

Communications & Public Affairs Strategic Plan

- 2023-2024 -

Over the next school year, the RCDSB Communications Department will be active with a number of existing and new projects. The overarching emphasis is on sharing the exciting and innovative initiatives, programs & learning taking place at the RCDSB. To do this we must effectively engage and provide our key stakeholders: students, parents, staff, and the general public with topical, timely and accurate information while highlighting the organization's excellence and innovation.

The Communications Department, under the leadership of the newly created Executive Officer of Public Affairs is the front line in demonstrating responsive, professional, transparent and friendly engagement. A goal in any engagement is to increase and maintain a high regard and reputation for the RCDSB, both internally and externally.

Staff changes, as well as external vendor issues and pandemic era related supply chain issues have had an impact on project timelines. By filling the vacancy in the role of Digital Communications Specialist, we will be able to ramp up our capacity while maintaining consistent high-quality output.

Over the 2022-23 school year, the communications team resumed most of the regular activities and projects that were paused during the pandemic period.

Going forward, current practices will be reviewed for effectiveness, stewardship of resources and new best practices explored; new initiatives will take shape; and initiatives currently underway, such as crisis communication protocols, AODA compliance, Administrative Procedure updates, website redesign and digital sign policy will move ahead.

Below is a summary of the Communications Department priorities for the next school terms.

Review Current Practices

Review our ongoing media buy, marketing strategies, customer service and practices in conjunction with analytic tools, best practices and trends. Consider how to streamline and offer information to increase user ease and awareness. Ensure that communications budget and resources are wisely used to increase profile, reputation and relaying pertinent information to our stakeholders.

This review will include the suggestions from the Parent Involvement Committee regarding Communications, from the Thought Exchange, as well as reviewing the Thought Exchange questions embedded by the Communications department.

Timeline: Beginning in late September 2023

1:1 Chromebook Deployment

Create more awareness, excitement and answer questions around the rollout of chromebooks for grades 7-12. An FAQ has been created for the website that can be updated with new frequently received questions as they arise. Elements such as FAQs in general reduce email traffic and provide proactive communications.

Timeline: September 2023

System Communications Training

The Executive Officer will visit school sites and spend time with the Administrators providing media best practices and crisis communications training throughout the school year.

As a goal, the Communications Officer, together with IT will offer training on Google Products to increase efficiencies and decrease reliance on Communications Dept.

Timeline: Throughout the year per capacity

Crisis Communications

In partnership with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Deep River Police, and our educational partners at Renfrew County Catholic (RCCDSB), Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est (CECCE) and Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO), we are leading an effort to create a standardized emergency response infographic for all school sites and District buildings, as well as undertaking an update of the Ministry mandated Local Police and School Board Protocol.

In addition to this County-wide communications plan, we will also be working to complete our own internal RCDSB Crisis Communications plan that aligns with our RCDSB Administrative Procedures and our newly developed Crisis Communications plan with our external community partners.

Per the above item, once a plan is in place the Executive Officer together with SO Safe Schools, will attend Senior Admin on crisis communications updates on the Local Police and School Board Protocol.

Timeline: Ongoing

Enrollment Campaigns

The Communications Department will work on creating an impactful high school and kindergarten enrollment campaign in coordination with local schools and Superintendents. The various campaigns are set to take place from December 2023 - March 2024 in order to align with school events and registration dates.

The goal of these enrollment campaigns is to increase enrollment by reaching a wider audience and showcase the programs, services, facilities, and educational support offered by the RCDSB. To accomplish this, we will need to use new avenues to reach our target audience.

Of note, in Summer 2023 a targeted radio advertisement in the Barry's Bay radio recorded by the Principal of MVDHS was produced to address lower enrollment at that site. This is an example of new ideas being tested.

Timeline: Beginning Fall 2023

Reputational Management

Reputational management is necessary for both internal and external stakeholders:

External Reputational Management

Utilize and create opportunities to showcase excellence at RCDSB, using “earned media” through press releases, and strategically placed media buys on both traditional and social media platforms when needed. Nurture relationships with partners such as municipalities, Garrison Petawawa, and other partner agencies. One example, Senate of Canada and RCDSB event on National Day of Truth and Reconciliation promotion this coming September 28, 2023.

Internal Reputational Management

Internally there are three main groups to consider. Staff, Students and Parents/Guardians. These stakeholders are our most important. The way each speaks about their experience with RCDSB will impact how we are viewed in general. It is important to be responsive, straightforward and listen when communicating with each group. There is a need to hit the right tone and frequency when communicating:

- Too frequent and the risk is that our communications are tuned out;
- not frequent enough and we are not engaging;
- too general in nature, and trust and/or relevance is not established; and,
- too many avenues for communication runs the risk of confusing the audience.

Using analytic tools to assess our interactions and engagement with our stakeholders we will be better able to communicate in a way that is effective and appreciated.

