



Module 3: Messages

Messages are an important tool in creating healthy schools. In fact, the right messages, shared by the right people through the right channels, can generate support and action at many different levels. As school leaders, how do we ensure that our messages have the impact we want? Message development and testing helps.

PAGE 76

Align this module to your needs and resources

The steps in this module will help you to use and develop messages that can gain support for implementing the WSCC model. You may be wondering how you can do this work on top of all your other responsibilities. This module was designed so that you can choose the range and intensity of the activities that you want to complete.

The chart on the next page outlines three different options from which you can choose. Each option requires that you work through the module in its entirety. As you move from Option A to Option C, you have the opportunity to tailor your approach to your community. Use the chart to understand the time, resources, and knowledge or expertise your school or district needs to accomplish each option and to select the option that is best suited to your needs and capacity.





The options build on one another, allowing you to customize who (messengers), what (messages), and how (messaging strategies) you communicate with members of your school or district.

Want to explore other ways to minimize the time and resources needed? If you choose to conduct message testing to identify effective messengers and messaging strategies in your school or district (Option B), consider using what you already know about what works when sharing information. Results from your Social Network Analysis or your past experience using different communication channels (read more on page 83) are good sources of information for this purpose.

If you choose to conduct message testing to identify effective messages in your school or district (Option C), consider gathering feedback from a few people or a few roles at a time. Messages that work among teachers and parents can be very different (read more on pages 90–91), and you can lighten your load by customizing messages for one or two groups at a time.

To view and select the option that works for you, **TURN TO NEXT PAGE** →

Select the option that works for you

	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
DESCRIPTION	Adopt the messengers, messages, and messaging strategies that have been found to be effective in other schools and districts	Conduct some message testing to identify which messengers and messaging strategies work for your school or district	Conduct message testing to develop messages that work for your school or district and refine the messages that you develop
ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED	1 week	1 month	2 months
ESTIMATED RESOURCES NEEDED	1 person to lead and participate in planning (1 hr/day)	1 person to lead and participate in planning (1 hr/day) 5–7 people to participate in activities (20 min/activity)	1 person to lead and participate in planning (1 hr/day) 5–7 people to participate in activities (20 min/activity)
TYPE OF EXPERTISE NEEDED	Familiarity with the messengers, messages, and messaging strategies shared in this module	Familiarity with the who (messengers), what (messages), and how (messaging strategies) of school or district Familiarity with facilitating 1-on-1 conversations	Familiarity with the who (messengers), what (messages), and how (messaging strategies) of school or district Familiarity with facilitating 1-on-1 conversations
OUTCOMES Create healthy school messages for different audiences based on what works in other schools and districts			
Identify messengers who are effective among people in your school or district			
Tailor messages that resonate with people in your school or district			
Refine messaging strategies that reach people in your school or district			
READ MORE ABOUT THIS OPTION ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES	messengers , p82–83 messages , p85–89 messaging strategies , p 97–99	messengers , p83–84 messaging strategies , p100–101	messages , p90–96

QUICK START GUIDE

I want to use messages effectively to gain support for implementing the WSCC model in my school or district. What are the key things I need to know and do?



1. LEARN KEY CONCEPTS

Before you start, take some time to learn about the who (messengers), what (messages), and how (strategies) of effective messaging. These elements are critical if you want to create messages that generate buy-in for a healthy school.

PAGE 80



2. UNDERSTAND WHO ARE YOUR MESSENGERS

The first step is to identify people in your school or district who are effective messengers. Usually, these messengers fill a few different roles that tend to be go-to sources of information. You will also learn about ways to identify specific individuals who can be your messengers.

PAGE 82



3. IDENTIFY WHAT MESSAGES RESONATE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

After you have identified your messengers, you can begin to select messages that will generate buy-in and action for creating healthy schools. You can use messages that have worked in other schools and districts, or you can use techniques to customize messages for your school or district.

PAGE 85



4. DETERMINE HOW TO REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

Many strategies can help ensure your messages reach your audience and have the impact that you want. You will learn about some general approaches to messaging in schools and districts as well as techniques to customize strategies for your school or district.

PAGE 97



5. READ ABOUT THIS WORK IN ST. LOUIS

Read the case study to learn how a team of researchers, educators, and community partners in two school districts in the St. Louis region tested and refined messengers, messages, and messaging strategies that worked in their communities.

PAGE 103

LEARN KEY CONCEPTS

Messages matter

No matter what it is, how we talk about something — a company, a movie, a friend — it shapes the way we think about it. Words help create our reality.

If we describe a school as, for example, “a place where students are instructed in a certain curriculum and take tests to measure how much of it they’ve learned,” then our expectations for the school will be one thing. If, on the other hand, we define a school as a place “where every aspect of student health is nurtured so that the opportunity for instruction can be maximized,” then we expect it to be something else. We expect it to be a place where the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health of students is also part of the agenda. Visiting a school like that, we would expect to see active young people who have access to healthy foods and supportive services that promote healthy lifestyles. We’d expect to see a place where parents, teachers, students, and community all work together to create the optimal conditions for learning and well-being.

So messages — the words in our heads and on our lips — matter. And here’s what also matters:

Who delivers a message — the messenger — and **how** they deliver it — the messaging strategy.

In this module, you’ll learn about messengers, messages, and message strategies that you can rely on to generate buy-in and promote collaborative action for a healthy school. You will also learn about a process called **message testing** that can help you to refine the messengers, messages, and strategies you use to more effectively reach and activate specific audiences in your school or district.

Let’s start with a story inspired by our work in St. Louis that demonstrates how the right messages, shared by the right people and through the right channels, can mobilize people to support a healthy school approach.

TURN TO NEXT PAGE →

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter — it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

— MARK TWAIN



MESSAGE TESTING

Message testing is a tool used in communication research. It helps us to understand how messages are understood and how messages can be improved so that they reach people and have the impact we want.



Learn more about [how message testing is used](#).²³

KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE



Messenger

Who delivers a message



Message

What is delivered



Messaging Strategy

How the message is delivered

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER JENNIFER ALONZO, had seen her share of burnout, stress and mental and physical exhaustion among teachers and staff in her school district.

To help offer support and strategies on wellness, Alonzo and the district's human resources team began sending out a weekly newsletter to all employees focusing on the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. Sometimes the newsletter would include nutritious recipes, along with simple exercises that could be done in the classroom between class.

After a few months, Alonzo and her team surveyed teachers and staff at the district's schools, who said they either didn't have time to read the newsletter, or if they did, they rarely followed any of the diet or exercise tips.

Clearly, the newsletter wasn't working. So Alonzo and her team convened a meeting with the superintendent and key faculty at each school to discuss initiating a district-wide wellness plan to encourage healthy behaviors.

As a result of the meeting, faculty members went back to their individual schools where they formed "wellness teams." These teams consisted of staff members who not only expressed interest in making positive changes to their health and well-being but

also were willing to attend a few after-school meetings to brainstorm ideas.

After several individual school meetings, each wellness team chose a leader to represent his or her school at the district. Leaders from each school then met with Alonzo and the superintendent to explain the ideas and put a plan into action.

