



## **2009-2011 Communications Plan**

### **New Start, New Direction**

The newly-unified Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD) enjoys a unique educational communication opportunity. The TRUSD was created as the result of a November 2007 when North Sacramento voters decided to merge four of the six north area school districts into a new unified district serving approximately 30,000 preschool through adult education students at 56 school sites. The four unifying districts include North Sacramento School District (elementary), Del Paso Heights School District (elementary), Rio Linda Union School District (elementary), and Grant Joint Union High School District (secondary).

It was and remains the hope of these voters that bringing together the four organizations into one will create an exemplary new educational system for all north area students. While this is an admirable goal, it is not without incredible challenges, not the least of which is in the area of communication.

TRUSD serves children in a wide geographical area serving Rio Linda, Del Paso Heights, North Sacramento, North Highlands, Foothill Farms, McClellan Park, Woodlake, and parts of Natomas. Students and staff in the TRUSD represent a wide variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity presents a unique challenge and opportunity for district communication. Diverse audience populations must be considered in planning the best communication tools, messages, and timing. The feedback of our community at forums like our four community summits this past spring, employee events, and the recent students roundtable provide valuable communication lessons and guidance.

This plan is an effort to provide a thoughtful and deliberate approach to our district communication efforts. The plan will be a living document, adjusting to the changing realities of the TRUSD internal and external environments, and will be updated each year to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our district. It will be posted on our web site, allowing any member of the community to review our plans and provide us with suggestions for improvement.

One of the ways our communication plan strives to increase effectiveness is to look at the ways that communication messages and activities can be integrated throughout Twin Rivers USD. Everything that our organization does—and sometimes what we don't do—sends a message. Our activities and messages are designed to ensure that the goals we commit to at our district office are guided and understood by our stakeholders and ultimately ring true

for everyone that interacts with our schools and departments across Twin Rivers USD. In addition, we will define our identity and value by strengthening relationships with all stakeholders—our students, families, classified staff, teachers, Board of Trustees members, associations, public officials, news media, and community leaders. In most cases, the informal communication taking place within our stakeholder communities is just as important as the messages sent in press releases or official speeches.

### **Key Audiences**

A proactive effort will be made to communicate important organizational policies, programs, general messaging and activities to all of our stakeholders. One of our primary objectives is to ensure that our employees understand key objectives, strategies, and messaging so that we maintain consistency and accuracy in our interactions with outside audiences.

Our employees, specifically those that touch the public most, should feel confident in our understanding of organizational direction so that we can deliver consistent messages. Classified staff, Board of Trustee members, administration, volunteers and teachers alike are the face and voice of our district. As such, our interactions, our demeanor, our professionalism and expressed view points all are important pieces of what our “public” thinks about Twin Rivers USD.

We will strive to foster and maintain an organizational culture where each of us understand our role and responsibility for communication of school policies, programs and activities to families and all stakeholders in our community. Our stakeholders include:

**Students** - TRUSD students are very diverse, representing multiple languages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, grade levels, and geographic locations. The percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students in our district appears to be growing each year, according to the number of free and reduced price lunch participants. Our percentage of English Learner Students is also growing. All students have some level of access to the internet through their classroom or school library.

**Student Leadership** – There are identified student leadership groups at almost every school within TRUSD, including most elementary sites. These student groups are a valuable resource for input and engagement as well as for dissemination of accurate information with their peer groups.

**Families**—TRUSD families and caregivers are also very diverse, representing multiple languages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations. Some members of the parent audience have access to the internet and some do not. The majority of our population has access to a telephone, and can also be accessed through materials sent home with students primarily at the elementary level.

**Staff**—Our staff fall into several categories: classified, certificated, administrators, and police. Our classified staff include maintenance, custodial, para-educators, bus drivers, and administrative employees. Our certificated staff includes all teachers as well as some administrative staff. There are a number of administrators throughout TRUSD, many who ensure the operational effectiveness at each of our schools (principals and vice principals), and others who work in department offices supporting our schools. Most of these administrators manage a group of employees and are a valuable resource for information distribution. Our internal police force has a unique opportunity to carry emergency preparedness and safety information due to their inherent credibility in those areas. Most TRUSD employees have access to an e-mail account, although in some cases these accounts are not checked regularly.

