



Comprehensive Communications Plan

**“Achieving Higher Levels
of Excellence in Education:
Great Schools, Great Value!”**

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Table of Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction and Purpose	1
Guiding Principles	1
District's Vision, Mission and Beliefs	2
Audiences and Outcomes	3
Communication Tools	4
Implementation Plan	5
Safety and Crisis Plan Communications	6
Crisis Communications Checklist	6
Crisis Communications Lifecycle	7
Board Policies Regarding Media Relations	7-10
Communications Effectiveness Measures	11

Introduction and Purpose

Benjamin School District 25 is committed to open, honest and continuous communication with its stakeholders. Maintaining a two-way conversation with stakeholders is essential for building relationships. These relationships are the foundation for an effective school system.

The primary purpose of developing this Communications Plan is to establish a comprehensive and integrated communications process for quality communication with all stakeholders. The plan aligns with the District's goals and is incorporated in the Strategic Directions 2014-2019.

The plan's focus is to:

- Implement a communications program that directly assists the District to achieve its strategic goals
- Foster productive relationships with District stakeholders
- Provide focus and direction for messages/methods in support of the District's goals
- Enable the District to present itself meaningfully to various groups

Guiding Principles

The following principles serve as the foundation of a sound communications plan:

- Effective public engagement is essential to creating an environment in which students, staff, families, and community members participate and contribute.
- Communication is a primary function of leadership and a responsibility of all employees.
- Well-informed employees and citizens are effective ambassadors for developing broad community support.
- Open, two-way communication is critical to maintaining effective public relationships.
- Accurate, understandable and timely communication is an essential component of the decision-making processes of the School District.
- Using a variety of sources and strategies enhances the school system's ability to communicate effectively and thoroughly.
- Public relations and communications strategies must be explicitly linked to the vision, mission, beliefs, and goals of the School District.

District's Vision, Mission and Beliefs

Vision

Achieving high levels of excellence in academics and supporting students in developing 21st century skills, such as collaboration and problem solving.

Mission Statement

To provide each child with the best educational opportunity to become a lifelong learner, achieve the highest personal growth and be a contributing member of society.

District Beliefs (Order does not set priority)

Guiding Principles

- All children can learn
- Education should have the child at its focus
- Education is the collaborative responsibility of students, parents, educators/support staff, and community
- Each child has value and can be a contributing member of society
- Learning is a lifelong experience

Roles and Expectations

- Parents are the primary lifelong teachers of children
- A well-prepared staff willing to grow professionally is essential for learning
- Children should learn to make responsible choices
- Learning takes place through personal effort, collaboration and taking reasonable risks
- Children need a safe, supportive environment in which to learn
- District 25 participates in a global community of learning resources

Expectations for Excellence

- High expectations stimulate growth
- All children must learn how to learn
- Each child should be challenged and given the opportunity to individually succeed in an ever-changing world
- A positive self-concept must be fostered
- Each child's unique learning style should be considered

Audiences and Outcomes

Internal Audiences

- Students
- Certificated Staff
- Educational Support Staff
- Principals
- Administrators
- Board of Education
- Contracted Services Staff
- Parents

External Audiences

- District Taxpayers
- Senior Citizens
- Business Leaders
- Media
- Citizens Advisory Council
- Parent/Teacher Association
- Education Foundation
- Civic Groups
- Governmental Agencies (Village of Carol Stream, City of West Chicago, Wayne Township)
- Emergency Responders (Police, Fire)
- Legislators
- Religious Leaders
- Park Districts
- New Residents of the District
- Private Schools
- Neighboring Feeder/Partner Districts
- Residents Without Children in District's schools
- Prospective Residents of District

Desired Behaviors and Attitudes

Through the implementation of this plan, the following desired behaviors and attitudes are the focus:

Internal Audiences

- Take pride and ownership in the District
- Keep informed of key issues
- Work as a high-performing organization whose employees respect and value customer/stakeholder feedback
- Exhibit District values of caring, integrity, trust, and collaboration

External Audiences

- Feel involved and engaged in their public schools
- Exhibit community pride and trust in schools and the District
- Support the School District

Communication Tools

The District can more effectively provide consistent and unified messages by identifying and managing all communication. A multifaceted approach to overall communications helps ensure greater impact of messages. The following list details the internal and external communication vehicles the School District utilizes:

Communication Vehicles: Electronic

- District Web Pages
- School Web Pages
- Staff Web Pages
- School Newsletters
- District Newsletters
- All-Call System
- Virtual Backpack Program
- Staff Bulletins (weekly)
- Superintendent's Bulletin (as needed)
- Web 2.0 Tools (examples: Facebook and Twitter)
- Text alerts
- Podcasts
- Email Blasts

Communication Vehicles: Print

- District Newsletters
- Local Newspapers
- Carol Stream Chamber of Commerce Publication Ad
- District Brochure; 25 Reasons Booklet; Informational Brochure and School Year Calendar

Communication Vehicles: Media

- Print Newspapers
- Broadcast Stations
- Local Magazines

Communication Vehicles: Interpersonal

- Administrative Council Meetings
- Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) Meetings
- Benjamin Education Foundation Meetings
- Benjamin Education Association Meetings
- District Advisory Council Meetings

Implementation Plan

District Goal: Continue to increase the communication about the Benjamin District 25 schools and with stakeholders.