Interestingly, a common message was articulated among all the school leaders: No one wanted a wellness plan just about food and fitness.

"Teachers and staff also need some sense of community," said one school leader. "They need a way to talk and strategize and confide in each other and cry on each other's shoulders, beyond the teacher's lounge. They need a safe place to commiserate and then go back to the classroom armed with a set of strategies that they've agreed on."

Understanding that employees wanted a holistic wellness program spurred the district to change its initial message beyond healthy eating and exercise and the way it was delivering its message.

Now the district devotes part of its professional development days to workshops that address mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, both in the classroom and beyond. The district also partnered with an area health system to provide free, on-site blood pressure, cancer and diabetes screenings for employees at each school as well as mental health assessments.

In addition, leaders of the wellness teams were empowered to implement health initiatives at their individual schools. Through texts, emails, and face-to-face conversations, these leaders reached out to teachers and staff to figure out one easy thing they could do at the school level to encourage healthy behaviors.

One teacher confided, "I used to dread walking into my classroom every morning but not anymore. I no longer feel so overwhelmed and actually look forward to coming to work."

Stories like this highlight the power of effective messaging. The more you know and understand your community's needs, the better prepared you are to create messages that they will listen to.

UNDERSTAND WHO ARE YOUR MESSENGERS

Learn about messengers who engage

Teachers, staff, parents, and students in your school receive messages from many different people, but they are more likely to be engaged and activated by messages that come from individuals they know and trust.

In some instances, people look to individuals in specific roles for information. A few examples of how different messengers serve different information needs are provided below.

**FIGURE 12: MESSENGERS AND THE UNIQUE QUALITIES
THEY HAVE FOR SHARING INFORMATION**

MESSENGER TYPES	UNIQUE QUALITY
PRINCIPALS AND ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS	"Go-to" source of information for teachers, staff, and community partners who need information about the school
INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES	Particularly important messengers for teachers, who rely on coaches for learning new information and classroom techniques
TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF (including counselors and family specialists)	Also great sources of information for parents who want to learn about their children's needs and services
DISTRICT LEADERS (including superintendents, assistant superintendent for student services and communications directors)	Important messengers for district-wide efforts or changes
COMMUNITY MEMBERS (including mayors, business leaders, and organizations)	Trusted sources for information about what is happening locally

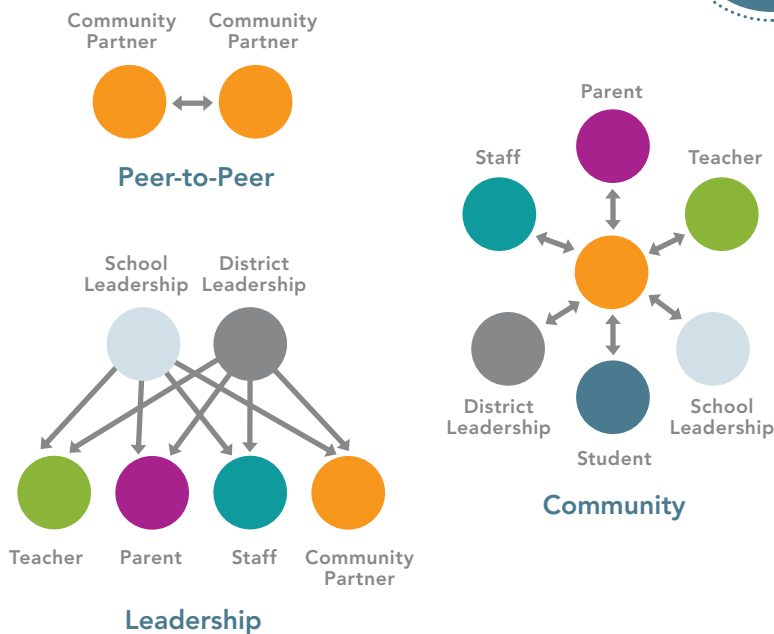
Not only are individuals in these roles visible and active in the school community, but they are particularly effective messengers because they can share information through different routes. They can share information with their peers, and they can also share information with people to whom they provide leadership or for whom they provide a connection to others in the school community.

Peer-to-peer is a messaging strategy where people of the same role or group share information with others in their group. Message delivery by peers is effective particularly if the person delivering the message accompanies it with a positive example from personal experience.

Leadership is another effective messaging strategy where people who are in leadership positions share information with everyone in their school or district. Teachers and staff, in particular, say that hearing from principals and superintendents helps to reflect the school or district's commitment to healthy-child concepts at high levels. Parents also find that well-respected school and district leaders are effective communicators to parents.

Community is another strategy for messaging that includes a community partner sharing information with several people and organizations. Many people feel that community partners are often central to a school or district's communication network and are in frequent contact with many others. As such, they are well situated to deliver messages.

MESSAGING STRATEGIES



Identify messengers for your school or district

There are many ways to identify the best messengers in your school or district. One tool, called Social Network Analysis, helps you identify people in your community who are trusted and communicate with others frequently.

Because these people, called *key influencers*, are active, visible, and trusted, they can be considered good messengers as well. Learn more about how you can identify the key influencers in your school or district in the [People module](#).

If you're not ready to complete a Social Network Analysis, you can also ask people in your school or district who they think are effective messengers. The answer to this question likely depends on the type of message being shared and the person being asked, so be sure to ask multiple people to describe how they would react to or perceive messages shared by different messengers.

You can gather this kind of descriptive feedback by talking with people and recording their answers. You can also ask people to fill out a chart, like the one on the next page, to help you understand which messengers are most compelling for the different types of messages you plan to share.



Download a [template of this messenger chart](#) that you can customize and use in your school or district.

Use the space on the next page to begin identifying the messengers in your school or district.

ACTION ITEM



..... **CONSIDERING EACH MESSENGER** listed in the chart, what kind of information does that person share? Why would you go to that person? What kind of story would that person share? Fill in your answers in the chart below.

	Question 1: What kind of information does a person in this role share with others most often?	Question 2: Why would you or others go to a person in this role?	Question 3: If a person in this role were to share a story that moved you, what would they most likely talk about?
PARENTS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
STUDENTS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
TEACHERS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
SCHOOL STAFF	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
SCHOOL LEADERS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
DISTRICT LEADERS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
COMMUNITY PARTNERS	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

IDENTIFY WHAT MESSAGES RESONATE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Learn about messages that work

There's no single answer to what makes a healthy school. It's not just the school lunch or gym class. It's not just the school building and its immediate surroundings. It's not just the ways in which students learn, are disciplined, or build relationships with one another and their teachers. It's all of these things and more.

So if you were to ask five of your peers to describe a healthy school, you would likely come up with five different definitions. But at the heart of all these definitions, you'd probably find ideas like these.

A healthy school:

- Allows learners to thrive
- Promotes positive behaviors and interactions among students and adults
- Creates a bright, welcoming environment
- Supports all students, no matter their resources or background
- Relies on collaboration among multiple partners

Articulating what a healthy school means to your community is the first step on the path to creating one. In addition to the aspects of a healthy school noted above, research shows that two themes are particularly compelling when describing the concept of healthy schools⁹.



