



**Regional School District #4  
Chester – Deep River – Essex – Region 4**

Via Google Meet  
**Dial +1 (617) 675-4444**  
**PIN: 194 839 768 2975#**  
February 22, 2021 @ 6:00 p.m.

**Supervision District Communications Strategy ad hoc Subcommittee**

**To:** Members of the Supervision District Communications Strategy Subcommittee  
**Subject:** Supervision District Communications Strategy Subcommittee Meeting – Mon., February 22, 2021  
**Time:** **6:00 p.m.**  
**Place:** **Via Google Meet – To listen remotely please dial (US) +1 (617) 675-4444 PIN: 194 839 768 2975#**  
(We kindly ask that you **please mute your phone immediately** upon connecting to the meeting as this will improve the audio quality for all participants. Google Meet may do this automatically, depending on the number of people already connected to the call. If so, pressing **\*6** will unmute your phone when it's time to speak)

Please contact Jennifer Bryan at Central Office email [jbryan@reg4.k12.ct.us](mailto:jbryan@reg4.k12.ct.us) if you are unable to attend.

**Mission Statement**

We, the communities of Chester, Deep River, Essex and Region 4, engage all students in a rigorous and collaborative educational program. We prepare our learners to be respectful citizens who are empowered to contribute in a globalized society.

**AGENDA**

- 1. Call to order - meeting facilitator, Lon Seidman**
- 2. Verbal roll call**
- 3. Review Charge of the Committee – L. Seidman**
- 4. Review Current Information and other topics for discussion – (Encl. #1 – #4)**
- 5. Discuss Information Still Needed and Determine Next Steps**
- 6. Select next meeting date (Mar. 10<sup>th</sup> or Mar. 24<sup>th</sup>)**
- 7. Comment.** *(In the interest of creating the best remote meeting experience for all participating parties, we would ask that you please keep your phone on mute until such time when the Chair calls for Public Comment. Please continue to keep your phone on mute unless you are requesting to be recognized by the Chair to make a comment. Once you have been recognized by the Chair to make your comment, the following standard public comment guidelines will still apply): PLEASE NOTE: Upon dialing in, Google Meet may have shared a message that your phone has been automatically muted due to the number of callers on the line and instructed you to press \*6 if you would like to unmute your phone. When you are done speaking, please remember to press \*6 (or your phone's mute button) again to reduce background noise.*

The public is reminded to state name for the record. Comments should be kept to a maximum of three minutes. Public comment is not intended to be a question and answer period; rather it is an opportunity for the Board to hear citizen comment related to educational matters

**8. Adjournment**

Cc: Town Clerks: Chester, Deep River, Essex

## **Bylaws of the Board**

### **Public Statements**

The Board of Education recognizes that communication is a continuous two-way process. The Board believes that it is important to keep the public informed about educational programs, and, in turn, that the community should have the opportunity to provide input.

Communication will be a concurrent responsibility of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent of Schools will work with the members of the Board of Education to conduct an active and comprehensive program throughout the school district and community for the prompt dissemination of information about decisions made at all Board meetings. Releases to the press and brief summaries of Board meeting actions prepared for distribution to staff members and parent/guardians are regarded as appropriate media of information for meeting the requirements of this bylaw. Press releases relative to Board of Education action shall be released only by the Board Chairperson or the delegated agent of the Board.

(cf. 1112.2 - School News Releases)

(cf. 1120 - Board of Education Meetings)

Bylaw adopted by the Board: November 25, 1996

CHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DEEP RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
ESSEX PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4

## ▼ Regional School District #1

## ) ▶ MISSION-GOALS-OBJECTIVES

## ) ▶ COMMUNITY RELATIONS

## ) ▶ ADMINISTRATION - SERVICES

## ) ▶ BUSINESS &amp; NON-INSTRUCTIONAL

## ) ▶ PERSONNEL -- CERTIFIED

## ) ▶ STUDENTS - SERIES 500

## ) ▶ INSTRUCTION - SERIES 900

## ) ▶ CONSTRUCTION - SERIES 900

## ) ▼ BYLAWS OF THE BOARD

☐ 9000☐ 9010☐ 9020☐ 9030☐ 9040☐ 9110☐ 9120☐ 9121☐ 9122☐ 9123☐ 9124☐ 9126☐ 9127☐ 9132☐ 9132.1☐ 9133☐ 9221☐ 9230☐ 9260☐ 9270☐ 9300☐ 9310☐ 9311☐ 9313☐ 9314☐ 9321☐ 9322☐ 9325.1**Bylaws of the Board****Public Statements**

