EAB

Creating an Effective District Communications Plan

Five Tools to Help Communicate Your District's Value

▶ **Resource in Brief**

Use this toolkit to identify opportunities to improve your district's communications and engagement with the community.

The toolkit is structured to help districts more effectively engage with the community by developing a communications plan that clearly aligns with the district's mission and goals, by establish social media policies, and by training parents to be district ambassadors.

3 Ways to Use This Toolkit

- Determine which communications channels the district will use and how

- Create a process for handling online posts and comments

- Develop a parent ambassador network

District Leadership Forum

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Executive Summary

The Changing Landscape of District Communications

Public school districts across the US increasingly need a strategy to better communicate with their stakeholders, including staff, teachers, parents, students, and the wider community. The new reality of constant social media interactions, rapid spread of information regardless of accuracy, and growing skepticism of public schools are forcing districts to develop both a detailed communications strategy and the ability to quickly adapt and respond to any event or statement.

Historically, public school districts have not engaged with their community at the volume and intensity that they do now and have not relied heavily on creating a strong public presence. However, in a world of constant communication, providing more information to parents about what's going on at their child's school, or better signaling the impact that district-wide initiatives will have on the community, are both equally important elements of developing a district's reputation, image, and reliability in the eyes of the public.

To support institutions in these efforts, this toolkit offers multiple tools that provide detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to better engage with the community: from creating a strategic communications plan to engaging on social media, and training parents to be your ambassadors. The table on the next page outlines each section and what the tools provided in it help district leaders do. The primary audience are the superintendent and the public information officer (or head of communications).[1]

Setting Up a Communications Team

Public Information Officer[2]

- Reports directly to superintendent
- Creates district communications plan and oversees all district communications
- Main point of contact for major events, including incidents and alerts

District Communications Team[3]

- Size of staff depends on size of district
- Includes part-time staff and interns
- Monitor social media communications and post value stories and non-urgent or minor updates

Individual School Communications Liaisons

- Liaisons appointed at each school
- Role assumed by existing school staff
- Liaison is responsible for all school communications and is point person for coordinating with central office

1) For the purposes of this toolkit, we will refer to the person in charge of all district communications as Public Information Officer (PIO). The position is also often referred to as Head of Communications or Communications Director.
2) Sample job description available in Appendix, p. 40.
3) Sample job description available in Appendix, p. 41.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

How to Use This Toolkit (cont.)

#	Section	Description	Intended User
1	Guide to Building a Communications Strategic Plan	Provides guidance on how to develop a formal communications strategic plan aligned with your district's mission and goals	Superintendent, PIO
2	Considerations for Establishing Consistent District Branding	Illustrates how to ensure district communications follow a consistent and professional pattern across platforms	PIO
3	Guide to Crafting a Social Media Policy	Equips institutions to establish an effective social media policy	PIO
4	Guide to Effective Email Communication	Aids the development of formal email policies and trains employees on effectively communicating important information via email	All district leaders
5	Helping Parents Communicate the District's Value	Helps districts identify, train, and support parents to be part of an ambassador network that can help promote the district's image in the community and aid the leadership team in achieving its goals	PIO, Head of Parent Engagement

Guide to Building a Communications Strategic Plan

Goal

Use the provided resources to develop a formal communications strategy plan for your district.

Intended User

Superintendent; Public Information Officer

Overview

This section helps districts identify and align communication goals with institutional priorities. It then maps those goals to various communication channels, serving as the foundation for a formal communications strategic plan.

The goal of a formal plan is to ensure cohesive, effective messaging from all parts of the district to all community stakeholders.

District Communications Strategy Planning Template

This guide outlines all the elements necessary to build a district communications strategic plan.

A. MISSION STATEMENT

A1. Write the district's mission statement below.

A2. Describe the key messages that you want your community to receive. What is your district focusing on and what do you want the community to know about your work?

District Communications Strategy Planning Template (cont.)

B. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

B1. List out the overarching goals of your district. These may come from the district's strategic plan.

B2. This worksheet provides guidance to help communications leaders identify how their goals align with those of the district.

1. Review the following goals and consider whether they fit the purpose of your communications team and whether any are missing. If so, write them in the blank spaces.

2. Rank the following goals from 1 (highest priority) to 4 (lowest priority). If any goals have been added, the lowest priority will increase accordingly.

Potential Communication Goals

☐ Increase student enrollment among increasing competition from alternative education providers

☐ Build district reputation, profile, and level of trust from the community

☐ Ensure district and school staff are all following district communications guidelines and protocols

☐ Improve outcomes on student/teacher/parent surveys

☐ _____

☐ _____

District Communications Strategy Planning Template (cont.)

C. IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS AND PRIORITIES

C1. List out major groups of community stakeholders, including their values and primary objectives. Stakeholders may include parents, students, teachers, community services, prominent organizations, voter groups, major employers, etc.

C2. Describe how the values and objectives of stakeholders impact how your district plans to engage them (e.g., formal partnerships with businesses, town hall meetings with active voter groups, joint events with local organizations, etc.)

D. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

D1. Outline how your district communications team will use the following channels to advance the district goals. *For more detailed guidance on how to align communication goals with specific channels, please see the **Communication Channel List** on page 11.*

- District website
- Social media
- Email
- Reports
- Posters, leaflets, flyers
- Newsletters
- Phone calls
- Internal communications

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

District Communications Strategy Planning Template (cont.)

E. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

E1. List out the roles primarily responsible for and involved in district communications.
(see sample job descriptions for communications department staff in Appendix, pp. 40-41)

E2. List out the communications expectations for individual schools. Make sure to set specific guidelines and recommendations for social media presence (i.e., 1-2 posts a day, designated school liaison, cross-linking to district posts, pushing out feel-good stories, etc.)
(see Section 2: Guide to Crafting a Social Media Policy on pp. 12-18 for detailed recommendations)

F. BRANDING

F1. Capture information about institutional branding that will impact communication through any media. This includes the templates, preferred colors, approved acronyms, location of official logos and seals, etc. *(full branding example available on pp. 22-25)*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Communication Channels List

The table below provides guidance to help district leaders determine how and when to use specific communication channels (e.g., social media, newsletters, email). Districts should use multiple channels as part of their communications efforts. However, some methods are better-suited than others for advancing certain types of communication goals. For instance, the district website should be heavily targeted towards new users (incoming families), social media should be the main tool for interacting with the community on a daily basis, while emails should be used more sparingly and phone calls almost always for emergencies only.

Method	Intended Audience	Frequency	How to evaluate effectiveness?
District website updates	Typically first-time users	As needed	Page view and click-through rates
Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)	All community stakeholders, but different platforms reach different groups	Daily, often multiple times a day, including for important announcements, emergencies, etc.	Likes, comments, follows, views and other metrics provided by "buzz monitoring" and other social media tracking tools
Email	Parents, students, teachers	As needed (for important announcements)	Open and click-through rates
Reports / presentations	Board, community, voters	As needed	Verbal and written feedback
Posters, leaflets, flyers	Parents, students	As needed, though sparingly (influence has dwindled significantly in the age of social media)	Verbal and written feedback
Newsletters	Parents, students	Weekly/bi-weekly/monthly	Verbal and written feedback from parents and students
Phone calls	Parents	Rarely, mostly in emergencies	Verbal and written feedback
Internal communications	Staff	As needed	Verbal and written feedback

Sample tools for monitoring social media platforms:

- Facebook Insights
- Google Analytics
- Chartbeat
- Hootsuite
- Sprout Social
- Mention

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Guide to Crafting a Social Media Policy

Goal

Use this step-by-step guide to establish an effective social media policy for district employees.

Overview

This section guides district leaders along the process from social media goal creation to implementation and performance tracking.

Intended User

Superintendent, Public Information Officer, School principals

Note: EAB recommends that any social media policy be reviewed and updated annually to ensure it reflects changing technology, media, and community preferences.

Centralization Within Bounds

While schools should be allowed freedom to post what they deem important, their strategy should be coordinated closely with the district.

Guide to Crafting Social Media Policy and Procedures

Step 1	Choose Channels to Monitor and Post

Owner: Public Information Officer and Team

The first step is to determine which social media channels to monitor and which channels to post on. As posting and monitoring will make up the bulk of your social media presence, it is important to ensure that the channels being passively monitored and actively posted on align with the goals identified in the previous step.

Defining Social Media Terms

- **Monitoring** is a passive presence where an institution tracks but does not respond to or create content on social media websites.

- **Posting** is an active presence where an institution creates original content (or echoes previously created content, either by the institution, an affiliate, or a third-party organization such as the local newspaper) and shares it on one or multiple social media channels to be consumed by a public audience.

Currently, most districts do not both monitor and post on every possible channel because of limitations of the size of the district and the communications team. **The following page provides guidance on posting on the most commonly used channels.**

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Outline of Common Social Media Channels and Uses

Channel	Frequency of Posting	Common Topics Posted	Examples
Facebook	Daily	Regular district and school news, updates, and accomplishments: • Important events and reminders • Major student and staff achievements, including academics, extracurricular activities, sports, etc. • Updates about major initiatives, projects, or upgrades	• Academic awards and achievements earned by district students • Sports updates and reports • Updates about financial investments • New teacher profiles • Safety and security updates: drills, training, new measures, etc.
Twitter	Daily	Similar content to Facebook	Similar content to Facebook
Instagram	Weekly	Picture-heavy profiles or updates: • Value stories • "Day in the life" stories • Support district or school pride • Sports events, pep rallies	• Photo and caption of a sports event, major tests, classrooms during teaching, etc. • Photos with caption during extracurricular events, celebrations, parent-teacher conferences, performances
Snapchat	Weekly	Quick visual stories and targeted messages, predominantly to students: • Updates • Reminders	Stories of how much students, parents, and teachers value and appreciate each other, school staff, etc.
Website	As needed	Basic information about district, board updates, information about schools, academic programs, extracurriculars, sports, etc. Information specifically targeted and written for incoming parents	• District strategic plan • District by the numbers • Major awards, achievements, updates
YouTube	Monthly or as needed	• Videos promoting the district • Videos outlining achievements on an annual basis • Public hearings and live streams of major events	• Board meetings • District promos ("Why Choose Our District")

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Guide to Crafting Social Media Policy and Procedures (cont.)

Step 2	Allocate Posting Permissions and Responsibilities

Owner: Public Information Officer (PIO)

Decide which staff members in the district will be responsible for posting

If the district has a communications team, responsibilities should be allocated among the team. The Public Information Officer should determine who will be responsible for posting what types of content, and on which media, to prevent duplication.

The district's social media presence is by nature targeted at students, parents, teachers, and the general public. Therefore, access to the official accounts should be thoughtfully allocated. Decide who needs to post on social media and make sure you can always know who has posted content if you need to. The table below provides guidance on how the type of message affects who would be crafting and posting it.

Topic	Person Responsible for Posting
Student Safety	PIO
Major Initiative Updates	PIO
School Event Notice	School Liaison
District Highlights	Communications Staff
Important Logistical Changes	Communications Staff

Other district employees, such as teachers, coaches, and staff should be encouraged to send relevant stories to the liaison at their school or the central district office. Provide guidance on what stories are relevant and what information should be included in the post request.

Providing Guidance to Individual High Schools

Assign a social media point-person or liaison at every school in your district. Make sure they are aware of the district social media policy, goals, expectations, and strategy.