WHAT WORKS WHEN COMMUNICATING ABOUT HEALTHY SCHOOLS

To better understand how parents, teachers, students, education stakeholders, and business leaders think about healthy school environments, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported a series of message research studies, conducted by Edge Research and GMMB.²⁴

Their research provides insights into how key audiences think about healthy schools, community involvement, and student success.



Read more about [communicating to build support for healthy school environments and download their key findings](#).²⁴



The first theme is **Equity**. The message that “every student deserves a chance to succeed” is one that resonates with many people. It speaks to people individually while also highlighting the shared responsibility among home, school, and community for making healthy schools a reality. Equity can also be a complex idea to communicate.

The message below was refined by researchers over many conversations many conversations with parents, teachers, and other education stakeholders:

“All students deserve a chance to succeed, no matter who they are, where they’re from or how much money their family makes. More than half of our nation’s public-school students live in poverty. Schools can help kids overcome challenges and give them the skills they need to succeed in life. But schools need resources, and families and communities need to be involved so all students have a supportive network at school, at home, and in between.”²⁴

The second theme that researchers found to be compelling is **Success**. Particularly important are messages that describe the specific skills that students need in order to be successful.

The message below uses both the terms “workforce” and “in life” to illustrate that healthy schools are places that support academic, social, and emotional skills:

“To succeed in the workforce and in life, young people need to graduate with a well-rounded set of skills — not just book smarts, but self-confidence and social skills, including the ability to work effectively in teams. Students need to learn these skills at home and during the school day.”²⁴



Taken together, these themes create a broad and comprehensive vision of a school as a place where a student’s education and health are connected, and to which teachers, students, families, and communities all make important contributions.

A vision, specifically, such as this:

“A ‘**healthy school**’ is one that nurtures and supports every aspect of a student’s health — physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. It’s a school where students are active and eat healthy foods. Where the school buildings and the grounds help students and staff feel motivated and ready to learn. Where teachers support students and serve as positive role models. Where parents and families feel welcome and invited to learn about how they can help their children succeed. And where the surrounding community supports and promotes learning.”²⁴

A vision like this will help guide your school’s approach to creating a healthy school. But, how do you get people to adopt this vision? How do you get them on board? Using clear, consistent messages that align with the reality of your school can help.

Our team partnered with two school districts in the St. Louis region to identify messages that generate support for creating a healthy school. Our work identified specific messages that were particularly compelling and activating to people in the schools and districts with whom we worked.

These messages represent three distinct themes: **empathy**, **teamwork**, and **action**. The charts on the next few pages outline which messages worked among which audience groups.

The first message theme is **Empathy**. Messages that express empathy for students and parents acknowledge individual social and economic struggles and help raise awareness about the challenging backgrounds that some students bring to the classroom.

Teachers in particular told us that these types of messages help them connect to their own personal experiences and foster a better understanding of what students and their families are going through.

FIGURE 13: MESSAGES OF EMPATHY FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

MESSAGES WITH SUGGESTION FOR SPECIFIC ACTION	PARENTS	TEACHERS	STAFF	ADMINISTRATORS*	COMMUNITY PARTNERS	FUNDERS
"Meet them where they are. Knowing their challenges can help you meet yours."	●	●	●			
"Children need to know you care."	●	●	●	●	●	
"Treat them like your own. Care about their health and wellness as you would if they were your own children."		●	●	●	●	
"Helping kids with their emotional needs and healthy thinking are essential for creating a safe and productive place to learn."		●	●			
"Healthy in body and mind. Mental health services are essential for creating a healthy, safe place to learn."				●	●	●
"Parents need to know you care."	●	●	●	●	●	●

*Administrators = School Administrators and District Leaders

Another message theme is **Teamwork**. Messages that emphasize teamwork among parents, teachers, staff, and community are appealing to school community members. Educators know that the more roles involved in supporting children, the less pressure there is on anyone alone to be responsible for children's welfare.

FIGURE 14: MESSAGES OF TEAMWORK AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

MESSAGES WITH SUGGESTION FOR SPECIFIC ACTION	PARENTS	TEACHERS	STAFF	ADMINISTRATORS*	COMMUNITY PARTNERS	FUNDERS
"Parents who feel welcome in school can help make a difference for students."		●	●	●		
"You're not alone. Administrators. Community. Parents. Teachers. We're all working together to help our children succeed."	●	●	●	●	●	●
"Strong schools, strong community. Volunteer at your [kids'/local] school to help make a difference."	●				●	●
"Teachers: The First Responders. To care for the whole child, schools need experts to whom teachers can refer kids with problems beyond the classroom."				●		●
"School safety: It's more than a metal detector. Effective safety includes existing programs and resources as part of a comprehensive, whole-school approach."				●	●	●
"Healthy schools, better together. Administrators. Community. Parents. Teachers. If we work together, we can help all our children succeed."	●	●	●	●	●	●
"Creating a healthy school is a team effort."	●	●	●	●	●	●

*Administrators = School Administrators and District Leaders

Action was also a message theme that resonated with people. Messages that included a specific suggestion or action were seen as effective at prompting people to participate in efforts to make schools healthier. These messages could be about the connection between health and education or what the audience might do to improve school health.

FIGURE 15: MESSAGES WITH SUGGESTION FOR SPECIFIC ACTIONS

MESSAGES WITH SUGGESTION FOR SPECIFIC ACTION	PARENTS	TEACHERS	STAFF	ADMINISTRATORS*	COMMUNITY PARTNERS	FUNDERS
"Mobilize for healthy kids. You know that health and education go hand in hand. Volunteer!"	●				●	
"Mobilize for healthy kids. Share your experience with others."		●	●			
"Mobilize for healthy kids. Share your experience with others."				●	●	●
"Get inside the backpack. Showing your child you care about what happens in school will make you both proud."	●					

*Administrators = School Administrators and District Leaders



Download the [list of messages](#) from the previous pages that express empathy, teamwork, and action, broken down by audience.

Customize messages for your school or district

Some of the messages and stories shared above may resonate with you. Others may not. That is okay, and it is expected, as every school is unique. In fact, the messages that work in your school may be different from what works for a school on the other side of your city or in a different part of your state.

Your school may already have messages that it uses to describe what makes it healthy. Or, you may want to see whether some of the messages in this toolkit resonate with people in your school community. Either way, the information in this section will guide you in customizing your own messages.

