



# BEST PRACTICES IN UTILIZING COMMUNICATION DATA

July 2021

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	3
KEY FINDINGS.....	3
SECTION I: MANAGING DISTRICT STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION DATA.....	5
Tracking and Collecting Data.....	5
Analyzing Data and Measuring Success.....	9
Legal Considerations .....	14
SECTION II: BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION	18
Establishing a Strategic Communication Plan .....	18
Optimizing Communication Channels and Frequency .....	23

# INTRODUCTION

Over the last year and a half, district leaders at a Hanover Research (Hanover) partner have prioritized communicating with stakeholders to receive feedback and keep them informed on several initiatives including district plans on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID crisis recedes, leaders are interested in assessing the extent to which stakeholders accessed, utilized, and were able to respond to information via district- and school-level communications. However, assessing communication effectiveness is challenged by knowing what metrics are available, reliable, and valid for their stated purposes. Further, processes for analyzing such metrics require knowledge and skills not always readily available to districts. To overcome these challenges, the partner needs research-based best practice strategies to identify appropriate data and methods for analyzing data that can inform future communication strategies.

To support district leaders in their efforts to strategically direct resources to improve and enhance stakeholder communication, Hanover has created the following report which outlines best practices for collecting and analyzing stakeholder communication data. Specifically, this report focuses on feasible metrics for school districts to collect and track communication data (e.g., social media usage, website tracking, email metadata), best practices for analyzing data, and the elements of effective and efficient district-level communication. Hanover also highlights strategic communication plans and innovative strategies developed by peer and exemplar districts.

## KEY FINDINGS



**Districts with effective communication collect both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of their communication strategies.** Common quantitative metrics used to evaluate district communication programs typically relate to tracked communications channels. The number of social media followers, website visitors, and email receipts and click rates are common metrics cited in exemplar district communication plans. Qualitative metrics include surveys and focus groups that gather stakeholder feedback and analyze their perceptions around district communication strategies.



**Experts recommend that districts evaluate digital traffic and engagement through multiple metrics.** Increases in social media followers or website hits provide limited insight into the effectiveness of external digital communications. Social media metrics can provide granular demographic data (e.g., percentage of student vs. adult-aged followers) and engagement data (e.g., the number of times a district Twitter handle is mentioned by other users or the percentage of users hiding specific Facebook posts). Similarly, website analytics metrics can help districts better understand who their audience is and how visitors react to website navigability and content.



**An effective communication programs support school districts in advancing organizational goals and strategies.** Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that include data metrics can align with high-quality objectives that are based on broad organizational goals. Including communication data in strategic plans allows districts to develop work plans, assign accountable personnel, and ensure continuous tracking and evaluation of how communication efforts work toward achieving district goals.



**Strategies for communicating with external stakeholders typically include using multiple communication methods and tools.** District and school administrators use various tools and channels (e.g., websites, e-mails, apps, texts, newsletters) to communicate important information to students, families, and other community stakeholders (e.g., community groups, media). The literature recommends developing district and school websites as a streamlined information source for most communications (e.g., student/parent portals, announcements, updates, soliciting feedback). Similarly, districts can increase communication effectiveness via these platforms by

personalizing communications and interactions to include information valuable to families and other community members that are available in the stakeholders' preferred languages.



**Written, internal communication plans help detail goals, strategies, and action steps to improve internal communications.** Districts often form a committee consisting of administrators, teachers, and other staff to create internal communication plans. These committees conduct research on internal communications, outline specific short- and long-term improvement goals with timelines, regularly evaluate the plan, and ensure the district meets all outlined internal communication goals and objectives. Core components of internal strategic plans include analysis of goals, audiences, communication channels, and metrics. Additionally, some districts hire internal communication managers, such as Public Information Officers, to lead communication department efforts in keeping staff informed about important policies, news, and events.

# SECTION I: MANAGING DISTRICT STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION DATA

In this section, Hanover details best practices for managing stakeholder communication data, including how best to track, collect, analyze, and house data. Hanover adapts findings from businesses, corporations, and other district communication plans.

## TRACKING AND COLLECTING DATA

**Districts should collect both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of their communication strategies.** Common quantitative metrics used to evaluate district communication programs typically relate to tracked communications channels, while standard qualitative metrics, such as stakeholder surveys, gather stakeholder feedback and perceptions around district communication strategies. However, tracking too much data can overwhelm district capacity. Therefore, is essential districts identify the most important data points they wish track.<sup>1</sup> Section II will further discuss how to set objectives, goals, and specific data measures within a larger district strategic communication plan.

**Districts should invest in data analytics tools to track and collect communication data.** In this way, districts should generally focus on tracking and collecting three aspects of data: **Audience, Acquisition, and Behavior.**<sup>2</sup> Data analytics tools, such as Google Analytics, can help districts understand who engages with their content and when (*Audience*), how they access district content (e.g., organic Internet search, social media, email) (*Acquisition*), and what content is most or least popular among users (*Behavior*).<sup>3</sup> The following subsections will expand on these three components of collecting quantitative data, as well as common measures of collecting qualitative data.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA

### AUDIENCE

Districts generally divide communication into "internal" and "external" audiences.<sup>4</sup> Each district communication team should define both their internal and external target audiences to cater communication content and channels to the target audiences' preferences.<sup>5</sup> For example, Woodland Park School District in Colorado has a communication framework that describes its internal audiences as students, staff, the board of education, and contracted services (e.g., food service, transportation). Its external audience is much broader and includes both current and prospective parents and families, alumni, parent organizations, government and city officials, non-profit organizations and businesses, and other school districts.<sup>6</sup> Yet other districts, such as St. Anthony-New Brighton School District in Minnesota, list students as their external audience.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Are We There Yet? A Communications Evaluations Guide." Communications Network and Asibey Consulting, 2008. p. 24. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/arewethereyet.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Griffin, S. "Google Analytics 101 for School Marketers [Webinar Recap]." Finalsight, January 25, 2018. <https://www.finalsite.com/blog/p/~board/b/post/google-analytics-101-for-school-marketers-webinar-recap>

<sup>3</sup> Williams, S. "How Schools Can Use Google Analytics." Campus Suite, March 25, 2018. <https://www.campussuite.com/blog/how-schools-can-use-google-analytics>

<sup>4</sup> [1] "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures." National School Public Relations Association, October 2014. [http://agenda-hrtf.edmonds.wednet.edu:8085/mindocs/2016/SBA/20161026\\_361/minutes/198\\_NSPRA-Benchmarking-Rubrics-2014-10-24%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf](http://agenda-hrtf.edmonds.wednet.edu:8085/mindocs/2016/SBA/20161026_361/minutes/198_NSPRA-Benchmarking-Rubrics-2014-10-24%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf) [2] "School Communication Planning Guide." Campus Suite. p. 4. <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/296999/School-Communication-Planning-Guide.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> "Communications Framework." Woodland Park School District. p. 3. <https://wpsdk12.org/uploads/forms/Comm-Framework.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Communications Plan 2020-2021." St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District 282, 2020. p. 5. <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1595347126/stanthonyk12mnus/deezpb8oovtsrrlh9fha/2020-2021StAnthony-NewBrightonSchoolDistrictCommunicationsPlan.pdf>

Once audiences are identified, districts will want to track *who* engages with their communications within those groups. Websites, social media pages, email systems, and even school phone notification systems usually all have data tracking and collecting capacity. For instance, Google Analytics can deliver "Audience Reports" which track active users, demographics (e.g., age, gender), interests (e.g., affinity categories), geography (e.g., language, location), mobile or desktop usage. The reports even organize users into similar cohorts for ease of analysis.<sup>8</sup> Insights from these data will help districts notice user trends and inform future communication strategies to meet stakeholder needs.



According to a recent Finalsite webinar, school audiences are increasingly accessing school and district websites from their mobile devices. Districts will likely notice existing or growing trends in mobile viewership data using website analytic tools. Therefore, to encourage visitors, district websites need to have a "responsive design" so visitors can have a positive user and navigation experience on their mobile phones. Examples of responsive design considerations include ensuring the photos and text collapse into a mobile-friendly view.<sup>9</sup>

## ACQUISITION

Districts will also want to track *where* audiences find and engage with district or school communication. Acquisition measures how stakeholders arrive at a district website—in other words, how a website *acquires* users.<sup>10</sup> Insights from this data point can help districts determine how well they are driving traffic back to their website and help identify improvement areas.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Channels tool on Google Analytics could help a district communications officer notice a trend in district website visitors who come from social media posts. The district would then use this insight to post more content on social media pages and drive additional users towards the website.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, a district team could use acquisition data to measure the effectiveness of a recent online campaign launched on a local community organization's website. Acquisition data would show that clicks on the campaign content on the community organization's website successfully directed, or "referred," visitors to information on the district webpage. If a district team noticed a significant trend in referral traffic on their district webpage, the team could explore expanding their online campaign presence to other websites.

Figure 1.1 describes four types of "traffic" channels that data analytics tools can organize and visualize for districts.

