LETHBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 51

Communications
PLAN

- A comprehensive guide
to communicating
with our staff, educational
stakeholders and the general public

- Building Bridges
to a High Level
of Student Success

Lethbridge
School District No. 51

What is our current situation?

Lethbridge School District No. 51 does not currently have a comprehensive communications plan. The goal is to create a plan that guides senior administration, the board of trustees and all staff in the process of communicating and engaging stakeholders.

Principles Underlying Communication

1. A communications plan is a living, breathing document, subject to change and alteration as needs arise.
2. With the evolving world of technology, and the way our students, staff and stakeholders gather, view and share information, it requires the district to have a complete understanding of how we can best communicate with stakeholders.
3. A plan provides a framework to help our district better communicate its messages, both to internal and external audiences.
4. Working with staff, the board of trustees and stakeholders leads to effective and efficient forms of communication.
5. It is the responsibility of all in the district to help foster a culture of open and honest communication to ensure our successes and achievements are shared.
6. Effective community engagement informs Board priorities, enhances the breadth of experience for students and provides opportunity for students, staff and the Board to contribute to the community.

Our organzation

- Lethbridge School District No. 51 has been educating students in Lethbridge since 1886, and has grown to include over 10,000 students and over 1,000 staff.
- Based in a growing city of over 90,000 people, the district includes a wide range of elementary, middle schools and high schools, along with number of outreach schools.

2.

Our target audiences

- This plan will seek to engage those both directly involved in the education system (internal audiences) and those outside the system (external audiences) who have a vested interest in the education system on some level
- Internal audiences include Education Centre staff, trustees, teachers, support staff, union representatives, School Councils and students
- External audiences include parents and families of students, the media, municipal, provincial and federal governments, industry and business and those in the community served by Lethbridge School District No. 51.

Communication methods in our toolbelt

- Our district brand (our name, logo and messaging)
- Establishing key communicators at each school (staff selected by principals, and placed in charge of distributing ideas and information to the school community, promoting events)
- Communication plans for schools developed to standardize how we promote events, deal with media requests/coverage
- Our district website, web portal and social media channels
- The board newsletter, school administrator email/text lists
- News stories and videos in print, radio and television media
- Coverage of board of trustees meetings
- Surveys, town hall meetings to engage the public

3.

General objectives

- The district strives to increase communication at all levels, ranging from internal communication among employees to external communication with parents, media, corporate and community sponsors and taxpayers.
- Guided by this plan, the district will use a variety of communication tools, and build capacity among staff on how to best use these tools.
- Interactive communication processes will be implemented to boost reciprocal, two-way communication, which is key to gathering public feedback.
- Increase public and staff awareness of district activities, initiatives, programs and achievements of our schools, staff and students.
- Maximize enrolment in our schools, and position the district as the number one choice locally for education.

Why do we need a plan?

- A communications plans sets best practices for communication, and outlines the most effective ways to get our message out and receive feedback from stakeholders.
- Recognizing ongoing changes in the way people communicate, through social media in particular, we need to ensure our messages are timely, consistent and accurate.
- The district needs to stress all employees have a role to play in communication, on some level, in order to develop positive working relationships with stakeholders

Goal 1

- ENSURE STAFF ARE WELL INFORMED ABOUT DISTRICT PROGRAMS/INITIATIVES AND BOARD PRIORITIES

- INCREASE KNOWLEDGE STAFF POSSESS ABOUT BEST PRACTICES AND WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT

- IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH TRUSTEES, SCHOOL COUNCILS AND STUDENTS

Effective internal communications

Proposed actions

- Host regular information sessions for staff, with district lead administrators and trustees, to deliver up-to-date information on district priorities, the budget, and board decisions which might impact them.
- Develop information messaging for staff on key issues the district is dealing with, complete with background information, and information on major projects in the district.

Proposed actions

- Create a list of key contacts for each school (athletic directors, technology experts, key communicators) who can lend support to teachers in other schools.
- Develop an online discussion board where staff can direct questions to district leaders and other staff members.
- Support networking of school leaders to provide opportunities to support an organizational approach for collaboration and sharing of best practices.
- Encourage each school to send a monthly list of events to district office for the creation of a district-wide event calendar.

Proposed actions

- Provide informative and timely information for students online.
- Have the communications officer put together briefing notes for trustees on hot-button issues impacting the district, or issues currently in the news about the district
- Distribute media releases, board highlights and district newsletters to School Councils.
- Organize a yearly student forum with district administration, trustees and students from the junior high and high school levels.