Facilitate an informal exchange of best practices among schools for posting on different channels and writing compelling messages.

Focus on branding demonstrates professionalism

Ensure the district is always presented well by strongly emphasizing style rules and the importance of proofreading all posts. Outline brand requirements for posting format, images, and content. To assist posters in creating appropriate content, provide examples for people to reference.

Refer to branding guide and example available on pp. 22-25.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Guide to Crafting Social Media Policy and Procedures (cont.)

Step 3   Create a Process for Handling Online Posts and Comments

Owner: Public Information Officer

This step helps district communication teams determine how to process and respond to feedback or questions in a timely, respectful, and consistent manner.

1. **Establish a protocol for triaging and allocating feedback or comments to the appropriate person**. Most comments can be handled by the Public Information Officer and the district communications team, but some may have to be triaged depending on the comment and on the channel used.

   For high-volume channels like Twitter or Facebook, a coordinator or an intern can sift through tweets or comments and call out any that require response from the PIO.

   Provide clear instructions, such as to direct any posts regarding immediate safety and security concerns directly to the PIO. An electronic record should be kept of all communications received and sent, to reference in case of questions later.

   For lower-volume channels such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Youtube, a separate communications staff member, coordinator, or an intern can scroll through the content and determine which comments merit follow-up.

2. **Set up a method of replying to comments,** either by email, in person, or via the method the comment was received (e.g., replying to a comment on a Facebook post). Generally, replying to comments through the channel that they were received is the most appropriate and ensures wide readability. However, in sensitive situations, an email might be merited.

3. **If responding to a true emergency**, activate emergency plans and use the pre-determined communication channels to respond.

Step 4   Determine How to Measure Social Media Effectiveness

Owner: Public Information Officer

Thoughtfully choosing which metrics to track across platforms helps districts highlight the impact of different behaviors on successfully spreading messages through social media. There are a number of metrics that will help your district track the reach and impact of the institution's social media presence.

> Note that many social media channels offer business accounts. Districts wishing to track metrics will find that business accounts provide utilization metrics more effectively than personal accounts.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Guide to Crafting Social Media Policy and Procedures (cont.)

Key Social Media Metrics to Track

	Metric	Definition	Channel
Inform	**Reach**	Total number of unique users who have viewed post (how far content is disseminating, potential audience size)	All
	Followers/Friends	Number of fans or people who are seeing regular updates from the district and school accounts	All
	Total story completions	Number of unique users who have viewed the last snap of the story	Snapchat, Instagram
	Completion rates	How many people completed viewing the story compared to how many began viewing the story	Snapchat, Instagram
	Unique views	Number of unique users who have viewed the first frame of the story for at least one second	Snapchat, Instagram
Engage	**Engagement**	Number of unique users who have interacted with post	All
	Likes/Favorites	Number of unique users who have "liked" or "favorited" a post	All
	Shares/Retweets	Number of unique instances that users have reposted or shared your content with other users on the platform	All
	Comments/Replies	Number of comments received on or replies to a post	All
	Screenshots	Number of screenshots of snaps	Snapchat

Step 5	**Codify and Disseminate the Completed Social Media Policy**

Owner: Public Information Officer

Having a written policy ensures that the institution's procedure is clear to staff members and that consistency is maintained even with turnover. The policy should be disseminated to all district and school employees (communications teams, school liaisons, etc.) who will need to reference it for posting.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Guide to Crafting Social Media Policy and Procedures (cont.)

Step 6   Set Ground Rules for All Staff's Social Media Uses

Owner: Public Information Officer

While the majority of the district's communication will happen through the approved channels, it is important for districts to understand that their teachers, students, and staff members will also post independently and will often be seen as representing the district even when posting from their personal accounts.

Districts should set basic ground rules for all social media interactions that include, refer to, or are made in relation to the district or any of its individual schools. While each district will decide how restrictive or permissive its ground rules should be, the list below sets a basic minimum for what the social media policy for all district employees should include.

Basic Rules for Social Media Interaction

- **Do NOT** respond to any political comments
- **Do NOT** engage with negative comments related to a school or the district; leave response to communications team
- **Do NOT** direct messages to any individual students or families
- **Do NOT** use social media as a vehicle or a tool for judgment or social commentary

For additional examples of social media policy, please visit the **National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)** website at https://www.nspra.org/embracing-social-media-practical-guide-manage-risk-and-leverage-opportunity

Step 7   Train Staff on Social Media Literacy and Policy

Owner: District Communications Team

There is a variety of knowledge among district and school employees about how social media can and should be used, and about what constitutes an appropriate content. Make sure to train all of your employees not only on the policies outlined above, but also on basic social media skills. Some of the most important modules to include in your training are:

Creating and Managing an Account:

Not every teacher or staff member needs to or wants to have a social media account, but those who do sometimes need help in understanding some social media basics, such as private messages versus public posts, visibility of posts, tagging the district and the school, reposting, etc.

Keep this session optional and offer only once a year, unless there's high demand.

Representing the District and the School Online:

The district's policy shouldn't just be a set of rules. All employees should be given a brief training on what the district policy is, what some examples of compliance/non-compliance are, how to distinguish when to engage, and how to make sure posts by individuals align with the district's overall communication strategy.

Privacy and Security in the Digital Age:

Mandatory session for every employee, in order to maintain the security and integrity of district communications. Make sure to educate teachers and staff on password management, privacy settings, potential fake/hacking accounts, etc.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Section 3

Considerations for Establishing Consistent District Branding

Goal

Consult this section when preparing a poster to communicate an important initiative, event, or project to students, parents, teachers, and the wider district community.

Overview

This section helps users distill broad projects or initiatives into the key takeaways the audience needs to know. It also ensures that the format is as accessible as possible while also aligning with institutional branding.

