cognition, it's important that families view themselves as partners in their children's education and think about different roles that they can play in that. Also important is building confidence of both staff and families so that there's a sense of comfort in being involved in family engagement activities and that they develop self-efficacy and develop capabilities to work across cultural differences. All of this is to help achieve these outcomes that you see on this slide—oops, sorry, previous slide—so that staff learn to honor and recognize families' funds of knowledge. They connect family engagement to student learning. And they create welcoming, inviting cultures. The outcomes for families are to help them take on multiple roles in terms of how they can support their students' learning.

So, whether it's just supporting their students' learning and development. Or encouraging an achievement identity, their positive self-image. Or monitoring their children's time and behavior. Or whether it's modeling lifelong learning. Or serving as an advocate for improved learning opportunities for their children, participating in decision making by being members of



committees at the district level and the school level. Or just collaborating with school staff and other members of the community on issues of school improvement and reform. So if you take all of those four Cs together and the opportunities of the process and the organizational opportunities, then these are the outcomes that we're headed for.

The second tool we'd like to talk about is *The Strategic Communications Toolbox*. As you have probably noticed in your own efforts, communication—particularly two-way communication—is an important part of family engagement. And *The Strategic Communications Toolbox* is designed to provide a framework for planning and implementing effective communication strategies.

The toolbox helps you move from communication that is disjointed and only externally-facing to an approach that is more centralized and occurs across divisions of the organization, involves everyone, and includes both internal and external stakeholders. The results of using this approach is that your communication is thoughtful. It's coordinated. It's clear. It's aligned. It's proactive. And it's effective in tying the organization's vision, mission goals, and strategies to the communication that the organization uses.

Next slide, please. The toolbox has six modules. And you see that they range from centralizing and planning the strategic communications—so forming that central group that will work to coordinate all the communication—thinking about what are your key messages and how do you get those right and how do you get them out to both internal and external audiences. As well as how do you actually implement your plan. So the toolbox helps you take a continuous improvement approach to communication.

It provides guidance and tools that help you assess your communication needs and then refine your strategies and processes, and monitor implementation of strategies and then assess their success. The toolbox includes examples, questions to guide discussions during the planning, sample tools, and additional resources. One of the nice things about the toolbox is that you can use it sequentially. So each of the modules in order. Or you can think about where your district is in terms of its communication. And you can just choose whichever of the modules best fits your needs.

On the next slide, you'll see an example of a tool. And this sample tool is related to identifying effective communication channels. So usually, each tool has a set of questions that guide discussion around whatever the focus of the tool is. And then there will be a completed example of the activity that some other state or district has used.

In the next slide, you'll see that the toolbox also has a series of three webinars around the six modules. And these are available on the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) website. And the BSCP Center is the group that developed the toolbox. So that is on your side. And I think that may be in the chat box as well.



Social media use as a communications strategy is blossoming—

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Hey, Ceri?

CERI DEAN: Yes?

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Sorry. This is Carrie. Sorry. I just got to get myself off mute faster. So I wanted to interrupt you for just a second, only because there were some questions in the chat box. So I was going to see if you might be, since you're on a toolbox—and everyone, we're actually on slide 24. I saw somebody was maybe having an issue with which slide we were on. So we're on slide 24.

But we had a question to us around the toolbox. So as we're all well aware, of a number of our states are—well, most of them—they're quite rural. And there is some limited capacity at the state education agency sometimes in terms of being able to provide communication and support. And so there's a question. "What if you're the only communications staffer in your agency? How might you then leverage or utilize the toolbox?" Ceri, what might you say to that particular question?

CERI DEAN: Well, there are a number of tools in the toolbox that can help you. Part of the beauty of the toolbox is helping you think about how you bring different people from across the organization.

So even if you're a small organization, you probably have to deal with communication internally, as well as externally. And sometimes departments can do a pretty good job of communicating externally, like sending out messages, like if you are a state department out to districts. But internally, you may have difficulty keeping one another on top of what's happening in each department. So there are several tools in the toolbox to help you think about how you improve communications within your organization itself.

And, then you might find yourself as not the only person dealing with communication, as you think about what might be a core group that could think about communications, both internally and externally.

Another key feature of the toolbox is that it really focuses on how your communication helps the organization accomplish its vision and its mission and tie its messages to its goals and its strategies so that you're really focusing your messages out to people and helping everybody understand how they can help accomplish the goals that are important both to the organization and, in general, if you're talking about a district or an SEA (State Education Agency), then their goals are around improving student achievement or teaching and learning in some way.



