



# Communicating for Success:

Using Data-Driven Stories to  
Move Audiences to Action

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# Key Learnings

- Communicating our successes effectively to audiences is critical to our success and sustainability.
- Data are critical—but abstract. Offered within a human context (language, stories) data are easier to understand.
- Stories—visual and linguistic—can be persuasive communication tools.

# Key Learnings (Continued)

- The right data, presented in the right way, adds credibility to our stories.
- Compelling, data-driven stories can “stick” with audiences and compel action.
- Our stories can be delivered in many ways to many audiences.

# Key Learning #1

Communicating our successes effectively to audiences is critical to our success and sustainability.

A photograph of a forest with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm, golden glow. The image is slightly blurred, emphasizing the light rays and the overall atmosphere of the scene.

**If a tree falls in the forest...  
...but no one's there to hear it**

# Our Audiences Need to Know

- How programs/services positively impact:
  - Physical and emotional safety for all
  - Academic outcomes
    - Students' ability to learn
    - Teachers' ability to teach
  - Human relationships
  - School connectedness
  - Improved health and wellness



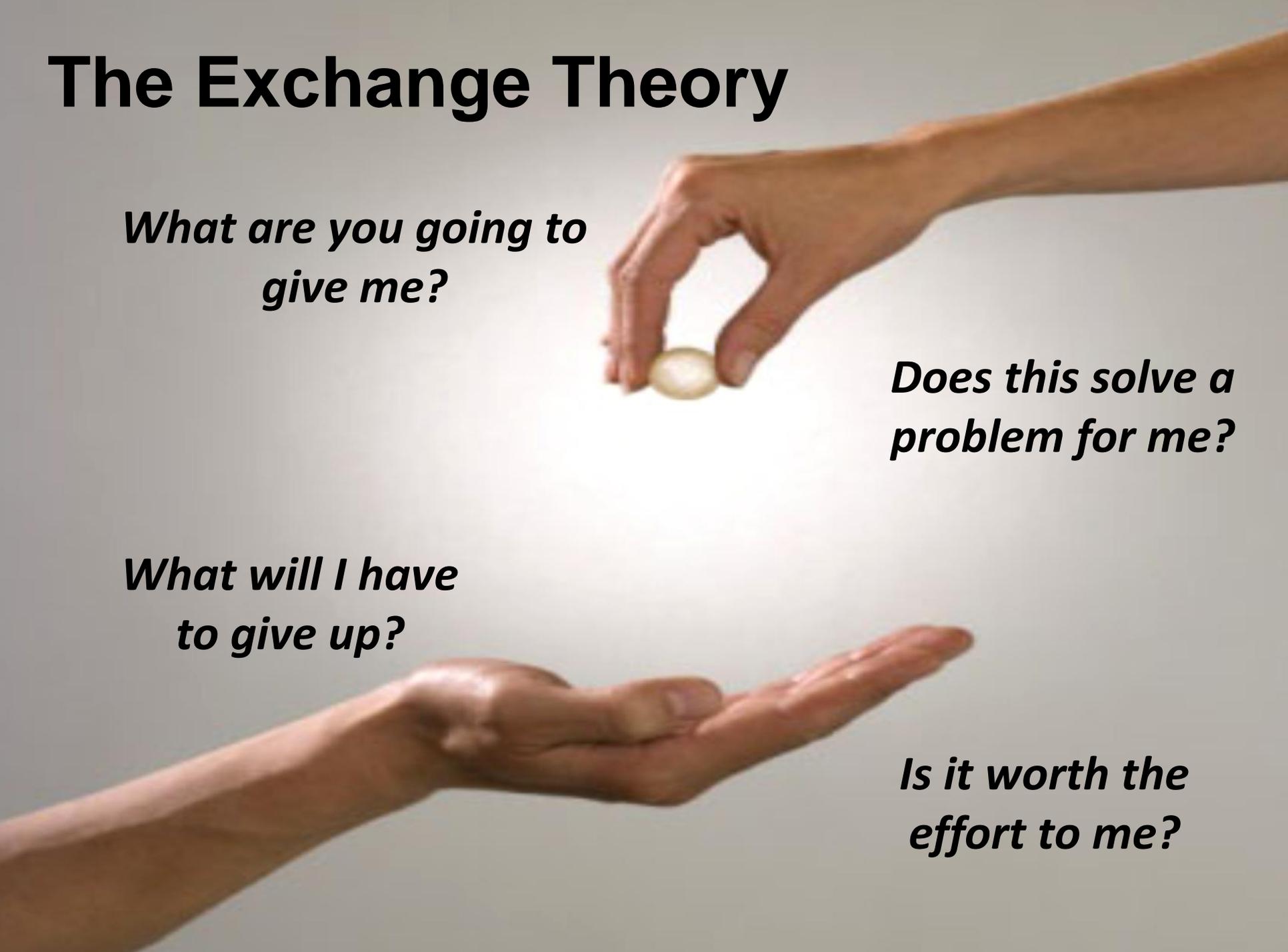
# What Do We Want Audiences to Do?

- Do we need support for specific programs, services, data collection, more?
- Are we asking people to change the way they live or work?



First, they need to *know* (raise awareness)...  
Then, they need to *act* (change)!

# The Exchange Theory

The image shows two hands against a light gray background. The upper hand is holding a small, round, light-colored coin between the thumb and index finger, positioned just above the palm of the lower hand. The lower hand is held flat, palm up, in a gesture of offering or receiving. The lighting is soft, highlighting the skin tones and the texture of the coin.

*What are you going to give me?*

*Does this solve a problem for me?*

*What will I have to give up?*

*Is it worth the effort to me?*

# The “Typical” Approach to Communications

- “Experts”:
  - Tell others what to do because they “know what’s best.”
  - Become baffled when people:
    - Don’t support their programs
    - Throw away their information
    - Ignore their advice.
  - Ask “*What’s WRONG with those people?!*”