Intended User

Public Information Officer

Ensure Effective District Branding

A key element of improving district communications is standardizing branding across all forms of external communication. This includes printed materials: posters, brochures, and flyers, as well as online formats, such as social media posts, reports posted on the website, electronic banners, etc.

Consistent branding makes communications more likely to be read, reinforces perceptions of professionalism, and bolsters districts' reliability and gains community trust. Below is a list of key steps district communications teams need to take to ensure all district communications are effectively reaching their intended audience.

Adopt clear, effective visual style for all communications.

- **Standardize logos, fonts, and colors** across all district communications. Use consistent fonts and a limited color scheme across documents.

- **Use bolding, underlining, and italics** selectively (and sparingly) to call out the most important information.

- **Balance graphics and text with white space.** Incorporating white space into a document creates more "hooks" for the reader's eye and reduces the effort required to digest the information. Increasing line spacing and margins (of both text and graphics) allows for more white space in a document.

- **Caption pictures clearly** with content and location (if applicable).

- **All graphs** should be accompanied by a brief description of key takeaways. This will enable readers to quickly scan and extract the important information.

  o Use bright colors and big numbers (within the district guidelines) to call out important data points.

  o Make graphs as accessible as possible by including titles, axis labels, and legends; color-coding the graph is helpful, but keep colors to a limited number to avoid overwhelming the reader.

Communicate at most one topic, project, initiative, or event per poster, brochure, or post.

Maintaining a narrowly scoped focus minimizes clutter and improves readability. It also speeds time to print material creation by standardizing the information that should be included on each page.

Bullet out important information to provide context:

- Basic information about initiative, project, or event

- Important dates to note

- Contact information

Use short, simple sentences and concise language.

- Target the writing style for laypeople by excluding jargon and unfamiliar terms. The goal is to make your communication as easy to read and understand as possible.

- Check your content carefully for grammatical errors.

- Use online tools to test and improve readability, such as the Gunning-Fog Index or the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

District Branding Guidelines

1 Provide examples of proper logo usage. Differentiate between academic and athletics logos.

2 Show examples of improper logo usage, (e.g., logos that are disproportionate, stretched, angled, or printed in alternative colors).

3 Explain the proper use of official colors by providing the process equivalent numbers for both primary and secondary colors.

4 Provide guidance on logo spacing (e.g., amount of space around the edges of the logo to avoid crowding the details).

5 Explain proper font usage by providing the names of primary and secondary fonts.

For an illustration of these guidelines, refer to the sample branding guide on pp. 22-25.

Source: Brands Standards Guide, School District of Milton, Wisconsin; EAB interviews and analysis.

Sample Branding Guide: School District of Milton, WI

Proper Logo Usage

These logos are our most visible asset, therefore maintaining consistent logo usage is critical.
Always allow 1/4" of clear space around all edges of the logo. Below are examples of proper usage.

Academic "M" Logo

Color logo

Athletics Logos

Hawk logo

Hawk logo with Milton

Color logo with Milton Red Hawks

Hawk with Wings Logo

Source: Brands Standards Guide, School District of Milton, Wisconsin;
EAB interviews and analysis.

Sample Branding Guide: School District of Milton, WI (cont.)

Improper Logo Usage
It is mandatory that our logo is not manipulated in any way. Below are examples of improper usage.

Do not stretch the logo

Do not change the logo colors

Do not distort elements of the logo

Do not angle the logo

Sample Branding Guide: School District of Milton, WI (cont.)

Official Colors and Logo Spacing

The Milton Red Hawks logo is comprised of two main colors. The spot colors, process equivalents, and alternate colors are listed below.

Primary Colors

PMS 187

Process Equivalent:
C=7 M=100 Y=82 K=26

Black

Process Equivalent:
C=0 M=0 Y=0 K=100

Logo Spacing

Always allow ¼" of clear space around all edges of each logo for Milton Red Hawks. Do not crowd the logo in any way.

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Sample Branding Guide: School District of Milton, WI (cont.)

Font Usage

The Milton Red Hawks logo is built using the primary font, but can be used in conjunction with the following recommended fonts.

Primary Fonts

Indiana Solid

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Secondary Fonts

Garamond Reprise Old Style Small Caps

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Garamond Regular

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z

Garamond Bold

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z

Garamond Italic

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z

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Section 4

Guide to Effective Email Communications

Goal

Use this guide when preparing to send both internal and external emails to district staff and teachers, as well as when developing general email policies.

Intended User

Superintendent, Public Information Officer

Overview

This section helps users standardize the format of and information shared in various email communications. It also includes tips to reduce the burden of crafting emails by helping users highlight relevant information. These steps help reduce email burnout and increase the chance that emails will be read and understood by the recipients.

Enhance the Impact of Email Communications

Step 1	Select Email Type that Matches the Communication's Purpose

District leaders use email to communicate a wide variety of information to stakeholders: teachers, principals, students, parents, etc. However, the content, structure, and branding of the emails must frequently change to effectively communicate the message being delivered.

Staff can use the table across the following two pages to identify the purpose of various emails, as well as how often such emails should be sent. The table also provides considerations of what content to include and how to stylistically design the email to make the most important information stand out.