CARRIE GERMEROTH: Thanks, Ceri.

CERI DEAN: You're welcome. Were there other questions we should answer now?

CARRIE GERMEROTH: No, that's the only one. So definitely, please—if anybody does have any questions, feel free to stop. And we're happy to interrupt and chat as we go. And if that didn't answer your particular question, Paul, then please chat us back again. And we'll try to figure it out some more with you. Because it's definitely a challenge in a number of our state agencies, at least in our central region. But I'll let you go on. Thanks, Ceri.

CERI DEAN: OK. Thank you, Carrie. And thank you for the question. That was a great one. As we said, we all know how popular social media is right now as a communications strategy. And again, even thinking about the toolbox, we want to be sure that our use of these kind of tools is really strategic and purposeful. There have been a number of SEAs and LEAs (Local Education Agencies) that have been using social media. The slide that you see here reflects the results of a survey that was done in 2013. And this included 23 SEAs and 11 LEAs. You can imagine that now there probably have been some changes in the tools that are being used or not. That would be interesting. But this is from 2013.

So as you think about your own district or your own SEA, you might say, "Oh, well, we're using Twitter." Or "We've decided not to use Twitter." Or "We don't use Facebook, or whichever of those." You can think about how your particular organization is using those social media tools. The good thing about social media tools is that they can involve and prompt inquiries from different audiences. So maybe those that were previously pretty difficult to reach.

So now almost everybody has a smartphone, and so it's pretty easy to communicate with them through text or through Facebook or through Twitter and other outlets. Social media can help break down the traditional communication walls. As you know, they can spread information more quickly and more directly to those affected. And another good aspect of them is that they inspire a much broader conversation among stakeholders about policy changes and implementation.

Whether you see social media as a promise or a peril, it's clear that it can't be ignored.

On the next slide, we have some examples of how states have used various social media. So you can see that Alabama has used Facebook. Missouri sends video messages from the commissioner through YouTube. Ohio used Twitter chat a great deal when they were rolling out some of their education initiatives. Many of you may be familiar with EngageNY. They had a fairly extensive website that housed a lot of information about Common Core Standards and how to implement the policy. Washington, DC, also uses social media feeds on their blogs. Those are just a few examples of how SEAs have used the various social media platforms. In a



few minutes, we're going to hear some more details from Jay and Tammy about how Kansas educators have used social media.

So with that, I mentioned some of the good parts about social media. But of course, there are also some challenges. So please take about 30 seconds to respond to this poll about the potential challenges to using social media to engage families.

Well, it looks like concerns about negative postings is our winner. Also staffing and lack of training and resources. But the primary one is the one about concerns about negative postings. And Tammy and Jay will have a little bit more to say about that in their section. So thank you for completing the poll. And on the next slide, you'll see some examples of social media use resources. If you'd like to find out more about the survey that I mentioned initially, you can see some examples there.

And in the second resource, *Using Social Media to Engage with and Communicate to Key Stakeholders*, you'll see some tips about using those. These were produced by the Reform Support Network, which worked with the group of states that had received Race to the Top money. So now we're going to move to hearing some more from Jay and Tammy about how Kansas has used digital tools and social media to engage families in education and improvement efforts. So we'll turn the control of the screen over to Tammy and Jay.

TAMMY MITCHELL: Thank you so much for this opportunity. We're really excited to share a little bit about what we are seeing in Kansas as we work with schools through a redesign process. So one of the things we wanted to do was give some background about the Kansas Can Redesign Project. We are currently right now working with 47 districts, approximately 110 schools. This is our second year. And last year, we started working in seven districts with just 14 schools. And we've learned a lot of really great lessons along the way.

One of the reasons why Kansas is embarking on this redesign is due to the largest qualitative study ever done in Kansas, where we went out and asked our stakeholders, our parents and community members, three questions. "What are the skills and attributes of the successful 24-year-old Kansan?" "What are the skills and attributes of the successful high school graduate?" And then, "What is the role of pre-K-12 education in Kansas to help realize that goal?"

And so, once all of the qualitative data was collected and analyzed this slide shows what Kansans said they want in their schools. They said that we absolutely have to have quality preschool and full-day kindergarten. That was something that Kansas was behind on and needed to move forward with. Changes need to be made to address school culture. We need new and dynamic roles for counselors and social workers. There needs to be a lot more collaboration between schools and businesses. We need the school reorganized around students, and not the system. And community service needs to play a much bigger role. And you might say, "Well, then where's family engagement in that?" We put that in this addressing



school culture. Our schools have got to be places where parents feel like they're connected with their child's learning.