Goal 2

Accurate, timely information for external audiences

- BOOST COVERAGE OF DISTRICT EVENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS, PROGRAMS, STORIES OF INTEREST IN THE LOCAL MEDIA

Proposed actions

- Develop detailed background information for media kits to distribute to news outlets for reporters covering issues which impact the district.
- Distribute a monthly calender of major events going on at local schools.
- Establish a board media centre tab on the district website to highlight press releases and host information the media can easily access on past board decisions.
- Create key messages and talking points to establish a distict "voice."

- INCREASE EFFORTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF DISTRICT STUDENTS

Proposed actions

- Develop a Get to Know 51 document, and have it translated into a few of the most popular languages for newcomers to the city.
- Ensure each school has up to date Facebook and Twitter accounts to push timely information out to members of their school communities
- Encourage teachers to use Twitter in their classrooms to better communicate with parents
- Have each principal appoint a key communicator at each school.
- Provide a link on the district website to allow parents to sign up for eNews from the district.
- Develop a communication strategy for student transitions from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school.

- DEVELOP TIMELY, ORIGINAL CONTENT FOR THE 51 WEBSITE, UPDATED DAILY AND PROMOTED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Proposed actions

- Encourage staff and student submissions of writing and photography to post on the website.
- Develop a weekly photo gallery of the most interesting events throughout the district.
- Create a monthly online poll question to encourage input on timely educational issues.
- Develop a video component for the website, and a website devoted to district sports.

Goal 3

Build communication capacity for all district employees

- HELP EMPLOYEES BECOME BETTER AT COMMUNICATING DISTRICT PRIORITIES AND SUCCESSES

Proposed actions

- Increase the number of spokespeople able to speak on a number of topics, and provide that list to the media and the district communications officer.
- Train employees and develop resources to assist district staff in dealing with the media, and information requests from the general public.
- Inform all employees about the role of the district communications officer and appropriate communication channels.

Goal 4 — Increase the quantity and quality of community engagement

Proposed actions

- CREATE A PAGE ON THE DISTRICT WEBSITE TO ACT AS A ONE-STOP-SHOP FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Create a How To Get Involved section on the district and school websites. It would include information on how to get involved with School Council, volunteer in the classroom, the steps needed to present to the board of trustees. Also included would be highlights from School Council and district board meetings. The webpage would list opportunities for public engagement (open houses for instance) and contact information for those in schools responsible for programs such as fine arts and sports (where volunteers are often required).

- COLLECT INPUT AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITES FOR THE PUBLIC TO PROCESS FEEDBACK WE RECEIVE

Proposed actions

- Design and release a monthly poll to encourage feedback from parents and community members on issues which are hot topics in education.
- Use online survey tools such as Survey Monkey to solicit the opinions of parents in regards to issues which are impacting the school district.
- Provide a summary of feedback received, whether from polls, surveys or from open houses, and detail how the information will be used and who in the district has viewed it.

8.

Goal 5 — Develop outside-the-box methods of communication

- BE INNOVATIVE IN OUR APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PUBLIC THROUGH CONSISTENT AND DYNAMIC INTERACTION

Proposed actions

- Ensure locations of community-engagement events are convenient for target audience.
- Use multiple media sources more often. Produce short videos to encapsulate open houses, reveal important information (such as new school designs) and conduct interviews with trustees when important decisions are made at the board level.

9.

Goal 6

Create and review a comprehensive social-media/digital rights policy

Proposed actions

- ENSURE CONSISTENT MESSAGING IS DELIVERED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

- Distribute to staff a set of guidelines for what is appropriate to post on district and school Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Ensure the use of social media complies with the district's ethical and professional principles at all times.

Proposed actions

- CLEARLY DEFINE RESPONSIBLE USE OF DISTRICT TECHNOLOGY FOR ALL STAFF

- Update the district's Use of Technology policy, taking into account the ever-evolving world of social media.
- Outline staff responsibilities involving identifying and reporting potential threats via social media.

Are we improving?

Simply having a plan is only part of the equation for improvement. Part of the process is also determining if those plans are making an impact. We must also devise a set of benchmarks to determine if the communication plan is indeed making a difference, and if our stated goals are being achived.

How will we measure success?

- Schools are making use of the Communications Officer to help promote their schools and their events.
- Staff members are satisfied with the level of communication between senior managers and schools.
- Survey results indicate parents are satisfied with their level of engagement with the schools.
- Our message is getting out to the local media.
- Track newspaper, radio and television coverage, whether or not district news releases and stories are being used and monitor media attendance of important district and individual school events.
- The general public is paying attention to district and school social-media accounts.
- Track the traffic on our district and school websites, ensure existing social-media accounts are being used and track increases in followers and likes.
- Routinely monitor school websites and newsletters to ensure information is getting out on a timely basis, and that schools are using communication tools.
- Track participation in online and in-person community-engagement opportunities.