



Rio Linda Union School District

Communications Plan

Providing the communication that builds trust, confidence, and collaboration for the RLUSD core purpose of guiding extraordinary achievement for children.

Communication Plan Objectives

Defining Audiences, Promoting Collaboration

The RLUSD is the Sacramento area's largest elementary school district and includes 22 schools and more than 10,000 students from preschool to 8th grade. The district serves children in a wide geographical area covering Rio Linda, North Highlands, McClellan Park, Foothill Farms, and parts of Natomas. Students and staff in the RLUSD represent a wide variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity presents a unique challenge and opportunity for district communication. The audience populations must be considered in planning the best communication tools, messages, and timing. The feedback of our diverse community provides valuable communication lessons and guidance.

This plan will analyze the audiences, messages, challenges, and resources of the RLUSD in an effort to provide a thoughtful and deliberate approach to district-wide communication. The plan will be a living document, adjusting to the changing realities of the RLUSD internal and external environments, and will be updated annually to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the district.

The plan will begin with a solid quantitative foundation, a baseline assessment of internal and external perceptions of the district. Where these statistics exist, they will be analyzed for the areas that can be improved. In the areas where little data is available, surveys and studies will be planned to create the baseline. These baseline statistics will create the starting point in measuring the effectiveness of communication efforts and will guide future versions of the plan as well as communication tactics and tools going forward.

Key Audiences of the RLUSD

1. **Staff**—The staff of the district fall into two distinct categories. The classified staff include maintenance, custodial para-educators, bus drivers, and administrative staff who are not certificated. As of October 2006, there were more than 514 staff in this category. The second group is the certificated staff, and this includes all teachers as well as administrative staff who are certificated. There are approximately 626 teachers in the district (as of 9/06.)

The teachers can be grouped into two communication audiences. The first is the older and usually more experienced generation of teachers. The second group are younger teachers, mostly under 40 years of age, who tend to be slightly more open to change and progressive ideas. In communicating with the classified and certificated staff, there should be some consideration of the state of contracts and/or negotiations if relevant. Most staff of the RLUSD have access to an e-mail account, although in some cases these accounts are not checked regularly.

2. **Parents and Students**—The parents and students of the RLUSD are very diverse, representing multiple languages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations. At schools like Ridgepoint and Rio Linda Elementary, 75 percent of the students have stayed continuously enrolled. However, at other school including Aero Haven, Joyce, Kohler, and Oakdale, the percentage continuously enrolled is in the 50s.

The percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged families in the district appears to be growing each year, according to the number of free and reduced lunch participants. In the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 61 percent of RLUSD students received free or reduced lunches. In 2005-2006, (most recent year with data) approximately 68 percent of students were participating. The percentage of English Learner Students is also growing. In the 2000-2001

school year, approximately 20 percent of students were English Learners, and in 2005-2006, that number has grown to more than 30 percent.

As would be expected in relation to the English Learner population, the ethnic diversity of our district continues to become more ethnically diverse. In the past six years there has been steady growth in the Latino population (17% to 26%) and a decline in the white population (60% to 48%). The other ethnic groups have fluctuated slightly over the same period. Some members of the Student/Parent audience have access to the internet and some do not. The majority of the population has access to a telephone, and can also be accessed through materials sent home with students.

3. **Local Businesses**—This population includes the business owners and staff in and around the schools of the RLUSD. Businesses that currently provide goods or services to the district are also included. This population can be a valuable audience in that they include opinion leaders that influence residents on local issues and can provide valuable resources and opportunities to the students and staff of the RLUSD.
4. **Community Organizations**—A partial list of the organizations that serve the North Highlands, Foothill Farms, McClellan Park and Rio Linda communities includes: the Rio Linda/Elverta Chamber of Commerce, Rio Linda/Elverta Community Planning Council, Community Rio Linda/Elverta Historical Society, Rio Linda/Elverta Recreation and Park District, Sacramento County Commissions, North Highlands/Foothill Farms Community Planning Advisory Council, North Highlands Recreation and Park District, Antelope/Highlands Chamber of Commerce, Sunrise Recreation and Park District, the Foothill-Highlands Rotary Club, Beanstalk, Headstart, Mercy Hospitals and the North Sacramento Community Service Center.