Figure 1.1: Common Types of Website Traffic

Organic Search	Direct Traffic	Referral Traffic	Social Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience arrives to site from a result in a search engine (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Bing)</li> <li>• Typically 50-60% of overall traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience arrives to site through unclear access route (e.g., visiting from bookmarked link in browser, typing in URL, email links, QR codes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience arrives to site from other websites</li> <li>• Google Analytics lists specific websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience arrives to site from social media</li> <li>• Google Analytics breaks down the results by platform (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)</li> </ul>

Source: Finalsite<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Overview of Audience Reports." Google Analytics Help.

<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1012034?hl=en#zippy=%2Cin-this-article>

<sup>9</sup> Figure adapted from: Griffin, Op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> "Acquisition Reports." Google Analytics Help. [https://support.google.com/analytics/topic/3125765?hl=en&ref\\_topic=3544907](https://support.google.com/analytics/topic/3125765?hl=en&ref_topic=3544907)

<sup>11</sup> Griffin, Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, "How Schools Can Use Google Analytics," Op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations: Griffin, Op. cit.

## BEHAVIOR

**Tracking behavior helps districts understand how audiences interact with district communication channels and content** (e.g., webpages, social media posts, emails). Information around this user activity can be especially helpful to discover areas of greatest and least audience engagement. For example, Google Analytics tracks page views, clicks, form submissions, and other site engagement metrics to help customers collect data about the interactions with content.<sup>14</sup> Other third-party services can help track user activity for social media engagement or email opens, clicks, and bounces.<sup>15</sup> Collecting behavioral data can help districts notice patterns, identify potential content issues, and answer some of the following valuable questions:<sup>16</sup>

- What are your popular pages?
- What are visitors searching for when they come to your site?
- How do users interact with your pages?
- How many people open and/or click through your emails?
- How do people discover and respond to your social media posts?

## QUALITATIVE DATA

**Collection and evaluation of qualitative data can help inform district communication strategies as well.** The Communication Network, a company which provides best practices and research for philanthropic communication, notes that qualitative data can often provide more insight than quantitative data alone:

---

"While quantitative measures provide a numerical measure of your communications results, qualitative measures reveal more about their effects...Qualitative measures are often more helpful in determining what is working and what can be improved."<sup>17</sup>

---

Qualitative data generally refers to stakeholder surveys (online or in-person), interviews, and focus groups.<sup>18</sup> Initial research and subsequent evaluation of communication programs often center on feedback gathered through surveys and other qualitative methods. True perceptions about and engagement with communication content can be a more effective measure of public relations outcomes.<sup>19</sup> As findings from initial research serve as a baseline for communication program operations and efficacy, subsequent evaluations logically rely on similar methods to assess progress.<sup>20</sup>

**While district communication plans commonly list staff, parent, student, and community surveys as an evaluative measure, plans do not frequently include specific survey items or broader KPIs.** Recognizing the lack of universal survey items to assess district communication efforts, in 2013 the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) collected a series of evaluative measures, the majority of which are survey items, from districts with top performing communication programs. The NSPRA organized common measures into "critical function areas" of district communication programs, including measures to evaluate communications and relations with internal and external stakeholders.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> [1] "The Site Content Reports." Google Analytics Help. [https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9879857?hl=en&ref\\_topic=9878923](https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9879857?hl=en&ref_topic=9878923) [2] "About Events." Google Analytics Help. [https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1033068?hl=en&ref\\_topic=1033067#zippy=%2Cin-this-article](https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1033068?hl=en&ref_topic=1033067#zippy=%2Cin-this-article)

<sup>15</sup> "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Bullet points taken verbatim with minor alterations from: Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Are We There Yet? A Communications Evaluations Guide," Op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Jain, A. and 2014. "Emerging Models of PR Measurement." July 16, 2014. [https://www.prweek.com/article/1303749/emerging-models-pr-measurement?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.prweek.com/article/1303749/emerging-models-pr-measurement?utm_source=website&utm_medium=social)

<sup>20</sup> Matters, B. "Five Principles of Good PR Campaign Evaluation." Business Matters, November 3, 2013. <https://bmmagazine.co.uk/in-business/advice/five-principles-good-pr-campaign-evaluation/>

<sup>21</sup> "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 2.

### Collecting External Stakeholder Qualitative Data

Surveys of external stakeholders broadly assess parent and family satisfaction with district and school communications, as well as awareness of important events and issues in the district. Effective external communications support parent and family involvement in their students' learning. As the NSPRA notes, "communications include information and resources on how parents [and] families can become and stay involved in their children's education and how they can support and reinforce learning."<sup>22</sup> District and school communications should inform parents and families about "the goals, objectives, plans, programs, finances, issues, events and incidents of the district and their children's schools."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, survey-based evaluations of external communications partially aim to assess: (1) family and parent satisfaction with district and school communications, and (2) program effectiveness in spreading awareness of district initiatives and other aspects relevant to their child's learning experience.

In addition, surveys to evaluate external communications often assess family and parent perceptions of the district more broadly. District communication programs support positive relationships between families, teachers, and other school-based staff, as well as shape families' opinions of and feelings toward the district overall. Consequently, the NSPRA finds that effective district communication departments evaluate external communications based on parents and families' perception of, and relationship with, the district more generally.<sup>24</sup> Figure 1.2, below, details a sample of related measures (KPIs and/or specific survey items) focused on assessing these areas.

**Figure 1.2: Example External Stakeholder Survey Measures – Communication, Awareness, General Perceptions and Involvement**

COMMUNICATION	AWARENESS
▪ Top sources of information for learning about district/school issues (rank from a list)	▪ Parent awareness of district strategic plan, mission, vision, values, and motto
▪ Percentage of parents agreeing they are informed in a timely manner of major decisions	▪ Percentage of parents aware of district's performance in key areas
▪ How well district keeps parents informed	▪ Parent awareness of key information media
▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that their opinions/input is valued/used when making decisions	▪ Percentage of parents aware of different ways they can support their child's education, such as communication with teachers
GENERAL PERCEPTION AND INVOLVEMENT	
▪ Whether school/district is doing a good job/headed in the right direction	▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that the overall public image of the school is good
▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that school staff responds to their needs/concerns in a timely manner	▪ Attendance and participation in parent-teacher conferences

Source: National School Public Relations Association<sup>25</sup>

Districts may wish to collect qualitative data on school-level communications as well. For example, the NSPRA finds that districts with effective communication departments commonly survey parents and families on their agreement with the National PTA Standards for Family-School Involvement, listed below:<sup>26</sup>

- School keeps families informed about important issues and events
- School communicates in multiple ways
- School communicates timely alerts on health/safety issues

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 47.



- School connects them with somebody who can help if school cannot
- School considers parent input before making important decisions
- Teachers communicate with them regularly

### Collecting Internal Stakeholder Qualitative Data

**Surveys of internal communications intend to measure to what extent district employees feel informed, as well as their general relationship with the district.** As the NSPRA states, "employee communications support employee engagement. Employees are kept informed about the goals, objectives, plans, programs, finances, issues, events and incidents of the district and their school."<sup>27</sup> In addition to supporting employee engagement, effective internal communications indirectly affect employees' relationships with external stakeholders. As the NSPRA summarizes, "research shows that employees who have positive relationships with their organizations help develop positive relationships with their organization's publics."<sup>28</sup> Thus, internal communications may indirectly shape public (i.e., external) perception of the district. The internal communications measures listed in Figure 1.3 consequently aim to measure district employees' perceptions of districts leadership, policies, and general communication.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 1.3: Example Internal Communication Survey Measures**

SAMPLE MEASURES	
▪ Percentage of employees feeling adequately informed about district/breaking news/non-emergency news	▪ Percentage of employees agreeing that district communications provide useful information
▪ Percentage of employees aware of/reliance on key sources of information	▪ Percentage of employees feeling prepared to tell others about positive aspects of their district
▪ Percentage of employees agreeing that school leadership effectively communicates policies	▪ Staff rating on communication from site leaders
▪ Ranking of specific communications vehicles	▪ Trustworthiness of information in district website

Source: National School Public Relations Association<sup>30</sup>

## ANALYZING DATA AND MEASURING SUCCESS

**Districts commonly measure communications effectiveness through digital communications tools.** Engagement with digital components of district communications, including district websites, emails, social media, and other digital forms of communication, are objectively measurable to a certain degree. Many district technology plans cite a form of data analytics as an evaluation strategy and list specific metrics and KPIs, including website hits, email open rates, and the number of followers on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>31</sup> Correspondingly, NSPRA notes that communication departments with established evaluation systems often leverage the digitally-based metrics listed below in Figure 1.4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> [1] "FCPS Strategic Plan 2015-20." Fairfax County Public Schools.

[https://www.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/ADZVXN82E669/\\$file/Updated%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/ADZVXN82E669/$file/Updated%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf) [2] "2019-20 Strategic Communications Plan." Hillsboro School District, 2019.

<https://www.hsd.k12.or.us/cms/lib/OR02216643/Centricity/Domain/82/documents/Strategic%20Comms%20Plans/2019-20%20Strategic%20Communication%20Plan.pdf> [2] "North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plan." North Boone Community Unit School District 200, 2013.