Timeline: Ongoing

Video Campaigns

Social media video campaigns are increasingly an important and necessary way to share information, promote programs, and reach large and targeted audiences. With oversight from the Executive Officer and area specific Superintendents, the Communications Officer will continue working with local company Indigenous Geographic in creating targeted and professional-grade videos centered for the following areas:

- TELT-C's and eLearning (Technology-Enabled Learning and Teaching Environments);
- French as a Second Language Program Expansion (Elementary and Secondary - special highlight on secondary);
- Special Education;
- Indigenous Education (Indigenous Graduation Coaches);
- English as a Second Language;
- Adult and Continuing Education;
- International Education;
- Skilled Trades/SHSM/OYAP;

- Athletics and Extracurricular Activities (ministry Approved);
- Mental Health Services;
- Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression.

Timeline: Completed by June 2024

Website Redevelopment Project – All RCDSB Elementary and Secondary Schools (Phases 2) and Staff Portal (Phase 3)

The Communications Department will be moving forward with Phase 2 of the multi-year Website Redevelopment project that was started in 2019, and has been postponed due to COVID-19 and staff turnover. The project will be managed by the Digital Communications Specialist together with the Communications Officer, and the RCDSB Information Technology (IT) Department.

2022-2023 School Year

- Vendor Selection for Phase 2; (completed)
- Redevelopment plan for all 27 school sites (elementary, secondary, and continuing education); (completed)

2023-2024 School Year

- School Sites to launch by the end of 2023, with soft launch in Fall 2023.
- Begin Phase 3: Staff Portal.
 - Execution and redevelopment of RCDSB Intranet and Staff Portal;
 - New Staff Portal to launch 2024-2025 school year together with IT & HR.

Timeline: Phase 2 and 3, set to resume September 2023.

School Digital Signage – Phase 3

In partnership with RCDSB Facilities, the Communications Department will be working with Facilities to map out a strategic plan to complete this project for the remainder of our RCDSB schools who do not yet have a digital sign. This project is set to resume September 2023, and is being executed and managed by the RCDSB Facilities Department, Communications Department, and the Information Technology (IT Department).

The Communications team has a new AP Digital Sign and Form on track to be approved in 2023-24.

Timeline: Beginning process of vendor selection in September 2023.

DEPARTMENTAL PRIORITY REQUESTS:

Beyond the day-to-day, monthly and annual communication activities, the following are priorities as set out by Superintendents for their departments and oversight responsibilities:

Human Resources:

- Employee Wellbeing initiatives
- Support for engagement and attendance

Health and Safety:

- Proactive teaching and learning in relation to Health and Safety

Corporate Services:

- Website updates budget - June
- financial statements - Nov/December

Adult and Cont. Ed:

- Document in Support of Adult & Continuing Education Vision Exercise (Fall & Winter)

Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression:

- Reporting on student demographic data (Fall)
- Possibly an infographic for best practices in elementary athletics
- Staff demographic data survey (Spring)

Experiential Learning:

- Messaging on Ministry updates.

ICT:

- Implementation of parent portal for September 2024 (Spring)

Early Years & Child Care:

- As required, messaging ongoing updates of the Canada-wide child care program.
- Setting the stage for program review (2024-2025)

Indigenous Education:

- Event with Senate of Canada, Sept 28, 2023
- Ongoing messaging

Families of Schools:

- Madawaska Valley renaming of MVDHS/SHR (Winter)
- School Year Start-Up Communications Package - for September 1st/23

Literacy:

- Develop a communications strategy around new approaches in connection with the Right to Read and Structured Literacy. Build understanding for families around how the approaches to teaching reading have changed in our schools, our screening processes, as well as how parents can support at home if able. (Fall to Winter)
- Develop a strategy that builds understanding of the new language curriculum and also showcases learning in schools. (Fall to Winter)

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

- Develop a communications strategy to build understanding of how mental health and wellbeing are supported in schools. A major focus during the Mental Health Awareness week in May. (Beginning in late winter and into May 2024)
- Develop a communication strategy as an outreach to families, for the launch of mental health modules for Grade 7 and 8 students. (January 2024)
- Develop communication strategy to build awareness around the RCDSB 3-year Mental Health Strategy and the role of School Mental Health Ontario to better communicate the goals and strategies with the system, differentiating between how we share with the staff and the wider community. (October 2023)

School and Board Improvement Planning:

- Graphic design and RCDSB branding for a document outlining new process for School Improvement Planning as it is developed. Communication connected to the newly required Student Achievement Plan as per Ministry requirements. Strategy for engaging with the school community for both school and board improvement plans. (Beginning in September and ongoing throughout the year)

PD Day Communication:

- In accordance with the Better Schools and Outcomes Act, post detailed plans for what will be occurring on PD days in each school. Plan a concise and transparent approach to meet communication requirements. (Beginning in September and ongoing throughout the year)

Rethink at Secondary:

- Ongoing implementation of Rethink documents: *Reaching Every Learner*, *Experiential Learning* and *Transitions*.

International Exchanges:

- Create material and strategy for outreach on international exchanges and excursions.

Math:

- TBD upon receipt of Ministry mandate.