These organizations make up a very important audience for our district in that they are serving the same families and can be a valuable resource for sharing information and resources. They all have at least a general e-mail address for electronic communication. Some of these organizations do not list phone numbers. Many have regular monthly meetings.

5. **Residents**—This audience represents the population not included as parents or as businesses/organizations. These are the residents in the RLUSD who can potentially vote on school measures such as bonds and board representatives. According to state-wide surveys, about 25 percent of the residents have children attending schools in the RLUSD. In addition, approximately 62 percent of the RLUSD classified employees live in our district's residential boundaries. This population is also very diverse, representing multiple languages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations. Some members of this audience have access to the internet and some do not. The majority of this population has access to a telephone.
6. **Media**—There are three smaller neighborhood papers that serve the RLUSD communities. These include the North Highlands News, the Rio Linda News, and the Natomas Journal. The district currently enjoys a strong relationship with all three of these publications. The Sacramento Bee North Sacramento section is another potential outlet, but is more competitive because it includes downtown Sacramento and several school districts. The Sacramento Bee also has a reader photo posting area that could be a good venue for promoting positive district events. There are also several smaller publications that could serve as informational vehicles for the RLUSD. The Sacramento Business Journal covers mostly the commercial sector in Sacramento, but could potentially be appropriate for a story depending on the angle. The Sacramento

Observer is a small weekly paper that cover African American issues in Sacramento. The Sacramento Union I is a small daily conservative newspaper. "N" Magazine is a monthly magazine devoted to the Natomas area issues.

The television media include KCRA (Channel 3), KVIE (Channel 6) KXTV (Channel 10), KOVR (Channel 13), KUVS (Channel 19 Univision, Spanish-speaking), KMAX (Channel 31) and KXTL (Channel 40). The local radio stations include KFBK (AM 1530), KCTC (AM 1530) and KXJZ (FM 88.9 and 90.9, NPR).

There are two types of interaction with the media audience. One is in dealing with a school emergency or public relations issue in which the media is requesting information. The other is pro-actively feeding media outlets information about district events and issues that the administration would like the public to know about. In either case, the development of positive relationships with members of these audiences is crucial to the way the RLUSD is presented by the media.

Key Messages of the RLUSD

The administration of the RLUSD has identified several key objectives for the 2006-2007 school year and many of these can be translated into key messages to be communicated through communication strategies, programs, and policies. These key messages include:

1. *The RLUSD teaches through the use of a rigorous curriculum.*
2. *The RLUSD meets the educational needs of all children.*
3. *The RLUSD involves the community in the educational process.*
4. *The RLUSD maintains a highly qualified and motivated employee group.*
5. *The RLUSD provides quality facilities and support services for students and staff.*
6. *The RLUSD cultivates technology that improves the district and school operations.*

Challenges

Each organization faces challenges in getting the correct messages out to each of their audience groups. The RLUSD is no different. It is important to understand and acknowledge the unique challenges our district faces in communicating our key messages. Some of the primary challenges include:

1. **Perception of community**—The name of the district leads many members of the community to believe that only the Rio Linda area is served by our district. In addition, the Rio Linda area struggles with the perception that the community is socio-economically depressed and culturally unsophisticated, a view that can be a challenge to counter.

However, this belief can create a unique communication opportunity. While the general perception is that most of the areas in the RLUSD are low-income and simple, it often comes as a great surprise when people learn of the high-achieving scores of our successful schools or the progressive programs offered. This "surprise" angle makes the good news in the district more note-worthy because it is unexpected. However, when negative things happen, and they will

happen in every school district, it is this general perception that is the easiest storyline for the media and the general public.