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(cf. 1112.2 - School News Releases)

(cf. 1120 - Board of Education Meetings)

**Bylaw adopted by the Board: November 25, 1996**

Report of the  
Long Range Plan  
Communications Committee

Columbia Public Schools  
July 13, 2015

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### Charge to the LRP Communications Committee

The committee will develop a comprehensive Communication Plan for all our constituents to solicit input, promote our successes, address our challenges and provide direction for future progress. Based upon the input yielded through the process, the Committee will draft a proposal for review and approval by the Columbia Board of Education.

Specifically, the Committee will:

1. Develop a common understanding of what is meant by effective community engagement
2. Assess the current standing of community engagement between the district and its various constituencies
3. Develop a framework for a plan to improve community engagement
4. Prepare a proposal for improving communication that includes implementation milestones for Board of Education review and approval

The first meeting of the Communication Committee will be Tuesday, March 10. The committee will operate between March 2015 and June 2015.

## Long Range Communications Committee Membership

Linette Dooley	Board of Education
Tom Doyle	Teacher
Kerry Hoffman	Board of Education Chairperson
Michael Kenyon	Assistant Principal/Data Coordinator
Lorraine McLeish	Teacher
Corey Polakowski	Teacher
Paula Shepard	Parent
Nick Carusso	Facilitator (CABE)
Warren Logee	Facilitator

## Part 1 – Definition of “Effective Community Engagement”

**“Authentic engagement is a substantive give-and-take with those who have a vested interest in the decisions being made.”**

Source: Hanover Research  
Community Engagement and Advocacy by School Boards  
August 2013

**“The purpose of community engagement is to ensure that school improvement is done with the community, not to the community.”**

Source: The Reform Support Network  
Strategies for Community Engagement in School Turnaround  
March 2004

### **The Communications Committee agrees that community engagement:**

- is an ongoing, continuous and long-term process;
- uses a variety of communication strategies to reach the full community;
- involves listening to and deliberating with members of the public;
- seeks to find common ground among stakeholders;
- centers on policy concerns rather than day-to-day operations.

Community engagement must be intentional, strategic and sustained over time.



## Part II – Assessment of Current Community Engagement

The Columbia School District educates children from Columbia attending Horace W. Porter School (HWP pre-K to 8); Bolton High School, E.O. Smith High School in Mansfield, and Windham Technical School in Willimantic (grades 9 through 12).

Key constituencies to the Columbia School District include:

- HWP teachers/staff/administrators
- HWP students
- high school students
- parents/families
- PTO
- town officials
- town services (e.g. recreation department, senior center, library)
- Columbia residents
- local businesses
- civic organizations (e.g. Lions, scouts)
- real estate agents
- religious institutions
- HWP alumni/families
- staff and administration at receiving high schools
- BOE in Bolton, Mansfield, Willimantic
- media/editorial contacts covering the area

To date, no formal assessment of either the current state of community engagement or public awareness of district programs/communications has been done among constituencies.

A survey conducted with the LRP Steering Committee on October 1, 2014 provided some input on 12 areas of community engagement (Appendix I). A formal survey aimed at a larger community sample would help the district better understand how well informed and engaged constituents are.

Based upon limited feedback from parents, town officials and residents, it is clear that district communications programs need to be expanded and, formal two-way communications channels need to be established.

## Part III – Framework for Plan to Improve Community Engagement

Communications programs designed to increase awareness of district programs/policy and to solicit feedback from key communities involve a three-step process.

