



Communications Plan Revised 12/16/2014

SCHOOL DISTRICT MISSION

A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS BECOMING PRODUCTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENS AND LEADERS

VISION STATEMENT

Bexley City Schools values a warm, safe and nurturing learning environment for children and adults, characterized by an appreciation for the culture, achievements, accomplishments, challenges, and struggles of all people.

We have a deep and abiding respect for individuals and their learning. We will foster innovation, initiative, leadership, creativity and respect for diversity.

We expect the highest level of quality to exist throughout the school system and will involve students, staff and community in the implementation of continuous improvement processes and research-supported best practices. We will employ innovative and creative methods to maintain and acquire resources to support the District's strategic direction.

INTRODUCTION

The Bexley City School District serves some 2,137 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth in this small suburban community three miles east of downtown Columbus, Ohio. The students in the Bexley school system are among the top achievers in the state, consistently performing at the highest levels on standardized achievement tests and in a variety of academic competitions.

The Bexley community is invested in its schools and, in order to plan for the future, the community and school district must be able to make informed decisions. Understanding of the educational programs and activities that lead to high achievement by, and satisfaction with, the schools drive community members' decision-making. An understanding of the needs and issues of the community inform

the decisions made by school district administration. An ongoing, direct two-way communications effort between community and schools is critical to this process.

The Bexley City School District is only one of many choices for families. Generally, house hunters, particularly those with children, choose a particular community in part because of the strength of the local school system. Those in communities like Bexley increasingly can find alternative schools, both independent and parochial, to meet their needs. Families shop the schools for programs and facility, and taxpayers typically want to know exactly what their tax dollars are supporting.

PURPOSE

Community participation in the schools is essential to promote and maintain the quality of education for all students (Board policy KC). A planned school community relations program encourages citizen participation in and support for the educational program. The community relations program must show evidence of efforts to:

- 1) Encourage citizen decision-making about and participation in school functions in accordance with the philosophy of education and educational goals.
- 2) Communicate educational program goals, strengths and needs,
- 3) Provide information regarding school activities and student accomplishments, and
- 4) Enlist community resources to support educational programs (Board policy KA).

OBJECTIVES

Accordingly, the following objectives are essential to the Bexley City School District's communication effort:

- 1) To demonstrate that what is happening in the schools is meeting the desires and standards the community expects;
- 2) To demonstrate widely recognized qualities of an exemplary educational program, both in terms of practices and evidence of student learning;
- 3) To demonstrate specifically what excellence looks like in programs that result in high performing students, and what teachers and staff do to encourage and support these students.

- 4) To demonstrate to all taxpayers, with tangible evidence, that their money is being well spent;
- 5) To invite the community in to the school facilities to see first hand stewardship of the physical and relational environment that supports students learning;
- 6) To reach out into all facets of the Bexley community – one where word of mouth is the most frequent source of information -- with easily understood, timely information and timely responses;
- 7) To maintain a strong relationship with current families.

STRATEGIES

Strategies that are used to reach the communication goals and objectives must be those that can be trusted by the community. These should demonstrate thoughtfulness, respect for individuals, and should be of high quality. The school district must:

- 1) Share information quickly, openly and accurately; it should be factual, using summaries and drawing implications as needed to improve understanding.
- 2) Promote the positive aspects of issues and events and include how negative implications will be addressed.
- 3) Share ordinary successes and progress as well as the culminating evidence of successes.
- 4) Take responsibility for what the district does (or does not do) towards ensuring a high quality education for all students. Focus on thoughtful planning, attention to factors of quality, and the involvement of many in successful implementation.
- 5) Highlight how the ongoing conduct of the school district is a benefit to the community in general and the various constituencies in particular.
- 6) Meet community members where they congregate, including on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to expand on and compliment existing communication.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Each person who is a beneficiary of the endeavors of the school program is an audience member. Each should have ready access to information, and/or be able to

collaborate in decisions about the schools and support of school efforts. The school district needs input from these audiences, as well as feedback about the benefits of these efforts.

