



ACIS Thanks ISU Insurance

For Sponsoring Workshops at the
37th Annual Leadership Conference



ISU Insurance Services of Colorado (ISU) is a 139-year-old independent insurance brokerage firm, partnering with independent schools on their commercial insurance, risk management and employee benefits protection.



When the Unthinkable Happens: Navigating Crisis with Confidence & Compassion

LAURA LOVE & JEREMY STORY

OCTOBER 10, 2025

ACIS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



GFM|CenterTable



Your Presenters

Laura Love



Jeremy Story





Top 5 Common Mistakes Schools Make



#1 - FAILING TO HAVE A CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

Nothing makes a crisis easier to handle than having processes & messaging in place

#2 - FAILING TO MONITOR SOCIAL PLATFORMS WHERE FAMILIES COMMUNICATE

Nothing spreads rumors faster than social media, and you can't address what you don't know



#3 - VOLUNTEERING TO BECOME A MEDIA STORY

News stations use their 'tip line' to find potential stories and then go fishing to see who volunteers

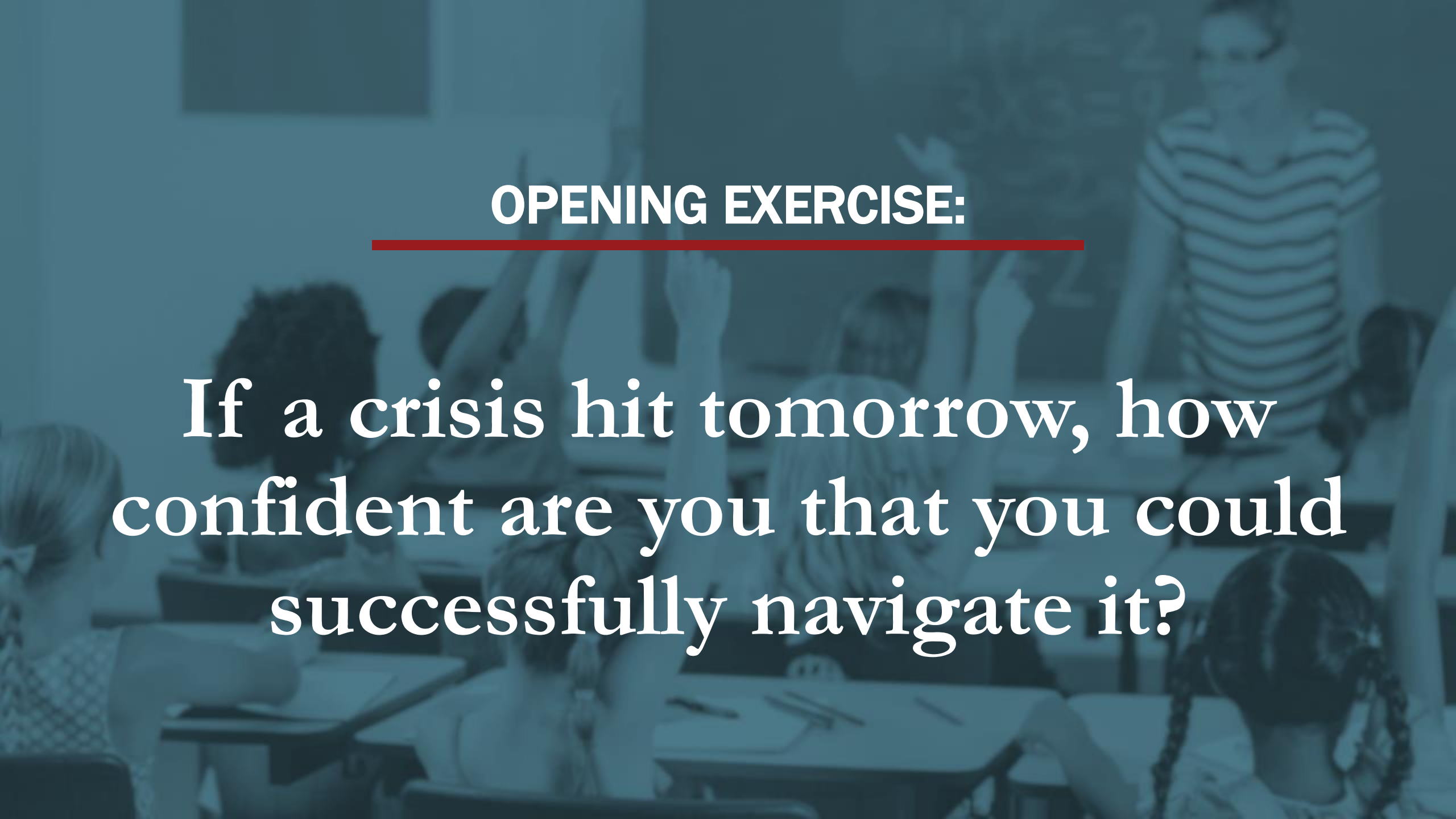
#4 - NOT ENGAGING WITH TEACHERS & STAFF ENOUGH