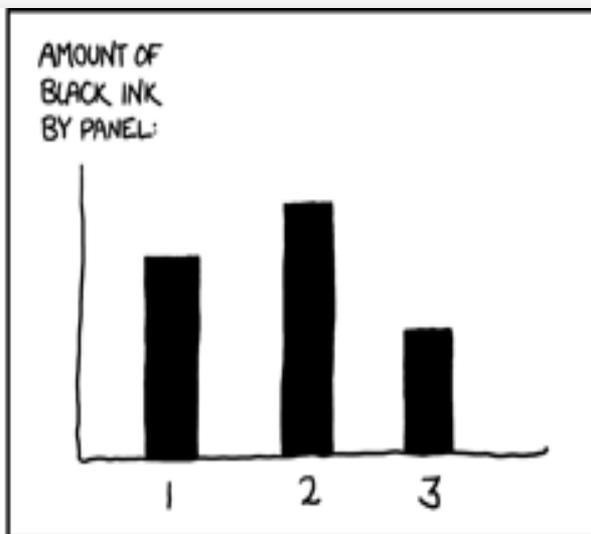
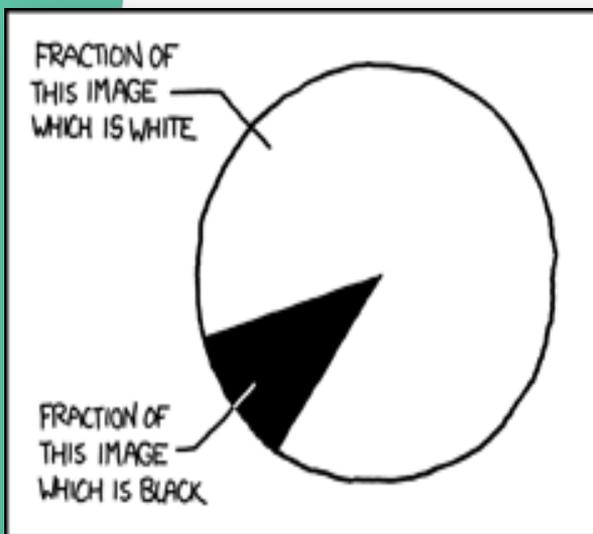
# The Marketing Mindset

- Instead of blaming our audience, we ask:
  - What’s wrong with our message?
  - Are we connecting to audience values?
  - Are we solving a problem for our audience?
  - Are we delivering the message poorly?
- To answer these questions, we research—and respect—our audiences.

*Remember:*

**“I am not my target audience.”**

# Key Learning #2



Data are critical—but abstract. Offered within a human context (language, stories), data are easier to understand.

# What Do You See?

**J FKFB INAT OUP**  
**SNA SAI RS**

# Now, What Do You See?

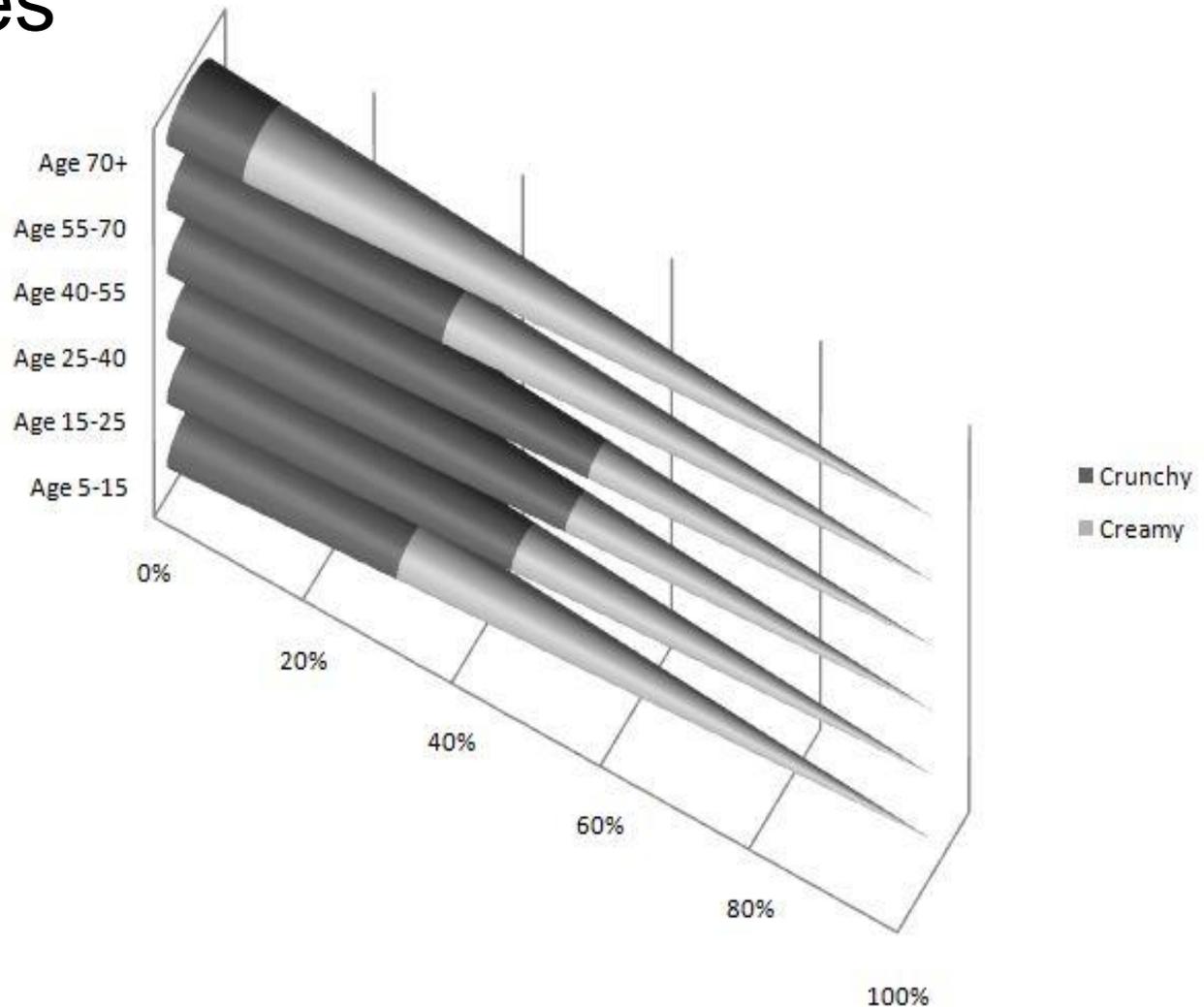
**JFK FBI NATO**

**UPS NASA IRS**

Context makes all the difference!

Data without stories (human context) leaves audiences with an abstraction that does not move them to action.

**Peanut Butter Preferences Over Time**



Stories without  
data (credibility)  
may leave  
audiences  
moved, but  
without a sense  
of direction.



# Key Learning #3

Stories—visual and linguistic—  
can effectively communicate our  
data.

# The Value of a Good Story

- Stories:
  - Illustrate the need for our programs and services.
  - Showcase our successes.
  - Make the case for sustainability, systems integration.
  - **Are easily shared—and remembered.**



Powerful  
stories are  
everywhere  
around us.

Are we  
listening for  
them?