### Step 1: Articulate the Message

<p>1. <u>What Is The Message?</u></p> <p>All messages should be conveyed in a concise and direct manner. They should communicate relevant information about school news (facts), education strategy, or decisions of interest to the district's key constituencies.</p>
<p>2. <u>Who Is the Messenger*?</u></p> <p>The messenger or communication source should be clear within the message. Is the communication coming from the superintendent of schools, HWP administration, a grade-level teaching team, others within the district organization?</p> <p>*No matter who the messenger is, either the superintendent or a designated HWP administrator should be the filter for all public communication, overseeing the message and its distribution.</p>
<p>3. <u>What Is the Timing and the Cycle?</u></p> <p>What is the required deadline or best time for the message to go out? Is it an ongoing message that will need to be repeated or a one-time communication?</p>
<p>4. <u>Does the Message Require Feedback?</u></p> <p>Many messages simply deliver facts. Some messages are sent out in order to solicit input and feedback. If feedback is desired or required, how should it be collected? What should be done in response to it? Do we need to communicate in response to the feedback?</p>
<p>5. <u>Is the Message Proactive or Reactive?</u></p> <p>Is this communication sending out new information or is it correcting inaccuracies or dispelling rumors?</p>

## Step 2: Identify Potential Target Audiences

### What Communities/Constituencies are Interested in or Affected by the Message?

Key constituencies for the district were listed in Part 2 (page 7) of this document. This list can be grouped and simplified into the following categories:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HWP faculty/staff - employees of the school</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HWP community - students, parents, families, volunteers</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District - Columbia residents and leaders, high school families, feeding school systems and BOE (Bolton, Windham and Mansfield), local businesses and organizations, etc.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greater Columbia community - surrounding towns, media/editorial contacts, statewide education and political leadership, regional businesses and organizations</li></ul>

By identifying target audiences and discerning the breadth of the message, we begin to understand the best ways to reach these groups, and the best vehicles to employ for effective communication.

### Step 3: Determine the Method

The final step in developing communications that will engage the community is determining the most effective tactics to reach the audiences who will benefit from the message. How will the district most effectively reach its communities/constituents? What communication tactics will best deliver a feedback loop if one is needed?

Communication vehicles available to the district include:

- School Newsletter
- Email
- Mailings
- Brochures/Flyers
- Columbia School District/HWP web site
- Social Media
  - FaceBook \*
  - Instagram
  - Twitter
  - LinkedIn
  - YouTube
- Educational Forums/Meetings
- Events/Open Houses
- Focus Groups
- Public Access Television
- Newspapers/Magazines (daily, weekly, Columbia Crossroads)
- Radio
- TV news
- Signage in and outside of HWP school building
  - Community sign on town green
  - Bulletin Boards

Certain communication vehicles naturally invite feedback: social media, public events, meetings, email. Others are one-directional and best for putting out fact-based communications that require no feedback loop. Decisions about methods of communication tie directly back to both the target audience and the message.

\*Currently at least four Facebook pages reference Porter School in Columbia CT: Horace W. Porter PTO (the official PTO page), Horace Porter PTO, Horace W. Porter School (lists itself as an unofficial page), and Horace Porter School Parent Community (the longstanding unaffiliated parent site). The Columbia School District and HWP School do not control any of these pages, a situation that should be addressed ASAP.



## Part IV – Proposal for Improved Communication

Before a communications plan for the Columbia School District and Horace W. Porter School can be developed and effectively implemented, representatives from administration and the Board of Education must address certain questions and concerns. Without further input, the communications plan would not be strategy-based and success of the effort will be difficult to measure.

This section of the proposal and the remainder of this document will provide recommendations about next steps required to develop and implement a communication plan.

### Recommendation 1: Identify Purpose and Objectives

Administration, BOE members and any other key district representatives should come to an agreement about:

1. The purpose of the communication program
2. The prioritization of audiences and,
3. Specific short- and long-term goals and objectives that communication outreach should achieve.

### Recommendation 2: Update District Communication Policy

The BOE must develop and approve a district policy on communication that will go beyond the existing policy - which focuses mostly on BOE meeting conduct - and expand it to include discussions of: internal and external communications, social media usage, oversight and control of communications outreach, media contact, designated spokespersons, responsible parties and other issues.