Types of Email Communication

	Internal Emails (Including Daily Announcements)	Major Project Initiation Announcements	Major Updates on Projects, Initiatives, or Performance
Purpose	Provide brief, succinct information to individuals impacted by content of email.	Inform district community about upcoming major initiatives or projects (i.e., investments, transitions to 1:1, changes of schedule, etc.)	Notify community of progress on initiatives: updates on progress, results, growing scope of involvement, etc.
Frequency	Daily/Weekly	As needed	Monthly to annual, depending on project
Branding and Style	Keep it simple; use consistent fonts and a limited color scheme. These may omit logos and other cumbersome graphical elements.	Use appropriate branding, according to district standards. Balance graphics and text with white space to reduce effort required to digest information. Add bullet points to call out critical information.	Keep it simple; selectively use bolding, underlining, and italics to call out titles or the most important information.
Content to Include	• Important points that people need to know to understand the reason for the communication • District point of view or stance on the issue, if necessary	• Important details, such as: o Project name o Contact information o Important dates/milestones o Estimated impact on students o Link to media stories or research showing need for project	• Brief description of milestones achieved and progress to date • Who, what, when, where, why, for how long, and who to contact with questions or concerns • Expected future timeline

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Enhance the Impact of Email Communications (cont.)

Types of Email Communication (cont.)

	Safety and Security Updates, Drills, and Alarms	Email Newsletter	District Staff and Teacher Spotlights
Purpose	Notify district community of a drill, event, or an ongoing/ active situation.	Share routine, non-urgent information internally and with district community.	Display ways that staff and teachers are providing value to the community, particularly beyond their usual roles.
Frequency	As needed. This may vary from pre-planned weekly emails about drills to hourly updates about active situations	Weekly, monthly, or bimonthly	Weekly or monthly
Branding and Style	Use appropriate branding, but keep focus on message. Bullet accordingly as needed to keep critical information easily accessible. Be especially careful with word choice to avoid misunderstanding.	Use branded fonts and colors, as well as ample white space. Use a consistent template across time to ensure familiarity with format and ease of understanding.	Balance graphics and text with white space. Ensure high-quality pictures where possible.
Content to Include	• Description of situation or of expected impact • Who, what, when, where, why, for how long, and who to contact with questions or concerns • What the district and other authorities (if applicable) are doing to mitigate the disruption to impacted parties	• Student achievements • Teacher/staff achievements and recognition • Important upcoming dates • Minor updates on ongoing initiatives	• How staff and teachers have positively impacted both students and the community • Any positive/value stories or compliments from local organizations, businesses, or individuals

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Enhance the Impact of Email Communications (cont.)

Step 2	Draft Email that Clearly Articulates Intent and Action

While emails are a familiar form of communication, leveraging them for the mass distribution of information requires effort. The following table provides **five essential rules for crafting effective emails**.

Rules for Writing Effective Emails

Rule	Implementation Guidance	Examples
Know the intention or purpose of the email before sending	Is the purpose of the email to share information or request action? The main points should be clearly articulated upfront.	**Sharing information** requires language such as "Attached is a link to the Board Decision for your reference," "We are pleased to announce," or "Updates to a previous report." **Requesting action** from recipients requires language such as "Please respond with your comments" or "Create this document and disseminate it to teachers."
Highlight follow-up actions expected from recipient(s)	What actions (if any) should happen as a result of this email? Make the expected action clear to the addressees by calling out who is responsible for which part of the action.	For example, "[*Name 1*], please send [*document*] to [*Name 2*]."

Provide only as much context as necessary	• Think through the background information required for recipient(s) to understand the email and take appropriate action.
	 • To ensure recipients grasp the email's key takeaway(s), leave out extraneous detail.
		• Key content to include:
		  o Impact on students, teachers, community
		  o Basic reasoning for decision
		 • Content to avoid:
		  o Long stories and details about how a decision came to be, unless absolutely relevant
		  o Personal views

Include relevant supporting graphics	Text-heavy emails can be hard for recipients to digest and may not get read. Use a quotation, statistic, image, or photo to break up the text and make the message being communicated more compelling and accessible. Data supports requests or stories more effectively than anecdotes, and graphs are a powerful way to communicate changes.	When possible, use: • data to show (potential) impact of initiatives (e.g., "research has shown that engaging students in social-emotional learning improves their outcomes by 11%") • pictures to celebrate achievements • quotes from district staff to make emails more interesting to read
Avoid jargon unless it is certain that the recipient(s) understands it	Clearly define any terms that the recipient(s) might not be familiar with, including acronyms. Note that even names of systems or regulations can count as jargon. Be particularly mindful of jargon when sending external emails.	Parents may not know what Title I vs. Title II funds means or what "ESSA" or the Perkins Act stand for.

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Enhance the Impact of Email Communications (cont.)

| Step 3 | Ensure the Message Reaches the Target Audience |

The remaining four rules below focus on **how to deliver the email** after it has been written. While delivering an email may seem as simple as hitting send, district leaders should carefully consider when and how they send their digital messages to achieve the highest view and response rates.

Rules for Sending Effective Emails

Rule	Implementation Guidance
Proofread emails before sending	Read emails out loud to check for comprehension. To avoid unnecessary back-and-forth with recipients, ask someone else to read the most important information and check if they have questions.
Target emails to as few people as possible—do not reply-all unless absolutely necessary and appropriate	Reply-all emails can spam the inboxes of readers who do not need the information and reduce the likelihood that those recipients will open important email from the same sender in the future.
Time emails to arrive at prime reading hours for the audience	Leverage the "delayed send" function to time emails to prime reading hours for the audience. Sending emails during prime reading hours increases the chances of the recipient reading and responding to it quickly, instead of putting it on a to-do list or letting it fall further down the queue.
Know when not to use email to communicate. Some messages are best delivered in person or over the phone	How a message should be delivered will vary depending on the audience and the content. For sensitive or highly-personal topics with staff, principals, or teachers, err on the side of an in-person conversation. Employees will have a chance to respond in the moment and are more likely to feel heard and respected. Additionally, always bear in mind that emails can become public once they have been sent.

