

## Exercise: Identify Key Elements of a Flashpoint Response Statement

Evaluate the flashpoint incident below, then determine which elements of EAB's Flashpoint Statement Checklist may be missing from District 18's public statement.

### Description of Flashpoint

Friday, September 9, 2022, 3:30pm

On Friday afternoon, an activist group handed out pamphlets to parents during dismissal at Spring Middle School in District 18<sup>1</sup>. The pamphlets correctly identified the publisher and series of the social-emotional learning curriculum used by the district. However, the pamphlet states inaccurate information about the goals, standards, and topics within the curriculum. Among other inaccuracies, the group claims the curriculum teaches Critical Race Theory.

### District Response

District 18 community,

Monday, September 12, 2022  
Timestamp: 9:12 am

On Friday, I learned that a community group distributed pamphlets to school community members during dismissal at one of our middle schools. The district leadership team has reviewed the community group's pamphlet and wants to clarify that the information shared regarding our Health curriculum is misleading and inaccurate.

Curriculum standards, objectives, and content are reviewed during the Board of Education curriculum approval process. This process takes place each time a new curriculum is proposed for district adoption. Visit the [district website](#) to review the Board process and the most recent adoptions of approved curricula.

District 18 welcomes opposing viewpoints, as engaging with differing perspectives allows us to learn and better understand each other – a practice that we want to model for our students. However, when viewpoints are shared with misleading and inaccurate information, this greatly inhibits these lessons and skill building. We encourage parents, students, and staff to attend the Board meetings or read the Board meeting recap to stay up to date on any new district initiatives.

Sincerely,  
Superintendent of Schools

**Using the Flashpoint Statement Checklist on the next page, list any important elements you feel are missing or improperly addressed in the above statement.**

1) School as been anonymized for this exercise.

## 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

# EAB's Recommended Revisions for District 18's Public Statement

## District Flashpoint Statement Response

Friday, September 9, 2022; Timestamp: 8:12 pm

District 18 community,

On Friday, I learned that a community group distributed pamphlets to school community members during dismissal at one of our middle schools. The district leadership team has reviewed the community group's pamphlet and would like to correct any misconceptions **and share resources for further questions.**

**First, the district leadership team emphasizes our disappointment that a group is intentionally spreading misinformation to strike uncertainty and panic.**

**Second, the central mission of our district is to provide a safe and well-rounded education for all students. Our teachers show the utmost fidelity to district curriculum goals and standards as outlined in our district strategic plan.**

**Below, please find clarifications of the misconceptions presented in the pamphlet:**

- 1. The statements made about the health education curriculum are inaccurate and the [detailed curriculum outline is available here.](#)**
- 2. The district's social emotional learning curriculum is reflective of the [state board of education's Healthy School Climate Initiative.](#) SEL lessons are based on the [research-based framework RULER](#), and we encourage reviewing [example lessons](#) based on this framework.**
- 3. District 18 does not teach critical race theory (CRT). Our adopted curriculum is developed from the leading experts in adolescent health. Please find their statement on CRT [here.](#)**

Curriculum standards, objectives, and content are reviewed during the Board of Education curriculum approval process. This process takes place each time a new curriculum is proposed for district adoption. **Parents can express their curriculum concerns by following the district's [content challenge process policy.](#)**

District 18 welcomes opposing viewpoints as engaging with differing perspectives allows us to learn and better understand each other – a practice that we want to model for our students. However, when viewpoints are shared with misleading and inaccurate information, this greatly inhibits these lessons and skill building.

**District 18 prioritizes community partnerships built on transparency and trust. We encourage all community members to raise any concerns with district leadership and look forward to stronger partnership in our community in the future.**

Sincerely,  
Superintendent of Schools

Release statement **as quickly as possible** following knowledge of incident

Statement references **tangible action(s)** taken by the district to answer further concerns

Statement **speaks to the concerns of parents** impacted by the misleading information

Statement **speaks to the concerns of teachers** impacted by false information

Statement includes **only factual information**, not speculation

Statement **passes the "front page" test** by ensuring all sentences and references can be clearly understood if reported out of context

Statement references **specific action(s)** for parents if concerns continue

Statement **aligns to core values** of the district and addresses stakeholder concerns