[https://www.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/ADZVXN82E669/\\$file/Updated%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/ADZVXN82E669/$file/Updated%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf)

Figure 1.4: Common Digital Metrics to Inform Evaluations of District Communications



Source: NSPRA<sup>32</sup>

As districts often use digital forms of communication (e.g., social media, email, websites, text messaging) to reach external audiences, associated metrics typically provide insight into the effectiveness of external communications. However, districts may leverage the same forms of communication and digitally-based metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of internal digital communications. Notably, however, these methods cover high-level approximations of the volume of engagement but may not be directly related to efficacy or satisfaction.

### COMMON DIGITALLY-BASED METRICS

**The number of social media followers and website visitors are two standard metrics cited in district communication plans.** For example, North Boone Community USD in Illinois and Palmdale School District in California both include the number of followers on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) as metrics.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, several other district plans include website traffic as a metric.<sup>34</sup> Districts may measure social media followers at the district and school levels, if schools have individual pages or accounts.<sup>35</sup>

Notably, as Figure 1.5 shows, North Boone's communication plan references both metrics and distinguishes between web traffic to specific sites.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 1.5: Data Analytics – North Boone Community Unit School District 200

- Increase the traffic on the district website
- Increase the Facebook traffic for North Boone Facebook page
- Increase readership of the North Boone Blog and principal blogs (where used)
- Increase the number of Twitter followers for NBCUSD200

Source: North Boone Community Unit School District 200<sup>37</sup>

**Experts recommend that districts evaluate digital traffic and engagement through multiple metrics.** In a communication guide for school districts, the software company Blackboard notes that district websites and social media are some of the most effective components of community engagement efforts.<sup>38</sup> Through platforms such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insight, communication departments have access to a variety of digitally-based metrics to evaluate communications effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. While volume metrics (e.g., number of followers or website hits) are common measures, Blackboard recommends that districts consider multiple metrics to evaluate digital communications with external stakeholders. For example, both Facebook and Twitter have deeper analytical tools that show "weekly

<sup>32</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> [1] "North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plan," Op. cit. [2] "Palmdale School District's Communications Plan 2020-2025." Palmdale School District. <https://www.palmdalesd.org/cms/lib/CA02000054/Centricity/Domain/6/PSD%20Communications%20Plan%202020-2025%20FINAL%20030321.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> [1] "2019-20 Strategic Communications Plan," Op. cit., p. 9. [2] "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> "50 Schools, 3 Months, 1 Social Media Plan." Blackboard, 2015. p. 3.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/578506d62994ca687a5eac86/t/57aa744ae58c62f754f206dd/1470788684264/Case+Study+Collier+County+Social+Media.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> "North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plan," Op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Blackboard Inc. "A K-12 Communications Leader's Guide to Social Media Success," July 19, 2016. p. 4.

<https://www.slideshare.net/BlackboardInc/ebook-a-k12-communications-leaders-guide-to-social-media-success>

analytics including reach, video views, page likes, page views and even specific demographics on your audience composition."<sup>39</sup> These data points can better indicate whether a district is producing content that both reaches and matters to its audience.<sup>40</sup> The next subsections will expand on these specific data points and their implications for effective communications.

## SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS

In addition to growth in total followers, social media platforms can provide in-depth metrics related to page or account reach, as well as follower engagement and demographics. For instance, customer relationship management (CRM) company Salesforce notes that receiving "replies to your content and replying to the content of others is the basis of any social network."<sup>41</sup> However, a metric related to total (or growth in) followers is not necessarily indicative of stakeholder engagement with district content. Consequently, experts recommend organizations consider additional metrics to evaluate engagement. For example, Sprout Social, a company specializing in social media management software, recommends that in addition to total number of followers, organizations leverage additional metrics that Twitter provides in a 28-day account summary.<sup>42</sup> Figure 1.6 lists these metrics below:

Figure 1.6: Twitter Metrics

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Tweets.</b> The number of Tweets posted from an account.</li> <li>▪ <b>Tweet Impressions.</b> The number of people that have viewed an account's Tweets.</li> <li>▪ <b>Profile Visits.</b> The number of people who have visited an account.</li> <li>▪ <b>Retweets:</b> When a user re-posts another user's Tweet to share with their own followers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Mentions.</b> The number of times an account's username has been mentioned by others.</li> <li>▪ <b>Followers.</b> The number of total and recently added account followers.</li> <li>▪ <b>Tweets Linking to You.</b> The number of Tweets that link to an account.</li> </ul>
--	--

Source: Sprout Social<sup>43</sup>

Districts should measure these additional metrics based on their communication goals. For example, if a district's communication goal is to increase brand awareness or audience reach, Twitter's "Tweet Impressions" or "Profile Visits" might be important metrics to measure. However, if the district's goal is to increase stakeholder engagement, the district would want to prioritize "Mentions" or "Retweets" since the stakeholders engage more actively with the content.

Similarly, Facebook provides additional metrics to analyze page reach, engagement, and follower demographics. Figure 1.7 provides a sample of additional metrics identified by Sprout Social.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> "Beyond Followers: How to Achieve True Engagement with Social Media." Salesforce Canada, November 20, 2014. <https://blogs.salesforce.com/ca/2014/11/engagement-with-social-media.html.html>

<sup>42</sup> Chen, J. "The Most Important Social Media Metrics to Track." Sprout Social, March 26, 2021. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-metrics/>

<sup>43</sup> Figure contents adapted from: Ibid.

Figure 1.7: Facebook Metrics

METRIC CATEGORY	SPECIFIC METRIC
General Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Page Likes.</b> Total Page Likes is the number of unique people who like your Page. New Page Likes shows the number of new Likes your Page received during the last seven days, compared with the previous seven-day period.</li> <li>▪ <b>Post Reach:</b> Total Reach is the number of unique people who have seen any content associated with your Page, including ads, during the last seven days. Post Reach shows the number of unique people who have seen your Page posts.</li> <li>▪ <b>Engagement:</b> People Engaged is the number of unique people who have clicked, Liked, commented on or shared your posts during the last seven days.</li> </ul>
Post Reach Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Engagement (by engagement type).</b> Reach metrics include a breakdown of overall likes, comments, and shares. Examining post reach over time can identify particularly effective content. If these metrics increase, content will reach more people organically.</li> <li>▪ <b>Disengagement.</b> Reach metrics also include the number of users who hide a specific post, hide all posts, or unlike a page.</li> </ul>
Demographic Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Location, age, gender:</b> The People tab includes a demographic breakdown of fans, people posts have reached, and people that have engaged with posts. This information can be utilized to focus on specific audiences (e.g., students vs. parents).</li> </ul>

Source: Sprout Social<sup>44</sup>

Districts may also wish to create metrics to evaluate responsiveness over social media. For example, Salesforce suggests that customer service organizations "track replies and comments (conversations) related to customer service: questions, problems, and requests." A specific metric might refer to the number of total responses, the percentage of questions answered, or the timeliness of the response.<sup>45</sup>

### WEBSITE ANALYTIC METRICS

Platforms such as Google Analytics similarly provide comprehensive metrics related to website traffic. While total website hits or traffic may serve as a proxy for general engagement, additional metrics allow districts to determine whether new visitors are routinely finding the website, how long visitors stay on the website, and which specific pages are most of interest. Figure 1.8 identifies a series of website visitor metrics particularly relevant to school marketers.<sup>46</sup> Note that metrics correspond with those offered in Google Analytics.<sup>47</sup>

Figure 1.8: Key Website Analytics Metrics and Solutions

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	IMPLICATIONS	SOLUTIONS
Pages Per Session	The number of pages a visitor viewed during their time on the site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A low pages/session ratio may indicate that content is not linked across multiple pages.</li> <li>▪ A high pages/session ratio may indicate that the site requires too many clicks to navigate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Add calls-to-action where missing.</li> <li>▪ Review content for opportunities to link to other related pages or posts.</li> <li>▪ Review website navigation and reduce number of clicks.</li> </ul>

<sup>44</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Beyond Followers," Op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> "The Google Analytics Basics School Marketers Need to Know." Cursive Content, August 2, 2016.

<https://cursivecontent.com/google-analytics-basics-school-marketers-need-know/>

<sup>47</sup> "Analytics Tools & Solutions for Your Business." Google Marketing Platform. <https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/analytics/>

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	IMPLICATIONS	SOLUTIONS
<b>New vs. Returning Visitors</b>	The number or ratio of first-time visitors to the site vs. returning visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A high number of new visitors indicates that many people are discovering the website.</li> <li>A high number of returning visitors indicates that people like the website (because they're coming back for more).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure use of appropriate keywords in content to boost search ranking.</li> <li>Double check page titles and meta descriptions for each page.</li> <li>Continue to update content to maintain and increase new and returning visitors.</li> </ul>
<b>Unique Page Views</b>	The number of unique sessions in which a specific page was viewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of unique page views indicates a page's popularity. If key pages have low numbers of unique page views, site navigability may be ineffective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review navigation to key page and adjust if necessary.</li> <li>Repeat successes of most popular pages throughout the website.</li> <li>Find related content on website to link to key page.</li> </ul>
<b>Average Time on Page</b>	The average amount of time visitors spend on an individual site page per visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content-heavy pages should have higher average times; a low duration on a page may indicate that content is not holding the audience's interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the problematic page for clarity; consolidate or expand where needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Bounce Rate</b>	The percentage of people who came to the website and visited just one page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically, lower bounce rates are preferable. A high bounce rate could indicate that:</li> <li>Readers are typically satisfied with the information on that page and move on.</li> <li>Readers are not compelled to explore the site further.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Copyedit to make pages active and engaging.</li> <li>Add/edit calls-to-action.</li> <li>Review content for opportunities to link to other related pages or posts.</li> </ul>
<b>Exit Rate</b>	The number of visitors who leave a site from a specific page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like bounce rate, exit rate might just indicate that the visitor read a page and was satisfied. Some pages (e.g., form and contact pages) will naturally have high exit rates.</li> <li>However, bounce rate may indicate that the visitor did not find the content helpful and was not encouraged to read additional content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Copyedit to make pages active and engaging.</li> <li>Add/edit calls-to-action.</li> <li>Review content for opportunities to link to other related pages or posts.</li> </ul>

Source: Cursive Content<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: "The Google Analytics Basics School Marketers Need to Know," Op. cit.