### Recommendation 3: Establish Official Social Media Presence

The district and HWP should investigate ownership of the existing Facebook pages affiliated with the school and attempt to eliminate all but the official PTO page. The district and HWP should then investigate establishing an official page for the school system on Facebook, as well as a presence on other available social media including Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

#### **Recommendation 4: Re-establish HWP Newsletter**

The HWP parent newsletter was discontinued within the past year due to parent complaints about receiving too many emails. Now parents feel that they are receiving insufficient communication from the school.

The committee recommends that HWP reintroduce a parent newsletter designed to communicate only important news and upcoming events relevant to the school and the district.

Community news, library programs, recreation department information and other listings can be included on the district web site. Links to this community information could also be included on electronic versions of the newsletter so readers can easily access community group web sites.

#### **Recommendation 5: Formation of Ad Hoc Communications Committee**

The district and HWP should establish an Ad Hoc Communication Committee whose purpose is to finalize a communications plan for the district, make recommendations about ongoing strategic communications efforts and oversee the district's communication programs. This committee would meet throughout the calendar year to discuss upcoming events, news, policy changes and initiatives.

#### **Recommendation 6: Review Crisis Communications**

Administration, BOE and the Ad Hoc Communications Committee should work together to identify potential crises the district and the school has experienced and could potentially face. The communication plan should put in place strategies for how these events could be most effectively and efficiently handled, taking into consideration the concerns of students, parents, staff and the community as a whole.

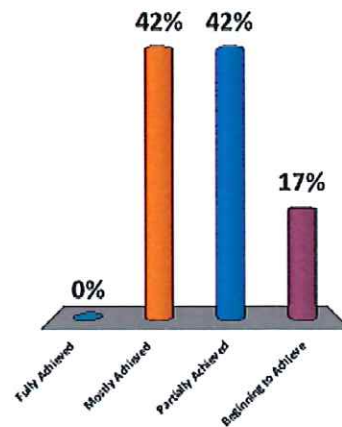
#### **Recommendation 7: Determine Responsibility Hierarchy**

To be effective, all communications must be regular and ongoing. A designated communications professional\* should be charged with executing the communications plan once it is finalized and adhering to the policies and protocols established by administration and the BOE.

\*The district must determine if this person will be an existing staff member OR if a new staff position will be created OR if a freelance communications consultant would be hired OR if another solution could be implemented.

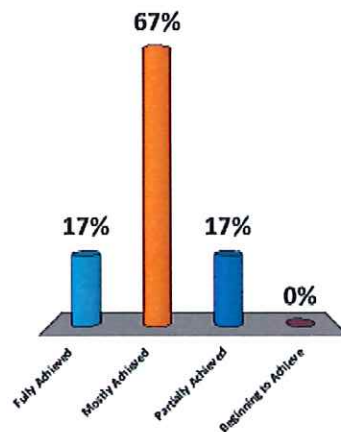
We understand that collaboration begins with us.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



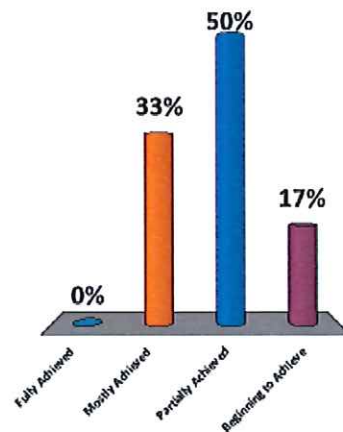
We treat each other, the superintendent, staff, students, parents and community with respect.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



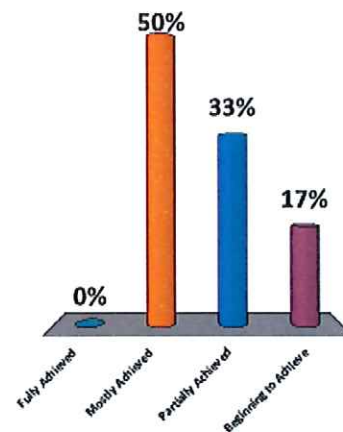
We take time to reflect on and improve our own internal and external relationships.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



We view our communication with staff and the community as a two-way process.