# Develop a Story Bank

## Story Bank: Index

Story Name

Brief Summary

Keywords

Story Name	Brief Summary	Keywords

# Example: Story Bank Index

## EXAMPLE: Story Bank: Index

Story Name	Brief Summary	Keywords
Bus Story	Violent incident on bus 2 years ago points to children feeling unsafe on trip to/from school. SS/HS pilots installation of security cameras on buses, and children report feeling safer.	Safety, violence prevention, school climate
Hank's Story	Ninth-grade at-risk student with a history of juvenile arrests is ultimately supported by caring School Resource Officer (SRO). Hank <u>graduates</u> , and data show that this result bucks the "trend" in our county.	Truancy, graduation, SRO, academic success
Stacy's Story	Stacy's single mom is a high school dropout (with GED), working two service-industry jobs. Stacy's education is her mom's #1 priority. Stacy (in 6th grade) has never missed a day of school ever. SS/HS works with Stacy's mom to link her to support services, such as afterschool tutoring/mentoring, that help Stacy stay in school.	Family, parent involvement, school connectedness, attendance, academic success

# Key Learning #4

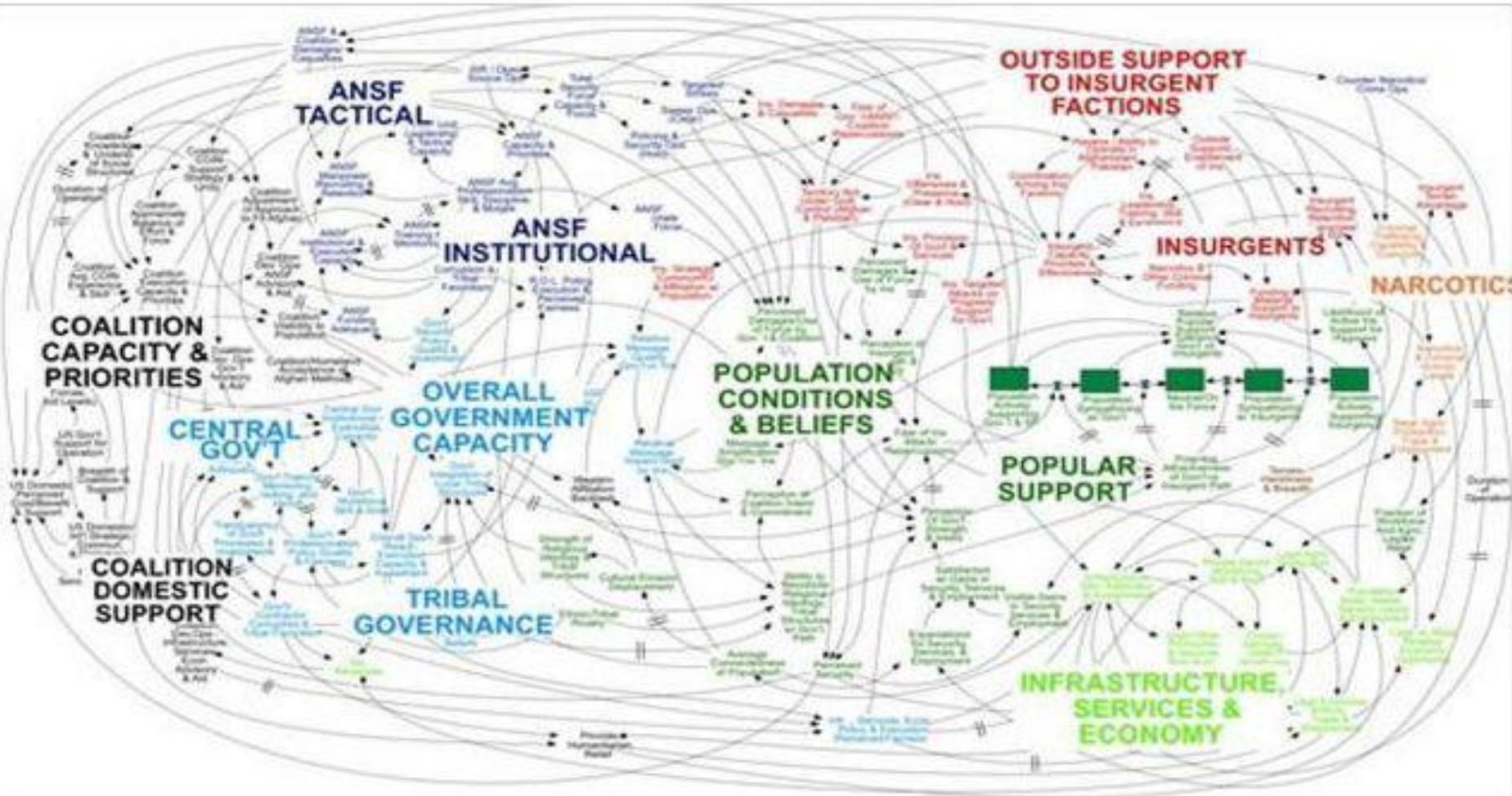
The right data, presented in the right way, adds credibility to stories.

To create change,  
audiences must hear

**PROOF!**

This is particularly true for funders,  
decisionmakers.

# But that proof must make sense to our audiences.



# Yes, It's All About Our Audience!

- What do *they* want to hear?
  - Do we have it?
  - Can we get it?
- What presentation(s) will be most effective?
  - Chart/graph/table
  - Infographic
  - Social math
  - Linguistic (written, oral)

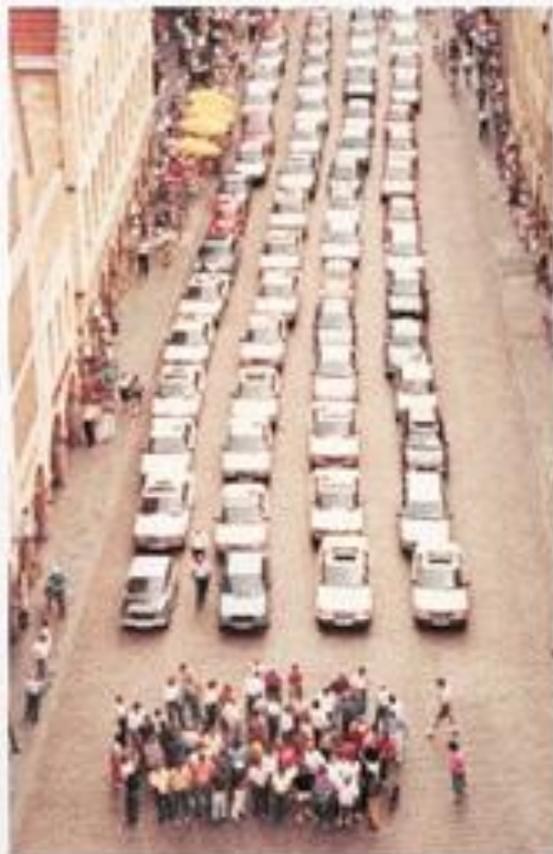
# Does It Work “At a Glance?”