1. **Limited mainstream media access**—The Telecommunications Act of 1996 had a tremendous effect on coverage of local and community news. The act led to historic industry consolidation, reducing the number of major media companies from around 80 in 1986, to 5 in 2005. With this consolidation and the deletion of the requirement to offer public service announcement time, many stations now receive national feeds for their news and have reduced the staff and resources dedicated to covering local events. This makes it very difficult to get school news covered, particularly with television stations which require film. With most newspaper and radio stations, a story might still get covered if the staff-strapped local stations are provided with pre-written scripts and/or articles with photos. This challenge makes nurturing positive media relationships even more important.
2. **Limited staffing and resources**—As a school district, many structural resources come through the taxes paid by the local community. While the district leadership understands the importance of good communication, it is difficult to sell the idea of putting tax-payer resources into “marketing” the district. It is for this reason that in many districts there is no communications or public information staff. While the RLUSD is fortunate to have a full-time Communications Officer position, it is just one person. This makes it very important for the Communications Office to create beneficial relationships with members of the community, media, and other audiences—spreading the effect of the efforts of the one staff member when possible.
3. **Geographic, socio-economic, and cultural diversity**—The RLUSD encompasses several distinct communities, including North Natomas, Rio Linda, North Highlands, McClellan Park and Foothill Farms. Each of these areas has a community “personality” of its own. North Natomas is a relatively new community, most of the homes in the planned development were built within the past five years. Members of this community are ethnically diverse, but socio-economically homogeneous. The community is usually included in general Sacramento statistics and data related to the North Natomas area specifically was not available. This area is located in the western-most part of the district. This community is going to grow as a percentage of the RLUSD, as two new schools are planned for the area.

Rio Linda is located east of Natomas and is the oldest community in the RLUSD. The first school in the district, Rio Linda School, was constructed in 1917. The area has a pretty stable student population, with each of the schools posting consistent enrollment percentages in the high 60’s to mid 70’s. According to the most recent census, the population is approximately 80 percent white, with percentages less than 4 percent of every other ethnicity. The median income for the Rio Linda area is \$52,740, slightly higher than the median for Sacramento County.

North Highlands and McClellan Park are located east of Rio Linda and are much more ethnically diverse. Slightly more than 60 percent of the households are classified as white, 15 percent are Latino, 11 percent are African American, and about 6 percent are Asian. The median income for the area is about \$39,000, much lower (\$13,000) than the average for Sacramento County. The McClellan Park Community is home to Serna Village, a community helping formerly homeless families, children and adults with the transition from the streets to self-sufficiency. Located on the former McClellan Air Force Base, Serna Village is home to approximately 80 students who attend Joyce Elementary School in the RLUSD.

Foothill Farms is located just east of North Highlands and mirrors the ethnic diversity of its neighbor. Approximately 63 percent of the families are white, almost 15 percent are Latino, 13 percent are African American, and 4 percent are Asian. The median income is \$45,569, about \$7,000 less than the median for Sacramento County.

As described above, the five geographic areas served by the RLUSD are very different and these differences must be taken into consideration when crafting messages and choosing communication strategies and tools. For example, all households do not have internet access, and some do not have phone access (getting real numbers from John B.). Many of the district's households do not speak English, or are English Learners. In addition, in some areas the students are very mobile, so messages must be communicated more often to be sure they have been received and it makes measurement of the communication activities more difficult.

Resources

The RLUSD is fortunate to have a number of resources that are helpful in the planning and implementation of communication strategies. Several of the top assets are listed below:

1. **Quality Schools and Scores**—The RLUSD has improved the median API scores at district schools by 13 percent in the last year, compared to an improvement rate of just eight percent by other Sacramento-area districts. RLUSD has eight schools that have been recognized as California Distinguished schools, and nine schools that have been recognized as Title 1 Achieving Schools. This year, the district received its first National Blue Ribbon Award at the Westside Preparatory Charter School. Three RLUSD schools have exceeded the overall State API goal with scores of more than 800.
2. **Quality Personnel and Leadership**—The RLUSD is one of the few districts that can boast fully credentialed teachers in every classroom. In fact, the RLUSD boasts the highest level of qualified teachers of the 16 Sacramento districts, according to the Teacher Qualification Index. In addition, all Instructional Aides and Para-Educators are compliant to No Child Left Behind standards. Our financial management have ensured that the RLUSD has received a clear and unqualified financial audit for more than nine years in a row. Our Board of Trustees ran unopposed during the most recent election and have each served long terms with the RLUSD so they are extremely familiar with the district.
3. **Community Connections**—The RLUSD leadership team has established quality relationships with community organizations in each of the district neighborhoods.
4. **In-house Print Shop**—Our district has the unique ability to print black and white publications internally. In addition, we have limited color printing capability.
5. **In-house Transportation**—District buses can transport groups to and from special events.
6. **School PIO Community**—The Sacramento area has a School Public Information Officers group that acts as a sounding board and provides valuable communication templates to one another.
7. **Local Media Relationships**—The Rio Linda and North Highlands News are extremely helpful in getting district messages out to the community.
8. **School Site Relationships**— Principals and staff at the school site level have formed positive

relationships with their local communities.