Communication Goal 1: Build and maintain proactive collaborative relationships with all stakeholders to strengthen support for the Benjamin School District 25.

Strategies:

- 1a) Publicize the accomplishments of the School District, such as academic achievements, staff recognitions and Scorecard Report.
- 1b) Develop and maintain partnerships with businesses and community leaders.
- 1c) Emphasize customer service through *The Fred Factor* book study and related best practices.
- 1d) Participates in Carol Stream Intergovernmental and West Chicago Council of Governments quarterly meetings.
- 1e) Participates in Carol Stream Rotary Club.
- 1f) Participates in Carol Stream Government Directors' monthly meeting.

Communication Goal 2: Use a variety of media and social interaction to maximize awareness and support of the District's goals, strategies and programs.

Strategies:

- 2a) Extend the use of electronic, print and mass media tools to promote awareness and interest in the District.
- 2b) Continue to interact face-to-face with a variety of stakeholders.
- 2c) Lobby legislators to inform them of issues and to explain the impact of potential legislation.

Communication Goal 3: Utilize an effective communications plan to enhance internal communications and staff engagement.

Strategies:

- 3a) Facilitate ongoing training and support for administrators in effective communications with staff and the public.
- 3b) Encourage the flow of information from parents and the community to the School District (example: sign up stakeholders for District and school Internet list serves.)

Communication Goal 4: Achieve coordinated external and internal communication.

Strategies:

- 4a) Continually update the District's safety and crisis plan in collaboration with emergency responders.
- 4b) Inform parents and community of conducting safety drills and using feedback to improve best practices.
- 4c) Inform parents and community of education-related issues.

Communication Goal 5: Strengthen a clear identity for the School District and build upon that image and reputation.

Strategies:

- 5a) Ensure that the message of committed staff, motivated students and supportive parents/community is emphasized in communications with internal and external audiences.
- 5b) Ensure that the message of the personalized and high expectations learning environment is provided in a cost-effective manner and is emphasized in communication with internal and external audiences.
- 5c) Continue to market the School District in local publications, such as Carol Stream Chamber of Commerce Business and Community Directory and the Carol Stream Rotary Club Community Map.
- 5d) Make presentations at local, state, and national education conferences, such as the state's annual Triple I Conference.

Safety and Crisis Plan Communication

A Comprehensive Safety and Crisis Plan is regularly updated based on feedback from emergency responders. Staff and students are trained to implement the plan, as needed.

The Crisis Communication Checklist (below) and Crisis Communication Lifecycle (on the next page) are for use during a crisis.

Crisis Communications Checklist

Following are key actions in media relations and communications operations you must take during the first 24-48 hours of a crisis:

Before a Crisis Occurs

- Identify and media train spokesperson(s)
- Clarify media relations guidelines with employees. Only designated spokesperson can speak with the media
- Complete all preparatory checklists

Within First 24 Hours

- Convene crisis communications team
- Collect facts and outline immediate course of action
- Create a crisis fact sheet and chronology of events (for internal use)
- Notify Web Administrator and update content on crisis website (ongoing)
- Prepare and distribute initial media statement*
- Communicate and reinforce media protocol, especially with phone operators
- Schedule initial news conference/media briefing
- Anticipate likely questions and prepare FAQ piece. Update and date FAQ as situation progresses
- Develop and distribute non-media communications
- Review the appropriateness of upcoming calendar of events in light of crisis incident. Cancel or reschedule, if necessary and contact affected parties (vendors, participants, etc.)

Throughout Crisis

- ❑ Keep a log of telephone media inquiries and status of responses
- ❑ Monitor media and Internet for new developments to ensure that information is getting out, and to detect any erroneous information that needs to be corrected

*Issue follow-up media statements as frequently as warranted.

Crisis Communications Lifecycle

Every crisis evolves in phases and communications must evolve in tandem by anticipating the information needs of the media and key audiences. Movement of each of these phases will vary according to the triggering event. The degree of intensity and longevity of a crisis will impact required resources and staff.