## Space Taken by 60 People

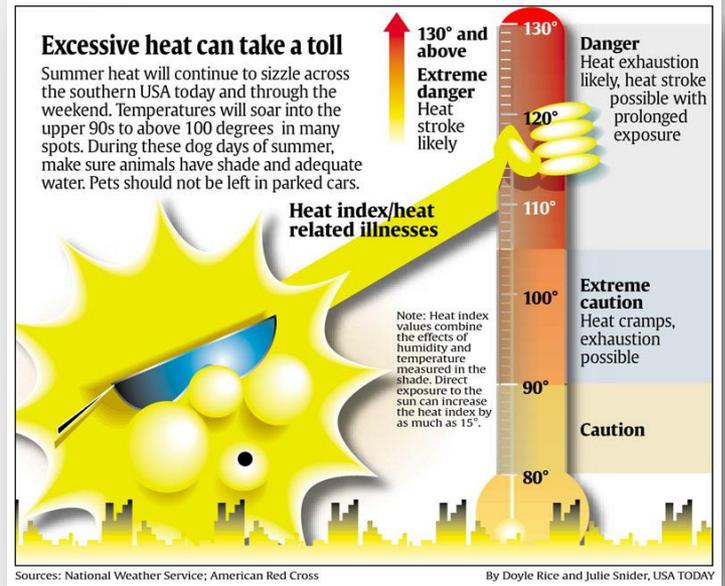
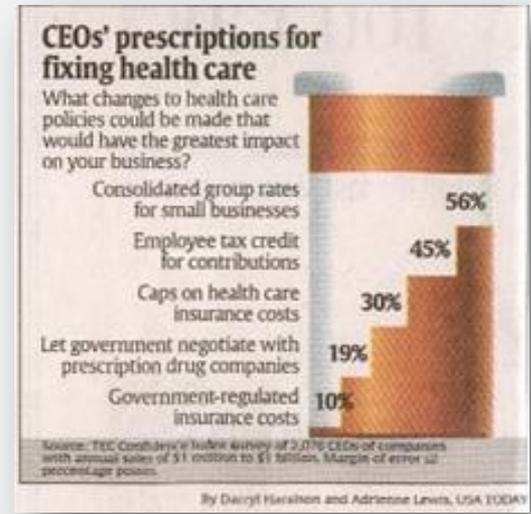
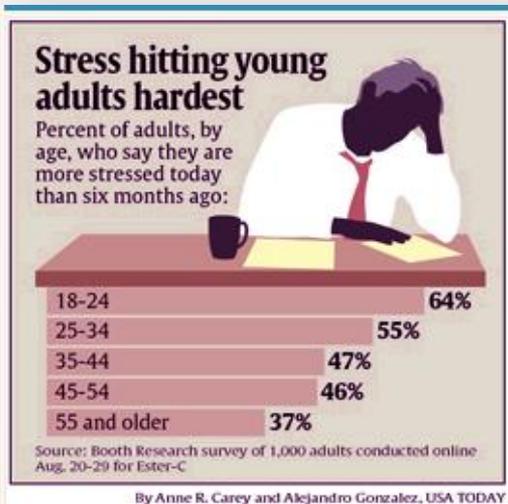
Vehicle Type	# of Passengers	# of Vehicles	Sq. Ft. Per Vehicle	Total Sq. Feet
Car	1	60	86	5,160
Bus	40	1.5	340	510
Bicycle	1	40	6	240

# SPACE

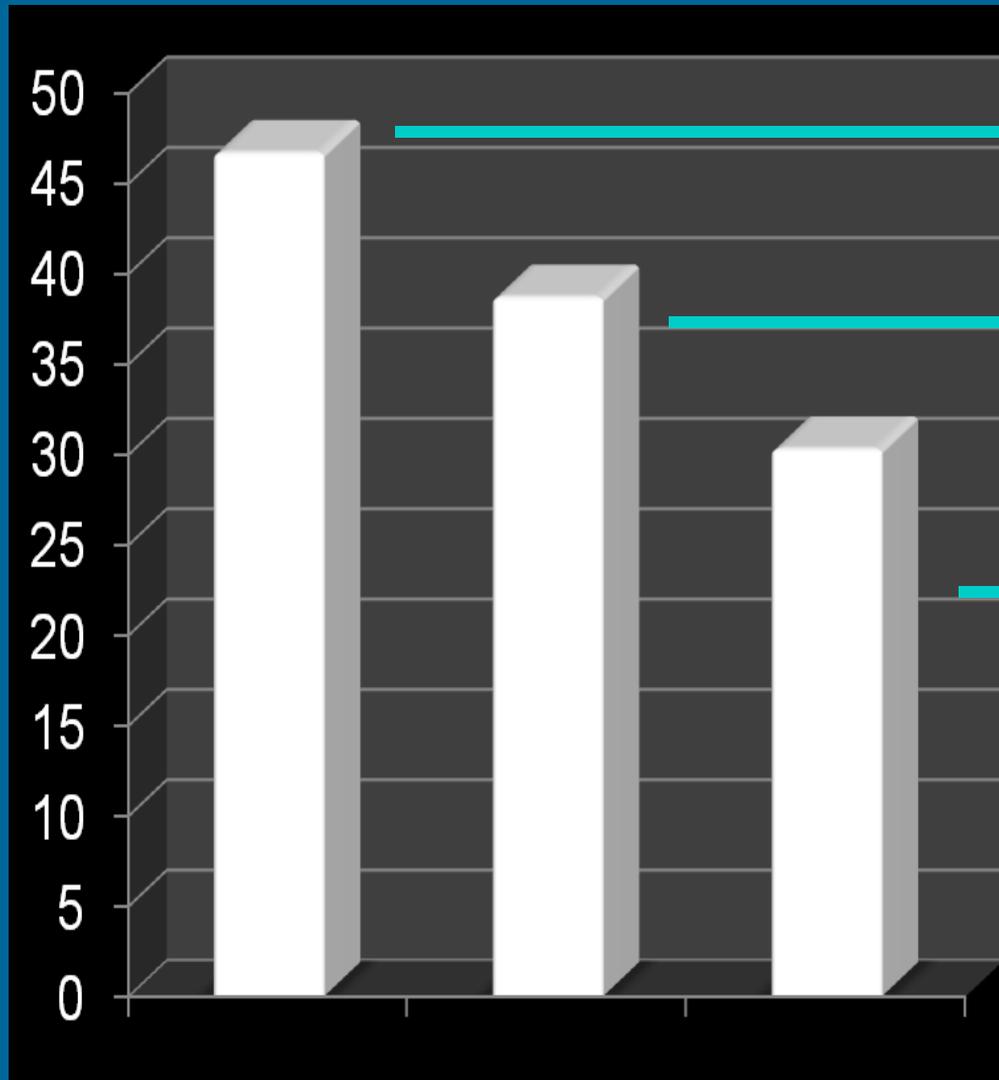
taken by 60 people



# "Glanceability": USA Today Snapshots



# What Story Do the Data Tell?



**46.7 percent** report no aspirations for their lives beyond high school.

**38.7 percent** don't believe an adult at school cares about them.

**30.3 percent** regularly experience hopelessness.

# Through Their Eyes

*Student Perceptions From 2010  
Survey of District High School Students*

**Almost one-half of students have no vision for their future beyond high school.**

**Almost one in three students regularly feel hopeless.**

**And more than one-third don't believe that any of us care.**



A word cloud on a black background. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, pointing downwards. The largest word is 'hopeless' in orange. Other words include 'no vision for future' in yellow, 'no adult cares' in yellow, 'feel unsafe' in orange, 'isolated' in orange, 'disconnected' in orange, 'unclear expectations' in orange, and 'bullied/harassed' in teal.

hopeless

no vision for future

no adult cares

feel unsafe

isolated

disconnected

unclear expectations

bullied/harassed

# Our students have a lot to say:



Could we do a better job of listening?

