



Westerville City Schools

**Communication Plan
2007-08 through 2009-10
*Research & Strategies***



Office of Communications

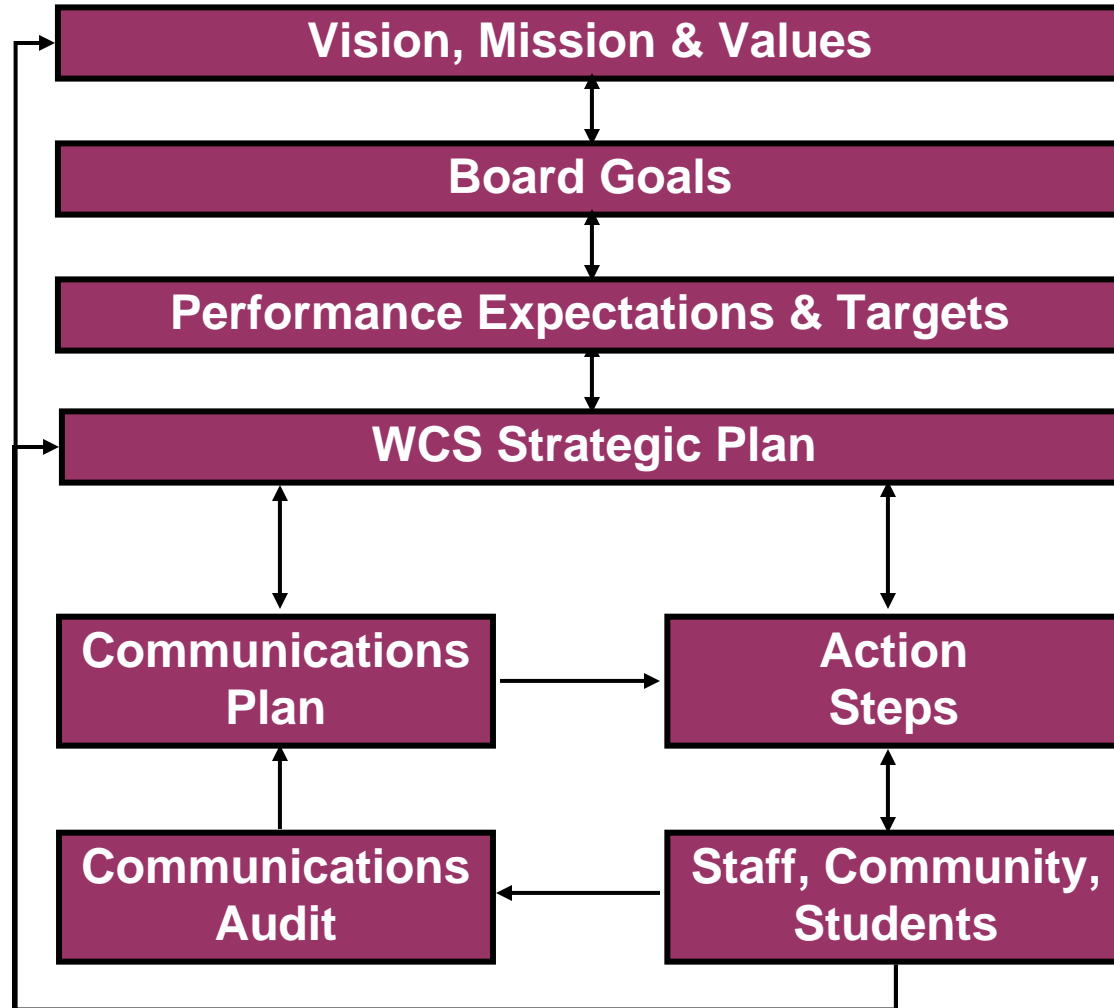
- **Mission:**

- *To foster two-way communication between the Westerville School District and its publics in order to nurture community support for the district; develop an understanding of district operations; build mutually-beneficial partnerships; and promote staff, student and district accomplishments*

- **Staff:**

- *Lynne Maslowski, community engagement coordinator*
- *Matt Davis, visual communications coordinator*

Systemic Alignment of Communications Plan





Communications Audit as the Foundation

- **Audit conducted in spring of 2007**
- **126 individuals participated in the audit process through:**
 - *Focus groups: Parents, Classified Support Staff, Business Professionals, District Leadership, Senior Citizens, Central Office Administrative Assistants, Teachers, Diversity Committee Members, Community Representatives (non-parents, elected officials, faith-based community), and Students.*
 - *Individual meetings*
- **Department situation analysis, principal survey and “inventory” of school-based communication vehicles**



Communications Audit as the Foundation

- **Audit goal:**
 - *To seek facts and perceptions, and from those to develop an implement a comprehensive communications/community engagement plan*
- **Recommendations stemming from audit findings are intended to enhance two-way communication between Westerville City Schools and its internal and external publics**

Key Audit Findings

- Overall positive image
- 2006 Passage of levy and “Excellent” rating were seen as “high watermark” for district
- WCS employees look to principals and supervisors as main source of information necessary to perform jobs and remain informed about district happenings
- Employees desire regular communication from district’s Central Office
- Time is a commodity and is often a hindrance to participating in district activities and/or remaining informed
- General belief the district is understaffed in support staff and administrative staff

Key Audit Findings

- **Diversity is both a strength and a challenge**
- **Electronic communication is valued, though face-to-face remains preferred method of receiving information**
- **District's "lack of involvement" in community affairs is largely a misperception**
- **District is perceived as a "catalyst" in the community that can make things happen for the benefit of many**
- **Individuals without children in schools have a desire to remain informed, but their needs are very different from parents**

Key Audit Findings

- **Employees desire new or the streamlining of existing processes related to internal communications**
- **The district must become more proactive in addressing rumors, clarifying misinformation or providing missing context when issues become widespread**
- **Local newspapers remain a preferred source of information though people would also prefer to receive information directly from the district**
- **The district is missing out on potentially beneficial long-term relationships because it loses touch with those who have made it successful**

Key Audit Findings

- **Internal and external audiences believe district employees and officials are very accessible, but they desire more informal feedback mechanisms to share thoughts, ideas and concerns**



Audit Recommendations

- Recommendations are based upon the premise that effective external communication with parents and the community begins with a solid internal communications program
- Recommendations address the ideas and observations raised by audit participants
- Recommendations offer strategies that ultimately were developed into a comprehensive communication plan



Audit Recommendations

- **Establish informal feedback opportunities**
- **Establish/Enhance research mechanisms**
- **Establish “Key Communicator” network**
- **Establish Communications Advisory Council**
- **Redesign existing internal newsletter to meet employees’ needs**
- **Conduct readership surveys of school newsletters**
- **Provide customer service and communication-related professional development**
- **Build awareness of district’s involvement in the community**
- **Become source of “value-added” information for non-parents**

Audit Recommendations

- **Reestablish and maintain contact with alumni, retirees and once-involved community members**
- **Redesign/reorganize district web site**
- **Expand opportunities for parent/community involvement**
- **Identify and incorporate key messages into all communications**
- **Improve branding of district**
- **Provide front-line employees with resources that help them perform their jobs**
- **Explore mutually-beneficial partnerships with other community organizations to “pool” communication and community relations activities and resources**



Communications Plan

- **Parameters**

- *Grounded in data gathered and feedback received during communications audit process*
- *Based upon identified best practices in educational communications*
- *Will be evaluated annually and effectiveness measured periodically*



Communications Plan

- Six “overarching” goals
 - *Create and support opportunities for dialogue with district internal/external stakeholders*
 - *Foster the district’s visibility and involvement in school/community events*
 - *Promote and recognize district goals, programs, services, activities and successes*
 - *Provide communications/community relations consultation, training & resources*
 - *Manage the district’s media relations efforts*
 - *Strengthen the district’s Internal Communications program*