Parents know and trust teachers more than administrators; use that to your advantage

#5 - NOT USING DATA TO INFORM HOW YOU RESPOND

Use analytics to help diagnose what's happening and how to best respond





OPENING EXERCISE:

If a crisis hit tomorrow, how confident are you that you could successfully navigate it?



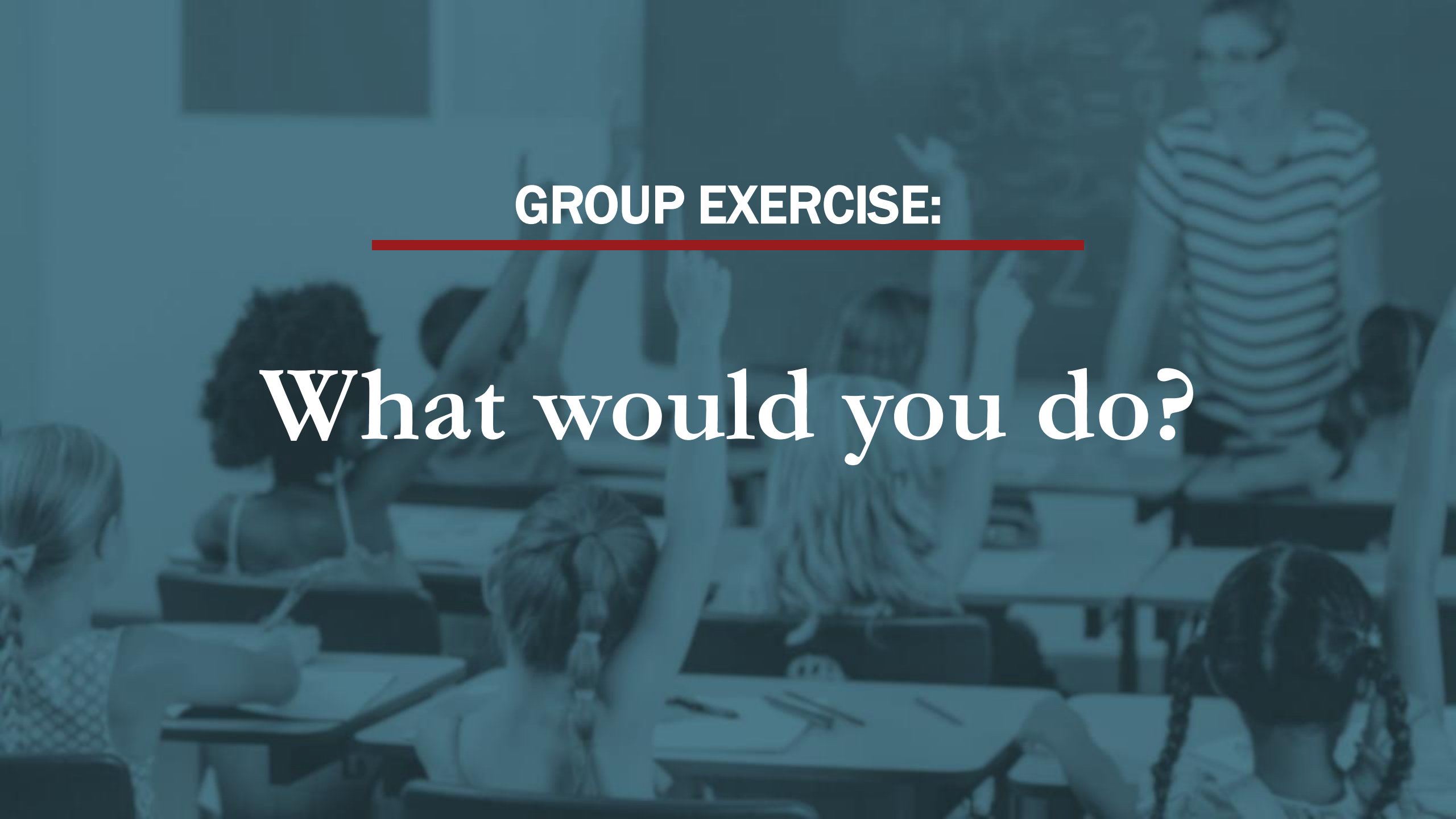
Understanding ‘Crisis’ In A School Context

