

Pottsgrove School District Communications Plan

May 2009

Introduction

The Pottsgrove School District Administration, under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Bradley C. Landis, is working to improve communication across all levels of the school district. The administration understands that good communication – internal and external – is critical to student achievement and community support.

Parents and other tax payers need to be well-informed about student progress and the great things happening in the District. They should also be provided with information about how the District is managing its finances. Staff members should have opportunities for their input to be heard and valued, and they should be well-informed about the District's initiatives. Clear, consistent communication will ensure that all staff members are operating with the same knowledge and information. The District must also work to ensure there are ways to engage in meaningful, two-way communication with staff to solicit feedback on initiatives and operations. All communication should be conducted with student achievement and best interest in mind.

The Administration has been working to communicate effectively, but began its formal efforts to develop a communication plan in September, 2008. Six focus groups were conducted on September 16, 2008 by communications consultant Beth Trapani. Each group had 8 to 12 participants who were selected by administrators. An attempt was made to select a somewhat diverse range of people for each of the six groups: senior citizens, support staff, elementary teachers, secondary teachers, elementary parents and secondary parents. Each group was asked questions about how they feel the schools and the district communicate, the district's strengths and weaknesses, and where they would like to see improvements – both in the school system and specifically with regards to its communications. The focus group summaries were used to develop surveys to get additional feedback from all audiences. The summary of the focus groups as well as the surveys are provided as an appendix to this plan.

Goals

All goals have been developed in support of the District's mission: *to educate and inspire all students to excel as productive, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners.*

The District's vision:

Our students will attain their fullest potential while exhibiting a love of learning, a passion for excellence, and respect for humanity.

Our students will demonstrate proficiency relative to state and district standards.

Our graduates will be productive contributors to a changing global society.

Good communication is paramount to helping the District achieve its goals and fulfill its mission and vision. Therefore, the goals of this communications plan are to:

1. Improve internal communications across all segments of the District (internal)
2. Provide more opportunities for employees to have input in District decisions/initiatives (internal)
3. Increase positive publicity for the District (internal and external)
4. Increase and improve communication with parents and other taxpayers (external)

Audiences/Publics

1. Active/Enrolled Families (including students, parents, and grandparents)
2. Employees
3. Other Community Members and Groups (including alumni, business community, senior citizens, elected officials, faith-based community, and the media)

ACTION PLAN

- 1. Improve internal communications across all segments of the District**
 - Provide current information to employees about District decisions (ongoing)
 - Increase opportunities for staff to become involved with District decisions (ongoing)
 - Establish an internal district-wide newsletter
 - Require each school principal to develop a building communications plan that's aligned with the District's communications plan (deadline)
 - Establish district-wide communication expectations for staff (deadline)
 - Require each administrator to have a communications goal (deadline)
 - Develop standards for email and voice mail communications (deadline)
 - Ensure secretaries and support staff are included in building meetings (ongoing)
 - Ensure secretaries receive all information before it is sent home to parents (ongoing)
 - Celebrate staff contributions and efforts (ongoing)
 - Establish a protocol for student feedback (deadline)
 - Make communications a component of new employee orientation (deadline)

- 2. Provide more opportunities for employees to have input in District decisions/initiatives**
 - Provide regular opportunities for all staff in buildings to meet with the Superintendent
 - Establish a superintendent's staff liaison council (deadline)
 - Establish communication guidelines for district office staff (deadline)
 - Continue to survey staff (ongoing)
 - Establish system for staff to provide feedback to administrators (deadline)

- 3. Increase positive publicity for the District**
 - Redesign and update website to make it easier to use
 - Develop 'school ambassador' guidelines/training (deadline)

- Improve district newsletter to make it more current and relevant (ongoing)
- Meet with The Mercury editorial board (deadline)
- Respond to negative publicity in The Mercury with Letters to the Editor (ongoing)
- Write Op-Eds for The Mercury (ongoing)
- Establish a publicity liaison for the District (ongoing)
- Establish a section of the website for employees to submit items for consideration for publicity (ongoing)
- Celebrate staff contributions and efforts (ongoing)

4. Increase and improve communication with parents and other taxpayers

- Encourage principals to hold parent forums (deadline)
- Add a ‘How are we doing?’ section to the website (deadline)
- Add suggestion boxes to each school building (deadline)
- Institute ‘secret shoppers’ program (deadline)
- Develop standards for email and voice mail communications (deadline)
- Develop ways for principals to convey their accessibility (deadline)
- Provide methods of communication that are diverse and two-way (ongoing)
- Improve distribution of school information (deadline)
- Offer a simple summer middle school ‘academy’ for incoming middle school students and parents
- Provide regular district updates for school building newsletters (deadline)
- Conduct regular surveys with parents (ongoing)
- Improve and continue use of Phone Alert System (including reinforcing criteria for it)
- Improve school collection of email addresses (ongoing)
- Establish a list-serv for parents/community members (deadline)
- Develop better information about the District’s demographics/scores/programs (deadline)
- Establish a Key Communicator Network (deadline)
- Establish tutoring and mentoring programs (deadline)
- Increase contact and communication with senior citizens (ongoing)
- Develop simpler financial reports and publish them on website (deadline)
- Publish regular board meeting updates on website

- Host “Administrator for a Day” event for community/business – work with local chamber and service groups to establish an annual event (deadline)

Appendix 1

Summary of Focus Groups September 2008

Six groups were surveyed: senior citizens, support staff, elementary teachers, secondary teachers, elementary parents and secondary parents.