Internal audiences include:

- teachers and substitute teachers (those who live in the district and who live outside of it)
- administrators
- school secretaries; cooks, custodians, maintenance staff, technology staff and bus drivers
- coaches (some of whom are teachers and most of whom are not)
- parent booster groups supporting athletics, music, theatre, art, gifted education and other
- school and Special Needs PTO's and PTO Council
- Board of Education members

External audiences include:

- parents of students in the schools
- non-school parents who have raised families in the community or have young children; retired citizens
- area businesses and their employees
- Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and local realtors' groups
- various religious groups and institutions
- early childhood day care programs
- programs providing before and after school care, such as YMCA and JCC
- City of Bexley, Bexley City Council, Bexley Public Library, Bexley Recreation Department;
- Capital University
- news media, particularly the three local papers
- various ad-hoc task force groups who provide guidance and direction for program and facility planning as needed.
- alumni
- potential school district residents; those considering a move to the community.
- [Twitter universe.](#)

FORMULATION OF THE MESSAGE

Effective communication boils down to participation in and support for the education program in Bexley City Schools. Key features:

- Knowledge of audience characteristics such as beliefs, attitudes and concerns (as an essential part of persuasion)
- Reinforcement and repetition
- Conveyance of information in a variety of ways, using multiple communications channels

Reaching Various Audiences

School district and its representatives:

- Maintain an attractive Web site with timely and up-to-date information and news articles.
- Solicit press coverage of school events, achievements and programs (both print and broadcast media).
- Send regular communications via U.S. Mail to every Bexley household
- Maintain email network, the Key Communicator Connection (KCC) that channels school information into the community by sending twice-weekly messages to a core group of residents representing all audiences (numbering approximately 2,200).
- Maintain and monitor a social media presence via Facebook and Twitter.
- Appear at public forums to communicate the school district's mission, vision and priorities.
- Maintain a presence at meetings of all parents groups, including Bexley Music Parents, Bexley Athletic Boosters, Special Needs PTO, etc. These groups are aware that representatives of administration and the Board are available to address particular concerns or issues at meetings.

Receiving Input from Audiences

School District administration, Board Members and Key Communicator:

- Seek input from and follow activities of the following staff committees that meet regularly: building Faculty Advisory; district wide Curriculum Development; North Central Chairs; Area Coordinators; Grade Level Elementary Chairs; Partnership Council; Middle School Team Leaders and High School Department Chairs; and building Tech Advisors/Tech Roundtable;
- Attend building PTO, PTO Council and parent group meetings as well as school and community events and activities;
- Receive comments from community members via suggestion boxes placed in the individual school buildings;

- Monitor on a daily basis and, if warranted, respond to community members' comments appearing on Facebook and Twitter.
- Hear Public Comment at Board of Education meetings;
- Maintain contact with the members of CARE, Bexley Citizens for Accountability and Responsibility in Education;
- Include residents on a variety of committees and task forces serving the district, including the Financial Advisory Committee and Accountability Committee;
- Seek assistance from community members concerning (1) key hiring decisions (by screening applicants and participating in the interview process); (2) district budget reviews and (3) establishing district and program goals;
- Using the Key Communicators Connection (KCC), monitor the community's pulse and respond directly and immediately to concerns that are voiced in the community about the school district.

Materials for Target Audiences

The Bexley City School District sends **direct mail brochures to the community**. In addition to being mailed, these are distributed at key points in the community, such as the individual school buildings, Bexley Public Library, local coffee shops and retail outlets.

- *Annual Report to the Community* is compiled in July for an early fall mailing to every Bexley household. The piece summarizes the achievements and activities of the previous school year and serves as a reference source regarding all district programs, statistics and financial data.
- *Checkpoints to the Community* newsletter, with articles and photos about school district programs, events and achievements, is mailed quarterly to every household in Bexley.
- *visual and performing arts* brochure listing all performance and exhibition dates for the school year that is mailed in early fall.
- Information pieces concerning particular issues on an as-needed basis.

The District **communicates directly with students and parents** via the following.

- The program of study for each educational level is published in a *Handbook* that details curricula, programs, and curricular and extracurricular opportunities, as well as policies and behavioral expectations. Students and parents receive copies of these at the start of elementary and middle school, and at the beginning of each year in high school. They are updated annually.
- School administration produces a yearly *School Calendar* to mail to student households at the start of school.