## EMAIL METRICS

Email is also a frequent means of district communication. Districts should use a third-party email service to manage email campaigns or announcements, not only to evaluate email activity data, but also to ensure delivery without spam blocks.<sup>49</sup> Common metrics to measure email effectiveness include:<sup>50</sup>

- Tracking how many stakeholders open district emails;
- Monitoring bounce trends; and,
- Reviewing clicks to help increase engagement.

Recommended third-party email services include Hubspot, Mailchimp, Constant Contact, Salesforce Pardot, and Campaigner.<sup>51</sup>

## TOOLS FOR TRACKING AND ANALYZING COMMUNICATION DATA

In the table below, Hanover provides a sample list of tools districts can use to track and analyze communication data (Figure 1.9). Please click on the orange hyperlinks to view features for each digital tool.

**Figure 1.9: Sample Data Analytic Tools for Tracking Stakeholder Communication**

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	CLICK LINK TO VIEW FEATURES	
Website	■ <a href="#">Google Analytics (*free)</a>	■ <a href="#">Adobe Analytics</a>
	■ <a href="#">Matomo</a>	■ <a href="#">Mixpanel</a>
	■ <a href="#">Open Web Analytics</a>	■ <a href="#">HubSpot</a>
Social Media	■ <a href="#">Sprout Social</a>	■ <a href="#">Keyhole</a>
	■ <a href="#">Google Analytics</a>	■ <a href="#">Facebook Insights</a>
	■ <a href="#">HubSpot</a>	■ <a href="#">Twitter Analytics</a>
Email	■ <a href="#">HubSpot</a>	■ <a href="#">Mailchimp</a>
	■ <a href="#">Constant Contact</a>	■ <a href="#">Campaigner</a>
	■ <a href="#">Salesforce Pardot</a>	■ <a href="#">Sendinblue</a>
Podcast	■ <a href="#">Podtrac</a>	■ <a href="#">Anchor</a>
	■ <a href="#">Chartable</a>	■ <a href="#">Podbean</a>
	■ <a href="#">Bluebrry</a>	■ <a href="#">Backtracks</a>

Source: Multiple<sup>52</sup>

## LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

District communication plans need to be in accordance with federal, state, and local laws.<sup>53</sup> Particularly when collecting data and contacting stakeholders, districts must be aware of several laws which can affect phone, digital, and survey communications. Figure 1.10 summarizes the major legal requirements districts should incorporate into their communication plan.

<sup>49</sup> Hiles, M. "How to Keep School Email from Being Blocked." July 30, 2015. <https://www.campussuite.com/blog/keep-school-email-blocked>

<sup>50</sup> Bullet points quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> Hiles, Op. cit. [2] Sevilla, Op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Figure contents adapted from: [1] "Top 20 Web Analytics Tools Used by Experts in 2021 [Free + Premium]." Hotjar, May 22, 2021. <https://www.hotjar.com/web-analytics/tools/> [2] "10 of the Best Social Media Analytics Tools for Marketers." Sprout Social, March 26, 2021. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-analytics-tools/> [3] Sevilla, G. "The Best Email Marketing Software for 2021." PCMag, June 24, 2021. <https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-email-marketing-software> [4] Barker, S. "9 of the Best Podcast Analytics Tools to Measure Success." Medium, June 28, 2019. [https://medium.com/@shane\\_barker/9-of-the-best-podcast-analytics-tools-to-measure-success-8d4537eff697](https://medium.com/@shane_barker/9-of-the-best-podcast-analytics-tools-to-measure-success-8d4537eff697)

<sup>53</sup> "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 15.

**Figure 1.10: Legal Considerations in Communication Planning**

LAWS	IMPLICATIONS
<b>Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If your district uses a notification system, you should require all recipients who subscribe to the notification service to provide consent. Otherwise, your district is legally exposed to potential fines for contacting subscribers without their consent.</li> </ul>
<b>Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Under FERPA, families have the right to request and receive their child's education records, and they have the right to submit those requests via email or an online submission form. Your district should have the systems in place so that parents can easily make those requests, and you can respond to them in a timely manner.</li> <li>▪ FERPA protects "personally identifiable information" (PII) of students and prohibits third parties from using the data outside the boundaries of the partnership. Third parties are also required to destroy the student data after the specified use.</li> </ul>
<b>Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ADA extends to your district website. Because your website is the online proxy for your school, people with disabilities need to have access to it just as all other members of your community do. This applies to screen readers, which are often used by individuals with poor vision. Your website should be designed in such a way that it is easy for the screen reader to scan. That means the reader should have the option to skip over unnecessary text, like navigation. It also means your site should have clear headings and text structure so the reader can announce any breaks in the text.</li> </ul>
<b>Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This regulation protects minor students from disclosing personal information if their parents do not wish to disclose the information in question. This extends to electronic surveys, polls, or other questionnaires. Districts must get consent from parents before asking children about specific personal information. One way to do this is to have an email system that can quickly send consent forms to parents. Once the parents consent, the email software can record the answer and you can then move forward with any survey or questionnaire.</li> </ul>
<b>Freedom of Information Act</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As government institutions, public schools are required to respond to requests for information. Under the Freedom of Information Act, you must make available copies of all records, regardless of format. That includes emails, blog posts, and more. You also must respond to requests within 10 days. Of course, this means that you need to keep your records and emails in an easily accessible form of storage. Ideally, a searchable and sortable database could help you quickly find any requested pieces of information.</li> </ul>

Source: Multiple<sup>54</sup>

## PROTECTING STUDENT DATA PRIVACY

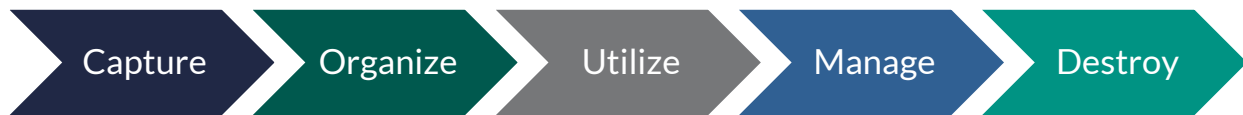
The Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) of the U.S. Department of Education notes that "data in any of their forms move through stages during their useful life and ultimately are either archived for later use, or destroyed when their utility has been exhausted."<sup>55</sup> The data lifecycle can be seen in Figure 1.11 below.

<sup>54</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: [1] Ibid., pp. 15–17. [2] "Best Practices for Data Destruction." Privacy Technical Assistance Center, May 2014. p. 4.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=best+practices+in+tracking+school+district+communication+data&id=ED585293>

<sup>55</sup> "Best Practices for Data Destruction," Op. cit., p. 3.



Figure 1.11: Data Lifecycle



Source: Privacy Technical Assistance Center<sup>56</sup>

In this way, districts and schools must be aware of federal, state, or local privacy laws which may have specific data disposal methods. For example, FERPA protects "personally identifiable information" (PII) of students and protects the data from being disclosed without parental consent, or student consent once a student turns 18 years old or enters a postsecondary institution at any age.<sup>57</sup> If a district conducts a survey with a third-party service, FERPA requires a written agreement for the third-party service to use the data only within the boundaries of the partnership and to destroy the student data following the specified use. However, the timeline for data disposal will vary by purpose and as designated by the district; longitudinal studies may need access to student data for decades.<sup>58</sup> Since districts often consider students the central stakeholders and target audiences within their communication plans, such situations will not be uncommon. Thus, districts will need to discuss the lifecycle of the data they collect and establish responsibilities for when and by whom the data will be eventually destroyed.

The table below (Figure 1.12) describes various data destruction categories, organized according to the "degree of assurance" the data are permanently destroyed. The figure also describes general best practices for data destruction.