JAY SCOTT: So thanks, Tammy. And again, my name is Jay Scott. I'm the secondary redesign specialist at KSDE. And I just want to take this moment to thank REL Central for having us on with everybody today. And thanks to you out there who joined in. Tammy took you through basically what Kansans told us they wanted in their schools. This is some data that we pulled from the Georgetown Public Policy Institute on just basically education and workforce trends. And this research really undergirded our redesign effort in Kansas. And it really reinforced the notion that we must redesign our schools to help our children be more successful. And so what this graphic shows you is that by 2020, over 70 percent of the jobs in Kansas will require some sort of postsecondary certificate. We tend to refer to it as another piece of paper in addition to a diploma. And that could be anything from a bachelor's degree, a four-year degree, an associate's degree, or an industry-recognized certification.

And so you can see where Kansas is on this graph as compared to the national average of 65 percent. So we know that the trend in Kansas is that our jobs increasingly are going to expect—as far as education goes—a higher percentage of—we need a higher percentage of graduates to earn that additional piece of paper besides a diploma. So this is another piece of the puzzle that went into us saying we really need to do something different in Kansas.

TAMMY MITCHELL: And so we wanted to talk a little bit about the data that Kansas is showing about the success of our graduates. And so these are percentages. But if we were to start with a class of 100 high school freshman in Kansas, on average, 80 percent of those 100 would graduate high school. 69 of those 100 would enroll in a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution. 45 of those 100 would complete one year of college. And only 31 of those 100 would complete a postsecondary credential with labor market value.

So given the information that Jay shared on the previous slide, we have a huge gap as far as the number of students we graduate each year that actually have a credential with labor market value versus the number of jobs we have in Kansas. And so that's when we talk about wanting to have successful high school graduates and we want them to be successful postsecondary, we've got to make sure that they have the credentials that they need in order to be viably employed. And so all of this data lead to the vision for Kansas, which is Kansas leads the world in the success of each student. And that is our aspirational vision and the impetus for our school redesign.

JAY SCOTT: So with that, you can see how our vision was built and the basis for our vision in Kansas. And so we decided as a state to undertake this school redesign effort. And that is basically our intent. We're taking action towards that vision of leading the world in the success of each student. And these are the standards, so to speak, or the school redesign principles for redesigning Kansas. They're based on these four areas. These four areas basically we pulled



from our schools who were in the redesign project. We worked with them last year—the first cohort—through the redesign process. We began that last year. Those were what we call our “Mercury Schools.” We have a fascination with space and putting somebody on the moon and so we’ve used the Mercury Project as our first cohort. And the schools that were in the redesign effort last year and the plan year—we basically took what they did and what they focused on in their redesign effort and pulled it into these four redesign principles.

You’ll also see this is just a high-level look at those redesigned principles. If you dive down into each one of them, you’ll see what Kansas told us they wanted in their schools. You’ll also see the trend data that we shared really brought forth in these principles. So we have student success skills, which are all those things that high school graduates in Kansas feel are important, like academic, cognitive skill development, social-emotional skill development, which is a huge focus in the state of Kansas right now. And so those are the student success skills schools are redesigning around and focusing upon.

We have community partnerships, where it’s not just the traditional relationship between the community and the school. It’s Friday Night Lights, or it’s fundraisers. Or it might be an internship there with a local business. It’s much more involved.

We see that in our schools that school redesign is really about a community effort. And so it’s more of a mutually beneficial relationship and collaboration. And really, as we narrow down towards family engagement, this hits upon this principle—these partnerships. And having different conversations around school in the community and with families. Real-world application, project-based learning is a big part of redesigning Kansas—work-based learning experiences, like internships and job shadows. And then civic engagement—that’s a huge piece that we’re really promoting in Kansas. We want our students to be civic-minded and to give back to their communities.

And then personalized learning, which is a very broad topic—and we’ve narrowed it somewhat into teachers supporting students to have choice over their time, place, pace, and path as they learn and go through our system. So those are the four redesign principals in Kansas.

TAMMY MITCHELL: So, why engage families? Well, it’s kind of preaching to the choir. But we know that parents and families have the most direct and lasting impact on children’s learning. School redesign is a all-hands-on-deck initiative. And as the school goes, so goes the community. So we know that we’re really going to impact education in Kansas. We have to do it in partnership with families like never, ever before. So this picture here just shows one of the innovative things that one of the elementary schools decided to do. And that was they noticed that when it was time for school to start, parents were dropping kids off and a lot of times they had toddlers or preschoolers in the car that were there.