Creating effective messages can be accomplished in four steps:

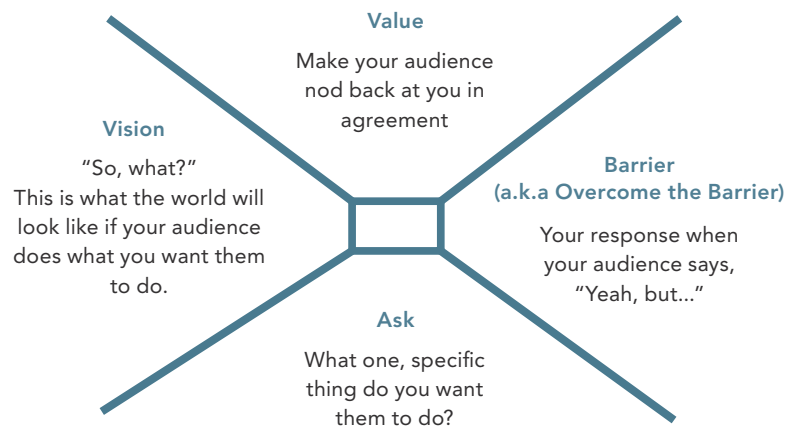
- **Identify and tailor messages** that you want to test in your school community
- **Identify people** who will give you honest and accurate feedback about what does and doesn't work when talking about healthy schools
- **Gather feedback** on your messages about healthy schools
- **Revise your messages** according to the feedback you receive

IDENTIFY AND TAILOR MESSAGES

If your school currently has messages that explain the concept of a healthy school, you can skip ahead to the next step to read about how you can test those messages within your school community.

If your school doesn't yet have such messages, consider testing some of the messages that have been successful elsewhere. See the message themes that worked in schools across the nation and in the St. Louis districts.

TAILORING MESSAGES TO SPEAK TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES



This message framing exercise was adapted from the [Smart Chart 3.0](#), a Spitfire Strategies tool.²⁵

Alternatively, you can create messages to test among audiences in your school or district. Creating a new message to generate support for healthy schools can seem daunting, but all you need is to focus on a few questions for each audience you are targeting.

Keep in mind that you can start small and test a few (3 to 5) messages at a time. You also want to keep the messages simple. Try to keep messages to one or two sentences long. Another way to think about it is: one audience, one issue, one message at a time. Too much and your audience won't remember any of your message.

Questions to consider:

- What does the audience value or care about?
- What would keep audience members from responding positively to your message?
- What do you want the audience to do after they get the message?
- Why will they be motivated to take action?



Say, for example, that you want to create a message that inspires people in your school community to join a committee to work on school health. The message you share with a teacher may be different than the message that you share with a community member.

For teachers, you know that they care deeply about students' academic success. Ensuring that students learn is their primary role, after all. But you also know that teachers' jobs extend far beyond the classroom into the lives of their students and into the community served by the school. As a result, teachers are also invested in their students' physical, social, and emotional health and well-being. It's important that your message make explicit the connections between health and well-being and academic success. Another motivating factor to include in your message is how the work of this committee will address some of the challenges that teachers face (Figure 16).

Community members, on the other hand, have less direct contact with students, but that doesn't mean they don't care about their health and well-being. In fact, schools are one of the most important assets of a neighborhood, and community members likely see many downstream effects of a healthy (or unhealthy) school, which impacts the strength of the community (Figure 17).

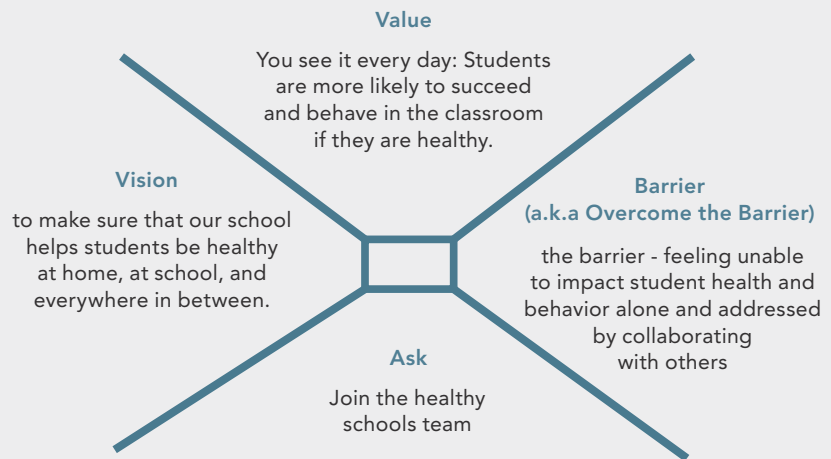
Try this out for an audience of your choosing on the next page. Use the example and instructions to help develop a message that speaks to the values, motivations, and barriers faced by your audience.

Your message to teachers might read:

"You see it every day: Students are more likely to succeed and behave in the classroom if they are healthy. By joining the healthy schools team you can collaborate with others to make sure that our school helps students be healthy at home, at school, and everywhere in between."

FIGURE 16

AUDIENCE: Teachers

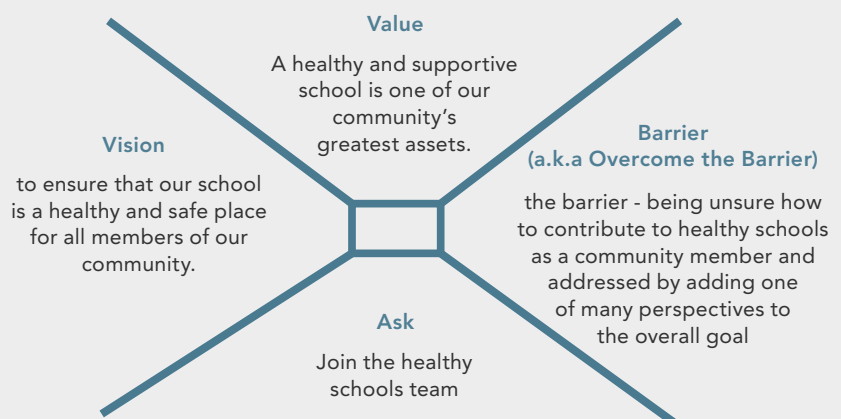


A message to community members might highlight this, reading:

"A healthy and supportive school is one of our community's greatest assets. Join the healthy schools team to add your perspective to a diverse team working to ensure that our school is a healthy and safe place, which will make for a stronger community."