Section 5

Helping Parents Communicate the District's Value

Goal

Use the provided tools to identify and support parents who would serve as district ambassadors and would help bolster the image of the district.
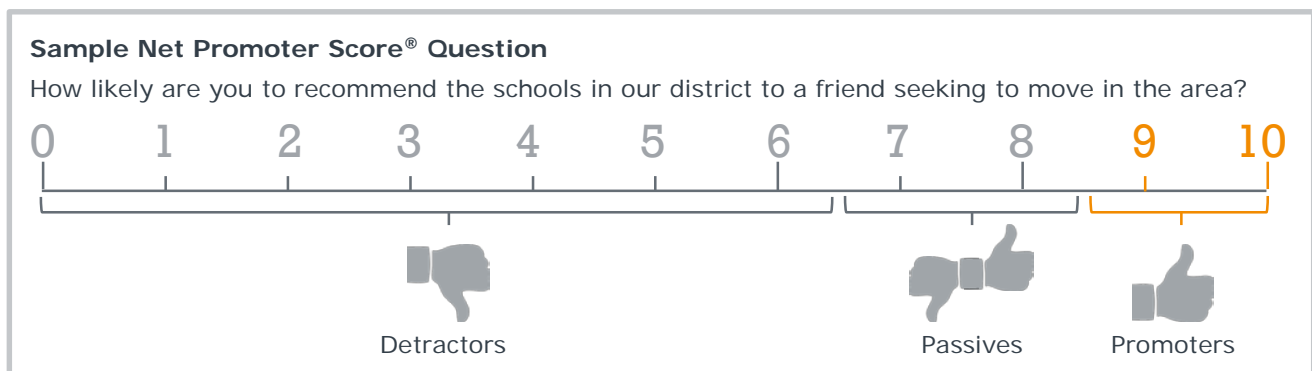
Overview

This section helps districts identify, train, and support parents who would be willing to act as advocates of the district in their interaction with the community.

Intended User

Public Information Officer

Identify Parent Advocates Using Net Promoter Scores®

Find Quiet Advocates to Create a Strong Parent Ambassador Network

In business, Net Promoter Scores®[1] use one basic question to measure the overall satisfaction of a customer: *"What is the likelihood that you would recommend company X to a friend or colleague?"* With a single score, companies can gauge their performance among current customers as well as their potential for growth within the market.

By asking this question of parents, districts can similarly collect valuable data on the level of satisfaction of their parent community. In doing so, they can use Net Promoter Scores to categorize parents as "Promoters," "Passives," or "Detractors" based on a 10-point scale. Parents who score a 9 or 10 are considered to be "Promoters," which indicates their higher likelihood of recommending the district's schools to friends and colleagues. Knowledge of parents' scores ensures that your district knows which "Promoters" to invite to a network of parent ambassadors, allowing all advocates to be identified, even parents who are less vocal in their appreciation of the district's schools.

Sample Net Promoter Score® Question

How likely are you to recommend the schools in our district to a friend seeking to move in the area?

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Detractors   Passives   Promoters

How to Use Net Promoter Scores®

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Measure Parent Satisfaction	**Contact "Promoters"**	**Follow Up with Parents**
• Include the Net Promoter Score® as a trackable question on an existing parent satisfaction survey	• Contact parents who are categorized as "Promoters," and explain how you identified them as potential advocates	• Identify parents who give a score within the range of "Detractors"
• Ensure parent names are recorded with their Net Promoter Score® even if all other survey questions are anonymous	• Invite parent "Promoters" to a Parent Ambassador Network training session before asking them to commit to being ambassadors	• Designate members of your communications team to follow up with parent "Detractors." Team members should ask parents what led to their dissatisfaction and work with these families with the goal of eventually moving them into the "Promoter" category
• Reassure survey respondents that their identity is only tracked for the Net Promoter Score®, not the remainder of the survey	• Provide parent "Promoters" with alternate forms of advocacy if they choose not the join the Parent Ambassador Network	

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Build a Parent Ambassador Support System

A Parent Ambassador Network or a similar structure should be an essential component of any district's approach to engaging its community, since parents are usually the strongest voices in support of or against the district. With a strong network of parents, word of mouth becomes the district's most influential community engagement strategy, as parents are often willing and ready to speak about the district's value within their social and professional networks.

However, a lack of guidance for parent ambassadors may prevent communications and Family and Community Engagement (FACE) teams from fully realizing the potential of their network. To ensure the effectiveness of parent ambassadors' messaging, districts need to provide them with proper support by creating a training program that clearly establishes roles, expectations, and guidance.

The purpose of this section is to assist communications and FACE teams in creating a training guide that empowers new and existing parent ambassadors to effectively relay the value of the district in the community.

Building a Parent Ambassador Network Guide

Key Components of a Parent Ambassador Network Guide

Include the following four elements in a comprehensive training guide to prepare parent ambassadors for their role as advocates of the district:

1

Establish Parent Ambassador Responsibilities

Outline roles, expectations, and goals for parent ambassadors

2

Provide District 'At-a-Glance' Quick Facts

Ensure consistent knowledge of basic facts about the district, such as school options, extracurriculars, awards and recognitions, exam scores, teacher training, etc.

3

Communicate the Mission Statement

Describe the unique mission statement of the district, as well as the biggest areas of focus for the current leadership

4

Prepare Ambassadors for Difficult Questions

Prepare parent ambassadors for difficult questions from skeptical community members (e.g., how does the district combat the achievement gap, how does it work to improve student safety, etc.)

How to Use This Guide

Use the *Parent Ambassador Network Planning Document* to develop the training manual content
Pages 34-35.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Parent Ambassador Network Planning Document

Complete the planning document below before creating your Parent Ambassador Training Guide. Use the questions under each section to help you brainstorm content to include in the guide.

1 Establish Parent Ambassador Responsibilities

Determine the role you want your Parent Ambassador Network to play within the community.