Pre-crisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation
Prepare	Fact finding	Ongoing media and public interest	Media and public interest diminish	Capture lessons learned and revise crisis communications plans and procedures appropriately
Develop template communications materials	Strong media and public demand for information – Who, What, When, Where, Why	Need to proactively communicate to avoid rumors and misinformation	Further analysis / critique of District response	Anticipate “anniversary” media coverage and events
Identify and train spokespersons	Express empathy	Questions intensify and shift to analysis of prevention efforts	Communications shift to future focus: prevention, protection, support services	Return to pre-crisis planning
Determine and secure necessary equipment and information resources	Establish credibility	Third party analysis/critique of District response begins	If appropriate, begin planning for resumed operations and/or memorial activities	
Foster alliances and partnerships with local first responders	Commit to continued communication with key audiences and the media	Ensure message consistency in all communications with all audiences	“Thank you” to those who provided support	

Board Policies Regarding Media Relations

The School Board and administration understand the importance of effective media relations. Board Policies 8.40: News Media, 8.40-AP: News Media Administrative Procedure, and 8.45: News Media Access to District Schools and Facilities explain the District’s position and procedures to promote open and appropriate relations with media.

These policies are included on the following pages and are updated periodically.

Community Relations

News Media

The District supports the rights of citizens to have access to information that affects school programs and services for children in the District. The District encourages positive relations with news reporters and other communications representatives. Dissemination of timely, accurate, and newsworthy information to the community through the news media is the primary responsibility of the Superintendent's Office, working in cooperation with school administrators and other staff.

District administrators and other personnel shall endeavor to create a positive, courteous relationship with members of the news media and maintain open communications on matters of a routine nature; however, the Board expects the welfare of students to be the guiding principle in all contacts with the news media. Maintaining a safe, orderly educational environment on the campus and in the classroom must be the most important consideration when working with the news media.

Adopted: 4/12

Community Relations

Administrative Procedure News Media

The Superintendent's Office shall coordinate news coverage of the School District. The Superintendent's Office is responsible for overseeing official communications between the school system and the news media by initiating story ideas as well as facilitating requests for news coverage from media representatives and District personnel.

The Superintendent's Office provides assistance to school administrators regarding effective relations with the news media.

The Superintendent of Schools (or a designee) serves as the primary spokesperson for the District and the schools. The president of the Board of Education serves as the primary spokesperson for the Board.

All news conferences and public events of a district-wide nature in which news coverage is requested must be coordinated by or through the Superintendent's Office. District personnel should submit story ideas to the Principal's Office as early as possible prior to the desired coverage date.

When crisis events occur outside of normal business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.), news media personnel are to contact the Superintendent via cell phone at: 630/514-7003 either by voice or text messaging. Media requests may also be made via email at: pehrhardt@bendist25.org.

Adopted: 4/12

Community Relations

News Media Access to District Schools and Facilities

News reporters and other communications representatives must initiate their requests to interview, film videotape, and/or photograph students and/or District personnel on District property through the Superintendent's Office.

Although schools are public buildings, the principal is responsible for maintaining discipline and the safety of all persons in the school.

The principal may, therefore, develop procedures restricting the actions of news media personnel if those actions interfere with the orderly educational process.

The Superintendent's Office will contact the school principal prior to a media visit. If media appear on campus without notifying the Superintendent's Office, the school administrator should notify the Superintendent's Office.

No media representatives will be allowed in the school without approval of the principal and notification of the Superintendent's Office. Principals and other staff are encouraged to assist with any reasonable request for media access and cooperate to the fullest extent possible.

News representatives must first check in at the principal's office before proceeding to other areas of the school building. Reporters are considered visitors to the campus and are required to sign in at the school office and comply with the District's Board Policies and Administrative Procedures. Media representatives will be escorted by the principal or his/her designee while they are in the building.

In handling crisis situations on campus, principals should first contact emergency medical services personnel (if the situation is life threatening). Following that, the general order of notification depending upon the circumstances surrounding the situation, is first, the emergency responders and the Superintendent.

During crisis/emergency situations, media access to schools and facilities may be limited to ensure students and staff safety or to maintain order. However, building administrators may designate an area on school property to conduct news briefings on the crisis or emergency situation. In these situations, normal access procedures for media and other visitors may be suspended in the interest of student and staff safety and an orderly emergency response.

Communications Effectiveness Measures

A system to measure communication effectiveness is essential to the continuous improvement of the Communications Plan. The measures include:

- Surveys to ascertain opinions to collect quantitative and qualitative information (example: 5Essentials Survey of students, staff and parents).
- Track hits on the District's website (examples: access of PowerSchool by parents and students, and results of One-Call Notification System).
- Interpersonal dialogue will be used with groups, such as the PTA, Education Foundation, Benjamin Education Association, Administrative Council, and Citizens Advisory Council.

The Communications Plan will be reviewed and updated annually or as deemed necessary by the superintendent.