**Employee Associations** - The associations that represent each group are also considered stakeholders in our district. In communicating with the classified and certificated staff, there should be some consideration of the state of contracts and/or negotiations if relevant. In addition, there may be opportunities to involve association leadership in the development of communication materials and to share information through association newsletters and other outlets.

**Board of Trustees** – The members of our TRUSD Board of Trustees are the elected representatives of our community, and as such they will be in a position to represent our district policies and actions in a variety of interactions. In addition, it is likely that news organizations will attempt to contact these individuals as stories about our district are breaking. It is vitally important that our Trustees are kept informed and supported in their communication efforts with staff, our public and media.

**School Site Associations and Organizations** – Many of our families and caregivers choose to serve at our school sites and at the district level in associations, organizations, boosters, and advisory groups. These members of our community are a valuable resource to assist our district in understanding community issues and concerns as well as communicating Twin Rivers USD policies, programs, and activities.

**Retirees** – This group includes the large number of employees who retire each year from our district and those who have retired from the unifying districts. In many cases, these individuals feel very connected to the schools they served and enjoy continued involvement with district and school activities. When possible, including this group of stakeholders, engaging their expertise, and recognizing their service and support sends an important message to our community and current employees – that the greatest value in our district is our people.

**Local Businesses**—This population includes the business owners and staff in and around the schools of the Twin Rivers USD. 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 Twin Rivers USD students and staff.

**Community Organizations**—A number of organizations serve the North Highlands, McClellan Park, Del Paso Heights, North Sacramento, Natomas, Foothill Farms, Woodlake, and Rio Linda communities. 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 and newsletters that can provide a valuable opportunity for communicating our latest news and understanding community concerns.

**Residents**—This audience represents the population not included as families or as businesses/organizations. These are the residents in the TRUSD who can potentially vote on school measures such as bonds and board representatives. 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.

**Media**—There are several smaller neighborhood papers and magazines that serve the TRUSD communities. The Sacramento Bee is another potential outlet, but is more competitive because it includes downtown Sacramento and several other area school districts. The Sacramento Bee also has a reader photo posting area that could be a good venue for promoting positive district events. The Sacramento Business Journal covers mostly the commercial sector in Sacramento, but could potentially be appropriate for a story depending on the angle. There are also a number of television and radio media outlets, including Spanish, Hmong, and Russian language stations that could assist our district in communication with our diverse families. For our district, 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 providing media outlets with information about district events and issues. In either case, the development of positive relationships with members of these audiences is crucial to the way Twin Rivers USD policies and actions are interpreted presented by the media.

**Additional Organizations and Individuals** – Due to their influence with many of our other stakeholder groups, elected officials, commissions, boards, the real estate community, county and state educational academic ranking services, web sites, and publications should also be considered key audiences for Twin Rivers USD.

### **Communications Department -Guiding Principles**

Our Communications Department strives to create and support genuinely engaged and trusted relationships with our stakeholder groups in an effort to provide an educational system which responds to students, staff, and community needs and provides a supportive environment that fully and efficiently utilizes the human, community, and financial resources available. This perspective is guided by our work with the initial Spring 2008 community summits and our ongoing feedback by families, community members, and students. In this effort, we strive to operate by the following principles:

**Collaborative** – ensure that affected stakeholder groups are involved in the planning and implementation of activities.

**Visible and Accessible**—enhance and increase the quantity and quality of contact made with stakeholders, including those who speak a language other than English.

**Trustworthy**—focus on providing accurate information about activities, programs and successes.

**Consistent**—focused, proactive communications delivered consistently and regularly to stakeholders.

**Responsive**— timely responses to inquiries and a genuine effort to use all input, interactions, and activities to improve communication efforts going forward.

**Supportive**—customer-service oriented to all stakeholders, providing communications training and counsel to all school sites, departments, and programs.

### **Communication Goals**

1. Continue to build and maintain a clear identity, image, and reputation for our district.
2. Maintain a clear voice and consistent messaging based on the goals of Twin Rivers USD.
3. Continue to create and support positive relationships with all stakeholders.
4. Continue to refine policies and strategies for coordination of communications activities throughout Twin Rivers USD and school sites based on feedback from stakeholders.
5. Maintain Board of Trustees commitment to making communications and community involvement a top priority for our district.

These five goals, along with the following strategies and action items in the Communications Department 2009-2011 Work Plan, will guide our work.