Consider the following as you brainstorm:

- *What is the primary role of the Parent Ambassador Network (e.g., combatting negative perceptions, acting as advocates for initiatives, speaking to families considering moving in the area, etc.)?*
- *Are there other responsibilities parent ambassadors should take on (e.g., calling or meeting with incoming families, working with existing families, participating in bond/levy campaigns, etc.)?*

2 Provide District 'At-a-Glance' Quick Facts

Fill in key information about your district below:

Number of schools per level (elementary, middle, high) and alternative options (CTE, Arts, Magnet, etc.)		Most commonly represented language groups:	
Demographic breakdown of student population:			
What is the main focus of the district's mission statement and strategic plan?			
What are main sources of pride and achievement for the district and its schools and students?			

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Parent Ambassador Guide Planning Document (cont.)

3 Communicate the Mission Statement

Discuss what differentiates your district from neighboring ones and from alternative options

Consider the following:

- *What is the focus of the district's mission statement and strategic plan? What are the areas the district is investing heavily into and planning to invest in the coming years and why?*

- *List out the unique elements of your district (e.g., partnerships with major companies for career realization for students, high test scores, progress on the achievement gap, focus on personalized learning, etc.). Also include information about your schools.*

4 Prepare Ambassadors for Difficult Questions

Anticipate questions asked by skeptical members of the community or incoming families who are concerned about the value of public education.

- *What are your district's policies and measures on student safety and security?*

- *What is the impact of the district's demographic composition on student outcomes?*

- *Is there an elitist attitude or narrow perspective among students and parents? How do you expose students to different perspectives and life experiences?*

- *What are the opportunities for children with special needs?*
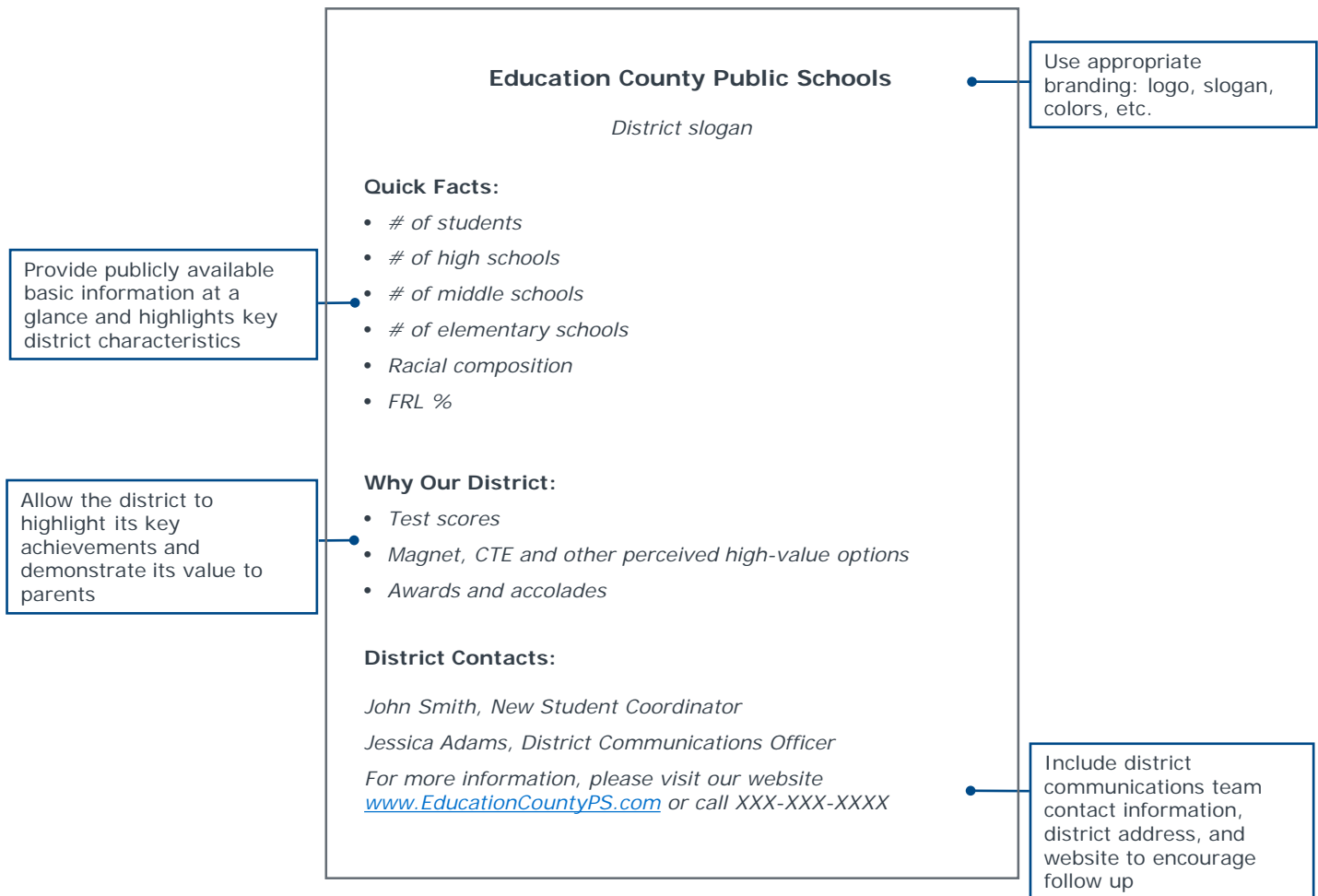
Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Sample Resource: District Information Card for Parents

Information Card Can Help Parents Deliver Key Messaging about District

In addition to training your parent ambassadors, you may also consider supporting them directly with resources to help them better represent your schools in the community. One way to do so is to create a small (5x7) information card to share with parent ambassadors to help them deliver key messages about what your district and its schools have to offer. The card can include information to both promote the value of the education provided by the district and address potential myths and misperceptions about it, including student demographics, test scores, alternative setting opportunities, and details about school programming.