# Connecting With Social Math

Social math places data into a real-world context that our audience easily understands.

(It helps audiences understand the “story.”)

**Data + Audience Reality = WOW!**

In 2007, **5.8 percent** of students nationwide ages 12-18 reported avoiding school activities or one or more places in school because they thought someone might attack or harm them.



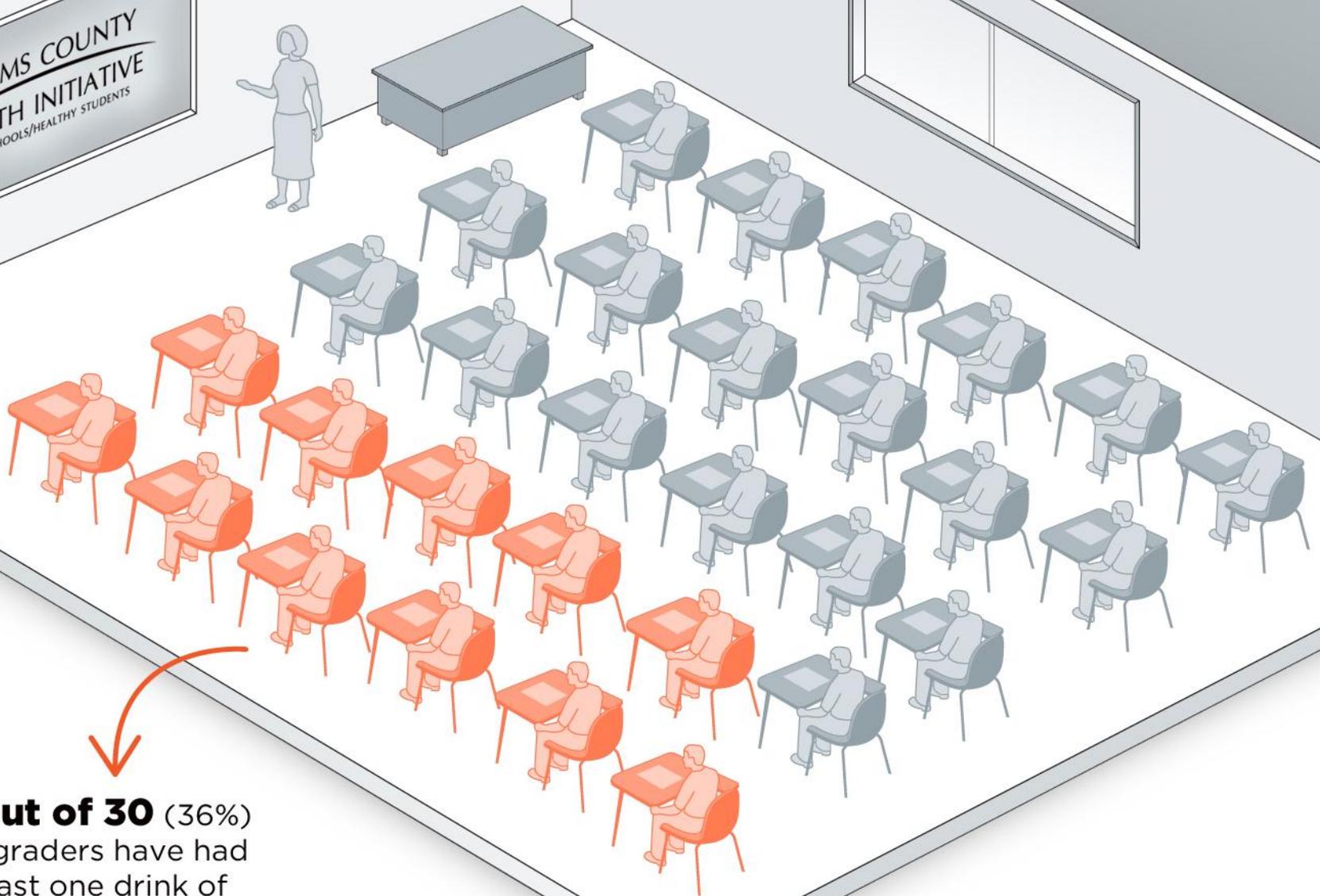
**Enough children to fill 450,000 school buses.  
(That's 3,409 miles of buses.  
And that more than stretches from coast to coast.)**

