

# **Think Like a Patron (without losing your mind)**

**Presentation to the OSPRA Spring 2014 Conference**



## **Our agenda:**

**1.Presentation (some)**

**2.Conversation (a lot, I hope)**

# **A little bit about us...**

- **Eight staff members, including four recently retired school superintendents**
- **Kansas City-based; 22 years (corporate) experience in K-12**
- **Focus is on helping school districts build stronger relationships with patrons through better data and better communications execution (not on snappy PowerPoints, I'm afraid)**

# **Let's begin today with a question...**

**What are the three things you wish your patrons knew about your district but – try as you might to get the word out there – they just don't?**

# Reasons they don't hear what you are saying



*Life intervenes*

# Reasons they don't hear what you are saying



You think  
←

They think  
→



*They view your relationship...differently...than you do*

# Reasons they don't hear what you are saying



Bank of America



*Competition for their attention*

# Reasons they don't hear what you are saying



*Apathy*



# **What do your patrons wish you knew?**

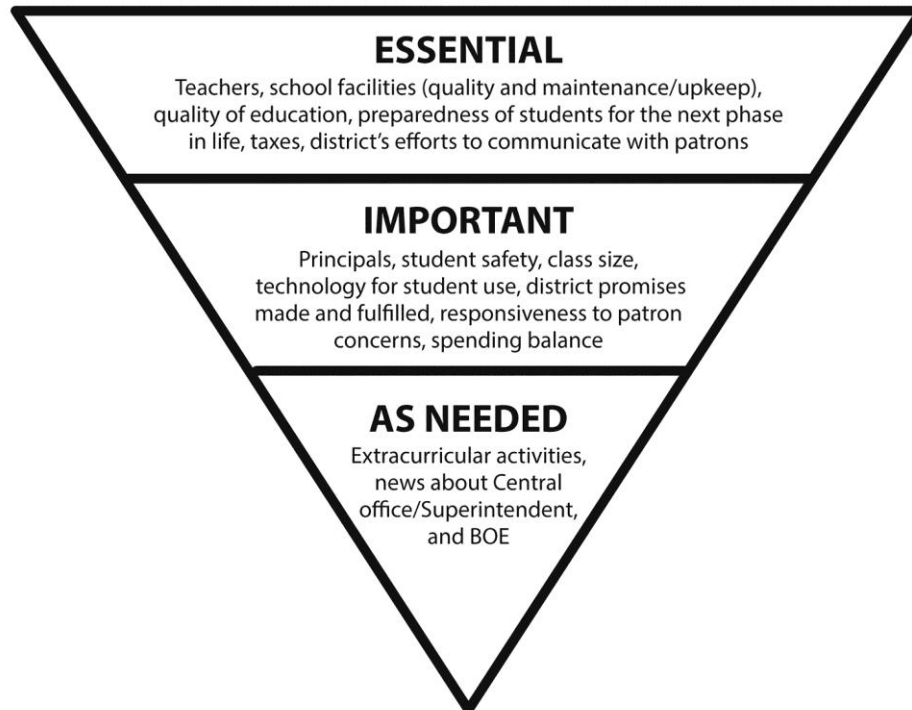
*I'm not as interested  
as you think I am  
(or you wish I was).*

# **So, now what?**

*Focus primarily on what matters to your patrons – no matter what you think should matter to them.*

# How do we know what matters to them? (Here's a place to start.)

## The Patron Information Pyramid™



# How we got here...

- **22 years working with districts of all shapes and sizes**
- **“Grading” questions key part of our research**
- **Some questions=lots of opinions...Others=fewer opinions**

# **So, what are patrons trying to tell us?**

**By grading some areas, but not others, they are telling us what matters to them.**



# **Rules of the Patron Information Pyramid**

- 1. This is an average, not a recipe.**
- 2. Topics will move.**
- 3. When in doubt, always start at the top.**

# **Essential topic 1: Teachers**

*Research says...*

**Perception of teacher quality is the number one factor typical patrons use to judge school districts.**

**However, they rely on their own experiences, the experiences of their children, and what they hear from others to form their opinions – not on bland stats about expertise.**

# Essential topic 1: Teachers

*What patrons say they want...*



**Ongoing evidence of your teachers' humanity and dedication to their profession.**



# Essential topic 1: Teachers

*Ways to do so...*

- Efforts by teachers to expand their skills
- Innovation in the classroom
- Dedication to students above and beyond
- Unique moments in teachers' lives

*“New class offerings enabled by teacher continuing ed,” NOT “Seventy-five percent of our teachers have Master’s Degrees.”*

# Essential topic 2: Facilities

*Research says...*

Perception of school facility quality depends on the “camp” your patrons occupy:

1. “It was good enough for me.”
2. “The latest facilities are essential to quality education.”
3. “I want school facilities that enable – rather than inhibit – a student’s opportunity to succeed.”

# Essential topic 2: Facilities

*What patrons say they want...*



**Evidence that you understand their facility expectations. (Could you sell this high school to your patrons?)**

# Essential topic 2: Facilities

*Ways to do so...*

- Show how you are lengthening facility life
- “Functional,” “Appropriately sized,” “Efficiently designed”
- “Why this?” and “Why now?”
- Connect “audience-specific” facilities to a larger benefit

*“Maintaining student-friendly class sizes goal of district expansion discussion,” NOT “District growth points to need for more classrooms.”*

# Essential topic 3: Education quality

*Research says...*

How do typical patrons measure your district's educational quality?