Figure 1.12: Data Destruction Best Practices

DATA DESTRUCTION CATEGORIES	
<b>Clear</b> <i>Least amount of assurance</i>	A method of sanitization that applies programmatic, software-based techniques to sanitize data in all user-addressable storage locations for protection against simple non-invasive data recovery techniques; typically applied through the standard Read and Write commands to the storage device, such as by rewriting with a new value or using a menu option to reset the device to the factory state (where rewriting is not supported).
<b>Purge</b>	A method of sanitization that applies physical or logical techniques that render Target Data recovery infeasible using state of the art laboratory techniques.
<b>Destroy</b> <i>Greatest amount of assurance</i>	A method of sanitization that renders Target Data recovery infeasible using state of the art laboratory techniques and results in the subsequent inability to use the media for storage of data.
DATA DESTRUCTION BEST PRACTICES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When drafting written agreements with third parties, include provisions that specify that all PII that was provided to the third party must be destroyed when no longer needed for the specific purpose for which it was provided, including any copies of the PII that may reside in system backups, temporary files, or other storage media.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure accountability for destruction of PII by using certification forms which are signed by the individual responsible for performing the destruction and contain detailed information about the destruction.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember that PII may also be present in non-electronic media. Organizations should manage non-electronic records in a similar fashion to their electronic data. When data are no longer required, destroy non-electronic media using secure means to render it safe for disposal or recycling. Commonly used methods include cross-cut shredders, pulverizers, and incinerators.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depending on the sensitivity of the data being shared, be specific in the written agreement as to the type of destruction to be carried out.</li> </ul>	

<sup>56</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "What Is FERPA?" U.S. Department of Education. <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/what-ferpa>

<sup>58</sup> "Best Practices for Data Destruction," Op. cit., p. 4.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When destroying electronic data, use appropriate data deletion methods to ensure the data cannot be recovered. Please note that simple deletion of the data is not effective. Often, when a data file is deleted, only the reference to that file is removed from the media. The actual file data remain on the disk and are available for recovery until overwritten. Talk to your IT professional to ensure proper deletion of records consistent with technology best practice standards.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Avoid using file deletion, disk formatting, and "one way" encryption to dispose of sensitive data—these methods are not effective because they leave the majority of the data intact and vulnerable to being retrieved by a determined person with the right tools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Destroy CDs, DVDs, and any magneto-optical disks by pulverizing, cross-cut shredding, or burning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Address in a timely manner sanitization of storage media which might have failed and need to be replaced under warranty or service contract. Many data breaches result from storage media containing sensitive information being returned to the manufacturer for service or replacement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create formal, documented processes for data destruction within your organization and require that partner organizations do the same.</li> </ul>

Source: Privacy Technical Assistance Center<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 6–7.

## SECTION II: BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

In this section, Hanover details best practices for creating a district-wide, strategic communication plan and for optimizing communication channels. Hanover also provides information for how districts can strengthen and improve communications with both external and internal stakeholders.

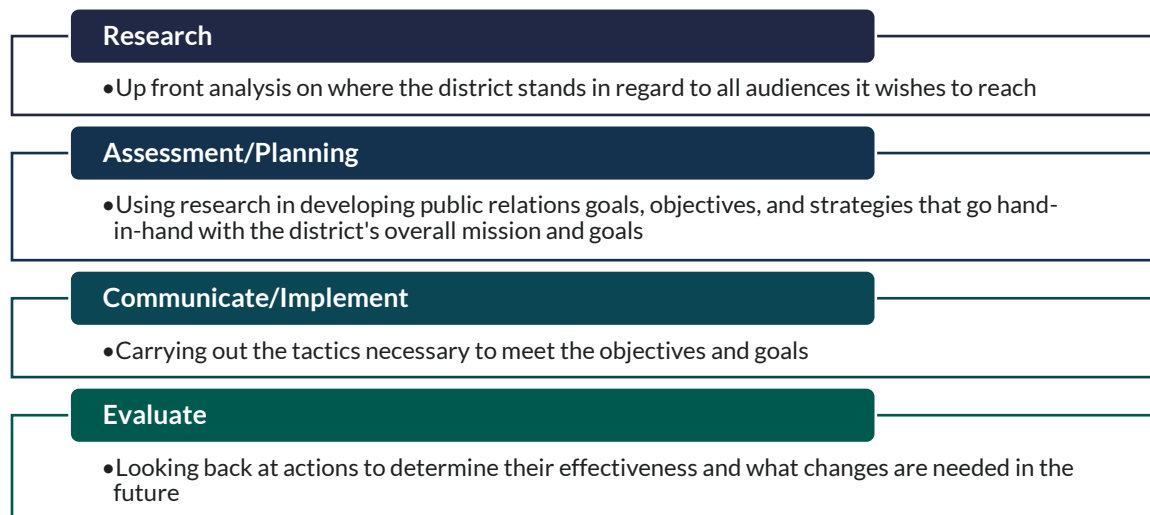
### ESTABLISHING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

#### RACE/RPIE MODEL

**An effective communication program supports school districts in advancing organizational goals and strategies.** To evaluate the success of specific communication and public relations initiatives (e.g., targeted outreach to a group of stakeholders), as well as the program as a whole, experts note that organizations require an initial baseline against which to measure progress.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the NSPRA recommends that districts manage communications and public relations through the RACE/RPIE model, which guides districts to align communications-related goals, objectives, and strategies with broader district strategic goals.<sup>61</sup>

As Figure 2.1 describes, the RACE/RPIE model begins with research regarding the effectiveness of the district's current communication program (i.e., the establishment of a baseline) and concludes with an evaluation of the program's progress following the implementation of specific strategies and initiatives. While the process is sequential, experts note that organizations should practice all steps of the RACE/RPIE model continuously, and even simultaneously.<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 2.1: RACE/RPIE Model for Public Relations and Communications**



Source: National School Public Relations Association<sup>63</sup>

**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and associated metrics should align with high-quality objectives that are based on broad organizational goals.** The American Marketing Association (AMA) states that, to evaluate

<sup>60</sup> Matters, Op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> [1] Turney, M. "Acronyms for the Public Relations Process." Northern Kentucky University, 2011. [https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/process\\_acronyms.html](https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/process_acronyms.html) [2] Sartin, H. "RACE Public Relations Model." Callis Integrated Marketing, April 1, 2014. <https://ecallis.com/insights/pr/new-season-brings-new-pr-opportunities/>

<sup>63</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: [1] "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 61. [2] "Communication Planning Resources." National School Public Relations Association. <https://www.nspr.org/commplan>

the success of a communications program, an organization must first "establish clear and meaningful objectives" that align with the organization's overall needs.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, an effective evaluation program begins with initial goal setting. Once an organization has established a series of objectives, it then continues to develop specific strategies and associated tactics designed to meet each objective. Finally, based on objectives and related strategies and tactics, an organization chooses KPIs and associated metrics to measure quantifiable progress.<sup>65</sup> Figure 2.2, below, depicts the progression of goals to KPIs.

**Figure 2.2: Alignment of KPIs with Organizational Goals**



Source: American Marketing Association<sup>66</sup>

In this way, analysis of district communications typically involves metrics and quantitative targets, as well as extensive qualitative feedback from stakeholders, to guide evaluation efforts.<sup>67</sup> Common evaluation strategies listed include surveys (e.g., staff, administrators, community members, parents, students), focus groups, and website and social media analytics.

## DEVELOPING EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLANS

Creating external communication plans helps districts strengthen connections with families and other community stakeholders, market branding and accomplishments, and provide targeted messaging. Like internal community stakeholders, parents are increasingly interested in receiving communications beyond their child(ren)'s academic performance. "Parents are interested in learning how the achievement at their child's school compares to other schools and how new education policies, online testing, and curriculum standards are impacting their child's future."<sup>68</sup> Additionally, districts seek to provide information and influence community and business leaders, non-profit groups, and voters.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, district communication officers report three major external communication priority areas: district brand development, community engagement, and communicating information to external stakeholders.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, "a well-thought-out, strategic communication plan will help ensure that a school district carries out its mission and meets its goals with the support of its staff and community."<sup>71</sup>

NSPRA recommends districts consider a multi-step approach in the strategic planning process, including stakeholder research, specific objectives, identifying different stakeholder groups, and developing strategies and tactics (see Figure 2.3 for example step descriptions).

**Figure 2.3: Strategic Communication Planning Process**

STEP	DESCRIPTION
Use a Variety of Assessments	Begin by meeting with the superintendent and school board to discuss their priorities for district communication objectives. Know the district mission and goals, and be prepared to discuss how your program can help achieve those goals.

<sup>64</sup> "Social Media Success: Special Report." American Marketing Association, 2014. p. 7. <http://coral.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Special-Report-Social-Media-Success-Metrics.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> "Strategic Plan 2017-2021." Spearfish School District 40-2, 2017.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SuFxBlmb1\\_F0KGjSChzO7B9vem-dehY/view?usp=drive\\_open&usp=embed\\_facebook](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SuFxBlmb1_F0KGjSChzO7B9vem-dehY/view?usp=drive_open&usp=embed_facebook)

<sup>68</sup> Bagin, R. "Trends in Digital Communications Priorities and Challenges: The Front-Line Views of District Communications Officers." Blackboard, 2016. [https://www.nspira.org/sites/default/files/newsletter/communication\\_matters/k12\\_2016\\_report\\_project-tomorrow-communication-leaders\\_091516.pdf](https://www.nspira.org/sites/default/files/newsletter/communication_matters/k12_2016_report_project-tomorrow-communication-leaders_091516.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> "Communication Planning Resources," Op. cit.