# Social Math: Find the Right Context

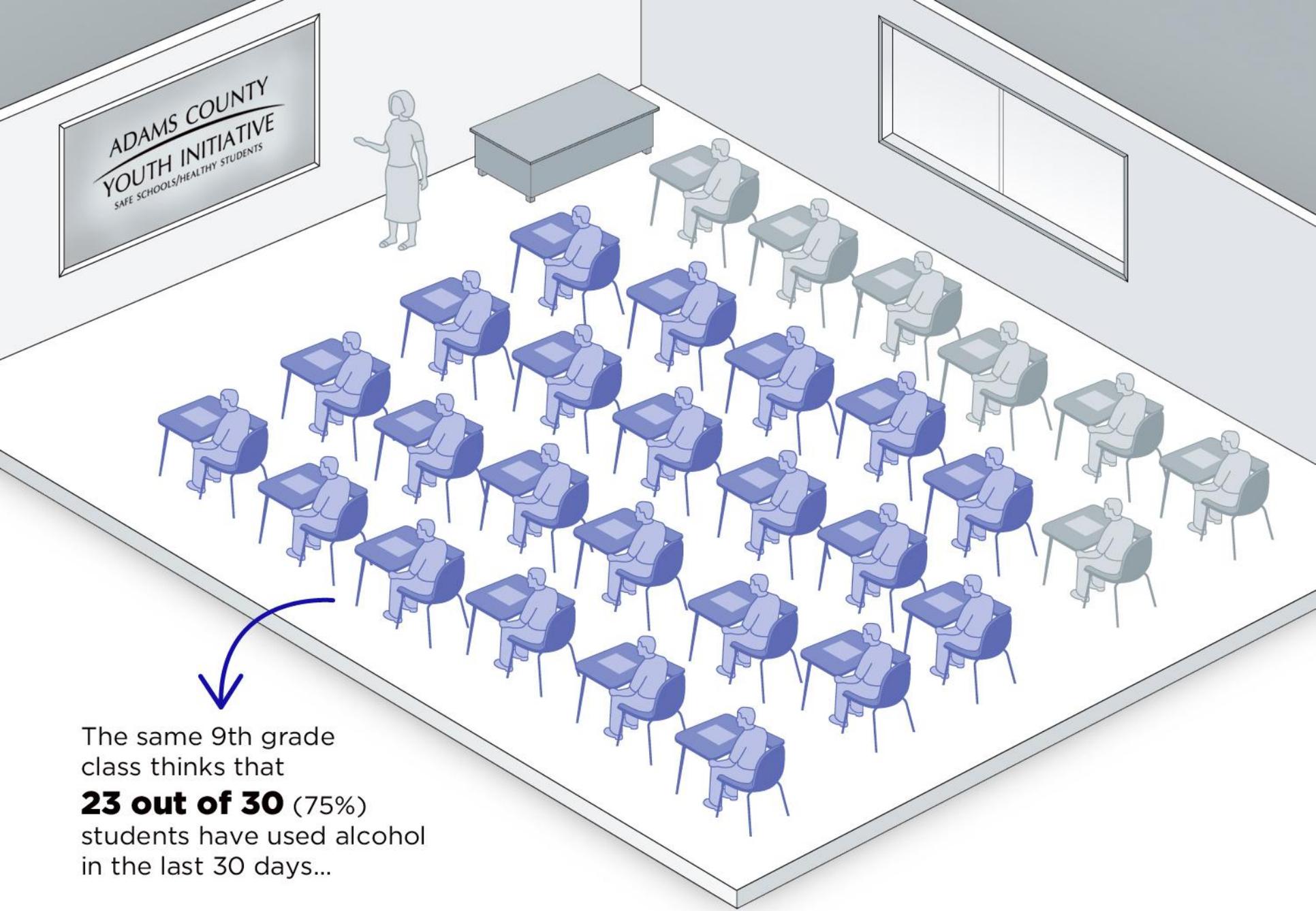
- Whom/what does it impact?
- What does it look like?
- How much money does it mean?
- How much time lost does it represent?
- What resources does it use/save?
- How long/wide/short/tall is it?
- Where can we place it?

Find the context that's right for your audience.  
Find the comparison with Google!

ADAMS COUNTY  
YOUTH INITIATIVE  
SAFE SCHOOLS/HEALTHY STUDENTS

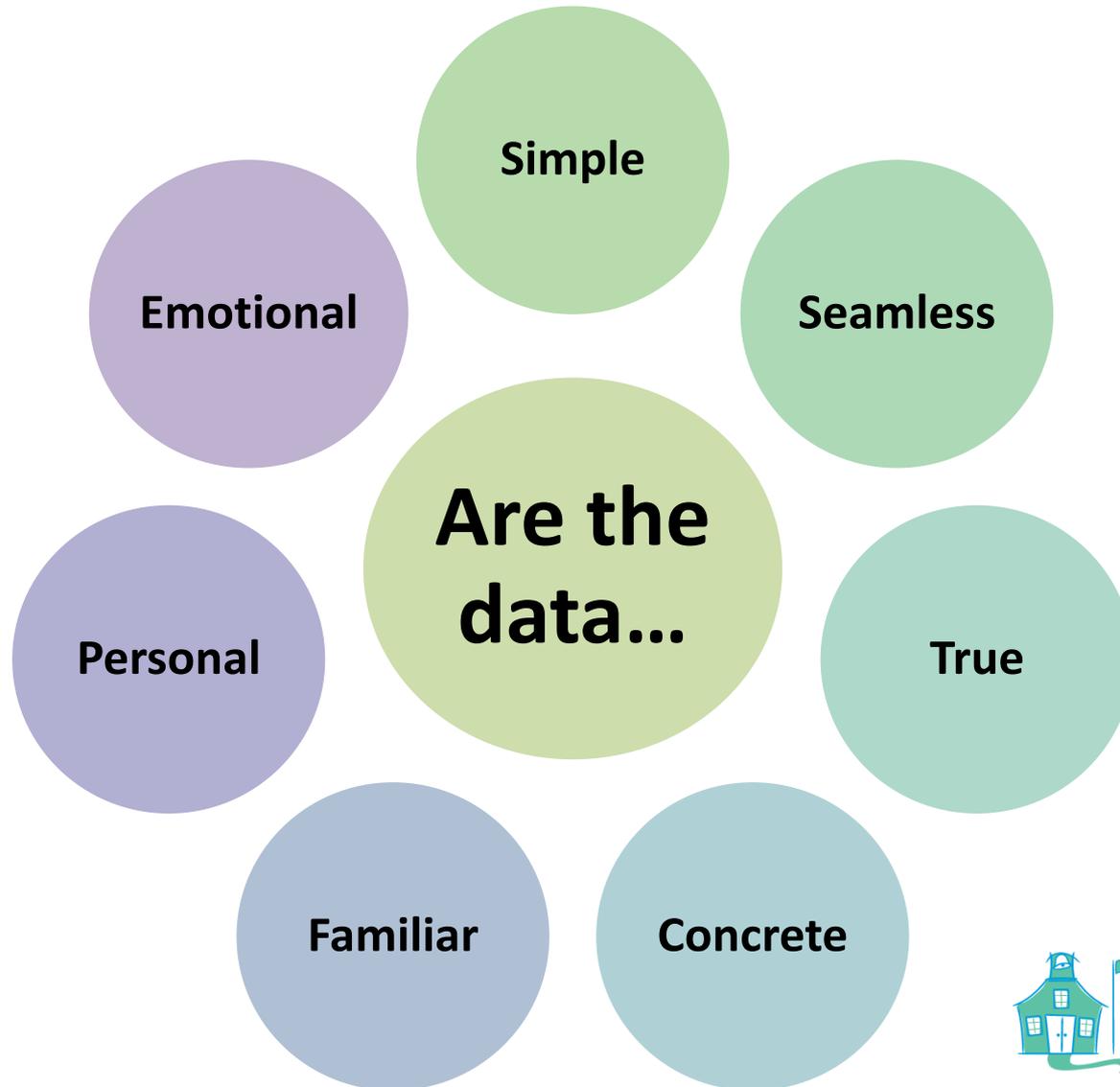


**11 out of 30** (36%)  
9th graders have had  
at least one drink of  
alcohol in the last 30 days



The same 9th grade class thinks that **23 out of 30** (75%) students have used alcohol in the last 30 days...

# Guiding Questions



# Key Learning #5

Compelling, data-driven stories can “stick” with audiences and compel action.

# To “Stick,” Think “SUCCES”:

- **Simple:** Understood by everyone.
- **Unexpected:** Audiences are caught off guard, they take notice.
- **Concrete:** Audiences connect the story to their own experience.
- **Credible:** Driven by unimpeachable data.
- **Emotional:** Meets audiences’ core beliefs and values.
- **Story:** Feels universal, worthy of sharing.