And so they decided, “How do we engage those parents and those younger kiddos?” And so they started this once-a-week breakfast club, where they got a community coffee shop to donate muffins and pastries and coffee. And they invited the parents in with the preschoolers and toddlers. And the library media specialist you know taught them some just basic—how to read books to your little ones in ways that are really engaging. And they had a partnership from a bookstore who donated books that they gave out to the families. And then, the music teacher also brought her guitar along. And they did some Kindermusik kinds of activities. And so that was hugely popular. And it has grown since their initial attempts.

It’s just a great way to bring families in and say, “Hey, you’re welcome to stay. You’re welcome to bring your kiddos. We’ve got things for them to play with. And then we’re going to also teach parents just a few ways that they can increase literacy at home.” Some of the digital tools that schools are using—they’re, of course, using Facebook. They’re using Twitter to tweet about the things that they’re doing with redesign and trying to connect with their community.

One platform that’s increasingly more popular around the state is a platform called SeeSaw. And that is the platform where students can keep their own digital portfolio. We’re talking—this is really more for elementary students. Students can keep their own digital portfolio. They can upload photos. They can upload samples of their work. They can make comments on their work. The teacher can give feedback to students. But it’s all on a platform that a parent can log in or click in and see their student’s portfolio any time they want to. They can do videos. It’s very intuitive. We’re seeing a huge surge, you know, in giving parents immediate digital access to the work that their students are doing.

Padlet is [AUDIO OUT. I have a link to a Padlet here that I’ll show you. But it’s just an online learning space where anyone with the link—if they want to, they can upload pictures and photos. They can share information with parents. It’s a little more closed than Facebook is. But it’s an electronic way of archiving and showing what students are doing.

There are some electronic scoreboards that have been in use. Of course, surveys—parents are being surveyed and asked for their opinion. They’re giving, you know of course, email. But for some of our younger parents, email is pretty old-school for the elementary parents who are really more into that instant, like Twitter and Facebook. Something that comes up instantly on a phone, and text messages—parents and teachers texting throughout the day, teachers taking pictures and then texting those pictures to parents so that they have this immediate access and feedback.

One of the questions that just popped up—it says, “Which surveys do you have—do you find useful?” Schools created their own surveys based off of the kind of information that they really needed or wanted. And so I really couldn’t say which surveys are the most useful.



But we do know that parents don't want to fill out a 20-questions survey. So, when those surveys can be brief, one or two questions. If they can be brief and electronic, they tend to get a much better response.

So here's a Padlet example from one of our schools. As they were planning for their redesign, they were prototyping different things. They're trying them on a small scale to see if it was something that they wanted to scale and include in their redesign plan. And so this particular Padlet showed there were different committees. There was a personalized learning committee, a social-emotional learning committee and they were just sharing resources and links here. But they also made the Padlet link public to parents.

So as schools were talking about the kinds of things they might want to implement, parents could go in and see the same links that the teachers were finding so that they could just be a lot more aware of what was going on within the school.

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Hey, Tammy? This is Carrie. I just wanted to interject really quick. I was still working on getting myself unmuted properly. I just wanted to respond really quick to Paul's question as well to let him know I was recently working on a project where we were doing some survey data collection via text message. And we were very careful to keep it—just piggybacking off of what Tammy said—we were very careful to keep it to around like five or six questions, primarily multiple choice, yes or no that they could quickly answer. And something just really interesting to note about that—if you had a SurveyGizmo platform, you can embed that in a text message link if you wanted to collect information that way. But when we sent it out, within an hour or two, we had 400-plus responses via text versus when we sent it out via email. It takes us two weeks to get up to 200.

So all this really reinforces what Tammy was saying in terms of keeping it short and sweet but also meeting parents where they are with the text messages becoming a more and more preferred way of communication. And so I wanted to just note that as well. And also, Tammy, I've got a question that I was kind of holding that I think maybe you could address as you're talking now with the Padlet. Is that this idea of—"How to promote two-way communication?" And Jay, you could answer, too, or Ceri if you want to. So, "How do you promote two-way communication in order to get more input or greater input from families to promote dialogue, whether that be with the school or with teachers?" And so I think some of the tools you're showing here may really lend a good response, I suppose, to this question around promoting the two-way communication.