Communications Plan

- **Create and support opportunities for dialogue with district stakeholders**
 - *Establish Superintendent's "Coffees & Conversations"*
 - *Develop Key Communicator network*
 - *Organize State of Schools Address/Information Night*
 - *Utilize web site as tool for dialogue/feedback*
 - *Reconnect former employees, retirees, past volunteers and alumni to the district*
 - *Continue "Town Meetings" w/ Set Topics*
 - *Hold "Westerville Schools in the Future" Community Dialogue sessions*
 - *Sponsor "Staff Chats"*
 - *Implement formal survey strategy*

Communications Plan

- **Foster the district's visibility and involvement in school/community events**
 - *Identify/promote opportunities for BOE and Executive Committee to visit schools and attend school events*
 - *Identify/promote opportunities for BOE, Executive Committee and schools/principals to represent WCS in community organizations and at various community events*
 - *Increase public awareness of district's involvement in community activities*
 - *Collaborate with various community organizations to "pool" communication/ community relations activities and resources*
 - *Improve branding of WCS*



Communications Plan

- **Promote and recognize district goals, programs, services, activities and successes**
 - *Redesign district web site*
 - *Provide prepared stories for school newsletters*
 - *Establish Communications Advisory Council*
 - *Use electronic newsletters to communicate pertinent and “customized” information to families and community members*
 - *Provide guest columns/letters to local newspapers*
 - *Identify opportunities to recognize staff, student, school accomplishments at BOE meetings and other public venues*



Communications Plan

- **Provide communications/community relations consultation, training and resources**
 - *Provide day-to-day counsel*
 - *Communicate to staff their importance as “ambassadors” of the district and provide the tools/resources necessary to fulfill this role*
 - *Assist schools in strengthening the quality of their newsletters*
 - *Provide basic media relations training to front-line administration*
 - *Provide training and support in use of web site as a communication tool*
 - *Establish resource section on WCS intranet*
 - *Offer public relations/publicity workshops to schools and parent/booster organizations*



Communications Plan

- **Manage the district's media relations efforts**
 - *Manage crisis communications and serve as spokesperson*
 - *Manage media information requests*
 - *Continue to supply media with story ideas and photo/video opportunities*
 - *Provide media access to appropriate district sources/authorities and provide appropriate counsel*
 - *Meet at least once annually with local media executives to discuss mutual needs/expectations*
 - *Assess effectiveness of proactive media relations (content analysis/placement rate/AEV)*

Communications Plan

- **Strengthen the district's internal communications program**
 - *Establish internal newsletter w/ content that meets employees' information needs and helps them complete "day-to-day" responsibilities*
 - *Develop and provide employees with "key messages"*
 - *Establish internal bulletin to communicate urgent information to employees*
 - *Develop standards for identifying "high priority" from "low priority" e-mails*
 - *Create a "Service Directory" for all employees*

What's New?

- ✓ **Coffee & Conversation meetings**
- ✓ **Key Communicator Network**
 - **State of Schools/School Information night**
- ✓ **Web site upgrade, training**
 - **Alumni/former employees/former volunteer reconnection efforts**
- **“Westerville Schools in the Future” community dialogues**
- ✓ **Staff Chats**
 - **Formal survey/research plan**
 - **Promotion of district’s involvement in the community**
 - **Enhancing district brand**
 - **Communications Advisory Council**

What's New?

- **Helping staff understand their role as district ambassadors**
- **School newsletter assistance**
- **Media relations training for front-line administration**
- **Communication/ community relations/customer service resources section on intranet**
- **Workshops for parent/booster organizations**
- **Annual meeting with media executives**
- ✓ **Media monitoring/ analysis**
- ✓ **Employee newsletter structure/content; bulletin**
- **E-mail prioritization system**
- ✓ **Service Directory**



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