# A Commercial “SUCCES”: Listerine

*Listerine coined the word “halitosis,” persuading consumers their product would make them more popular.*



**Simple:** Halitosis makes you unpopular.

**Unexpected:** No one had heard this “scientific” word or realized it was a “problem.”

**Concrete:** Anyone could identify another’s bad breath.

**Credible:** Included facts on dental health and testimonials from dentists, consumers.

**Emotional:** Worked on personal fear of being unpopular.

**Story:** “Is bad breath keeping you from love?”



# A Cultural “SUCCEES”: JFK

*“We will put a man on the moon and return him safely by the end of the decade.”*

*—President John Fitzgerald Kennedy*



**Simple:** No mistaking what the words mean.

**Unexpected:** Took the country by surprise.

**Concrete:** We would succeed or we would not —there would be no in between.

**Credible:** Delivered by Nation’s leader.

**Emotional:** Worked on collective belief that United States is exceptional, as well as fears of Cold War.

**Story:** We act on our ideas because we are inspired to do great things.



# Our Own Sticky, SUCCEsful Stories

- **Simple:** Understood by everyone.
- **Unexpected:** Audiences are caught off guard, they take notice.
- **Concrete:** Audiences connect the story to their own experience.
- **Credible:** Driven by unimpeachable data.
- **Emotional:** Meets audiences' core beliefs and values.
- **Seek: Envisions the community in which we want to live. Includes the call to action.**



# School Case Study

## *Communication Goal:*

*Persuade State legislature to fund their school-based clinician program through policy change.*

**Simple:** “You asked for effective programs. This one delivers.”

**Unexpected:** Legislators were unaware of the need for services, the success of this problem—and the possibility it would go away.

**Concrete:** Impacts constituents—a.k.a., the voters.

**Credible:** Forty-nine percent less substance abuse; 38 percent fewer problem behaviors. Their best champion was a legislator.

**Emotional:** Family stories, personal testimony put a human face on data.

**Story:** “We need a hero to come to our rescue and save a worthy program.”



# School Case Study

## *Communication Goal:*

*Engage support from untapped business community to sustain select key functions.*

**Simple:** “Kyrene is the Best of the Best.”

**Unexpected:** No one from the district had ever approached the business community before.

**Concrete:** Initiative promised—then delivered—concrete, meaningful ways to say “thanks.” Businesses saw a return on investment, if even a simple event program mention.

**Credible:** Data on safety, improved academic outcomes, delivered by trusted community members.

**Emotional:** These are the children of your employees—they are our whole community’s children.

**Story:** “Through your collaboration with us, we will ALL get to say we are truly the Best of the Best.”



# Developing Our Stories

## Story Bank: Story Page

Use one page per story. Include the name and keywords from your story bank index in the top line. In the next section, identify the communication goal that this story supports, the priority target audiences for this goal, the action you wish them to take, the data they wish to see, and the preferred delivery methods for your story and data. In the bottom section, sketch out your story using the SUCCES model.

Story Name:

Keywords:

Priority Audiences

Desired Action

Preferred Data

Preferred Delivery

The Story (think SUCCES):

Simple:

Unexpected:

Concrete:

Credible (data):

Emotional:

Story:

## EXAMPLE: Story Bank: Story Page

**Story Name:** Bus Story

**Keywords:** Safety, violence prevention, school climate

Priority Audiences	Desired Action	Preferred Data	Preferred Delivery
School board	Share funding of cameras	Safety stats	PowerPoint and handout
Local businesses	Share funding of cameras	Crime stats after school	Factsheet with <a href="#">infographic</a>
Parents	Write to school board on behalf of this goal	Student safety, specific bus routes	Oral presentation with social math

### The Story (think **SUCCES**):

**Simple:** Children should feel safe coming to school.

**Unexpected:** It's hard for most adults to imagine that a school bus ride could be terrifying to children—but for many of our students, it is.

**Concrete:** Two years ago, that fear became real when a knife fight broke out on board a bus bound for our high school. Beyond the trauma to every child on that bus, two students were hospitalized—one of them an honor roll student who tried to stop the fight. In that moment, our SS/HS initiative stepped in to provide student support and, what is more important, a solution to this problem.

**Credible (data):** We asked all children who ride a bus to tell us if they were ever afraid while on it, and we learned that more than a quarter of our students district-wide felt unsafe or had been bullied or harassed on the bus. That's enough children to fill the football stadium. We used that data to identify the 10 most dangerous routes and installed cameras in those buses. Eighteen months later, we are here to report that only 11 percent of children on those routes still feel unsafe. We're working on that 11 percent, but we now know—cameras on buses *work*.

**Emotional:** If our children don't feel safe, they can't learn. All they can do is worry and wonder if today's the day they'll be a victim. Their grades fall, they may skip school out of fear, and they may act out or become withdrawn. No caring adult—no one who believes it's our duty and honor to see that all children have a safe place to learn and grow—can ignore the issue of school safety.

**Story:** When children feel safe, they can learn and succeed. Our SS/HS initiative has made this possible for some of our children—one busload at a time—and now it's time to make it a reality for every child who rides the bus. Will you help?

# Key Learning #6

Our stories can be delivered in many ways to many audiences.