Review the sample card below as a potential easy-to-create resource to help your parent ambassadors represent the district. Also consider creating a similar card for parents from each of your schools.

Front of District Information Card

Education County Public Schools

District slogan

Use appropriate branding: logo, slogan, colors, etc.

Quick Facts:

- *# of students*
- *# of high schools*
- *# of middle schools*
- *# of elementary schools*
- *Racial composition*
- *FRL %*

Provide publicly available basic information at a glance and highlights key district characteristics

Why Our District:

- *Test scores*
- *Magnet, CTE and other perceived high-value options*
- *Awards and accolades*

Allow the district to highlight its key achievements and demonstrate its value to parents

District Contacts:

John Smith, New Student Coordinator

Jessica Adams, District Communications Officer

For more information, please visit our website www.EducationCountyPS.com or call XXX-XXX-XXXX

Include district communications team contact information, district address, and website to encourage follow up

EAB interviews and analysis.

Sample Resource: District Information Card for Parents (cont.)

Back of District Information Card

Distinctive Programs and Options:

Magnet High School, which allows students to truly develop and reach their academic potential
- Facts about Magnet High School (test scores, admission rates in top universities, etc.)

CTE Program, which pairs students with leading employers in the area and provides them with internships, hands-on experience, and career advice from leading professionals in multiple fields
- Facts about CTE program (participating employers, # of internships, starting salaries of graduates, etc.)

Alternative School, which takes into account the specific learning needs of your child and provides a nurturing and caring environment for them to thrive in

Other programs and options that community members and prospective parents may be interested in.

Describes academic and extracurricular offerings unique to your district

Tips to Effectively Share a Parent Information Card

Make available at both district and individual schools

Provide printed and PDF copies to parent ambassadors

Email or mail to current parents at the start of the year

Circulate at major district-wide events

EAB interviews and analysis.

Appendix

- Sample Job Description: Public Information Officer
- Sample Job Description: Non-Administrative Communications Officer

Sample Job Description

Public Information Officer

Position Title: Director of Community Relations

General Statement Of Responsibilities:

The Department of Community Relations provides communication/public relations services to the district, each department and school. The director functions as a communications coordinator during emergencies on district or school levels, establishes in-service training sessions, produces components for specific programs and activities and publishes a newsletter for school district patrons periodically. The department publishes an employee publication on a regular basis.

Essential Duties:

- Serve as information liaison between the total school system and the community at large, represents the district within various community organizations.
- Set annual objectives for and evaluates the district's community relations program, to include budget planning for meeting those objectives.
- Serve as liaison person between the district and the news media and supervises the production and distribution of news releases.
- Serve as district spokesperson in areas of sensitivity or controversy.
- Cooperate with district administrators and other staff members, as appropriate, in publicizing and promoting performances, exhibitions, displays, dedications or special programs sponsored by the schools and open to the public.
- Provide professional public relations counsel and assistance to the administration, Governing Board, schools, parent groups and student groups.
- Oversee the writing and production of the employee newsletter.
- Prior to final publication, review and edit all district publications which will be disseminated to the general public.
- Recommend innovative avenues of communication for external and internal audiences.
- Solicit feedback through formal and informal means on activities, products and purposes of the community relations program and the school district in general.
- Develop and maintain accurate records of the district's public relations program.
- Provide logistical support for all meetings of the Governing Board.
- Expedite responses to inquiries and complaints received by the department from citizens, news media and school personnel.
- Conduct recognition programs for employees and students.
- Coordinate and manage city, state and national campaigns and programs.
- Conduct information campaigns for district elections.
- Research and write articles and speeches for the Superintendent and Governing Board.

Marginal Duties:

- Provide professional assistance in the development of various publications (brochures, newsletters, letters, information bulletins) for school and departments.
- Provide in-service training as required on public and community relations.
- Perform other tasks as assigned by the Superintendent.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in public relations, mass communications, or equivalent experience
- Professional experience in a full-time public relations position
- Working knowledge of internal and external public relations programs
- Mastery of communications skills
- Understanding of the importance of two-way communication
- Experience in planning, implementing, evaluating, and budgeting personnel management
- Good health, physical stamina, fitness and vitality
- Accreditation by the National School Public Relations Association or Public Relations Society of America preferred, but not required
- Evidence of adherence to the code of ethics of the public relations profession

Supervision Received: Superintendent of Schools

Supervision Given: Community relations specialist and secretary to the director

For more information and resources on setting up a public relations department, please visit the **National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)** website at www.nspra.org/research

Sample Job Description

Non-Administrative Communications Officer

Position Title: Communications Specialist

Duties:

- Disseminate information to the public and school district staff.
- Evaluate and coordinate requests for community use of facilities, as well as approval of event promotional materials.
- Serve as editor/writer for district website, newsletters and other publications.
- Generate newsletter stories.
- Coordinate layout, design and production of website, newsletters and other publications.
- Serve as communications liaison between the media and the district; prepare and distribute news releases, arrange media interviews and conferences and respond to requests for information.
- Photograph district programs and events for publications and slide shows.
- Determine appropriate communications for target audiences.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in PR, communications or related field.
- Two years of related experience in public relations and/or media work.
- Previous experience working with public schools preferred.
- Knowledge of the unique district community.
- Excellent verbal written and interpersonal communication skills.
- Proficiency with current technology for performance of duties, including graphic design and publication/print software.
- Excellent analytical and critical thinking and judgment skills a must.

For more information and resources on setting up a public relations department, please visit the **National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)** website at www.nspra.org/research

Source: National School Public Relations Association; EAB interviews and analysis.