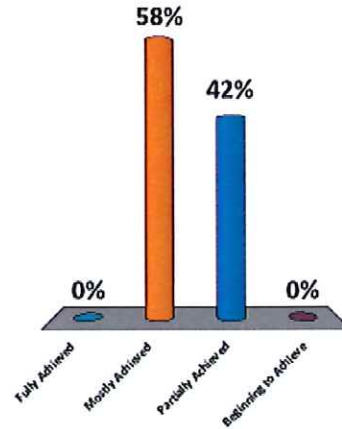
- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve





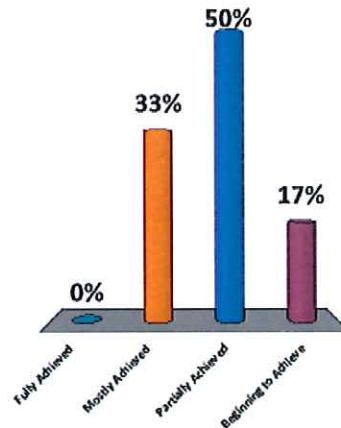
We have policies and practices in place to encourage parents to be active partners in their children's education.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



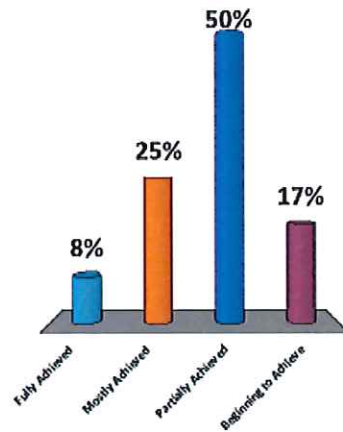
We encourage parents to share responsibility for the success of schools and students in pursuit of the common good.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



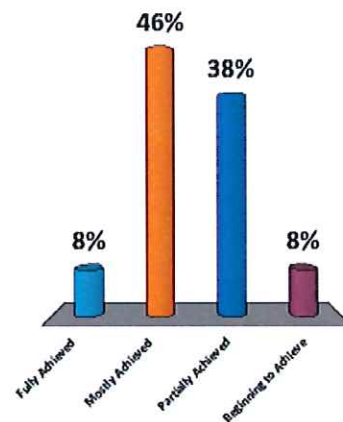
We provide opportunities for community input into key actions for the board.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



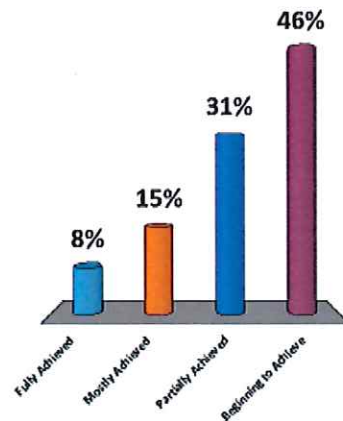
Our priorities and student performance standards reflect community needs and interests.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



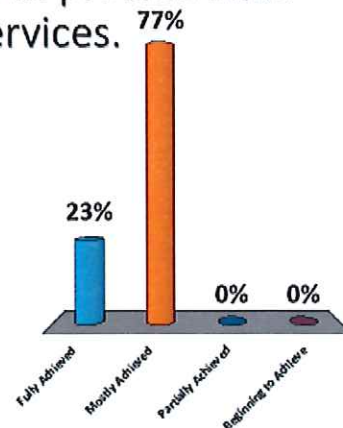
We build partnerships with the business community and others that promote high student achievement as the top priority.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



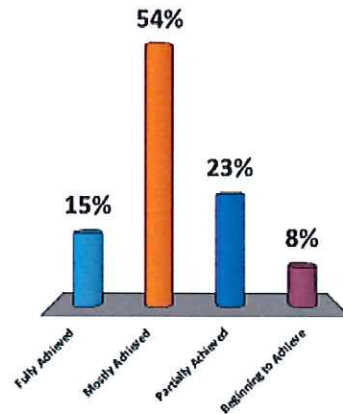
We support staff efforts to build collaborative relationships with other agencies (e.g., social services, police, juvenile justice) to provide child and family centered services.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