Consistent themes across all six groups:

1. The Quill is read by many but it's outdated, often full of errors, and "fluffy."
2. The website is poor and is not updated.
3. People would like to see more information about where their tax dollars are spent.
4. People are very frustrated about all the negative publicity in The Mercury and want the administration to respond to negative and incorrect news and information.
5. People want to see more positive information about Pottsgrove and its great students in The Mercury and elsewhere.

Consistent themes across the staff groups:

1. The current administration is trying hard to make positive changes and to communicate, but there's far too much change too quickly.
2. The administration is out of touch with what it's really like in the classrooms. The demands are unrealistic.
3. Employees are not asked for their opinion or input with relation to all the changes.
4. Employees don't feel valued.
5. The staff is one of the great strengths of the district.
6. The administration should do more to combat the bad press in The Mercury
7. The district should do more to get positive press about Pottsgrove students into The Mercury and elsewhere.
8. Pottsgrove needs more K-12 communication.

Consistent themes across parent groups:

1. Most information about what happens in the district comes from their children and from other parents.
2. They receive very little information from the District – rather most communication is from school buildings.

3. Communication is great at the elementary level but drops off significantly at the middle and high school, where many parents feel suddenly unwelcome.
4. Parents want academic progress reports sooner – before report cards come out.
5. Parents want phone calls from teachers and miss the ‘human touch.’
6. Parents feel there’s great variability in communication from teacher to teacher.
7. Parents want the chance to access their child’s grades and assignments online.

Appendix 2

Pottsgrove Parent Communication Survey Results

- Percentage is listed as the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement
 - 44 parents responded
1. I think the Pottsgrove School District does a good job communicating with parents. **71%**
 2. My child's individual school building communicates well with parents. **50%**
 3. Communication from my child's teacher is strong and effective. **74%**
 4. Most of my child's teachers are effective communicators. **79%**
 5. I receive adequate information about my child's progress in school. **85%**
 6. My school's principal is accessible and is a good communicator. **59%**
 7. I feel as though my child is valued in the Pottsgrove School District. **64%**
 8. Many of my neighbors' opinions about Pottsgrove are based on what they read in The Mercury. **33%**
 9. I'm frustrated with the amount of negative news about Pottsgrove in The Mercury. **37%**
 10. I'd like to receive more regular communication from the school district about a variety of issues and topics. **88%**
 11. I'd like more information about how to help my child succeed in school. **76%**
 12. I'd like ways to be more involved with the school district. **79%**
 13. Parent-teacher conferences are well-structured and useful. **76%**
 14. I feel welcome in my child's school. **64%**
 15. If Pottsgrove's website had more useful information on it, I would welcome the opportunity to use it as an informational tool. **91%**

Pottsgrove Resident Communications Survey Results

- Percentage is listed as the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement
- 16 residents responded

1 – I feel the Pottsgrove School District does a good job communicating with residents. **45%**

- 2 – I'd like to know more about where my tax dollars are being spent in the Pottsgrove School District. **100%**
- 3 – The word in the community is that the Pottsgrove School District is a strong, positive school district that serves our children well. **50%**
- 4 – I'd like to know more about the students of the Pottsgrove School District. **73%**
- 5 – I regularly read the district newsletter (formerly known as The Quill.) **100%**
- 6 – Information in the district newsletter is pertinent, useful, and/or interesting. **72%**
- 7 – I'd like to know more about how the Pottsgrove School Board operates. **100%**
- 8 – I'd like the opportunity to get involved with Pottsgrove schools. **36%**
- 9 – I rely on The Mercury for most of my information about the Pottsgrove School District. **37%**
- 10 – I would like to see more positive news about Pottsgrove in The Mercury. **73%**
- 11 – I value public education and welcome the opportunity to learn more about Pottsgrove. **100%**

Pottsgrove Staff Communications Survey Results

- Percentage is listed as the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement
- 149 staff responded

- 1 – The Pottsgrove School District Office communicates well with its staff. **82%**
- 2 – I feel there is good communication within my school building. **77%**
- 3 – I feel my opinion is valued by administrators. **69%**
- 4 – I feel well-supported by administrators. **73%**
- 5 – I would like to see an internal district-wide newsletter. **73%**
- 6 – I'd like to know more about what's happening in other buildings, and in the district office. **82%**
- 7 – If I am a teacher or classroom educator, I have a good understanding of the goals and purposes of PLC's. **69%**
- 8 – I feel well-informed about what's happening in the Pottsgrove School District. **64%**
- 9 – I believe I am an ambassador for the school district. **82%**
- 10 – I think the district does a good job communicating with parents. **80%**

11 – I'd like to see more positive news stories about Pottsgrove in The Mercury. **91%**

12 – I feel as though I am a capable communicator. **93%**

13 – I feel as though I could benefit from some communications training. **50%**

14 – I'd like more opportunity to meet as a staff within my building. **85%**

15 – I have confidence that the current administration is making positive changes and moving the District toward positive, clear goals. **90%**

Other comments/suggestions about communications that would be helpful: