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-INDEPENDENT-
SCHOOL DISTRICT **518**

WORTHINGTON, MN

Worthington Public Schools
Strategic Communications Plan
April 2018

Prepared by

DEHLERPR
Educate. Communicate. Motivate.

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INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of any communications or public relations program is to maintain or increase the reputation of the organization. Stakeholder groups who hold an organization in high regard trust that organization to make sound decisions that are in the stakeholders' best interest. School districts build trust and reputation through transparency – including clear, concise, honest messages about information needed by parents regarding their students and the district's student programming; by taxpayers about the use of taxpayer dollars for student programs that lead to an educated workforce; and by faculty and staff about the support they need to provide these programs. However, simply generating more information does not constitute an effective communication effort. In addition, the most effective communication is two-way. You can measure the effectiveness of your communication through evaluation, or listening to your audiences.

Communications Framework

The National School Public Relations Association recommends that school districts ask the following questions for every action or activity the district undertakes:

1. Who needs to know?
2. What do they need to know/why was the decision made?
3. Why do they need to know?
4. When do they need to know?
5. How are we going to tell them?
6. What do we want them to do with the information they receive?

This process is like a rubric, it provides a set of criteria that, when answered, result in clear communication. Each audience member may hear about an issue from a number of different sources, from a school email, from their student's teacher or from their barber or hairdresser. This process gives the issue, or story, the best opportunity to be told and retold accurately.

Principles of organizational communication

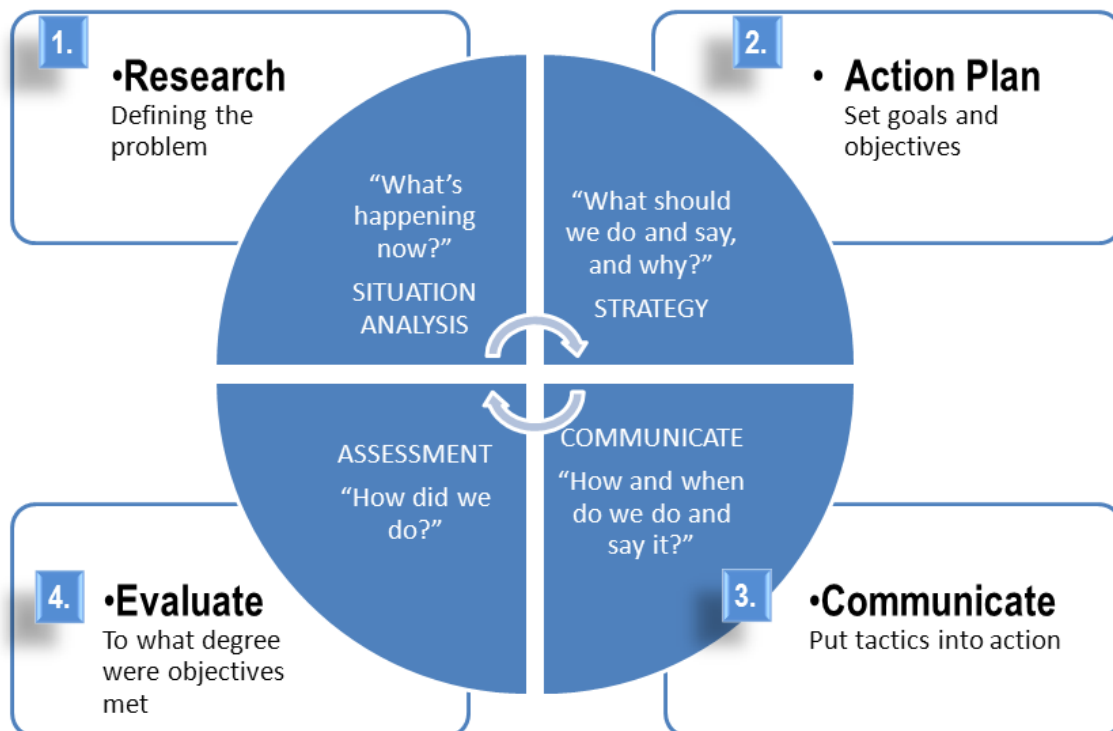In determining recommendations for Worthington Public Schools' communications planning, we look at the key findings through a lens of guiding principles used by organizations who are effective communicators. These principles are culled from NSPRA, the Public Relations Society of America, *Cutlip & Center's Effective Public Relations,* and other sources.