FIGURE 17

AUDIENCE: Community Members

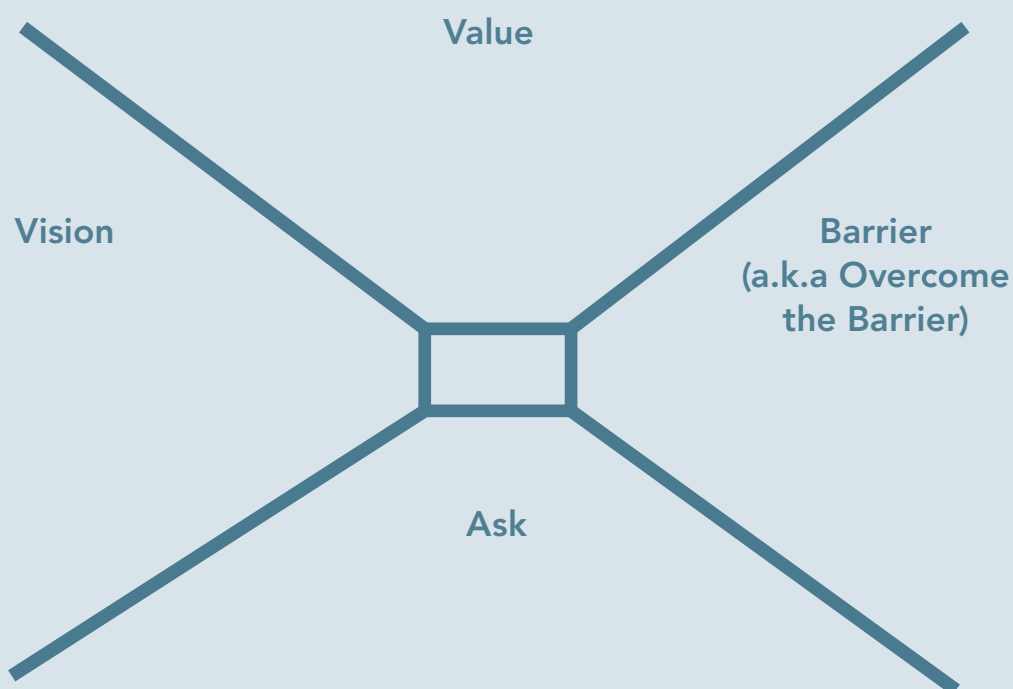


ACTION ITEM



..... **USE THE MODEL BELOW** to help develop a message that speaks to the values, motivations, and barriers faced by your audience.

AUDIENCE: _____



MESSAGE:

This message framing exercise was adapted from the Smart Chart 3.0, a Spitfire Strategies tool.²⁵

IDENTIFY PEOPLE

The next step is to identify individuals who represent distinct audiences in your school or district. These should be audiences you have already determined should receive messages about healthy school.

Write down a list of the groups you want to talk to and the names of two or three individuals in each group who you think will give you honest and accurate feedback about healthy school messages.

Use the section on the next page to begin identifying people in each audience group of interest.

PREPARE TO GATHER FEEDBACK

Once you've identified people, you need to plan how you will gather their feedback. There are many ways to get feedback, but before you start, you want to think about where and how you will ask for it.

You can gather feedback from many people at once in a group setting (such as a committee meeting) or from one person in a one-on-one conversation (such as a parent/teacher conference).

Here are a few more ideas:

- **Group feedback settings:** committee meeting; PTA meeting; school board meeting; school celebration or event (for example, a choir concert or basketball game).
- **One-on-one feedback settings:** parent/teacher conference; work session with a peer or colleague; and any number of other options, most of which can be easily built into your normal routine.

PREPARING FOR, GATHERING, AND RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK



Prepare

Decide where to gather feedback and create an "ask"



Gather

Ask questions that elicit descriptive and helpful feedback



Respond

Revise messages that respond to the feedback and test the new messages

Look back at the list of people you want to talk to. Thinking about your schedule and upcoming meetings, when will you see or talk to them next? Write down a few ideas about when and where you can gather feedback.

Once you have an idea of how and when you can ask for feedback, think about what you want to say to help people understand what you're asking and why. It may help to write out a script for yourself.

Here are a few examples of what you might say:

EXAMPLE 1

Hi Mr. Teacher, I have been working on coming up with some messages that help our school talk about the importance of health. I know this topic is important to you, and I was wondering if you had a few minutes during lunch this week to take a look at those messages and let me know if I'm on the right track?

EXAMPLE 2

Hi Ms. Principal, I have been working on coming up with some messages that help our school talk about the importance of health. I know this topic overlaps with the work we're doing on the Student Achievement Committee, and I was wondering if I could have a few minutes during this week's meeting to share those messages and get feedback from the team to see if I'm on the right track?

ACTION ITEM



..... **PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE BOX** next to each audience group with whom you want to test messages. Under each audience group you select, write in the names of people who will give you honest and accurate feedback about healthy school messages.

☐ Administrators (for example, principal)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Teachers

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Staff (for example, counselor, nurse, cafeteria workers)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Parents

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Community partners (for example, service providers, neighborhood businesses, churches)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ District leaders

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Students

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

☐ Others (fill in)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

GATHER FEEDBACK

Think about what questions you want to ask to help you understand which messages work best in your school community.

If you are interested in **feedback to help you create or tailor a message about what it means to be a healthy school**, consider starting with the question, “What does the term ‘healthy school’ mean to you? What words or phrases come to mind?” Ask follow-up questions to help clarify or to get more details.



Another way to get feedback is to share an existing description of a healthy school, such as the one below:

A healthy school is one that nurtures and supports every aspect of a student’s health — physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. This means getting students active and eating healthy foods. It means school buildings and grounds that make students and staff feel motivated and ready to learn. It means teachers who support students and serve as positive role models. It means a welcoming place for parents and families to learn about how they can help their children succeed. And it means working with a community that promotes health and learning.

AFTER SHOWING THIS DESCRIPTION, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think about that?
2. Is the description easy to understand?
3. Is there a part that you really like or really dislike?
4. Have you heard ideas like this before, or is this the first time?
5. Do you agree with this description? Is there anything you would add or subtract?
6. Do you think this school meets this definition of a healthy school? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
7. Do you think (teachers, parents, administrators, community partners) like you have a role to play in this? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

You can use a similar process if you’re interested in **feedback about a specific message**. Start by showing the message. Then ask some follow-up questions to get an understanding of what does or does not work about the message.

SOME GOOD QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

1. Tell me what you like or dislike about this message.
2. What do you think of when you read this message? What does this message mean to you?
3. Can you think of anything concerning or worrying about this message?
4. Would you recommend any edits or changes to this message?

If you are interested in **feedback to help you prioritize messages**, consider using a card sorting activity. For this activity, print all the messages you want to test on medium-sized cards, with one message on each card. Give all of the cards to your interviewee and provide these instructions:

In one pile, put the messages you LIKE in relation to your definition of healthy schools. In the other pile, put the messages you DO NOT LIKE in relation to healthy schools.



Download a [template that you can use to create message cards for a card sorting activity](#).

After your interviewee is done sorting, make note of which cards are in each pile, and then discuss the message on each card. You can use the specific message questions provided on the previous page.

ADDITIONAL CARD SORTING QUESTIONS

1. Is there a specific context this message should be used in?
2. What behaviors does this message promote?
3. Which messages would inspire you to action?
4. Who would this message speak to most? (Parents? Teachers? Community partners? etc.)
5. Considering all the options, which messages do you think are the best for inspiring action? For spreading information?
6. Can you think of other things or topics you might want a message for? Or that other people you know might want?

Whichever questions or questioning technique you use, be sure to take good notes. If your interviewee agrees, you can record audio from your conversation. Another way to keep track of feedback is to create an interview guide that has space for notes. This will help you organize feedback and will help you make sense of feedback from multiple people.



Download an [example of an interview guide that you can use to test messages in your school or district](#).

RESPOND TO FEEDBACK

Depending on the feedback you receive, you may want to revise some messages. Below are a few options for you to consider as you revise.