TAMMY MITCHELL: Sure. So, you can open up Padlet so that anybody could post a comment or a question. And so that's not particularly how this school used it at this point. But, it just depends on the parameters that you set up. So if you wanted this to be a chat feature for a school and you wanted anyone with a link can contribute, it's super easy to set up that way. But, I think this brings up a good point. And that is that we've got to hear from parents. I mean,



I know we say it and I know I'm preaching to the choir. But we've got to reach out to parents in ways that are meaningful to them. And taking time off work to come to another school meeting is just not it.

Even if it's an evening meeting, if they have worked all day—a lot of our parents are working two or three jobs. They're single parents. And if they do have a night off, the last thing they want to do once they get home is to drag everyone back out to a school meeting. So, how can we engage them in ways that are meaningful to them? And how do we engage them in ways that help us remember that, especially at the elementary level, these parents are a lot of times in their 20s? So what reaches that generation? And how do we speak their language? I think it's our role to speak the language of the parents and not the parents' role to try to figure out the language of education.

All right. So if we can move on to the next slide—there we go. So this is just the platform of SeeSaw. And you can see it's just very, very intuitive. I saw first graders running around with their little iPads. And they were doing STEM science activities. And they took a picture of the thing that they built with their iPad. And they uploaded it to SeeSaw. And they filed it in the file with their name on it. And then they shared the link with their parents. And the kids were doing that. So what's really neat about that is that when it's that simple, then the kids are responsible for sharing with their parents. And it doesn't have to be always on the teacher to remember to send a link or send an email.

All right, Jay. You can talk about electronic.

JAY SCOTT: Yeah. And I'm learning a lot from Tammy. Wow. SeeSaw, Padlet, all those—those are really good tools. And I also want to add to our list of digital tools that we're using now. I saw the previous slide that had the SEAs using different digital tools. And hopefully Kansas is in there now for Google Plus Community because Tammy just started one of those today. So we're always on the search for different digital tools to share with our schools. So if anybody out there has other great ideas on how to communicate—how schools can communicate their messages, we're all ears. McPherson Middle School is one of the schools that was in our Mercury Project.

Hopefully that link is live. We can actually take a look at this. But this is an example of what we call an "electronic scoreboard" that schools use to communicate with parents, families around their community all things redesign. So you can see that this is just one of the pages within a larger site. That's the data scoreboard. And if you actually go down to that on that slide deck and hit the arrow buttons down on there, you can scroll through and see. These are just the different slides that are available. Just actually click that—not the Play button, but the one to the right of that.



Yeah. You can just go through and see all the different things, some of the resources that they're using at McPherson Middle School for their redesign effort. So it's just a really nice piece. It's very clean. It has everything about their goals, their vision statement, all kinds of things that they developed with the community. But this is just a culmination of all those things they developed together. This wasn't the school just getting together in a committee and deciding all these things. They actually engaged their community in doing that. And if you scroll down a little bit on this site, you can see their survey results. So if you just click the right arrows there to go through, these are just different—these are responses from students. So as a parent, I can go in and see how my student feels.

The aggregate of all of us students—how comfortable do we feel with themselves in at least one class, just some really specific questions. But I thought it was pretty powerful that McPherson chose to put this on a digital platform and share it with their families. So a really good example of an electronic scoreboard.

But that's just one example. We have other schools that built something similar but maybe not as involved. You can see that they've put a lot of time and effort into this. In addition to the digital tools or the schools who use social media, what have you, they also implemented some really strong strategies. And so Tammy and I are just going to kind of tag team through this. And I know that she has some schools who used porch visits.

So Tammy, take it away.

TAMMY MITCHELL: Sure. So home visits have for years and years have been a recommendation under Title I. And schools have had varying amounts of success with that. But, it's making a comeback. And one school is implementing porch visits where, they visited every family in their school. And we're talking, oh, like 300 families. They got their entire staff together. They needed translators for multiple languages. They went out and just welcomed the kids back to school. Gave them some little treat bags with pencils, and crayons, and stickers, and fun little things in fun little treat bags. They saw it as kind of the opposite of trick-or-treat.

They would go around and hand out treats and just really making that extra, extra effort to make sure that not only were they welcoming the child back to school and making this connection with parents, but making absolutely sure that they had done all they can to bring someone along who could translate.

So the kids were just really excited to come back to school then because their teachers had been to their house.