9. **Collection of Contact Information**—Parents fill out emergency cards at the beginning of each year which provide valuable contact information and preferences.
10. **Geographic, Socio-economic, and Cultural Diversity**—The feedback of our diverse community provides valuable communication lessons and guidance on how to reach different populations within our audience.
11. **NTI Phone System**—This system allows the RLUSD to contact every household in the staff and student/parent audiences in about 15 minutes.
12. **Positive Union/District Relationships**—The RLEA and CSEA have partnered with the district to promote employee programs in their newsletters, and contribute funds each year for the annual Back-to-School event for employees.

Current Perceptions

Based on the parent survey conducted in April 2005, the district is scoring relatively high with parents. On a scale of 1 to 4, the survey results on 30 questions are 3.32 (My child receives the type and amount of homework appropriate to his/her education) to 3.53 (My school encourages my child to be responsible and successful.) Just as important, the three-year comparison of scores shows a gain in each question. Of particular note are the high scores in two important areas, being pleased with the school overall (3.50) and their child enjoys learning (3.50), both indicators that the schools are successful with students and their parents. However, the parent survey currently measures only the school that the child attends, not the district. While a certain level of satisfaction can be transferred to the district, it is difficult to know exactly how the parents feel about the district, its practices, and key messages. Additional information could be gathered in a district-level survey.

Current Communication Practices

It is helpful to explore the variety of current communication practices in the effort to create a district-wide communication plan. In many cases, the current practices have been created with good reason and still serve a very valuable purpose. In other cases, we might find that the current practices no longer serve the needs of the district's changing audiences, objectives, and messages.

1. **Newsletters**—There are currently two district newsletters and approximately 22 school site-based newsletters. One of the district newsletters is created for the parent audience. That newsletter is only slightly modified for the employee and retiree audience. There is currently no newsletter for local businesses, community organizations, residents, or the media. **Recommendation:** *Consolidate district newsletters into one publication for employees, retirees, and make available to local businesses, community organizations, residents and media. Provide district-level content for school site publications for parents. Create an informal employee space on the RLUSD intranet to share family news items such as weddings, births, and promotions.*
2. **Media Relations**—There is a close relationship between the administrative staff at the RLUSD

and the Rio Linda and North Highlands News publications. The Natomas Journal has an on-going relationship with the administration of the only school site located in their publication boundaries, Regency Park Elementary School. These media contacts are routinely invited to participate in the RLUSD's Key Communicator events. Relationships are being established with KCRA (Channel3) and the Sacramento Bee North Sacramento editor. Many of the other stations were re-introduced to the district and the new Communications Officer during the recent gas leak incident at Foothill Oaks Elementary School and the fire at Oakdale Elementary. While these relationships had a positive beginning in that information was provided them timely and accurately, there is much room for an active media outreach campaign. **Recommendation: Provide regular updates to the media in the form of the monthly newsletter, calendar of promotional items, and media alerts/releases when appropriate. Continue key communicators events and cultivate informal relationships with additional media outlets.**

3. **Brochures**—Several brochures have been created by the district to promote programs at various times. A partial list of these brochures includes:

- “Welcome to Your Board of Trustees Meeting” - documents the meeting procedures
- “The Rio Linda Educational Foundation” -describes the RLEF
- “RLUSD Community Report” - district overview
- “Creative Connections” -describes CCAC program
- “CCAC Cover” - cover page/fact sheet for the CCAC application
- “Westside Preparatory Charter School” - describes charter program
- “RLUSD General” -Smaller version of the community report
- “Measure N” - describes need and provides arguments for the measure
- “Measure P” - describes need and provides arguments for the measure
- “Program Enhancements” - description of enhancements adopted by the trustees
- Various Personnel Brochures - a variety of publications that describe the benefits and programs available to RLUSD employees.