- Utilize the R.A.C.E. four-step communications process (see figure below).

- Be true to your vision, mission and values. Honesty, respect, integrity and fairness are critical to the success of any organization, but especially those in the public trust.

- Communication is a management function: strategically tie communications goals to district and school goals.

- Listen to stakeholders and respond appropriately. If something can be changed, change it; if it can't be changed, explain why.

- Be clear, concise and consistent in all communication.

- School building-level communication is most effective. Community members identify with a school or schools, not necessarily with the district as a whole. The most trusted source of information about a student, the school or the school district is the principal, teacher or other staff member. Make sure your staff knows what is going on and why.

- Two-way communication ensures an engaged, active, successful community. Ask stakeholders to do something for students, from providing feedback to taking more significant action.

R.A.C.E.: The Four-Step Communications Process

Effective communication **sets and meets objectives** to ensure our messages are **effectively reaching the intended audiences** and are producing the **desired outcome.**

1. •**Research**
Defining the problem

"What's happening now?"

SITUATION ANALYSIS

2. • **Action Plan**
Set goals and objectives

"What should we do and say, and why?"

STRATEGY

ASSESSMENT
"How did we do?"

COMMUNICATE
"How and when do we do and say it?"

4. •**Evaluate**
To what degree were objectives met

3. •**Communicate**
Put tactics into action

WORTHINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

During August and September 2017, DehlerPR, with help from MP&G Marketing Solutions, conducted an operations inventory, communications inventory and evaluation, and a series of focus groups with community members. In April 2018, additional meetings were held with members of immigrant communities. Findings from this research, contained in the Communications Audit report, provide the foundation of this three-year Strategic Communications Plan. The Communications Audit should be used as a companion document to this plan.

This plan is designed to guide the district as it:

- Further develops and strengthens its branding, identity and messaging;
- Strengthens district and school communications with its internal and external stakeholders;
- Raises awareness of the district and its offerings to potential new students and their families; and,
- Builds community awareness and engagement.

The areas of opportunity outlined in the Communications Audit, and the activities outlined in the Strategic Communications Plan provide the district with tools for strengthening internal and external communications across the district, its schools and with its stakeholders.

Areas of opportunity

1. Strengthen communications systems with a strategic communications plan
2. Expand the number of communications channels, and improve existing channels
3. Increase consistency in use of branding
4. Tell your story
5. Enhance transparency by offering more opportunities for engagement, a variety of messengers

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN SUMMARY

This plan provides:

- Guidance that will lead to improved communications systems (Implementing audit recommendations)
- A list of major communications activities and timelines (The Communications Plan)
- The rationale for why we are communicating specific messages to specific audiences (objectives)
- A month by month work plan that makes communicating easy

What will be different in three years if we are successful?

In student and parent surveys, respondents will show increased satisfaction in district and school communications. In a survey, district staff will be able to recognize district key messages, and will be able to demonstrate their role in helping to communicate key messages to the community. In a community public opinion survey, respondents from the parent, business, agricultural and senior citizen communities will be able to recognize district key messages, and will show improved confidence in the district.

Target audiences

Primary audiences: Staff, Students, Parents

Secondary audiences: Business Community, Ag Community, Senior Citizens, Media

Key messages

What are the three-five most important messages for your audiences to understand and easily remember and repeat to others?

1. The Worthington School District is known for a high quality, competitive academics curriculum.
2. The Worthington School District provides a stellar fine arts and activities program to complement its renowned, award-winning athletics programs.
3. Worthington High School prepares students for a wide range of options after graduation, from four-year college to agriculture and technical fields.

Other supporting messages

- The diversity of the community and of the schools prepares students for the diverse workplace.
- Students benefit from the knowledge of and relationships with great, caring teachers.
- The Worthington School District is a model for excellent management, academically, financially, and preserving and maintaining its facilities, all while maintaining low property taxes.

Developing issues

- Enrollment growth and over-capacity facilities.

- Vocal opposition to tax increase proposals.