STEP	DESCRIPTION
<b>Research</b>	<p>There are a variety of questions to answer: Who are our publics (i.e., stakeholders)? What are our publics' overall perceptions of our schools? What "hot issues" are circulating among staff and community? What issues affecting other school districts may soon be coming our way?</p> <p>Research tactics to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National studies and census data;</li> <li>▪ Telephone logs;</li> <li>▪ Media reports;</li> <li>▪ Interviews with community opinion leaders;</li> <li>▪ Focus groups; and</li> <li>▪ Written, digital, or telephone surveys.</li> </ul>
<b>Develop Communication Goals and Objectives</b>	For example, by the end of the school year, 75 percent of the district's teachers will be involved in projects to improve teacher/parent relations.
<b>Identify Target Publics</b>	<p>Primary publics are those most important to achieving goals. In schools, they are often students, staff, and parents. Secondary publics are those who could be reached if money or time permit, or those who are indirectly reached by public relations tactics.</p>
<b>Identify Desired Behavior of Publics</b>	For the plan to be successful, you must decide what you want the program to do. Do you want to provide information? Or do you want reinforce or change the behavior of certain publics?
<b>Identify What is Needed to Achieve Desired Behavior</b>	Using research data, decide what actions must take place to create the behaviors you desire.
<b>Create Strategies and Tactics</b>	<p>Strategies are overall procedures, like developing a media kit that provides general information about the school district. Tactics are the actions that must be taken to carry out the procedures, like writing the press release or printing the folder for the district media kit.</p>
<b>Put Your Plan on Paper</b>	This is where you develop the budget, create a timeline, and assign responsibility for all strategies and tactics.
<b>Implement the Plan</b>	After management/board approval, put your plan into action. Keep your committee involved and prepare to refine along the way.
<b>Evaluate Your Efforts</b>	Using the same methods you used in the research phase, evaluate your plan. First, evaluate the planning process itself: what worked and what did not. Continue to evaluate your program as it is implemented to determine what revisions may need to be made. Finally, measure your goals and objectives to determine whether you have reached them.





Source: National School Public Relations Association<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: Ibid.

## DEVELOPING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLANS

As internal district communications are often the weakest part of school district communications, districts can improve internal communications by developing written internal communication plans, goals, strategies, and tactics. District communications audits conducted by the NSPRA often found that many staff members reported little authentic engagement and wanted more communication from district leaders.<sup>73</sup> Employees and civic leaders are also becoming increasingly interested in sharing information and often require different messaging and mediums than external community stakeholders.<sup>74</sup> Thus, districts should develop internal communication plans to create a streamlined strategy that ensures staff receive consistent messaging and reduce inefficiencies. Figure 2.4. lists recommended steps for internal communication plans.

**Figure 2.4: Steps for Creating an Internal Communication Plan**

	Create a committee consisting of district administrators, teachers, and other staff to develop the internal communication plan.
	Conduct research to assess the status of the district's internal communications.
	Outline specific short- and long-term goals with timelines (e.g., district administrators will send weekly updates to all staff recapping the week).
	Implement the communication plan, have the committee conduct regular evaluations, and ensure the district meets all outlined goals and objectives.

Source: National School Public Relations Association<sup>75</sup>

Although internal communication plans differ among organizations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recommends seven fundamental internal communication strategy components for businesses. Figure 2.5 adapts these components for districts and schools.

<sup>73</sup> Bagin, R. "Internal Communication Is Critical for Success." National School Public Relations Association. <https://www.nspra.org/communicationmatters/april-2017/internal-communication-is-critical>

<sup>74</sup> Bagin, R. "Trends in Digital Communications Priorities and Challenges: The Front-Line Views of District Communications Officers." Blackboard, 2016. p. 1. [https://www.nspra.org/sites/default/files/newsletter/communication\\_matters/k12\\_2016\\_report\\_project-tomorrow-communication-leaders\\_091516.pdf](https://www.nspra.org/sites/default/files/newsletter/communication_matters/k12_2016_report_project-tomorrow-communication-leaders_091516.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Figure contents adapted from: "Communication Planning Resources," Op. cit.

**Figure 2.5: Seven Fundamental Components of Internal Communication Strategies**

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
<b>Analysis</b>	This component should provide a complete overview of the current internal communications process. If your district doesn't have a formal internal communications plan in place, the analysis should include how departments communicate within the district.
<b>Goals</b>	What do you want your plan to accomplish? When setting your communications goals, consider the district's overall mission and how implementing an internal communications strategy will help you achieve them.
<b>Audience</b>	Consider the entire district, individual departments, and staff type when identifying your audience. How do administrators prefer to receive information versus teachers?
<b>Message</b>	This component should outline what specific information you want or need to include in your messaging. Why do these topics need to be communicated?
<b>Channel</b>	What is the best platform for employees to receive internal communications? Many districts default to email communications, but you can also consider using messaging apps if permitted (e.g., Slack)
<b>Schedule</b>	The key with an internal communication strategy is to maintain a consistent schedule. Consider the timing of sensitive or important information to make sure everyone receives the same message at the same time.
<b>Metrics</b>	Finally, determine your key performance indicators (KPIs) so you can measure how effective your communication strategy is and where it needs improvement.

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce<sup>76</sup>

### *COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DISTRICT LEADERS AND WITH STAFF*

**District leaders can further strengthen internal dialogue and information flow through ongoing and frequent communication with the school board and school staff.** Communication between the superintendent and the school board and emphasizes collaborative partnerships between superintendents and staff is critical to successful internal communication relationships. For example, one superintendent/school board communication strategy is for superintendents to send a weekly update e-mail on Fridays to all board members highlighting significant events, issues, and meetings the superintendent led or participated in during that week. Before creating an e-mail template, superintendents should "provide a confidentiality disclaimer at the end of the document and check with the school district attorney related to issues with the state's open meeting law."<sup>77</sup>

Superintendents can have in-person collaborative retreats with administration staff and get to know their colleagues through attending departmental and team meetings.<sup>78</sup> **Additionally, staff climate surveys help assess the best internal communication methods for individual districts.**<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Peek, S. "How to Create an Internal Communications Strategy." U.S. Chamber of Commerce, May 5, 2020. <https://www.uschamber.com/co/run/human-resources/how-to-create-internal-communications-strategy>

<sup>77</sup> Carlson, H. "Three Keys To A Successful Superintendent/School Board Relationship." AASA-American Association of School Administrators. <https://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=15188>

<sup>78</sup> "Communication Essentials: What Superintendents Need to Know and Want to Share About Communicating." Region 10 Education Service Center. <https://www.region10.org/r10website/assets/File/communicationessentialsforsuperintendents.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> "Communication E-Kit for Superintendents." National School Public Relations Association, 2013. p. 19. [https://www.ssc.coop/cms/lib/MN06000837/Centricity/Domain/9/Communication\\_E-Kit\\_for\\_Superintendents%20NSPR.pdf](https://www.ssc.coop/cms/lib/MN06000837/Centricity/Domain/9/Communication_E-Kit_for_Superintendents%20NSPR.pdf)

## OPTIMIZING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND FREQUENCY

**Strong, effective district communication plans will often explicitly list all channels and frequency of communication, based on the researched needs and preferences of the target audiences.**<sup>80</sup> Districts need to reference both qualitative and quantitative data to understand which methods and channels work for their specific target audiences. As Hillsboro School District in Oregon writes in its strategic communication plan, "predictability and consistency of information flow helps build trust while reducing confusion and frustration."<sup>81</sup> The following subsections will expand on common communication channels and optimal frequency for each type of communication method. External audiences will generally refer to parents, families, students, and community stakeholders, among others. Internal audiences refer to school staff, teachers, and district administrators.

### EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

**Districts can use data to determine the most effective communication tools for their particular community.** For example, the following tables (Figures 2.6 and 2.7) describe the nationwide Speak Up survey from 2015, which explored the communication preferences of a representative sample of parents and district communication officers. Both respondent groups believed that both digital tools (e.g. texts, portals, social media, mobile apps) *and* traditional tools (e.g., emails, phone calls, meetings) were important and effective communication channels.<sup>82</sup>

**Figure 2.6: Most Effective Communication Tools According to Parents – Speak Up Survey, 2016**

PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO IDENTIFIED THESE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AS EFFECTIVE			
Traditional Communications Tools	Parents of Elementary School Students	Parents of Middle School Students	Parents of High School Students
Personal emails to families or parents	87%	88%	87%
Face-to-face meetings	55%	46%	41%
Personal phone calls to families or parents	48%	46%	47%
PTA meetings	10%	8%	7%
Digital Communication Tools	Parents of Elementary School Students	Parents of Middle School Students	Parents of High School Students
Text messaging to families or parents	55%	56%	55%
School portals that share grades and assignments	35%	41%	42%
Mobile app	33%	30%	27%
Personalized auto messages regarding academics or attendance	21%	23%	25%
District Facebook account	20%	16%	14%

Source: Blackboard<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 52. [2] "2019-20 Strategic Communications Plan," Op. cit., pp. 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> "2019-20 Strategic Communications Plan," Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> Bagin, "Trends in Digital Communications Priorities and Challenges: The Front-Line Views of District Communications Officers," Op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 6-7.