- **Defining “Crisis” For Schools** (examples: safety threats, tragedy, public controversy, natural disaster)
- Common challenges leaders face during crises:
 - Uncertainty and lack of information
 - Emotional intensity (fear, grief, anger)
 - Pressure for immediate answers
 - What else?
- **The Dual Role Of School Leaders (Administration & Trustees): Communicator And Stabilizer**



CORE PRINCIPLES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS:

- **Transparency:** Sharing what you know, what you don't, and what's next
- **Empathy:** Acknowledging emotions and human impact
- **Integrity:** Aligning words and actions with values and commitments
- **Most important principle:** Have a crisis plan in place

A blue-tinted photograph of a classroom. Several students are seated at desks, and many of them have their hands raised, indicating an active learning environment. The text is overlaid on this image.

GROUP EXERCISE:

What would you do?



SCENARIO 1:

It's 10 p.m. on a Friday. A parent posts a video accusing a teacher of discrimination. The footage appears out of context, but the caption is emotionally charged. The post is already being reshared in parent Facebook groups and a local journalist has commented, "Looking into this now."

DO YOU:

- a) Wait until Monday to gather full context before responding
- b) Post a public statement expressing concern and pending review
- c) Call the parent directly and ask to meet in person
- d) Activate your internal crisis team and issue a statement to the community
- e) Notify legal counsel and prepare talking points for staff in the morning



SCENARIO 2:

A 2017 graduate posts a long caption about emotional abuse and manipulation by a now-retired faculty member. The post includes your school's name and tags current student accounts. It goes viral among alumni (and others) overnight.

DO YOU:

- a) Ignore it since the teacher is no longer employed
- b) Comment on the post asking for a direct conversation
- c) Acknowledge the post in an email to families and promise an investigation
- d) Alert your board chair, legal counsel, and communications lead for coordinated response
- e) Launch an internal listening campaign to assess whether this is an isolated or systemic concern



SCENARIO 3:

During Homecoming Week, a group of seniors bakes cookies with high doses of melatonin and gives them to unsuspecting students “as a joke.” One student has an adverse reaction and is hospitalized. The parents are furious and are already contacting the media.

DO YOU:

- a) Downplay the incident internally to avoid panic
- b) Call a special assembly to reinforce school values and address the incident
- c) Suspend all students involved to make a public example
- d) Hold one-on-one meetings with impacted families and offer transparency
- e) Update your crisis plan to include “non-illegal, but harmful, behaviors”



SCENARIO 4 (working scenario):

It's Monday morning. A senior was expelled over the weekend following an investigation into repeated code-of-conduct violations. The decision was made after multiple warnings, parent meetings and a final incident involving an off-campus altercation. By lunchtime, word has spread.

- **Students protest** with handmade signs, saying the expulsion was unfair and biased.
- **Alumni post online** in defense of the student, calling the school “punitive” and “out of touch.”
- A **well-known family donor** (and friend of the student’s parents) emails the Head of School and Board Chair expressing concern about the school’s leadership and transparency.
- **Local media** reaches out after being tipped off by an alumnus.



STEP-BY-STEP RESPONSE PLAN:

1. Activate Internal Crisis Response Plan and Team
2. Clarify Core Messages Internally First
3. Prepare Internal and External Talking Points
4. Engage Directly With Protesting Students
5. Communicate Proactively With Families
 - Designate a “Relationship Manager” for Key Donors or Concerned Families
6. Monitor Community Sentiment Carefully
7. Monitor Mental Health and Morale Within the Student Body
8. Schedule a Community-Wide Listening Session or Town Hall
9. Engage Board Leadership in a Values-Based Reflection
10. Reflect, Document and Communicate Closure Thoughtfully



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Confidentiality ≠ Silence:**
 - You can't share everything, but you must say *something*.
- **Students Deserve Voice & Support:**
 - Protest ≠ disrespect. Listen early. Support often.
- **Donors Are Stakeholders, Not Decision-Makers**
 - Keep them informed, but not in charge.
- **Values-Based Messaging Wins**
 - Communicate with clarity, care and conviction.
- **Monitor What's Said and What's Felt:**
 - Track both online sentiment and internal morale.
- **Closure Is Leadership**
 - Don't just move on. Create space to reflect and repair.