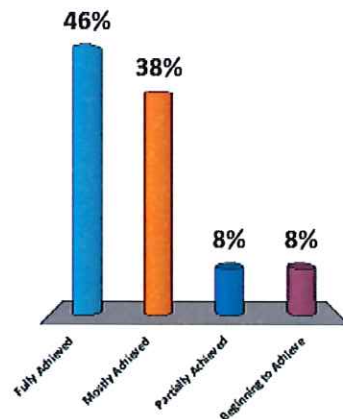
We recognize, as a board, that our leadership responsibilities extend beyond the district to include state and national issues.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve



We communicate regularly with elected officials to ensure that public schools are and continue to be a top priority.

- A. Fully Achieved
- B. Mostly Achieved
- C. Partially Achieved
- D. Beginning to Achieve





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# COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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April 2018

**BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Bruce Devlin, Chairman  
David Palmer, Vice Chairman  
Rick Lees, Secretary  
Jeremy Anderson  
Barbara Capuano  
Anne Kirkpatrick  
Jan Martin  
Kate McLellan  
Sarah Moynihan Bollinger

**ADMINISTRATION**

Central Office

Brian P. Czapla, Superintendent  
William Boutwell, Business Manager  
Jim MacFeat, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds  
Denise Messina, Director of Pupil Services  
Rob Wilson, Director of Technology  
Irene Zytka, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Somers Elementary School

Jennifer Oliver, Principal  
Dina Senecal, Asst. Principal

Mabelle B. Avery School

Clay Krevolin, Principal  
Rob Kapner, Asst. Principal

Somers High School

Gary Cotzin, Principal  
Dan Carroll, Asst. Principal

## Overview

The Somers Public Schools is committed to providing students with the best possible learning environments and opportunities. To achieve this, we must consider a multi-tiered approach to education. Included in this approach is the need to establish and maintain open and efficient communications. The public must understand the school system's story in order to support our educational programming.

## Principles

This plan was developed to assure:

1. All communications support the school system's goals
2. Two-way communications with all Somers constituents
3. The school district's "story" is accurately told
4. Transparency in school district operations

## Audiences

### External

- Businesses
- First responders
- Legislators
- Media
- Parents
- Parent/Teacher Organizations
- Realtors
- Religious leaders
- Senior Citizens
- Somers Education Foundation
- Somers municipal governing bodies
- Somers town agencies
- Surrounding school systems
- Taxpayers

### Internal

- Administrators
- Board of Education
- Non-certified staff
- Students
- Support staff
- Teachers



## Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

### I. Community

Facilitate meaningful and open communications with the Somers community.

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
A. Build connections with community members	1. Superintendent Blog to answer questions and update community
B. Facilitate two-way communication	2. Utilize social media to promote school system
C. Facilitate community and BOE engagement opportunities	3. Revamp Campus View structure, content, and frequency
D. Responsibly utilize a variety of media	4. Participate in community forums where appropriate
	5. Invite public to special events
	6. Increase visibility at schools and community events
	7. Host “town-hall” events or forums when appropriate
	8. Meet with Somers Education Foundation monthly or when appropriate



## II. Student / Parents

Facilitate meaningful and open communications with the Somers Public Schools students and parents.

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
A. Develop meaningful communications with parents and students to assure their voices are heard	1. Superintendent Blog to answer questions and update community 2. Parent notification system
B. Increase recognition of parents and students internally and externally for their accomplishments	3. Student reporting at BOE meetings 4. Focus groups organized as appropriate
C. Responsibly distribute school information to students and parents	5. Inclusion in the strategic planning process 6. Recognize outstanding parents and students at BOE meetings 7. Attend PTO meetings regularly to provide updates 8. Expand use of social media 9. Develop uniform newsletter schedule from schools. 10. Increase visibility at school and community events 11. Increase access and use of PowerSchool 12. Establish anonymous student reporting system

### III. Media

Establish and maintain collegial relationships with media outlets to enhance school district's image.