IMPLEMENTING AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Communications Systems

Activity	Person responsible	Timing
Develop a Strategic Communications Plan	Superintendent	April 2018
Develop systems to implement Strategic Communications Plan	Superintendent	2018-2019
Create Employee Ambassadors		

Improve and Expand Communications Channels

Activity	Person responsible	Timing
Direct mail program		2018-2019
District e-newsletter		
School and program e-newsletters		
Social media plan and policy		
Update other existing communications tools		

Increase Consistency in Branding

Activity	Person responsible	Timing
Update materials with district, school logos, branding		
Create and implement a style guide		2018-2019

Tell Your Story

Activity	Person responsible	Timing
Create district, school and program key messages		
Create a system to provide issues messaging		
Train communicators to have a key message mentality		
Share good news		

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Enhance Transparency

Activity	Person responsible	Timing
Communicate school board issues and decisions		2018-2019
Post video of school board meetings		
Increase school board member visibility		
Provide school board members with district, issues talking points		
Share community relations responsibilities		
Increase public and staff engagement in decision making		
Create a Key Communicators Network		
Increase opportunity for public, staff feedback		

THE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

AUDIENCE: Staff

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
About district • Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase participation in district decision making process • Increase awareness of issues		Employee Communications Committee Employee intranet website District email or blog Principal email or blog District and school e-newsletters Social media Building posters Media (interviews, news releases, guest columns, ads)		
About crises • Provide timely information		Alarms		

• Provide followup info		P.A. announcements? Text messages? Social media District website		
About employment • Create culture that attracts, retains staff		Employee intranet website District email or blog		
About school mission • Create culture of service to students		Principal meetings, emails Meetings held by other staff, such as supervisors, teacher team leads		
About community Increase awareness of district issues in the community		Create "ambassador" program Style guide		

AUDIENCE: Students

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
About district • Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase awareness of issues • Increase participation in district decision making process		District website Social media Building posters Meetings with student leaders		
About them • Provide information about academic and		Info process for transitioning students (mailings, emails, open		

extra-curricular opportunities • Provide information about student progress • Provide information about other opportunities like mental health, counseling, post-secondary options		houses, teacher visits, etc.) Student Bulletin Shoutpoint messages Letters		
About crises • Provide timely information • Provide followup info		Alarms P.A. announcements Teacher announcements Social media District website		

AUDIENCE: Parents

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
About district • Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase participation in district decision making process • Increase awareness of issues		District website District and school e-newsletters Social media Building posters Meetings with PTOs, etc. Enhanced school board transparency Key communicators network		

About their student		Info process for		
• Attract and retain resident students		transitioning students (mailings, emails, open houses, teacher visits, etc.)		
• Provide information about student opportunities				
• Provide information about student progress		Shoutpoint		
		Back to school packet, letter		
		Catalog flyer		
		Letters		
		Media (interviews, news releases, guest columns, ads)		
About crises		Shoutpoint?		
• Provide timely information		Social media		
• Provide followup info		District website		

AUDIENCE: Business

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
About district		District website		
• Increase understanding of district mission and goals		District e-newsletter		
• Increase participation in district decision making process		Social media		
• Increase awareness of issues		Meetings with business groups		
		Media (interviews, news releases, guest columns, ads)		

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
		Enhanced school board transparency Key communicators network		
About them Collaborate on student opportunities that local businesses can provide		Meetings with business groups		

AUDIENCE: Agricultural Community

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
About district • Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase participation in district decision making process • Increase awareness of issues • Increase understanding of school property tax		District website Direct mail District e-newsletter Social media Building posters Meetings with ag groups, ag industry, landowners, etc. at coffee spots, other locations Media (interviews, news releases, guest columns, ads) Enhanced school board transparency Key communicators network		

| About them | | Meetings with ag | | |
| Collaborate on student opportunities that local farmers can provide | | groups, farmers at coffee shops | | |

AUDIENCE: Senior Citizens

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing
<u>About district</u> • Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase participation in district decision making process • Increase awareness of issues		District website Direct mail District e-newsletter Meetings with senior groups, at card clubs, senior centers Media (interviews, news releases, guest columns, ads) Enhanced school board transparency Key communicators network		
<u>About them</u> Collaborate on student opportunities that local senior citizens can provide		Meetings with senior center management		

AUDIENCE: Media

Objective	Key Messages	Tactic	Person responsible	Timing

About district		Direct communication (news release, phone calls)	Superintendent	
• Increase understanding of district mission and goals • Increase participation in district decision making process • Increase awareness of issues		District website District e-newsletter Social media Enhanced school board transparency		
About schools		School news releases, emails, phone calls, social media	Principal or designee	
• Balanced coverage of academics, the arts and athletics • Balanced coverage of "good news"				
About crises		Shoutpoint? Social media News release	Superintendent	
• Provide timely information • Provide followup info				