JAY SCOTT: Another strategy that some of our schools implemented was this idea of a community conversation. And we as a state—we felt like we modeled this as our commissioner, Dr. Randy Watson, and our deputy commissioner, Brad Neuenswander—they went across the

state. And you saw that the feedback—and Tammy talked about the questions that were asked—we call those “community conversations.” And the difference in those was simple. We started with questions. So what we had were schools—within their communities, they would gather as many people as they could get together and have two or three questions that they would ask real high-level questions that they would ask and, from that, pull that all together and pull that into a vision for that building.

And so these were building vision statements that were built through community conversations. So people had community conversations before this, but this was at a much higher level and really asking for, “What do you see as important in our schools for the success of our kids?”

Some other strategies that schools used—I know one of our schools used vision walks. So this was during the plan year of redesign. They hadn’t launched anything yet. But they brought smaller groups of community business leaders, school board members, families, parents, grandparents—they brought them all in for these what they called “vision walks.” And they would just walk around the school as it existed in its current state, but talk about their vision for the school. And in some cases, they got to the level where the students could actually take community groups around the school through these vision walks. A really cool learning experience. And a really good way to engage your community and your families.

And then the last thing I’ll talk about is student-led conferences. And this has been something that—I think that’s not a newer idea of student-led conferences. But I think just the subtle ways that our schools are going about holding student led-conferences instead of your traditional parent-teacher conferences, where most of our schools—at least at the secondary level—most were getting somewhere around 30 percent to 40 percent of their parents to show up for parent-teacher conferences. And a lot of their parents would make the comment that, “What you’re sharing with us at these parent-teacher conferences we can find in a matter of a minute on our mobile device.” So really changing the culture of conferences.

We had several schools last year that went to student-led conferences where the students actually drafts up an invitation to their family, and either formally presents that to them or calls them and schedules the appointment with the school. So the student really is setting up the conference, making the appointments. And then they lead the conversation—not about their grades in each class. I think that’s part of the conversation, but that’s not the focus. The focus is what the student’s interested in, what they’re passionate about, how they’re developing socially and emotionally. Most of these conversations happen with a mentor.

So a lot of our schools are implementing what a lot of them call an “advisory program,” where teachers and staff members serve as advisors or mentors for each student. And so it’s a non-content-based relationship. It’s just more about the whole student, the whole child. And so that mentor would be part of these student-led conferences.

And the thing I really liked about it was the numbers of participation shot up dramatically. A lot of our schools went from, again, 30 percent to 40 percent participation from families up to 85 to 95 percent, in some cases 100 percent attendance just in one year by changing the culture and the expectation levels around student-led conferences. And parents really, really enjoyed it because they felt like that which they were really focused on—their child—it’s a different conversation hearing it from their own kids at school. Communicating in that way has been really beneficial for this. So that’s just another strategy.

TAMMY MITCHELL: And so a strategy that has just started in Kansas is this idea of a “parent camp.” And there’s some really good information online about how to host a parent camp, how to organize it. But essentially, it’s an unconference. So if you’re familiar with Edcamp, it’s something similar. But what the school does is they survey their parents on some possible topics. “What are they curious about?” “What do they want to know from school?”

So the way this is different is that parents, via survey, select the topics. And then typically, this parent camp is either held on a Saturday, or it’s held in an evening. And so basically, parents arrive. And they’re given a five-minute kind of orientation of, here are the topics that you chose. Here’s where they’re located. And parents are free to go to whatever topic they want or as many topics as they want. And there’s no set schedule of when to move.

As soon as the parent has learned enough of that topic, they’re free to move at their own pace. And one of the things that has been really powerful about this is that as schools gather this data to get ready for it, if one of the needs is someone wants to know what resources there are for a food bank types of resources in their community, then the staff can reach out to members of the community that can speak to that topic. So the idea is that the families have these small group conversations. And they learn more about the topics that are of interest to them.

And at first, schools were really nervous about this. They were just really fearful. If you think about the traditional parent meeting, the topic is always decided by the school it’s always the school leaders talking at the parents. And if there is an opportunity for question and answer, typically the loud-mouth person gets all of the stage time. Or the two or three people that are the most negative dominate the conversation. So schools were kind of fearful about this parent camp idea. But what they realized was as they had parents that show up to everything and want to complain, they were able to have deeper small group conversations with parents. And they were able to share information in a conversational way instead of a, I’m going to stand on a stage and show you 50 PowerPoint slides.

