

LETHBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 51

Communications PLAN

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



Learners are innovative thinkers who are successful, confident, respectful and caring.

What is our current situation?

Lethbridge School District No. 51 will be moving into the fourth year with a Communications Plan. The goal is to create a plan that guides senior administration, the Board of Trustees and all staff in the process of communicating and engaging stakeholders.



Principles Underlying Communication

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

Our organization

- Lethbridge School District No. 51 has been educating students in Lethbridge since 1886, and has grown to include over 11,000 students and over 1,200 staff.
- Based in a growing city of over 98,000 people, the district includes a wide range of elementary, middle schools and high schools, along with number of outreach schools.

Our target audiences

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

Communication methods in our toolbelt

- Our district brand (our name, logo and messaging). Efforts are underway to modernize our district brand in the form of a new logo.
- Communication methods for schools developed to standardize how we promote events and deal with media.
- Our district website, web portal and social media channels.
- The board newsletter, school administrator email/text lists, School Messenger, Trustee reports to school councils.
- News stories and videos in print, radio and television media.
 - Coverage of board of trustees meetings.
 - Surveys, town hall meetings to engage the public.



General objectives

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

Why do we need a plan?

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



Goal 1

Effective internal communications

Proposed actions

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

- Deliver up-to-date information to staff concerning District priorities, the budget and board decisions which might impact them.
- Develop information packages for staff on key issues the District is dealing with, complete with background information, and information on major projects in the District.
- Continue the production of the monthly staff newsletter, The District Dispatch, along with monthly emails with highlights of each Board of Trustees meeting.

Proposed actions

- CONTINUE TO BUILD UPON
KNOWLEDGE STAFF POSSESS
ABOUT BEST PRACTICES
AND WHAT OTHERS
ARE DOING THROUGHOUT
THE DISTRICT

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

Proposed actions

- IMPROVE
COMMUNICATION
WITH TRUSTEES,
SCHOOL COUNCILS
AND STUDENTS

- Provide informative and timely information for students online.
- Have the communications officer put together briefing notes for trustees on hot-button issues impacting the District, or issues currently in the news about the District
- Continue to distribute media releases, Board highlights and District newsletters to School Councils.
- Investigate the possibility of the creation of a District app, and school-specific apps, to create another form of communication for school events and emergent situations.

Goal 2

Accurate, timely information for external audiences

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

Proposed actions

- Develop detailed background information for media kits to distribute to news outlets for reporters covering issues which impact the district.
- Distribute a monthly calender of major events going on at local schools.
- Establish a board media centre tab on the district website to highlight press releases and host information the media can easily access on past board decisions.
- Continue to host media call events to promote school dance/drama/art events.

Proposed actions

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

- Develop a Get to Know 51 document, and have it translated into a few of the most popular languages for newcomers to the city.
- Ensure each school has up to date Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts, to push timely information out to members of their school communities.
- Encourage teachers to use Twitter in their classrooms to better communicate with parents.
- Continue to facilitate effective communication between school councils and their parent communities, through the School Council Sign-Up forms on each website.
- Continue to effectively utilize School Messenger to communicate with parents in emergency situations.

Proposed actions

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

- Continue to encourage staff and student submissions of writing and photography to post on the District website.
- Develop a weekly photo gallery of the most interesting events throughout the District.
- Build on the video component of the website, and continue to promote and showcase District events via video.