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
A. Partner with media to promote positive stories in Somers Public Schools	1. Press-releases, briefings and photo opportunities
B. Establish and expand professional relations with the media	2. Letters to the editor of local papers 3. Establish monthly article for local media

#### IV. Staff

Enhance communications with staff making information acquisition and dissemination more frequent, efficient, and uniform.

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
A. Increase staff communication skills	1. Develop new employee induction program and introduction video
B. Provide necessary, resources and professional development	2. Use email to communicate with staff frequently on school and community issues
C. Utilize effective communications strategies to develop trusting relationships	3. Superintendent to attend staff meetings to address concerns and answer questions
D. Streamline administrative and communications processes	4. Recognize employees for their accomplishments and contributions at BOE meetings, Campus View and via parent notification system
	5. Expand use of parent notification system to the teachers
	6. Integrate business systems and technology to streamline administrative tasks
	7. Develop communications in-service workshops.

**V. Crisis Communications**

Develop crisis communication plans to inform parents, students and a community in an effective and efficient manner.

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
A. Develop detailed crisis management plans	1. Crisis management and communications training and ongoing professional development
B. Provide timely and accurate information to internal and external audiences	2. Post reunification sites and procedures for parents
C. Develop pre-determined chain of command and incident commanders	3. Frequently update demographic information
D. Partner with media to provide accurate and timely information	4. Utilize social media
	5. Update website to have a dedicated crisis management section
	6. Update All Hazards Plan and sub-plans annually
	7. Review all crisis team plans and protocols with staff annually
	8. Establish media protocols for emergency incidents
	9. Consult and include local emergency management officials in planning
	10. Identify, acquire and utilize internal communications tools and resources

## **Protocols**

### **Outside Organization Information Dissemination**

Any outside agency that wishes to have a flyer sent home via the parent communications system must get the approval of the Superintendent and generally meet the following criteria:

1. Must not contradict the Somers Public School mission, values or policies
2. Must have a direct benefit for the students of Somers Public Schools
3. Must be a non-profit entity
4. Other as determined by the Superintendent

All outside agency distributions will be emailed (pending approval of the Superintendent) every Friday. They will be grouped together as one email.

Individual parents cannot utilize the parent communications system for dissemination of information.

### **School Newsletters**

Each school will send home newsletters via the parent notification system on the first Monday of the month (October-June).

The back to school newsletter will be email home via the parent notification system the first week after Labor Day.

### **Board of Education Meetings**

- Student/Parent/Staff Recognition – 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the month
- High School Student Report – 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the month

### **Campus View**






- October – Welcome back to School Edition
- March – Budget Edition
- June – End of the School Year Edition

### Field Trip Communications (Emergencies)

It is the expectation the Principal will communicate any emergency information (e.g. delayed return) to the parents of students on a field trip. While the students may choose to communicate with their parents, the official information should be coming from the Principal via email, text, and/or voice.

- When the roster of the field trip is known, a temporary list must be created in SchoolMessenger. This will be used by the Principal to send the official communications to the parents (list should be deleted upon completion of the trip).
- Teachers who go on Field Trips must have both building administrators cell phones with them.
- Principals will inform staff of this emergency communications protocol when they leave for a field trip.
- Principals must have cell phone access while students are on a field trip. It is essential that chaperones have access to you for emergency purposes (this includes after hours if the field trip).

### Communications Matrix

Type of Information	 Website	 Email	 Phone Call	 Text Message	 Social Media
General Info	✓	✓		✓	
Emergency	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Early Dismissal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Delayed Opening	✓	✓		✓	
School Closures (weather related)	✓	✓		✓	✓
Forms	✓				
Promotional (non-school)		✓			

*Note: the above matrix is a guide. Every effort will be made to adhere to this guide. Circumstance may dictate deviations.*



## **Sources and References**

### **Excelsior Springs School District Communications Plan 2016-2017**

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### **School Communications Planning Guide; Campus Suite**

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