DEVELOP A CRISIS PLAN:

- **Step 1:** Identify what could go wrong: include feedback from key stakeholders (trustees, staff, parents, etc.)
- **Step 2:** Define who needs to be part of a response to each issue?
- **Step 3:** What holding statements would you use for each?



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR LEADING THROUGH A CRISIS:

- **Supporting Your Team**
 - Equipping teachers, staff and trustees with talking points
 - Providing space for emotions and questions
 - Importance of demonstrating calm and steady leadership





PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR LEADING THROUGH A CRISIS:

- **Maintaining Trust with Families**
 - Communicating early, often and clearly
 - Choosing the right channels (email, text, social media, in-person)
 - Addressing rumors and correcting misinformation quickly
 - Identify a few trusted parents who can serve as ambassadors





PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR LEADING THROUGH A CRISIS:

- **Staying Grounded in Your School's Values**
 - Using values as a guide when decisions are tough
 - Demonstrating care, respect and inclusion
 - Balancing transparency with privacy/sensitivity
 - Build relationships with local law enforcement early.





DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:

1. AI-Powered Response Drafting

Use ChatGPT/Claude to generate multiple response options in seconds and then edit for your voice and tone

2. Set Up Social Media Monitoring

Tools like Google Alerts + Brand24 track mentions AND emotional tone of conversations about your school

3. Create Your Crisis Command Center

One browser bookmark folder with: Crisis team Slack, social media scheduler, Google Analytics, parent portal, and crisis templates

4. Use Video for Authentic Communication

Pre-record green screen videos for quick customization, or use Loom for personal stakeholder updates



DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:

5. Control the Narrative with Hashtags

Create official crisis hashtags BEFORE others do which allows you to control the conversation from the start

6. Track What's Working

Use UTM parameters on crisis links to see which communication channels parents actually use

7. Monitor Beyond Social Media

Set up alerts for Wikipedia edits about your school. It is often the first place negative information appears

8. Leverage Neighborhood Platforms

Use Nextdoor to reach parents where they already gather and trust information

A blue-tinted background image of a classroom. Several students are visible, with their hands raised in the air, suggesting an interactive lesson or a Q&A session. The text is overlaid on this image.

TAKEAWAYS:

15 Key Crisis Management Takeaways



BEFORE CRISIS (*PREPARATION*)

1. **Create a simple crisis contact tree/text chain** – List key people and their roles in one document everyone can access
2. **Draft holding statements for common scenarios** – Have 3-4 template responses ready for typical situations and have legal counsel pre-approve
3. **Designate a single primary spokesperson** – One voice prevents mixed messages and confusion
4. **Set up media/social media monitoring** – Use tools like Google Alerts to track news mentions of your school; use Meltwater, Sprout Social, Cision Social Listening, etc. or other paid tools to track online mentions; also include all usernames and passwords for your platforms in a central document
5. **Practice the review rule** – Establish that all major communications get reviewed before sending



DURING CRISIS (*RESPONSE*)

1. **Lead with facts, acknowledge emotions** – Start with what you know, then address how people feel
2. **Communicate early and often** – Send updates every 2-4 hours, even if it's “no new information.” Make sure your Board of Trustees and Legal Counsel are brought in.
3. **Give your staff and teachers talking points** – Equip teachers with consistent information to share with parents
4. **Use multiple channels simultaneously** – Email, text, website and social media all at once
5. **Address rumors immediately** – Don't let misinformation spread while you gather perfect information



AFTER CRISIS (*RECOVERY*)

1. **Conduct a CRT Debrief within 48 hours** – While memories are fresh, capture what worked and what didn't; include legal counsel, HR and PR partner
2. **Thank your community publicly** – Acknowledge support from families, staff and community partners
3. **Update your crisis plan** – Add lessons learned to your response protocols
4. **Rebuild trust through transparency** – Share what changes you're making based on the experience; include alumni network where appropriate
5. **Document everything** – Keep records of decisions, communications and timelines for future reference

Questions?

Thank you.