**Figure 2.7: Effective Communications Tools for District Information Dissemination – Speak Up Survey, 2016**

PERCENTAGE OF PR PROFESSIONALS WHO IDENTIFIED THESE TOOLS AS EFFECTIVE	
Traditional Communications Tools	Digital Communication Tools
Face-to-face meetings (74%)	District Facebook account (74%)
Personal emails to families or parents (59%)	School portals that share grades and assignments (68%)
Personal phone calls to families or parents (55%)	Text messaging to families or parents (64%)
PTA meetings (38%)	Mobile app (49%)
Hard copy flyers/newsletters—sent home with students or mailed (25%)	Personalized auto messages regarding academics or attendance (28%)

Source: Blackboard<sup>84</sup>

### DISTRICT AND SCHOOL WEBSITES

**District and school websites are important self-service portals for communicating information to external stakeholders.** Websites should be mobile device-accessible, serve as the social media hub, and be easy to manage. District and school websites can also host submission forms for gathering information or conducting registration.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, websites often facilitate two-way communication between the district and families in assisting district administrators in responding promptly to families' concerns.<sup>86</sup> Families should be able to access links easily and submit questions that receive a response in 24-48 hours.<sup>87</sup> For example, due to COVID-19, the Klein Independent School District (TX) has a "Roadmap to Reopening" subpage. Figure 2.8 details how the district responds to questions and concerns surrounding the pandemic.

**Figure 2.8: Klein Independent School District (TX)**

The Klein Independent School District (KISD) has a link on its "Roadmap to Reopening" webpage where families and other community stakeholders can submit questions and give suggestions. Stakeholders can ask questions regarding their student, a school/campus, or a central office department or program with specific details and can provide contact information to receive a reply. Staff monitor the responses and respond daily Monday-Friday. Additionally, the "Roadmap to Reopening" has a list of FAQs, including remote learning and student assessment.

Sources: Multiple<sup>88</sup>

### SOCIAL MEDIA

**While districts and schools generally use social media to share information, district and school leaders also need to have a visible professional presence on these platforms.** Community stakeholders look for school leaders to quickly share information, listen and engage with the community, and establish two-way communication via social media. School leaders should clarify how they plan to use social media and what kinds of communications community members can expect.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from Blackboard Inc., Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> "School Communication Planning Guide." Campus Suite. p. 8. <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/296999/School-Communication-Planning-Guide.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> "With Schools Closed and Distance Learning the Norm, How Is Your District Meeting the Needs of Its Students?" Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> "Keeping Equity at the Forefront During COVID-19 School Closures." Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, 2020. <https://masseduequity.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/03/Keeping-Equity-at-the-Forefront-During-COVID-19-School-Closures-Massachusetts-Education-Equity-Partnership-March-2020.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Figure contents adapted from: [1] "Klein ISD Roadmap to Reopening." Klein Independent School District. [https://kleinisd.net/district/klein\\_i\\_s\\_d\\_roadmap\\_to\\_reopening](https://kleinisd.net/district/klein_i_s_d_roadmap_to_reopening) [2] McNeill, J. "Efficient and Effective Communication Strategies for Schools and Districts to Connect with Families during COVID-19." EAB, March 24, 2020. <https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/district-leadership/schools-and-districts-connect-with-families-during-covid-19/>

<sup>89</sup> "Rethinking Your K-12 Social Media Strategy." Association of California School Administrators, January 2, 2018. <https://content.acsa.org/articles/rethink-k12-social-media>



**Relatedly, school blogs offer a simple and accessible way for school and district leaders to communicate.** For instance, Burlington Public Schools (MA) created a district-wide blog in 2012 to provide streamlined information to a broad audience. Although the district mostly posts news and events, several blog entries have included stakeholder feedback on various topics. For example, community members had the opportunity to comment on a school improvement plan between the first and second proposal readings before a final vote. Two-way conversations via the blog have given the district the ability to make better-informed decisions, created more transparency, and provided community members a voice in decision processes. Many teachers in the district subsequently created blogs or websites to communicate with families.<sup>90</sup>

**Many districts have even launched podcasts as a new digital communication channel.** Hillsboro School District (OR), Polk County Public Schools in Florida, and Poway Unified School District in California have all developed podcasts to inform district stakeholders of community news, district updates, and interesting student, staff, or community stories. Figure 2.9 below highlights two podcast projects launched by Polk County Public Schools.

**Figure 2.9: Podcasts at Polk County Public Schools (FL)**

**The Ignite Project:** This podcast focuses on elevating teacher voice to support teachers, encourage teacher leadership, improve district culture, and ultimately help others within the district to be "innovative and resilient...to ignite transformation." Guests tell stories, share their experiences, and discuss what can make a difference for students and staff.

**People of PCPS:** This podcast tells the stories of teachers, paraeducators, support staff, students, volunteers, alumni, and others who contribute to the district.

Podcasts are available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and YouTube.

Source: Polk County Public Schools<sup>91</sup>

## MOBILE APP

**Mobile apps have become an increasingly popular communication method at the school- and district-level.**<sup>92</sup> Apps connect external stakeholders to standard information on district or school websites, such as calendars, news, directories, and lunch menus. Apps also allow districts and schools to deliver push notifications to notify stakeholders of emergency alerts or event reminders.<sup>93</sup> Districts can gather stakeholder feedback and website analytics data to decide the specific parameters and goals of the app; most importantly, the app needs to fit within the "context of [a district's] larger communication picture."<sup>94</sup> The following Spotlight provides an example of Anchorage School District's (AK) mobile app and its features. Anchorage utilizes Blackboard to house its mobile app.<sup>95</sup>



### Spotlight: Anchorage School District's Mobile App

#### Features:

- Translates into more than 65 languages
- Access to ASD data dashboard
- Excuse an absence

<sup>90</sup> Larkin, P. "Say It with Social Media." *Educational Leadership*, 72:7, April 2015. Accessed via EbscoHost.

<sup>91</sup> Figure contents adapted from: "Podcasts." Polk County Public Schools. <https://polkschoolsfl.com/podcasts/>

<sup>92</sup> "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>93</sup> Williams, S. "A 7-Point Checklist for Your School Mobile App." Campus Suite, January 3, 2020. <https://www.campussuite.com/blog/7-point-checklist-for-your-school-mobile-app>

<sup>94</sup> Cooper, J. "3 Keys to Consider Before Selecting a School Mobile App." Campus Suite, December 10, 2015. <https://www.campussuite.com/blog/3-keys-to-consider-before-selecting-a-school-mobile-app>

<sup>95</sup> "Mobile App Frequently Asked Questions." Anchorage School District. <https://www.asdk12.org/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.asdk12.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D8013>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Timely updates and notifications</li> <li>▪ News and photos</li> <li>▪ Customizable feed based on school(s)</li> <li>▪ District and school calendars</li> <li>▪ Lunch menus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opt in or opt out of mass notifications (<i>*Note: Users cannot opt out of Emergency Messages</i>)</li> <li>▪ Student academic performance*</li> <li>▪ Lunch account balance information*</li> </ul> <p><i>*These options are only available to parents/guardians of ASD students.</i></p>
---	---






Source: Anchorage School District<sup>96</sup>

## VIDEO CONFERENCING APPLICATIONS

**Identifying and selecting an official video conferencing platform is essential for districts to streamline communications and eliminate potential Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) violations.** If a district already has a relationship with a video conferencing provider, all staff should default to using that platform, even if they already have personal accounts. According to EdWeek, "District contracts with video conference providers typically have outlined restrictions on how and under what circumstances the company can collect and share student data."<sup>97</sup> The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) provides [a list of video conferencing resources](#) for schools to consider through its distance learning page, including Zoom, Microsoft, and Google Hangouts.<sup>98</sup>

As video conference meetings can be chaotic, especially with large groups of students, staff, or community members, districts and schools should follow the guidelines listed in Figure 2.10.

**Figure 2.10: Guidelines for Video Conferencing Meetings**

	All participants should mute their audio if they are not talking.
	The conversation leader should choose the view that suits them: one person's face at a time or a gallery of all participants.
	Use earbuds with a microphone to improve audio.
	Participants should feel comfortable in turning off the video for any reason.
	Utilize additional features (e.g., sharing a whiteboard and offering nonverbal feedback).

Source: Education Week<sup>99</sup>

Adapting best practices from businesses and corporations, districts can use video-conferencing applications for marketing purposes, including district news, press conferences, and public Q&A sessions with district administrators.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor alterations from: "Anchorage School District Mobile App." Anchorage School District. <https://www.asdk12.org/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.asdk12.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FDomainID%3D1744>

<sup>97</sup> "How to Keep Students and Staff Safe on Videoconferencing." *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/media/videoconference-safety.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> "COVID-19 Supplemental Learning Resources." California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e-qzq4BPIAthuW\\_O6elcnaomGZ5LjrhV1Do2R6kv7yl/edit?usp=embed\\_facebook](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e-qzq4BPIAthuW_O6elcnaomGZ5LjrhV1Do2R6kv7yl/edit?usp=embed_facebook)

<sup>99</sup> Figure contents adapted from: "How to Keep Students and Staff Safe on Videoconferencing," Op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> Olenski, S. "Leveraging The Power Of Video Conferencing In Marketing." *Forbes*, December 11, 2015. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/steveolenski/2015/12/11/leveraging-the-power-of-video-conferencing-in-marketing/>

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

### STAFF PORTALS

Creating staff portals on the district or school website most effectively helps administrators centralize communication with staff, teachers, and employees. Staff portals on the district or school website are valuable places for staff, teachers, and other employees to access information strictly pertinent to them, including:<sup>101</sup>

- Updates, announcements, and events;
- District e-mail accounts;
- Technology resources;
- District successes; and
- Class resources.





### DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Digital signage allows schools to communicate with educators throughout the school day. Digital signs are especially vital for communication when educators cannot immediately access e-mails or log into portals. Digital signs throughout schools are recognizable and do not require additional effort to process the information and display general and emergency information.<sup>102</sup>

### OTHER COMMUNICATION FORMS

Teachers report helpful internal communication channels and methods to streamline information and foster positive working relationships include video e-mails, voice messages, and face-to-face communication (see Figure 2.11).<sup>103</sup>

Figure 2.11: Internal Communication Channels

COMMUNICATION METHOD	NOTES
<b>WEEKLY VIDEO E-MAILS</b> 	Allow teachers to multitask while receiving important information.
<b>COLLABORATIVE BLOGS</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Publish a weekly blog to provide teachers with inspiration and innovative practices for their classroom.</li><li>■ Feature a different teacher blogger each week.</li></ul>
<b>VOICE MESSAGES</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Faster than e-mail and better than sending a group text message when it is essential to convey tone and empathy.</li><li>■ Allow educators to make the most of their commute time and spend more time sharing how to meet students' and families' needs best.</li></ul>
<b>FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION</b> 	Face-to-face conversations allow administrators to personally engage with staff, ask or answer questions, and resolve any concerns.


<sup>101</sup> Bullets adapted from: "Staff Portal." Christina School District.

<http%3A%2F%2Fwww.christinak12.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FDomainID%3D38>

<sup>102</sup> Lynch, M. "6 Best Practices for Internal Communication in Public Schools." The Edvocate, September 14, 2016.

<https://www.theedadvocate.org/6-best-practices-internal-communication-public-schools/>

<sup>103</sup> "Good Ways to Communicate with Teachers - Educational Leadership." Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Educational Leadership*, 72:7, April 2015. pp. 93-94. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr15/vol72/num07/Good-Ways-to-Communicate-with-Teachers.aspx>

COMMUNICATION METHOD	NOTES
<b>WEEKLY UPDATES</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource for all stakeholders in the building, administrators, and other district support staff.</li> <li>Often includes upcoming events, updates, and shout-outs.</li> </ul>

Source: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development<sup>104</sup>

## COMMUNICATION FREQUENCY

A 2020 survey by the Center for American Progress (CAP) of K-12 parents, teachers, and school leaders found that while schools communicated most types of information between weekly and monthly, all groups felt that more frequent communication would be ideal. School leaders reported the most similarities between their current and preferred communication frequencies. Yet, stakeholders still wanted more frequent contact from districts and schools.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the survey reveals respondents are most interested in regular communication about day-to-day matters (e.g., homework, student behavior, and logistics). Figure 2.12 shows communication topics and the average desired communication frequency by group, per category. Survey respondents rated the ideal frequency of communication on a scale from "never" to "daily."<sup>106</sup>

**Figure 2.12: Communication Topics and Ideal Communication Frequency by Group**

COMMUNICATION TOPIC	IDEAL COMMUNICATION FREQUENCY BY GROUP		
	PARENTS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL LEADERS
Teacher Qualifications and Experiences	Monthly-Quarterly	Quarterly	Monthly
Information on School Budget Use	Monthly-Quarterly	Quarterly	~3 weeks
College and Career Preparation Resources and Information	Monthly-Quarterly	~6 weeks	~2 weeks
Schoolwide Achievement	Monthly	Monthly-Quarterly	~2 weeks
Decision-Making Opportunities	~2 weeks	Monthly	~2 weeks
School Volunteer Opportunities	~3 Weeks	~3 Weeks	~2 weeks
Curriculum	~2 weeks	~6 weeks	~3 weeks
Disciplinary Action	~Weekly	~Weekly	~2x per week
Behavior Patterns	~Weekly	~Weekly	~Weekly
Individual Student Achievement (Progress or Challenges)	~2 weeks	~2 weeks	~2 weeks
Logistics (e.g., early dismissal, enrollment)	~2 weeks	~2 weeks	~2 weeks
Classroom or School Event	~2 weeks	~2 weeks	Weekly
Homework	~2-3x per week	~2-3x per week	~2-3x per week

Source: Center for American Progress<sup>107</sup>

**Districts and schools need to have frequent and consistent two-way communication with families.** Standard methods include website information, text messages, written notes, e-mails, phone calls, printed materials, and face-to-face meetings. Families should have access to multiple platforms (e.g., school websites and hotlines) where they can ask questions, provide comments and concerns, and suggest improvements to

<sup>104</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim with some modifications from: Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Benner, M. and A. Quirk. "One Size Does Not Fit All." Center for American Progress, February 20, 2020.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2020/02/20/480254/one-size-not-fit/>







<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Figure contents adapted from: Ibid.

district and school administrators with rapid response times.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, schools can personalize communications by including information specific to families and their students, as families are most interested in information about their child(ren). For instance, teachers might describe examples of the child's behavior to their families in illustrating social and emotional learning skills in writing or in-person communication or by including positive highlights of a student's week in a weekly newsletter. Personalized outreach also increases the likelihood that families look at and review communications sent to them.<sup>109</sup>

**However, districts also need to understand the appropriate channels through which to send this frequent communication.** For instance, sports game updates can be frequently posted on social media or updated on a school website, but they should not be sent through the school phone notification system.<sup>110</sup> Figure 2.13 provides a helpful checklist for appropriate communication channels and frequency.

**Figure 2.13: Recommendations for Using Communication Channels**

TYPE OF INFORMATION	 WEBSITE	 MOBILE APP (PUSH NOTIFICATIONS)	 NOTIFICATION & ALERTS	 EMAIL	 SOCIAL MEDIA	 VIDEO
Emergency alerts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Public relations	✓				✓	✓
Event promotion	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Special announcement	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Important reminders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Forms/documents	✓			✓		
Campaigns	✓			✓	✓	✓
PTO Information	✓			✓	✓	

Source: Campus Suite<sup>111</sup>

**Community stakeholders find individualized and personalized communications most helpful and valuable, regardless of the communication method or tool.** The CAP survey discussed above found community stakeholders value systems that facilitate individualized interaction and communication most highly out of all communication options used at their school.<sup>112</sup> For example, Sunnyvale School District (CA) shares how the public can receive and customize communications and information from the district through a public page on the district's website. Figure 2.14 displays the types of communication platforms Sunnyvale School District uses to communicate with community stakeholders.

<sup>108</sup> [1] "How Two-Way Communication Can Boost Parent Engagement." Waterford.Org, November 8, 2018.

<https://www.waterford.org/education/two-way-communication-parent-engagement/> [2] "With Schools Closed and Distance Learning the Norm, How Is Your District Meeting the Needs of Its Students?" Digital Promise and The Education Trust, May 2020, p. 10. <https://edtrustmain.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/06163247/10-Questions-for-Equity-Advocates-to-Ask-About-Distance-Learning-During-COVID-19-May-2020.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> "School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth." Colorado Department of Education, p. 6. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/school-familypartnershipstrategies>

<sup>110</sup> "School Communication Planning Guide," Op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Benner and Quirk, Op. cit.

**Figure 2.14: Sunnyvale School District (CA)**

**Text Messages:** Students can sign up for urgent messages via text by texting "YES" to the number 67587 and can opt-out anytime.

**PowerSchool Parent Portal:** Students and parents have access to real-time information, including attendance, grades, lunch balances, detailed assignment descriptions, and school bulletins through this electronic student management system. Teachers can share information with parents and students, and parents can participate in their child's education. Students and parents can also change or update their contact information and their communication preferences through the portal.

**The District Digest** is a quarterly online newsletter published by the SSD covering programs, happenings, and issues affecting schools, the district, and public education. Community members can subscribe to receive a condensed digest.

**Social Media:** Half of SSD's schools have social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) in addition to the district's accounts. Community members can follow any of the channels.

**Mobile App:** Students and parents can download SSD's free mobile app from the iOS App Store or Google Play to follow and receive news/notifications from specific schools. Users can customize the app, including language preferences, individual student information, push notifications, SSD's events calendar, and a district/school directory.

SSD uses **Peachjar** to create and distribute district- or school-approved electronic flyers directly to parents' inboxes and posts them online to each school's website, where parents can find and view them and immediately sign up for activities and events. Parents can click the Peachjar button on school websites to receive flyers. They do not need to log in to receive or view flyers and can opt-out at any time.

Source: Sunnyvale School District<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Figure contents adapted from: "District Communications / Ways We Communicate." Sunnyvale School District. <https://www.sesd.org/Page/1321#:~:text=Sunnyvale%20School%20District%20uses%20Peachjar,up%20for%20activities%20and%20events.>

Hanover Research provides high-quality, custom research and analytics through a cost-effective model that helps clients make informed decisions, identify and seize opportunities, and heighten their effectiveness.