For messages that are liked but not understood:

- Consider using different words or phrases
- Then retest the revised messages with the same or new people

For messages that are liked by some groups (for example, teachers liked the message but parents did not):

- Interview a few more individuals from the group who did not like the message
- Ask questions to better understand why the message is not liked
- Try a new word or phrase that gets around the barrier you're hitting
- Remember: Not all messages will be effective for every audience, and it's okay to target a message only to the group that likes it. Understanding what people don't like about a message can help you better understand how to create messages that they will like.

For messages that are not liked:

- Ask a few people how they would revise the message or how they would create a message to share a similar idea
- Test these new or revised messages with some other people

DETERMINE HOW TO REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

Learn about strategies that connect

You can use many different strategies to make sure that messages are delivered effectively to individuals in your school community. You have already learned about some important messaging strategies, including identifying effective messengers and tailoring messages to your audience.

Another strategy to keep in mind is to use storytelling. Recall that when creating messages, you want to keep them simple. Stories, on the other hand, can be developed in long and short versions and in multiple formats, including written, audible, and visual. Even a story should convey a clear message, though.

As with messages, stories can be tailored to specific audiences. The questions above about what each group does, cares about, and experiences as challenges can help you get started. Once you have an idea of who your audience is and what messages might motivate them, you are ready to begin constructing your story.

CONNECT THROUGH STORYTELLING

Your opening should catch the attention of your audience, introduce your main character, and clarify the main point that your story will demonstrate.

After you've set the stage, it's time to explore how your main character navigates challenges and accomplishes (or doesn't accomplish) what they're trying to do.

As you wrap up your story, you want to make sure that your audience walks away with a clear message about what happened to the main character and what they should understand (or do) from your story.

Your story does not have to be long. In fact, brevity is a good quality of any narrative. It's also important that your story appeal to broad audiences. Make sure to use plain language and avoid any jargon or words that won't be understood by everyone.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Schools circulate a great deal of information about programs, initiatives, instruction, wellness classes, community-engagement campaigns, and other activities offered during, before, or after school, both inside their walls and within the larger community. Members of your school community may value and prefer diverse communication strategies, such as email, text messages, phone calls, mobile applications, in-person communication, or web-based media. How effective you can be with these different communications media depends on your audience and purpose. Understanding your audience allows you to identify the most effective method of communication for your school community members.



WHAT WORKS WHEN TELLING A STORY

Looking for more tips about telling good stories? Connect to [storytelling resources](#) developed by The Goodman Center.²⁶



Learn some quick and easy ways to know what message strategies and methods of communication work best in your school and district.

To view story examples and some questions to help you write the beginning, middle, and end of a story, **TURN TO NEXT PAGE** ➔

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE of a story that captures the theme of empathy:

Henry was a quiet boy. He came into my class every day looking disheveled. His hair was unkempt, and his clothes were often dirty. He didn't pay attention to what I was teaching and wouldn't listen when I tried to help him. I called his home, but his mother rarely answered the phone and when she did, she wouldn't say much. She never came to parent-teacher conferences. I wondered if she just didn't care.

One morning when I came to school, I noticed a woman sitting outside of the principal's office with her head in her hands. I asked the secretary what was wrong. "It's Henry's mother," she said. "Henry was in a fight." I took Henry's

mother aside and told her I was his teacher and that I wanted to understand what was going on. I asked her to come with me to a quiet room nearby and we sat down. "What's going on?" I asked.

She told me that she had lost her job and couldn't pay the rent. She had other children and wasn't able to give Henry the attention he needed. The other kids at school made fun of the way he looked, and he finally hit one of them. I told her that I cared about Henry and I cared about her, and so did many people at the school.

"Why haven't you come to school before?" I asked.

"I thought people here would look down on me, like the kids look down on Henry," she said. She told me more about her life and her family. I just listened. Later, I told her about what was going on with Henry in class. I also told her about the school counselor and social worker, who might be able to help. I told her I would work with Henry and try to get him back on track. I asked if she would help me to help Henry.

"I will do what I can," she said. She thanked me for listening. As she left, I felt sad for Henry, but for the first time, I also felt a little bit more hopeful for him.

THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR STORY'S OPENING:

1. Who is your main character? *A teacher*
2. Where does your story take place? *School*
3. What is your main character trying to do? *Help Henry pay attention in class and get connected to services*

THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP YOU FILL OUT THE MIDDLE OF YOUR STORY:

1. What challenges does your main character face? *The teacher can't get through to Henry and is not able to reach Henry's mother.*
2. How does your main character overcome these challenges? *Yes, the teacher meets Henry's mother where she is and listens to her story.*

THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS AS YOU WRITE YOUR STORY'S ENDING:

1. Does your main character accomplish what they are trying to do?
Yes, the teacher makes a connection with Henry's mother and connects Henry with the counselor and social worker.
2. What message does your audience walk away understanding?
It is important to listen first and work with families to find solutions.

AND HERE'S ANOTHER STORY, this one capturing the theme of action:

Students at Port Allen Elementary School used to eat breakfast in the cafeteria, but those who were tardy wouldn't get any. Teachers noticed that some students were hungry and not ready to learn. At the same time, students didn't exercise during the day, which made them restless and more likely to act out.

Working together, the community, district, and school staff turned things around.

With the help of a grant, the school revamped its breakfast program. Students are now greeted by administrators at the doors of the auditorium when they arrive in the morning and then can choose from an array

of milk, "grab n' go" breakfast items, and fruit. Then, they walk to their classrooms with breakfast in hand to eat at their desks or tables. Students who are tardy can get breakfast from the office as their parents check them in. The breakfast participation rate has increased to nearly 100 percent.

Another grant enabled the district to buy new equipment such as basketball hoops, basketballs, jump ropes, footballs, soccer balls, and hula hoops for students to use during recess. An outdoor concrete area was turned into a painted play space, an alternative to the grassy area when it was too wet due to

weather. New equipment in math and reading intervention classrooms enabled students to remain active while learning.

The results speak for themselves: The student activity level at Port Allen has increased, and so has learning.

"More students are actively engaged in recess — and they are more focused after," said one teacher.

"When the children have more to do, they are happier and more apt to engage and interact with classmates," said another. "We have grown into a healthier and happier school."

THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR STORY'S OPENING:

1. Who are your main characters? *A group of teachers*
2. Where does your story take place? *Port Allen Elementary School*
3. What are your main characters trying to do? *Help ensure students are fed and able to be physically active*

THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP YOU FILL OUT THE MIDDLE OF YOUR STORY:

1. What challenges do your main characters face? *There is a lack of funding for accessible breakfast options and equipment that allows for physical activity throughout the day.*
2. How do your main characters overcome these challenges? *The teachers work together, along with community partners and the school district, to apply for a grant.*

THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS AS YOU WRITE YOUR STORY'S ENDING:

1. Do your main characters accomplish what they are trying to do?
Yes, the grant they receive revamped the breakfast program and provided equipment to facilitate physical activity.
2. What message does your audience walk away understanding?
By working with their community, schools can better support the health and well-being of their students.

Refine messaging strategies for your school or district

Another messaging strategy to keep in mind is to use preferred methods of communication.