# How Do We Tell Our Story?

## Policymakers

- Public testimony
- Fact sheets
- Video/PSA
- News coverage

## School boards

- PowerPoint
- Report
- Oral
- Video

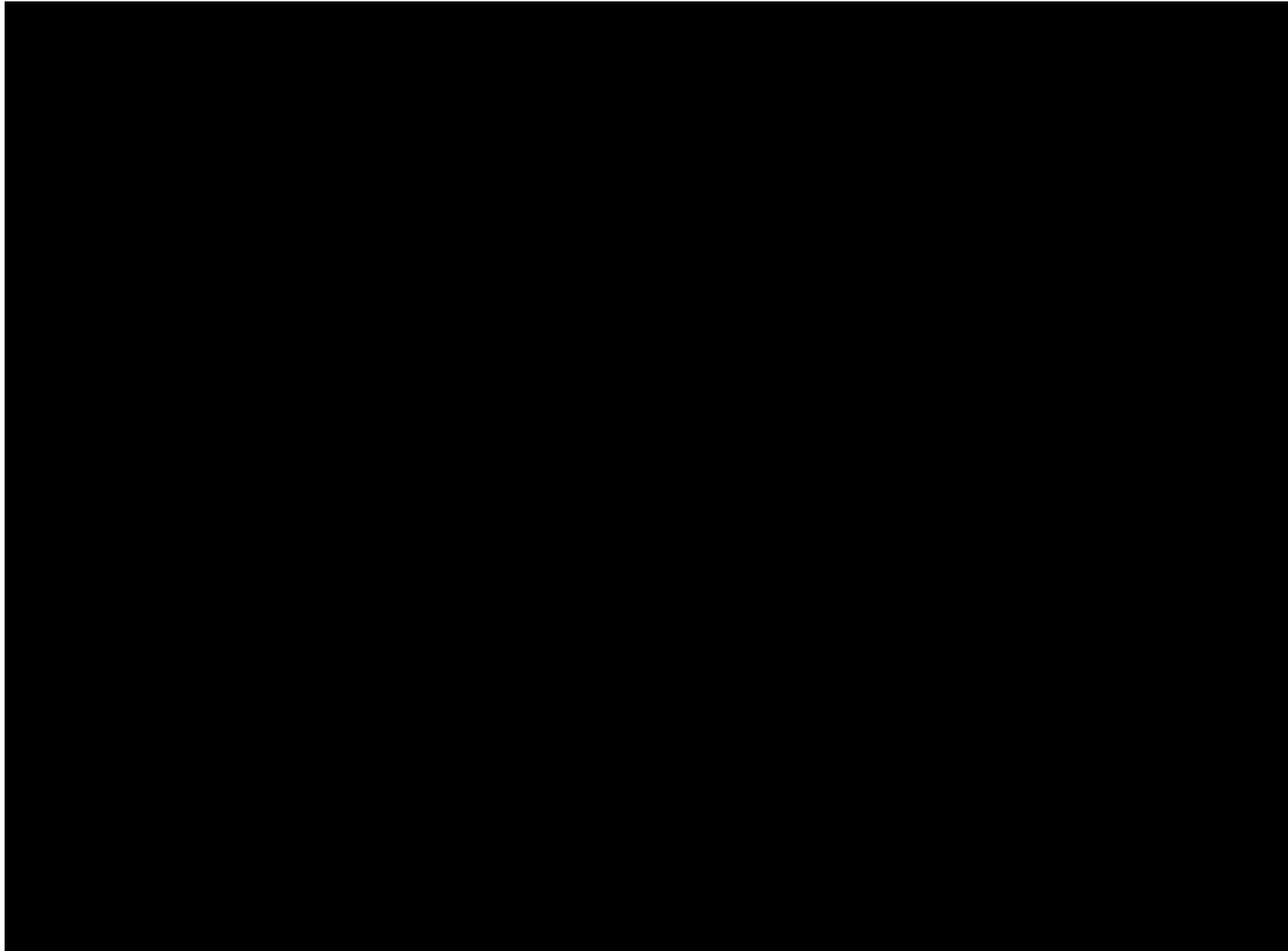
## Parents

- Student performances
- Posters/ Infographics
- Video/PSAs

## Business Leaders

- Fact sheets
- Infographics
- Oral
- News Coverage

# Simple Video Example

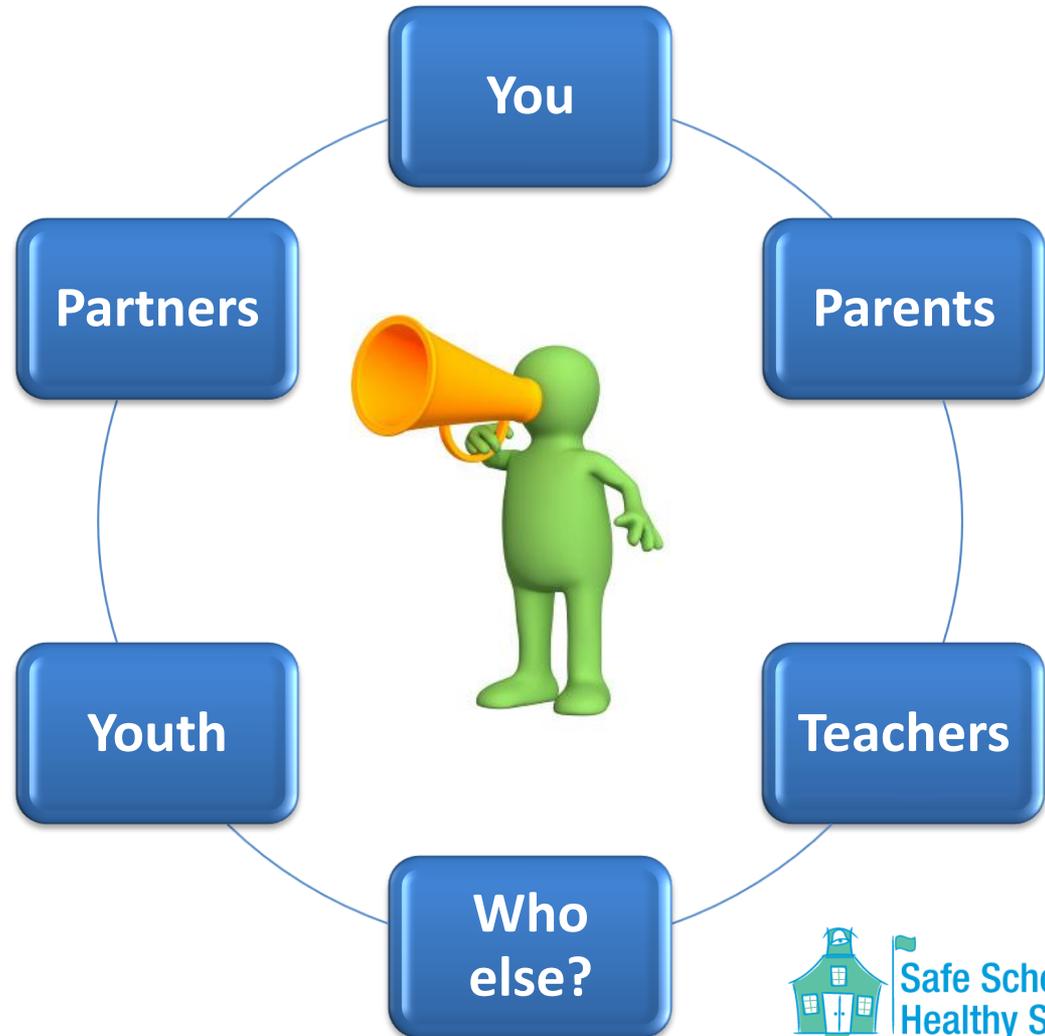


# Who Will Tell Our Stories?

Key questions:

Whom will our audience trust?

Who will move them?



# Group Brainstorm: Story Delivery

- Consider these possible audiences. How might we best deliver our stories?
  - Parents of elementary students
  - School board members
  - High school juniors
  - Middle school teacher
  - Policymakers
  - Faith-based leadership
  - Business community



# Pulling It All Together

- Humans need context to understand data.
- Stories can provide that human context.
- Data representation can provide that context (“glanceability”, social math).
- Data-driven stories are persuasive communication tools.
- We always need to meet the needs of our audience.



# Questions?

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