- The district also sends direct mail communications as needed, such as providing notice of a proposed policy change.
- The One Call Now communications system sends phone and email messages to as many devices as parents/guardians request.
- Parent/guardians may choose to subscribe to various district communications tools, such as an RSS feed from the district web calendar or various Twitter feeds.
- Individual schools and classroom teachers send email and/or newsletter updates on a regular (at least monthly) basis about classroom expectations, class work, homework, progress, topics being covered, curriculum, guest teachers. Teachers, administrators and other staffers advise parents at the start of a school year about the best ways to communicate with them.

Administration **communicates with staff** as follows:

- District-wide email is used regularly to inform, update, publicize and recognize.
- School intranet (V-drive) is maintained as a source of information and means of communication regarding the above-named staff committees;
- “*Checkpoints*” is emailed regularly to all staff members, with messages from the Superintendent and Director of Curriculum and Instruction and notices concerning programs, professional development opportunities and employment.
- *Board Overview*, summarizing the activities at each regular Board meeting is emailed monthly to staff.

Events

- Staff members from each building make an annual report and presentation to the Bexley Board of Education at a regular, public meeting. This gives staff the chance to discuss building goals, improvement plans and progress.
- The district recognizes employees, volunteers and students in public at Board Meetings on a regular basis. Star Thrower Awards acknowledge those who go the extra mile to help students succeed and Keymaker Awards recognize unique achievement on the part of students and faculty.
- The Board of Education, along with PTO Council, sponsors an annual Education Appreciation Banquet where retirees are honored and staff members’ service is recognized. An Educator of the Year is honored, BEF grant awards are recognized and student scholarship winners are announced.
- The annual BEF BRAVO event in February is well supported by many members of the community, including students who create items for auction. In addition to raising funds to support The Bexley Education Foundation, the event serves as a general community celebration of education.

- The district hosts an annual back-to-school convocation for all employees, as getting off to a great start is recognized as a critical factor for effective educators.

PRESS AND MEDIA

Press Releases: The district's Public Information Officer interviews, researches and writes for 2-3 press releases each week, supplying a steady flow of information to the local media outlets, including three weekly newspapers, the daily *Columbus Dispatch* and other media as appropriate. The Officer also makes sure that the person who can best speak to the release content is available for reporters' questions. In addition, school staff members often contact local media concerning school programs and activities pertaining to their particular areas. Staff members are encouraged to provide information in advance of events for these releases and for Key Communicator email purposes.

Editorials: The Public Information Officer is responsible for supplying a monthly editorial for publication in *Bexley News/This Week*, suggesting possible topics, and editing and proofing the pieces, which are generally written by the Superintendent. Topics include school best practices, changes to district policy, general educational issues and others.

Columns written by students, teachers, administrators, Board members or the Public Information Officer are also published in this forum. These pieces give community members an "insider's" look at how programs work in the schools, the points-of-view of students and staff about school programs, etc.

Board Meeting: The Superintendent's office sends advance copies of Board Meeting agendas to the local press. A *Board Overview* summarizing each regular meeting is developed by the Public Information Officer and distributed to all staff and Key Communicators via email. This same information is posted on the district Web site.

The Bexley City School District provides timely, accurate factual information and photographs to reporters. By staying abreast of education news, the district seeks to provide the media with explanations and descriptions of new programs and happenings at the local, state and national levels. The Superintendent serves as official spokesperson for the district while the Public Information Officer provides prompt follow up and builds positive relationships with all media representatives.

ANTICIPATING AND RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

The district works ahead to prepare for criticism resulting from (1) a lack of information, (2) an outcome contrary to the desires of the critic and/or (3) disagreements between constituents. Both district-level and building-level personnel must be ready with a well-crafted response to concerns and criticism from the public. The goal is to strive for an open flow of information at all times, which includes hearing and understanding the underlying issues. Lack of understanding from either party will increase criticism over time.