While brochures can be a valuable resource for communicating messages, most of the brochures listed above are stored in a centralized place and are generally not known throughout the district. A central repository of these items might make them more widely utilized and the message more widely dispersed. **Recommendation: Collect the list of all publications and make them available on a district intranet so that staff at every site can access them easily and know what is available. Make all future publications available on the intranet.**

4. **Calendar**—Updated each year, these school-year calendars are provided to the parents and staff and provide valuable information about RLUSD programs and schools. **Recommendation: Separate the two documents into a “school handbook” which includes a form for parents to sign and return, and a calendar which references the information with links to its location on the RLUSD web site.**

5. **Holiday Cards**—Also updated each year, these cards are sent out by the superintendent to staff and members of the community. This program could be strengthened by allowing additional staff to send these officially signed (by the Trustees) cards out to local businesses and community organizations that assist at the school level. **Recommendation: Continue this practice and make the cards available on an intranet for wider usage. Make a database available so that duplicate cards are not sent. Consider sending a congratulations on your first year card at the end of each employee's first year.**

6. **Posters**—"The Picture of Success" themed posters were developed and printed and sent to some of the schools in the district during the past year. The poster provides a positive perspective with pictures of RLUSD students excelling in the classroom. In addition, "Path to College" posters were provided to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders this year. **Recommendation: Continue to send "college" posters to students as they are available.**

7. **Wind Blades**—District wind blades were purchased during the last year as accessories for large meetings or gatherings. **Recommendation: Continue use of wind blades at special events. Make wind blades available for all school events and create easy and simple process for reserving them.**

8. **Web site**—The RLUSD web site has been operating for more than 11 years on a very small operating budget. The site provides mostly accurate basic data about schools and allows teachers to have a classroom site. The general information is very centrally controlled and could use more regular updating. There are plans for the RLUSD Technology Services Department to provide training to the administrative services staff so that more regular updating can occur. In addition, the department is considering a host of upgrades to the site in the near future. At this point, they are collecting ideas and potential vendors. **Recommendation: host a series of focus groups with parents, teachers, students, community members, and local businesses to collect guidance on the direction and scope of the web site upgrade.**

Communication Plan by Message

Message 1: *The RLUSD teaches through the use of a rigorous curriculum.*

Sub-messages:

- A. RLUSD schools use a rigorous, standards-based curriculum approved by the CDE.
- B. RLUSD schools are excellent, challenging, and award-winning.
- C. RLUSD students are prepared for success in their secondary education.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents and students, local businesses, residents, media.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages:

Evidence and results that support these messages: Blue Ribbon, Title 1 Achieving, and CA Distinguished Schools in the RLUSD, API scores, Similar-Schools rankings, CCAA and Westside Preparatory Charter Schools, student and parent testimony, results of annual CDE audit.

Potential Strategies: Employee Newsletter, School Site newsletters, Superintendent update e-mails, fact sheets for staff, parents, and community, parent and community e-mails, incorporate into school site meetings, award ceremonies.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, flyers, meetings, and ceremonies.

Measurement: survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, media coverage, quantity of outreach materials and efforts.

Message 2: *The RLUSD meets the educational needs of all children.*

Sub-messages:

- A. The RLUSD supports early childhood programs.
- B. The RLUSD provides effective systems to support achievement and progress in English learners.
- C. The RLUSD provides interventions and extended day programs to increase student achievement.
- D. The RLUSD supports student success in the least restrictive environment.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents and students, community organizations, media.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages: Director focused exclusively on early childhood education, pre-school and full-day kindergarten expansion, School EL programs for students and parents, Pathways and other similar programs, Project CHOICES, Partnership with Northern California Diagnostic Center, CCAA and Westside Preparatory Charter Schools.

Evidence and results that support these messages: Number of programs available, success of students in these programs, enrollment rates, parent testimony, CELDT results.

Potential Strategies: Employee Newsletter, School site newsletters, Superintendent update e-mails, fact sheets for staff, parents, and community, parent and community e-mails, incorporate into school site meetings, press releases for program/school openings and expansions.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, flyers, meetings, press releases.

Measurement: Survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, quantity of outreach materials and efforts.

Message 3: The RLUSD involves the community in the educational process.

Sub-messages:

- A. THE RLUSD provides many opportunities for parent and community involvement.
- B. The RLUSD welcomes guidance and oversight from the community.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents, residents, community organizations.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages: Latino Family Literacy Programs, parent participation in ELAC, creation of school site committees, District Advisory Committee, Budget Advisory Committee, Measure N and P oversight committees, Key Communicator Events, Rio Linda Educational Foundation, home visits, open house events, other school-site family events.