You can ask the individuals who gave you feedback on messages about their preferences for communication. Because schools and districts use many communication channels each day, it's helpful to learn directly from them which channels they pay attention to and which they disregard. Consider asking, **"How do you prefer to receive information? Which communication channel(s) is easiest for you? Which communication channel(s) do you ignore?"**

As with the feedback you gathered about messengers, you can talk directly with people and record their answers, or you can ask people to fill out a chart, like the one on the next page, to help you understand which message channels are most compelling for the different types of messages you plan to share.



Download a [template of the message channel chart](#) that you can customize and use in your school or district.



Email, announcements, posters, automated voicemails, text messages, and school signage — it is very likely that each of these communication channels will be most preferred by different groups. Some people, on the other hand, may want to receive information through several of these communication channels. If that's the case, then consider how you can adapt messages to share them across multiple channels.

Outside of asking for feedback, past experience can tell you a lot about what communication channels work well. If you've gotten good response through email or sending flyers home in students' backpacks, then try those channels again. Also, keeping track of what type of response you get can help you identify effective channels. For example, if you ask people to volunteer for an event, and you get more responses through a Facebook posting than an email, then you know that Facebook may be a more effective way to reach people.

Turn to the next page to try filling out the Message Channel Chart.

ACTION ITEM



..... **CONSIDERING EACH MESSAGE CHANNEL** listed in the chart, what makes the channel useful or easy to use? What makes it not useful or difficult to use? Fill in your answers in the chart below.

	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
EMAIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widely used within the school system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to keep up with high volume
TEXT MESSAGE		
PHONE CALL		
FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATION		
GROUP MEETINGS (such as town halls or assemblies)		
PRINTED MATERIAL (such as newsletter, mailing, or flyer)		
INTERNET (such as website or blog)		
SOCIAL MEDIA (such as Facebook or Twitter)		

FINAL THOUGHTS

The right messages, shared by the right people through the right channels, are critical to generating buy-in and action for healthy schools. With better understanding of who should communicate with whom, what messages resonate with different audiences, and which messaging strategies work best, you are ready to begin campaigning for support of the WSCC model.

As Step 1 ("Focus on Administrative Buy-in and Support," pages 25–31) of NACDD's [The WSCC Model: A Guide to Implementation](#) recommends, you should first focus on gaining buy-in from your building and district administrators. Their support

is critical for any sustained efforts related to the WSCC model. After you read Step 1, you'll be ready to use the messages you've developed to make targeted asks of your administrators.⁴

A team of researchers, educators, and community partners completed two rounds of message testing between January and June 2018 in two districts in the St. Louis region.

To read more about their process, **TURN TO NEXT PAGE** →

Identifying messengers in St. Louis

In St. Louis, we completed two rounds of message testing in both of our partnering districts. Before we held any feedback sessions, our first step was to review results from our Social Network Analysis to determine people and roles who might be good messengers.

We tested whether the key influencers identified in that process would also be effective messengers. For each message that was tested, we asked people to indicate who most needed to hear the message and who might best deliver it.

We heard from many people that their preferred messenger depended on the type of information they were receiving.

Descriptions of the unique qualities that different messengers provide are shared in [Figure 12](#) on page 82 of this module.

Beyond these individuals, who are effective messengers for specific topics, we also learned about three messaging strategies that schools and districts rely on to share information.

Peer-to-peer is a messaging strategy where people of the same role or group share information with others in their group. Many people said that message delivery by peers is effective particularly if the person delivering the message accompanied it with a positive example from personal experience.



Leadership is another effective messaging strategy where people who are in leadership positions share information with everyone in their school or district. Teachers and staff, in particular, said that hearing from principals and superintendents helps to reflect the school or district's commitment to healthy-child concepts at high levels. Parents also said that well-respected school and district leaders are effective communicators to parents.

Community is another strategy for messaging that includes a community partner sharing information with several people and organizations. Many people feel that community partners are often central to a school or district's communication network and are in frequent contact with many others. As such, they are well situated to deliver messages.

Customizing messages in St. Louis

We started the process of developing messages to test by reviewing existing messages that were used to describe the WSCC model and a healthy schools approach. This initial scan of messages gave us a sense of the terminology used when talking about healthy schools. It also helped us identify the types of messages we wanted to test among different audiences.

From this first step, we outlined three goals for message testing: Our first goal was to identify messages that clearly articulate the link between education and health. An example of a message that met this goal is, “Children who feel safe at school have an easier time focusing on learning.” In addition to messages like this, we also tested the healthy school themes and definition, introduced earlier in the [first part of this module](#).

Our second goal was to identify messages that support the concept of the WSCC model as a comprehensive and holistic approach to creating a healthy school. The messages we developed to meet this goal highlighted how a healthy school was a team effort and required many aspects of health and well-being.

A few examples of messages created for this goal are:

- “Positive, effective discipline is everybody’s job. Can you remember when you were their age? Stick with them. Support them.”
- “Administrators. Community. Parents. Teachers. If we work together, we can help all our children succeed.”
- “Healthy in body and mind. Mental health services are essential for creating a healthy, safe place to learn.”

Our third goal was to identify messages that persuade specific actions for target audiences to support WSCC model implementation. We created messages that prompted people to consider a variety of ways they could take part in the work. For example, “Mobilize for healthy kids. You know that health and education go hand in hand. Get involved!” is a message that prompted broad support. The message, “You take care of your students. Take care of you, too,” is an example of a more specific call for teachers and staff to practice self-care.

In addition to creating messages for specific goals, we also tailored some messages for different audience groups. For example, the message, “A healthy school starts at home. They’re watching and learning from you,” was created to speak directly to parents. The message, “Parents are looking to you. Your support keeps parents informed and involved,” was developed specifically for teachers and staff. And the message, “Healthier kids won’t break the bank. We can use the resources already available to support students’ health,” targeted administrators, district leaders, and board members.

In total, we created 36 different messages to test. Fifteen messages were general and shared with all audiences. The rest of the messages were created specifically for one of six audience groups, including parents, teachers, staff, administrators, community partners, and district leaders.



See a [list of all the messages we tested](#).

Our team next identified individuals we wanted to interview to get feedback on our messages. By this point, we had developed Social Network Analysis rosters for each of the schools and districts. These rosters listed individuals who were recommended multiple times by their peers as being highly visible, active, or well trusted in the school community. Using these lists, we selected potential participants who were nominated more frequently and who represented various roles and components of the WSCC model within their role capacity.

We targeted interviews with eight participants from each school, including one building administrator, one district leader, one teacher, two staff members, one community partner, and two parents. We sent an Interview Invite Email to all potential interviewees. The team then followed up with each individual until they recruited a well-balanced group of participants. In reality, we interviewed approximately six people from each school. The biggest issue we faced was that the interviews were being held in April and May, which are a very busy time for schools.

All interviews were held at schools during whatever time and in whatever space was convenient for the participant. Sometimes, this was during a teacher's lunch hour. For parents, it was often in the early morning, after they dropped off their student, or in the early afternoon.

The interview began by asking people to describe their role in the school or district. We then asked, "What does the term 'healthy school' mean to you? What words or phrases come to mind?" This opening question allowed our team to explore with people how they viewed the connections between health and education and their role in supporting healthy schools.