- 1) For topics that can be anticipated to cause concern, the district prepares a direct mailer so that detailed, accurate information arrives in homes in a timely manner.
- 2) Office staff quickly directs any individual requests for information or clarification to the staffer in the best position to respond.
- 3) The district responds immediately to inquiries from reporters, to demonstrate that the district takes their issues and questions seriously. Press releases are sent to the media in anticipation of upcoming issues.
- 4) In promoting positive aspects of issues and events, the district includes thinking about how negative implications will be addressed.
- 5) The district uses the Key Communicator email network and social media outlets to address rumors or issues before they have a chance to spread. Critics can easily join the email network or follow the Twitter feed connecting them to a source of timely, accurate information.
- 6) The district responds to letters-to-the-editor in local news media by recruiting supporters to submit responses/rebuttals that appear as a follow up in the same news source.
- 7) The district keeps a list of potentially controversial topics, in order to track developing trends and ideas in the community.
- 8) District Accountability Committees discuss district communications and provide anecdotal feedback about potential criticism, which allows the administration the chance to respond proactively and effectively.
- 9) The district makes extra efforts to communicate about proposed policy changes under consideration, such as by posting proposed policy changes on Board of Education Web page, communicating via Key Communicator about the topics included on Board meeting agendas, etc.

EVALUATION METHODS

- 1) Ongoing basis:
 - timing, timeliness and content of communications methods
 - maintenance of Web site info
 - continued expansion of email network database

- rate of public participation in all events taking place in the schools, such as open houses, parent education programs, principals' breakfasts, concert attendance, etc; the district must keep a systematic tally of participation to monitor and understand trend changes
- anecdotal information and feedback
- home values in the community; the district must formally monitor housing prices over time, as evidence that money spent on schools draws new families to Bexley and is money well spent.

2) Every three to six years:

- successful passage of public requests for funding, indicating to the Board that there is an understanding between the community's schooling expectations and the manner in which the Board oversees the ongoing operations of the district
- awareness measured via research, e.g., written, Internet or telephone surveys or questionnaires

LOOKING AHEAD: GOALS 2015 AND BEYOND

1) Establish social media presence and monitor community conversation through this avenue.

2) Continue to communicate about Ohio school funding matters, school district financial and budget matters and future district needs to ensure success of future ballot issues.

3) Update Key Communicators Connection (KCC) yearly to include all parents who have provided email contact information to the schools; troubleshoot with Tech Department to make sure that all parents who desire this contact are included.

4) File and monitor event attendance totals, as collected by appropriate personnel.

5) Continue communication efforts with real estate agents and relocation consultants in an effort to attract/retain students; conduct exit interviews where possible.

6) Seek wider recognition for the district (via regional and national awards, publication in educational journals, and other means).

7) Facilitate two-way communication among administrators, faculty and staff on Faculty Advisory, Curriculum Development and NCA committees with intranet (V-drive) posting of meeting agendas, notes and building improvement plans.

8) Assist in training and support to shift some responsibility for building web sites back to the individual school personnel.

9) Evaluate Web site and facilitate necessary changes to site and/or redesign.

10) Develop a start-of-school-year Communications Guide for school staff members, including steps for publicizing classroom programs, Key Communicator contact info, guidelines for parent communications, etc.

11) Work with the Athletic Department and Athletic Boosters to maintain up-to-date schedule, contest and other information.

Job description

Title: Public Information Officer (part-time)

Qualifications: Knowledge of communication techniques and evidence of good communications skills

Reports to: Superintendent

Job Goal: Develop a communications and public relations program providing a public awareness and understanding of the strengths and needs of the Bexley City Schools and actively promote the district's excellent programs, students and staff.

Performance Responsibilities:

1. Develop, direct and maintain an effective communications program with all employees and residents of the school district.

2. Develop and maintain an information system to facilitate communications via attractive and effective school publications, including:

- District Annual Report
- District Activities calendar
- quarterly *Checkpoints* to all residents
- weekly *Checkpoints* to all staff
- Key Communicators email network
- monthly *Board Overview* reporting Board of Education activities
- other special brochures or other pieces as necessary

3. Coordinate production of school/athletic handbooks.

4. Serve as communications liaison between the media, the Superintendent, staff and schools.
5. Prepare, coordinate and distribute district releases for the news media.
6. Provide content for the district Web site, including the Athletics Web site.
7. Maintain open lines of communication with all community organizations and provide prompt responses to requests for public information about the district, its policies and programs.
8. Serve on various Boards and committees within the district to promote open and accurate communication and serve as a sounding board (e.g., DARN, Accountability, BEF, Partnership Council, PTO Council).
9. Feed content to and monitor district's social media presence.