The feedback from parents that engaged in these was phenomenal. The survey results were, “This is the first time I ever came to a school meeting where I actually had a conversation.” Or, “It was so nice to not be talked at. So these are really taking off.” The first ones were not well-attended because it’s a new thing, and people are scared about it. But the parents that went to



the first ones—they’ve gone back to their neighborhoods, to their friends, to their churches and said, “Hey, this parent camp thing is really awesome. You should come.”

So they’re building that. And they’re becoming increasingly more popular. And as parents pick the topics that they’re interested in, they were thinking of topics that the school had never really thought of before. And so, yeah, parent camp—kind of scary to start. But we’ve got schools that are like, “Now that we’ve hosted a parent camp, we will never go back to the old way we used to do parent meetings.”

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Hey, Tammy, this is Carrie.

TAMMY MITCHELL: Yeah.

CARRIE GERMEROTH: I just wanted to interrupt you really quick because I think there was a question that came through that Jay answered. But I think Jay sent it to me accidentally. So the question was, do you use any specific tool or guidance that has led to success of your student-led conferences? And so Jay is sharing about one state-wide initiative. Jay, do you want to hop on and just share what you were writing?

JAY SCOTT: I apologize, Rebecca and everyone. My initial response was just to Carrie just for her. But no, Rebecca, really good question. I think one thing that’s really helped the development and the refinement of these student-led conferences—the first thing that really undergirded it was, just like Tammy was talking about, everybody’s time is very valuable. So let’s make sure that if we’re all getting together around students, let’s make sure that students are at the center of that. And they really are working to make those more relevant to everyone involved.

The second thing is as a state, we have an initiative called Individual Plans of Study (IPS) for all of our students, beginning in middle grades. What that means is—and actually, this is the first year that all students in Kansas Public Schools, beginning in the middle an individual plan of study. And that individual plan of study is not just a list of the courses they’re going to take. It is full of their interests, their passions, their talents. It has all their extracurricular activities. It’s basically like a digital portfolio of—for our students. It’s all about them. And so once we enacted that, it provided the schools the opportunity to use the IPS as the centerpiece for these student-led conferences. And so I think that, more than, in a lot of ways has been really, really helpful for student-led conferences.

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Thank you. Thank you so much. Let’s see. I want to make sure, just recognizing we’re getting close to about 10 minutes left—and we have a few opportunities for you to further engage with us. So, thanks for advancing to that next slide there.

We'd love for you to type into the question Q&A box, if you will. "What digital tools have you used successfully?" Or you can use the chat box, whichever you might find more comfortable. But we'd love to hear, "What digital tools that you have used successfully?" And while you're responding to that—if you could go ahead and advance to the next slide—I'll let Jay and Tammy talk a little bit about their lessons learned.

JAY SCOTT: Yeah. One of the things that we noticed early on—number one, redesign. I think a lot of people thought it's you change your instructional practices. Or you change different things within the school—those four redesign principles. But what we're finding out more and more as we work with schools is that it's really about changing your culture, which is a transformational shift and a big paradigm shift.

But one of the things we noticed early on was the differences. There's a wide variety of expectations from families on the school about communication. We've got some districts that if a rock gets turned over in a classroom, they want to know about it, all the way down to schools that parents really don't—they don't expect much communication from the school. In some sense, they trust the school. And then everything in between.

So that was one of the things that we asked schools to really think about—is, "What are your family's expectations for you communicating with them." And then building from that. So that was one lesson that we learned. One communication plan may work for one district. But another one needs a completely different communication plan because they have different expectations within the community.

TAMMY MITCHELL: Yeah. So the other piece of that is just to be really proactive, to stay ahead of what I'm calling the "Facebook gossip chain." So as powerful as social media is, it's possible for one or two misinformed community members or misinformed parents to get on a roll and put things out on Facebook that just are not true. And it takes a lot of time and effort to chase that down once it's out there. And so we saw that with a couple of schools. From the night before to the next morning, something had been posted on Facebook that wasn't true and had been reposted and reposted. And so that was really, really difficult.

And so then that also brings up this vigilant monitoring of what the community is seeing through social media. So that would be via Twitter or Facebook or whatever—all of them. One of the things that some of our schools who are wiser than they were a year ago—they got their parents from their site council or parents that they have really good relationships with watching those social media outlets and inserting the facts so that those parents are equipped to talk with other parents on these social media sites to relay the real information.

