

EAB's Checklist for Publicly Responding to Controversial Flashpoints

More than ever before, district leaders are feeling the pressure to publicly respond to social and political flashpoints at a moment's notice. In fact, these flashpoints have tripled in frequency in the past five years alone, exhausting leadership and resulting in small-but-costly mistakes that only cause flashpoints to spiral further.

Costly mistakes are rare in other highly skilled fields with the help of a simple technique: consistently referring to checklist before completing a critical task. Dr. Atul Gawande, surgeon and author of *The Checklist Manifesto*, reduced surgery-related deaths by 47% in only months after requiring a pre-surgery checklist protocol. Learning from Dr. Gawande's research, EAB developed a peer reviewed checklist that K-12 superintendents can use to avoid small-but-costly errors when publicly responding to controversial flashpoints.

Deploy EAB's flashpoint checklist before releasing your next official statement.

Flashpoint Statement Checklist

- 1. Has legal counsel been consulted?
What liabilities or rights should the district be aware of before taking responsibility?
- 2. Does your statement only include factual information, not speculation?
What basic information can be shared that won't create mistrust if later proven wrong?
- 3. Does your statement speak to the concerns of those directly affected?
What are key stakeholder groups feeling, and what questions do they have?
- 4. Does your statement reference tangible action(s) taken by the district?
How can the district show they're already working toward a solution?
- 5. Is the chosen messenger(s) appropriate for the severity of this flashpoint?
E.g., Superintendent for district-wide flashpoints, school principal for localized issues
- 6. Are chosen distribution channels a good match for the intended audience?
E.g., time-sensitive statements are posted as pop-ups on district/school homepages
- 7. Do your internal communications on this topic pass the "front page" test?
Would you be comfortable with an email being leaked or released via FOIA requests?
- 8. Has a holding statement been released within 30 minutes of the incident?
A holding statement will reduce risk of subsequent chaos if released promptly

3 Tips for Building Your Own High-Quality Checklist

Incorporate Boeing engineers' tips to craft useful checklists for other pain points in your everyday work.



Define a Pause Point

Determine the exact moment when the checklist should be deployed every time



Prioritize Speed

Limit the checklist to 5-9 items and ensure it can be executed in less than 60 seconds



Test and Revise

Revise the checklist each time you use it to ensure it stays useful and relevant