Evidence and results that support these messages: Number of community in-put opportunities in the district, community participants and parents in committees, number of community and parent volunteers, policies that have changed as a result of input.

Potential Strategies: Employee Newsletter, School Site Newsletters, Superintendent update e-mails, ads in local newspapers for oversight committees and meetings, fact sheets for parents and community, parent and community e-mails, incorporate into school site meetings.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, flyers, ads, meetings.

Measurement: Survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, level of participation from parents and community members, quantity of outreach materials and efforts.

Message 4: The RLUSD maintains a highly qualified and motivated employee group.

Sub-messages:

- A. RLUSD recruits and hires the top candidates in each field.
- B. RLUSD provides the time and resources for on-going staff development.
- C. With the help of Measure P funding, RLUSD will upgrade classrooms and other facilities.
- D. RLUSD staff enjoy a family-like atmosphere in the RLUSD with accessibility from the Superintendent to their immediate supervisor.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents and students, community, media.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages: CST twice-monthly trainings, EL Liaisons and bilingual para-educator monthly trainings, SDAIE trainings, Superintendent Representative Council, Longevity Lunch, Employee of the Year event and lunch, Superintendent brown-bag lunches, Reduced-cost flu shots on-site for employees, hiring of former students, Principal surveys, CELDT trainings, newcomer support kit and binder, restored VP positions, staff development for administrators and principals, Week of the Classified Employee, Day of the Teacher, Rio Linda Educational Foundation staff scholarships, BTSA new teacher training.

Evidence and results that support these messages: Teacher testing results, student testing results, number of training opportunities.

Potential Strategies: Employee Newsletter, Superintendent update e-mails, fact sheets for staff, parents, and community, invite media to high-impact trainings.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, flyers, media events.

Measurement: Survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, quantity of outreach materials and efforts, employee knowledge of programs.

Message 5: The RLUSD provides quality facilities and support services for students and staff.

Sub-messages:

A. RLUSD facilities are well-maintained, safe, and secure.

B. With the help of Measure P funding, RLUSD will upgrade classrooms and other facilities with ecologically healthy practices.

C. The RLUSD welcomes guidance and oversight from the community.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents, community organizations, residents.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages: Measure N improvements, Measure P improvements, renovation of Murchinson.

Evidence and results that support these messages: Condition of the campuses, planning and construction of two new schools, upgrades at each of the existing schools.

Potential Strategies: Employee Newsletter, school site newsletters, Superintendent update e-mails, information in local newspapers, fact sheets for staff, parents, and community, parent and community e-mails, invite local business to bid on work, publicize local businesses doing work, incorporate into school site meetings, web site displaying improvement projects.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, flyers, ads, meetings, web site.

Measurement: Survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, knowledge of improvements among audiences, level of participation from local businesses, quantity of outreach materials and efforts.

Message 6: The RLUSD cultivates technology that improves the district and school operations.

Sub-messages:

A. The RLUSD is open to new technology that improves the learning environment.

B. The RLUSD is pursuing a number of improvements to their technology options.

Main Audiences: Staff, parents and students, media.

Programs and Policies that advance these messages: E-mail access for staff, district web site, teacher web sites, digitizing 35mm slides, adding mp3s to curriculum options, library media centers, Destiny system.

Evidence and results that support these messages: All-new library media centers, installation of electronic calendar in Groupwise, web site upgrades.

Potential Strategies: Electronic employee Newsletter, Superintendent update e-mails, fact sheets for staff, parents, and community, parent and community e-mails, upgrade web site look and features, media event for new web site debut.

Tactics: Newsletters, e-mails, fact sheets, media events.

Measurement: Survey audience opinions to determine baseline and survey at six months, quantity of outreach materials and efforts, web site survey results.

Additional Communication Strategies

1. Need for measurement of success.

Communication activities are difficult to measure because many of the outcomes are connected to a number of variables. In addition, the internal and external environment of an organization and community are constantly changing. Activities that are chosen for a given period may need to change when the realities change. So while the task is difficult, it is important to track communication indicators closely so that strategies and activities can be adjusted as necessary. One way to measure communications activities is to document the quantity of outreach materials and efforts. This includes a log of materials created and where they are distributed, as well as e-mail, phone, and faxed communication activities. The second way to measure communication activities is to create a baseline of data related to the messages that are intended and to track any change in perception on those message points. This includes conducting surveys with each audience on the message points related to those audiences. Six months is generally a good starting point for tracking data. If drastic changes are noticed in the surveys during six month intervals and additional information is necessary to determine the causal factors, surveys can be conducted at shorter intervals.