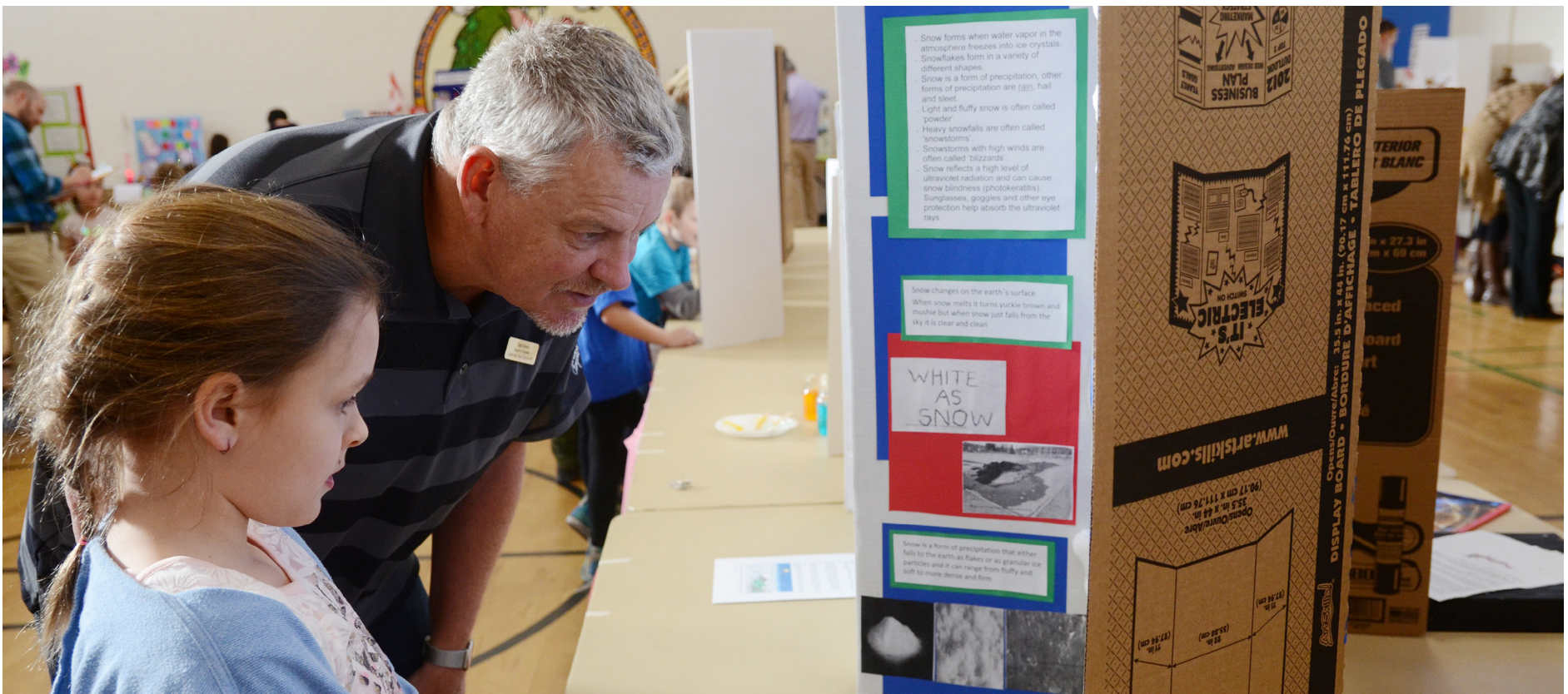
Goal 3

Build communication capacity for all district employees

Proposed actions

- HELP EMPLOYEES
BECOME BETTER
AT COMMUNICATING
DISTRICT PRIORITIES
AND SUCCESSES

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



Goal 4 Increase quantity/quality of community engagement

Proposed actions

- CONTINUE MOMENTUM
GENERATED THROUGH
THE COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- Build upon the success of the Canada 150 ICE Awards Scholarship Breakfast. Continue to bring in top-notch guest speakers for the annual February event, and, with the help of the committee, promote the breakfast throughout the community.
- Solicit other ideas from the committee, in terms of how the District can better connect with parents and host other events to collect community feedback and distribute information about the District.



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

Proposed actions

- Provide fillable forms, surveys and discussions boards on the district website.
- Use online survey tools such as Survey Monkey to solicit the opinions of parents in regards to issues impacting the district.
- Provide a summary of feedback received, whether from polls, surveys or open houses, and detail how the information will be used.
- Continue to demonstrate the practices listed above when planning for and reporting on the results from the District's annual Town Hall.

Goal 5

Develop outside-the-box methods of communication

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

Proposed actions

- Ensure locations of community-engagement events are convenient for target audience.
- Use multiple media sources more often. Produce short videos to promote and cover events, reveal important information (such as new school designs) and conduct interviews with Trustees to promote District initiatives and provide more information about important Board decisions.



Goal 6

Constantly review and update our social media and digital citizenship

Proposed actions

- ENSURE CONSISTENT MESSAGING IS DELIVERED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA
- Communicate to staff a set of guidelines for what is appropriate to post on District and school Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts.
- Ensure the use of social media complies with the District's ethical and professional principles at all times.

Proposed actions

- CONTINUE TO CLEARLY DEFINE RESPONSIBLE USE OF DISTRICT TECHNOLOGY FOR ALL STAFF
- Regularly update the District's Use of Technology policy, taking into account the ever-evolving world of social media.
- Outline staff responsibilities involving identifying and reporting potential threats via social media.



Goal 7

Streamline school-to-parent communication

Proposed actions

- ATTEMPT TO SIMPLIFY
SCHOOL-TO-PARENT
COMMUNICATION METHODS
AND PROVIDE SCHOOLS
WITH MORE OPTIONS
FOR MASS COMMUNICATION
METHODS

- Expand the SchoolMessenger text feature for use by all schools.
- Ensure all District staff understand the full capabilities of PowerSchool, and the options available to them via the Parent Portal and Student Portal
- Develop a comprehensive package for parents, which details the communication methods their schools could be using in that particular school year
- Continue to explore options for a District app, capable of sending a wide variety of notifications to parents, ranging from emergency alerts to daily information updates



Are we improving?

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



How will we measure success?

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