## **2009 – 2011 Communications Work Plan**

*Strategy: Continue to build and maintain a clear identity, image, and reputation for our district.*

- Action: Annually update materials for the 2009-2011 school years.
- Action: Provide timeline of production to all departments, including opportunities for suggestions for revisions.
- Action: Review materials by stakeholders prior to production when possible.
- Action: Work closely with district print shop and vendors to ensure smooth production and distribution of materials.
- Action: Develop district-wide Style Guide to ensure consistent use of logo, messaging, and style on all district materials. Provide Style Guide on intranet and web site for easy access.

*Strategy: Plan and implement regular district events to recognize and motivate students, volunteers, and staff.*

- Action: Distribute list of recognition events for the 2009-2011 school year (Welcome and Wellness, Neighborhood Celebrations, Fall Board Reception.)
- Action: Develop teams to work on each event to ensure participation from stakeholder groups.
- Action: Develop appropriate event-by-event budget to ensure accurate planning.
- Action: Provide an opportunity for evaluation and debrief after each event to ensure continuous improvement.

*Strategy: Develop and maintain staff and student Communications Corps.*

- Action: Provide annual district-wide staff training in communications and solicit interest in serving as the site or department representative.
- Action: Work closely with leadership teachers at each school to identify and develop student school site representatives. Student representatives could be considered for internship opportunities in our department office.
- Action: Utilize Corps to train peer groups, review materials, assist in planning of events and programs, maintenance of district-wide event calendar, assist in proactive media and newsletter coverage.
- Action: Develop evaluation method to ensure continuous improvement of the Communications Corps.

*Strategy: Create and distribute on-going written communications with*

*families and other community stakeholders.*

- Action: Distribute same newsletter in electronic pdf format through staff email and print for distribution at school sites.
- Action: Work closely with departments and school sites to ensure coverage of activities and programs.
- Action: Continue to use electronic news tools to communicate with community members who have signed up for the service.
- Action: Solicit feedback through newsletter and update materials to ensure continuous improvement of the materials.

*Strategy: Develop a positive and proactive media relations program to ensure fair and accurate treatment of news related to Twin Rivers USD.*

- Action: Annually update master list of media contacts for a variety of issues and geographic areas.
- Action: Solicit school site story ideas through Communications Corps.
- Action: Send out a weekly calendar of events and story ideas to core list of media contacts.
- Action: Provide annual media training to principals, secretaries, and appropriate district office staff.
- Action: Distribute clear and concise media guidelines for use at each site.
- Action: Collect and record data on media coverage to ensure continuous improvement of our efforts.

*Strategy: Maintain Crisis Communications Plan with clear instructions and guidelines for each site and department.*

- Action: Work closely with Emergency Preparedness and Twin Rivers Police Department to maintain comprehensive Crisis Communications plan.
- Action: Develop clear and concise fact sheets and training for appropriate staff at school sites and departments.
- Action: Debrief after each crisis to ensure continuous improvement.

*Strategy: Develop and improve relationships with all stakeholders.*

- Action: Maintain calendar of community and school-related events, including all day of/week of/month of items.
- Action: Attempt to provide a district representative at as many events as possible throughout the year.
- Action: Annually revise list of stakeholder groups in our district. Ensure these groups receive regular communication and support.
- Action: Continue use of automated calls, expand use to include

- events, programs, positive news.
- Action: Encourage involvement and connection to students and teachers with a "Connection to the Classroom" Program that encourages district office personnel to spend an hour or two a month volunteering in a classroom in our district.
- Action: Maintain list of Key Communicators throughout our district communities.
- Action: Working with Family and Community Involvement, plan and implement at least one Key Communicator meeting each school year.
- Action: Survey key stakeholders to ensure continuous improvement.

*Strategy: Improve customer service throughout every site and department.*

- Action: Continually revise training calendar and materials.
- Action: Utilize the Communications Corps and other interested individuals to provide additional training opportunities.
- Action: Utilize "Mystery Guest" method to periodically evaluate our efforts.
- Action: Provide evaluation cards and locked boxes at each site in the 2010-2011 school year.
- Action: Provide the ability to rate in-house customer service from various departments through an electronic survey.
- Action: Share results with sites and departments. Celebrate successes and offer additional training and resources to those that need improvement.

*Strategy: Continue to update and maintain engaging web site and intranet presence for Twin Rivers USD.*

- Action: Utilize Communications Corps to collect information that keeps the web site and intranet up to date and engaging.
- Action: Create online evaluation and feedback tools to ensure continuous improvement.