Potential Tactics: audience surveys at six month intervals, documentation of all communication activities.

2. Expand District support role for site PR to ensure consistent messaging.

Staff and resources at school sites are rightly focused on the most important activity of creating a successful learning atmosphere for the children who attend the schools. It is difficult for the schools to consider the larger picture of the school or district image with the variety of audiences. The district office should do everything possible to make the school-site communication activities simple and easy. This support could include newsletter templates, promotional flyers, fact sheets, and other materials. This support will also provide much-needed consistency for materials created by the schools and the district. A branding guide should be created and posted in a widely-accessible area so that everyone can reach it easily. In this same place, the available materials can be stored.

Potential Tactics: Materials, content and branding guide on intranet, media training and fact sheets provided at all levels, school newsletter templates, digital cameras at each school, MS Publisher at each school, MS Publisher training at each school, media training for the RLUSD board, Cabinet, Principals, and School Secretaries.

3. Collect district-wide information to create central promotional calendar.

Although it will be a sizeable undertaking, a central calendar of potential promotional activities would aid in the communication efforts of the RLUSD. This involves collecting the calendar of each school and creating a new, central calendar listing all activities. This calendar can then be posted on the intranet and used to create promotional activities with each of the audiences listed in this communication plan.

Potential Tactics: Request school activities list, create new central promotional calendar of events.

4. Document communication decision-making process.

THE RLUSD could use a formal documented process for communication activities and materials. This process would define the type of approval required for different types of materials and could be stratified by material type, audience size, or a number of other factors. This process will ensure consistency in materials, and allow staff involved in any type of communication activity to understand if and when approval is necessary.

Potential Tactics: Create document describing approval guidelines and make available on intranet.

5. Movement from hard copy to electronic materials when possible.

Electronic communication is a very efficient tool because it is very fast and inexpensive. In addition, it allows the receiver to access the message at their leisure. For this reason, it is not as helpful for urgent messages. As the audiences of the RLUSD increase their access to the Internet, this tool will become more helpful.

Potential Tactics: Create electronic version of district newsletter, offer electronic version to audiences with e-mail access, consider electronic delivery of materials and messages as needs arise.

6. Improving e-mail communication with multiple audiences.

As e-mail usage becomes more prevalent, it is important that the RLUSD is prepared to manage the addresses and communication effectively. E-mail offers a unique advantage in that it is easier than print or phone activities to create personalized messages and materials.

Potential Tactics: Collection of parent e-mail addresses from emergency cards, utilize e-mail management tools for updating and cleaning e-mail lists, collection of other audiences e-mail addresses as they become available, allow e-mail sign-ups on the RLUSD web site, send letters with hard copy materials allowing audiences to choose e-mail for future communication interactions.

7. Increasing superintendent and board communication with staff and other audiences.

It is important that the multiple audiences of the RLUSD are aware of the policies and activities of the Board and the Superintendent. Currently, the District Wire newsletter is the method of communicating these events. Unfortunately, it is published just once a month and cannot be distributed spontaneously as communication is needed. Additional communication tools should be considered so that each of the audiences can be informed of unfolding information in the RLUSD.

Potential Tactics: Creation of Superintendent Message template for spontaneous e-mail messages, creation of Board Message template for spontaneous e-mail messages, consider NTI phone message opportunities for Superintendent and Board, develop articles for CSEA and RLEA newsletters, create more Superintendent and Board-related content on the RLUSD web site.

8. Improving web site presence and helpful material available.

The RLUSD should be proud of the professional and accurate content that is currently presented at the URL www.rlusd.org. The current web site allows for limited participation at the staff and classroom level. This presence could be expanded to provide additional information about current events and opportunities for increased interaction with audiences. Specific web site upgrades should be determined through audience feedback.

Potential Tactics: Focus groups with all RLUSD audiences to determine potential web site upgrades in appearance and functionality, ability to provide feedback and suggestions about the web site on the site.

Once this plan has been reviewed and approved, a detailed project plan will be created to incorporate a list of tactics and time frames for activities.