- Intimate knowledge of teacher performance, student test scores and graduation rates? Not so much.
- The last piece of information they have seen, read or heard? Always.

# Essential topic 3: Education quality

*What patrons say they want...*



**Continuing proof of excellence, with meaningful examples.**

# Essential topic 3: Education quality

*Ways to do so...*

- Students winning all types of awards
- How district has changed to meet student needs
- Students engaged in high-profile service
- Upgrades tied to education – not to “wow”

*“Students making their mark in the community and classroom,” NOT “Graduation rate tops in metro area.”*

# **Essential topic 4: Preparing students for the future**

*Research says...*

**Are you delivering on the promise of a successful future for your students?**

**Only your community can decide – and it's a moving target.**



# Essential topic 4: Preparing students for the future

*What patrons say they want...*



**Demonstration of a commitment to – and celebration of – achievement at all levels.**

# Essential topic 4: Preparing students for the future

*Ways to do so...*

- Highlight student achievements in balance with community expectations
- Focus on scholarships of all types
- Detail graduates' accomplishments

*“Student success at Smith High opens doors to the future,” NOT “AP scores of 4 and 5 set record at Smith High.”*

# **Essential topic 5: Communicating with patrons**

*Research says...*

Level of patron engagement guides their view on how well you communicate.

- PTO/A parent: “That school/school district is really accomplishing things!”
- Typical taxpayer: “That school/school district never tells us anything about what it are doing!”

# Essential topic 5: Communicating with patrons

*What patrons say they want...*



Communication that makes them want to pay attention.

# Essential topic 5:

## Communicating with patrons

*Ways to do so...*

- Details for zealots; basics for the masses
- Connect it: “Why should I care?”
- Be consistent; when you get bored, your typical patrons are finally starting to pay attention

*“Students to benefit from expanded core class opportunities,” NOT “S.T.E.M. focus expanding in coming school year.”*

# Essential topic 6: Tax value

*Research says...*

For typical patrons, taxes are less about the amount and more about the perception of “value.”

**Value=What I see + What I hear + What I believe**

# Essential topic 6: Tax value

*What patrons say they want...*



**Demonstrations that their money is being spent wisely.**

# Essential topic 6: Tax value

*Ways to do so...*

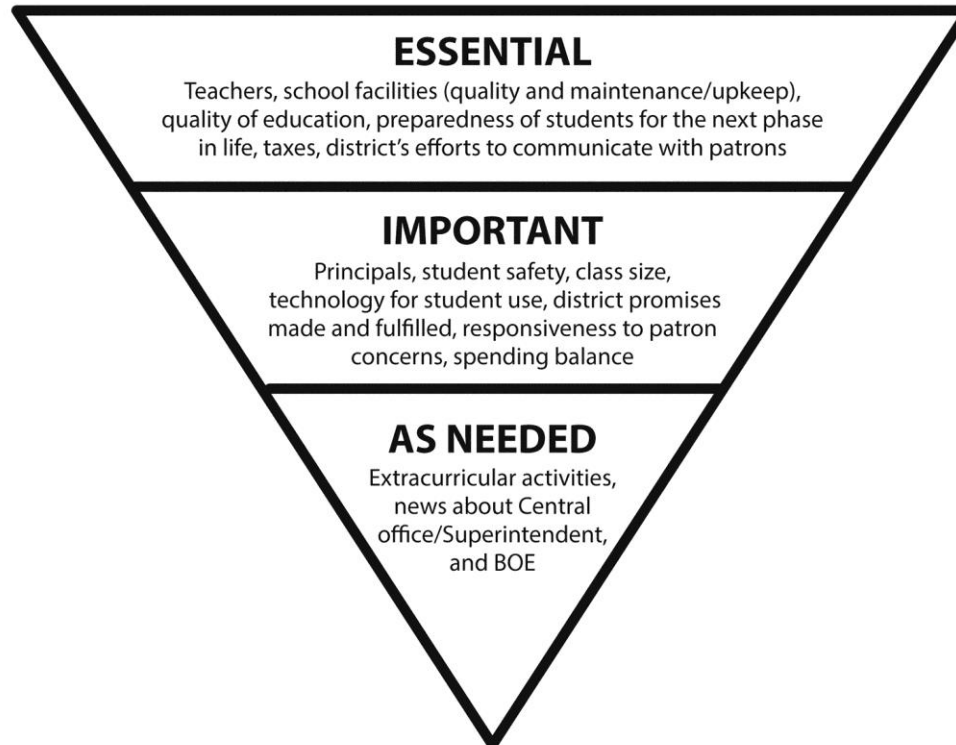
- Evidence of maintaining/reinvesting in facilities
- Cost-saving examples – big and little
- Success stories enabled by an investment

*“Maximizing achievement, minimizing downtime goal of iPad program,” NOT “iPad program to give tablets to all elementary students.”*



# A word about the other levels

## The Patron Information Pyramid™



**And, if you ever think you can't make  
communications too simple...**



**Thank you!**

**Comments? Questions?**