We then showed people cards featuring a definition of a healthy school and a series of healthy school message themes. For each card, people were asked if the statement was easy to understand, whether they agreed with it and why, and what parts of the statement they particularly liked or disliked.



See the [definition and message themes](#) we tested.

In general, people liked the definition of a healthy school and agreed with the message themes that we presented. There was broad agreement that health and education are linked and that a healthy school was an essential component to supporting and promoting students' health. As one person said, "If kids are neglected, they may not have their nutrition or dental needs met, [and] they won't be ready to learn."

When asked what made a school healthy, safety and nutrition were mentioned most often. Ensuring that students feel safe and have access to healthy snacks and meals before, during, and after schools was top of mind. Others said that providing opportunities for students and employees to exercise was important. A few others expressed that a healthy school was one that supported physical and mental health needs, allowing students to focus on learning and teachers to teach effectively.

DEFINING A HEALTHY SCHOOL



Safety



Nutrition

two of the most commonly mentioned factors in what makes a school healthy



MESSAGES MATTER

How you communicate about the value of message testing can determine who participates in interviews. If you have identified specific goals for your message testing, you can share these as a way to describe what you are hoping the interviews will achieve.

It is also important to consider who is inviting people to participate in the interview. Is that person highly regarded in the school or district? If so, then participants may be more likely or willing to respond and participate.



See an example of an [Interview Invite Email](#) that the team in St. Louis used when inviting people to participate.

After reviewing the definition and message themes, we gave people a stack of 15 to 20 cards, each with messages related to one of the message-testing goals. The messages shared with each person was slightly different, depending on their role. For example, parents received all the messages that targeted parents, but also some that targeted other groups. Similarly, teachers received messages specific to their group but also some general messages.

We then asked people to divide the cards into two groups: one with the messages they liked, the other with the messages they didn't like, had an issue with, or were confused by. Our team recorded the messages that were liked and disliked and then asked people to select their three favorite messages.

The most frequently liked and disliked messages varied slightly based on role groups.

PARENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS LIKED SIMILAR MESSAGES, INCLUDING,

"Meet them where they are," and, "Administrators. Community. Parents. Teachers. If we all do our part, we can help all our children succeed."

SCHOOL STAFF AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS MORE FREQUENTLY LIKED THE MESSAGES,

"Creating a healthy school is a team effort," and, "Mental health services are essential for creating a healthy, safe place to learn."

TEACHERS PREFERRED THESE MESSAGES:

"Children who feel safe at school have an easier time focusing on learning," and, "Let them know you're in their corner."

Next, we asked people a series of questions about each of the three messages they most liked and the messages that they disliked. Sometimes, people liked the overall idea communicated by the message but didn't care for a specific word or phrase.

For example, for the message, **"Healthier kids won't break the bank. We can use the resources already available to support students' health,"** one individual did not like the use of the word "kid" and preferred that we use "student" or "child."

Other times, people disagreed with the idea communicated. For example, a few people disagreed with the message, **"A healthy school starts at home. They're watching and learning from you,"** saying that this message put too much pressure on households with inadequate resources. In instances like these, we asked people what they felt would be a better message to share.

For some messages, the phrasing of the message was confusing and led to inaccurate interpretations of what the message was saying. The message, **"No recess? They still need to be active,"** was often read as advocating for or accepting the lack of recess, which was the opposite of what the message was communicating. This message was also disliked among people in high schools, as recess doesn't occur in high school.

We were also interested in learning which messages would activate different audiences. So, we asked which messages might be best at inspiring action and who most needed to hear each message. The table below highlights the differences in message preference by group.

Following the card sorting activity and discussion, we asked if there were any additional messages about healthy schools they believed were important but not covered in the messages they reviewed. This concluded the interviews for the first round of message testing.

After the first round of interviews, our team assessed feedback on each of the 36 tested messages. We created a list of the most liked and disliked messages. From these lists, we created 23 messages to be tested in a second round of interviews.


These messages included:

- Seven messages from the first round that combined well-liked headlines and taglines (for example, the “Meet them where they are” headline was combined with the tagline of, “Knowing their challenges can help you meet yours.”);
- Four messages from the first round that were revised to delete or edit disliked words or phrases;
- Eight new messages based on the suggestions of participants from the first round; and
- Four of the most popular messages from the first round.


We also developed a few stories to reflect two of the most popular themes in messages from round one: **teamwork** and **empathy**. The first story was about a healthy schools effort at an elementary school in Port Allen, LA. There, school staff

and the community worked together to provide breakfast to tardy students and to buy new equipment for students to use during recess. The second story was told in the voice of an elementary school teacher who was having problems with a student and was unable to reach his parents. Finding out about the parents’ difficulties at home caused the teacher to understand the student’s issues and seek appropriate help for him and his mother.

Each story was one-page long and between 280 and 350 words. The first story was based on actual events as recounted on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website. The second story was a fictional account based on anecdotal information from interviews in the first round of testing.

 [Download a list of the messages and the stories tested in the second round.](#)

We used a similar approach to identify people to interview in the second round of testing, but we added a seventh audience group of board members/funders. The second round of interviews followed a very similar process to the first: We used a card sorting activity to get feedback on revised messages and to identify messages that were liked and disliked by different audiences.


 [View a list of the most liked messages, organized by audience.](#)

After this activity, we asked people to read each story and tell us their initial impression — whether they liked it, whether they identified with it, and what, if any, emotions it evoked. We also asked whether the stories rang true to them.




MESSAGES MATTER

Asking good interview questions takes practice, but can make all the difference in getting detailed and helpful feedback.

 [See an **example of the interview guide we used to gather feedback in the first round of message testing.**](#)

How you ask for feedback in a message-testing interview is important. The right question can help open people up and elicit good information.

 [See an **example of the interview guide we used to gather feedback in the second round of message testing.**](#)

Everyone we spoke with said that they liked the two stories and that they both rang true. There was general agreement that stories were a more powerful platform, but some people doubted that everyone would take the time to read stories, and said that the shorter messages would be more effective. Many people said putting the stories on video would be helpful, especially if the person on the video had personally experienced what the story was expressing. Several people said that a combination of the short message and the story would be effective, with some saying the message should come first, and some at the end.

Refining messaging strategies in St. Louis

We asked what would be the best way to reach people with each message, prompting them to talk about message formats (for example, would it be better to hear this message in person?) and communication channels (for example, would this message be better as an email or text message?).

Some messages seemed to work across all platforms, while others were recommended for one or two platforms.



View a [list of the most liked messages](#), organized by communication channel.

Email, text message, and face-to-face conversations were recommended more frequently as communication channels. Each channel had its advantages as well as disadvantages. For example, email was widely used within our partnering schools and districts. People appreciated it for being convenient and a good way to save news or information. However, people felt overwhelmed by the amount of email they receive.

Tracking how people in your school or district feel about different communication channels can give you a sense of when it is appropriate and effective to use each channel. You can use a table, like the one below, to document the advantages and disadvantages to each channel.