CARRIE GERMEROOTH: OK. So just like Tammy was sharing there—and I think what most of us responded at the beginning as well about the biggest worry with social media is around the negative comments. And a lot of you have already responded in the chat and also in the Q&A



box about a number of different strategies. And it looks like there's numerous strategies, from Google's suite, Facebook, WhatsApp, newsletters that you're using to communicate and engage families.

So we were wondering if you've ever had any experiences where you had to stay ahead of the gossip and if there's strategies that you're using. Instead of typing those into the Q&A box or the chat box, we have this hashtag going, #FMEngage. And we'd love for you to tweet your response to #FMEngage so that it will kind of be an ongoing thing. And perhaps people can continue to learn and share on that.

And if you move on to the next one, here. I'll let Jay and Tammy say we could follow Kansas on Twitter. There's their handle and then the #KStotheMoon, which I just love. It's one of my favorites.

And so Kansas is, again, one of our states in the central region. And we're so excited to be partnering with them on a couple of projects around the redesign and some other things. And we're just so thankful that Jay and Tammy could join us this afternoon and share all of the great ways that Kansas is engaging with families and lesson learned as well. So I don't know. Jay and Tammy, did you want to say anything else?

I think we've got one more slide here with Q&A for another opportunity for people to weigh in.

JAY SCOTT: If I could, too, in Kansas, we have Jane Groff, who I know is on the call. And she works for the Kansas Parent Information Center (KPIRC). And she is a wonderful base of knowledge. And she is an advocate for kids and families all across the state. So if people on this call—you want to learn how to engage parents, call Jane Groff in Kansas because she's got it down.

CARRIE GERMEROTH: There you go. I'm sure she's happy to have the shout-out there. And then finally, on the same Twitter handle or hashtag there, we'd love for you to tweet more. "What strategies would you try? And what do you want to know more about?" Perhaps we can have a Twitter chat happen following the webinar here. Lastly, we just have a few more minutes. If anybody has any additional questions, please feel free to type them into the chat box or the Q&A box, as I start to close this out with a few reminders.

There's a number of resources that have been posted in the chat box. Lots of links to different things that Jay and Tammy were talking about, as well as just many of the other resources that were shared by Ceri at the beginning of our webinar here.

Let's see. The Q&A—yes. So one housekeeping thing—within about two weeks, it takes a little while to process the webinar. We will be sending—you'll get a link emailed to you with a



recording of the webinar. And you'll have all of the information in this webinar, including the resources shared as well. So that will be coming.

And then Heather has a question. "So for text messaging as a digital tool, is there a reputable text message service company used to send the text messages and help keep information secure and confidential? Or are text messages sent directly from an individual phone?" Jay and Tammy, do you all have a response?

TAMMY MITCHELL: Well, yeah. So, our Twitter handle at the Kansans Can Redesign is one that our agency communications department set up for us. And we have it on our individual devices and phones so that as we're out in schools taking pictures—we always ask the school, "Is it OK if I post this picture?" They may have students where they don't have permissions to do that. But we just run them off of our phones with this approved Twitter account. But no, we don't use a text message service company. And it's really intentional about asking permission at schools before we post pictures and comments.

JAY SCOTT: And I'll just throw in there, too, to Heather's question. I know some schools use—they have some sort of service that they use. And I'm just speaking from a—I used to be an athletic director. And we had a service to send out, "hey, game has been canceled." "It's been rescheduled." We had some sort of automatic text message voicemail system. But I don't know the names of those. But I know those do exist.

CARRIE GERMEROTH: Jay, I think there's one called—"Jackrabbit" is one that I know. One of my schools that my own kiddo is in—they have it set up so you can—it's called Jackrabbit. I'm sure if you Google it with "Jackrabbit text messaging"—I don't know. Don't quote me on that. It's called Jackrabbit. And so it's set up so that I get alerts from the school, just like you were saying in terms of if something is canceled or if something is rescheduled or things like that. So, but I know there's others because I get a couple of different texts. I have different texts from different schools with my own kiddos as well. But I don't know the particular names. So they are out there.

All right. I think we are at the close. And I don't see any more coming in. So you can continue to tweet questions on that #FMEngage. And then you can certainly follow Kansas on their handles and REL Central here as well. If you want to stay up to date on the latest from REL Central, you can go to our website. You can subscribe to our newsletter. And you could certainly follow us on @RELCentral.

Thank you again to Ceri from Dean Consulting and from Tammy and Jay from Kansas State Department of Education. It's been a wonderful webinar. And we will be in touch soon with more information.

Thank you all.



TAMMY MITCHELL: Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

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