



GLENVIEW 34
SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Communications Plan

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Executive summary

District 34 is known for its high quality education and programs provided by excellent staff. This reputation has been garnered through the support of the local community. While that support has been strong in the past, one of our strategic goals should be to maintain or improve that support, even with an estimated 80% of households within the District boundaries do not have school-aged children. This was made evident during recommendations that surfaced from the Community Engagement Program held last fall, in which stakeholders requested a more strategic need for information. While these groups highly support the District and feel informed, there is room for improved communications.

Situation analysis

District Background

Glenview District 34 offers a public education to approximately 4,900 students in Glenview. The District is comprised of eight schools – two primary, three intermediate and two middle schools.

District 34 has a rich history as a high achieving school district that has provided a quality education for students with roots that stretch to the 1840's. Since it was founded, this community has always supported education. As the community grew, school construction, staffing and quality programs became a priority. Glenview families were willing to invest in their children through volunteering in the schools, supporting the hiring of outstanding teachers and administrators and passing bond issues necessary to build schools.

All public school students from the District 34 attendance area attend Glenbrook South High School, which is a part of District 225. Students in District 34 attend one of three primary schools for kindergarten through second grade. When students move on to third grade, they attend an intermediate school that is clustered with their primary school. Students are in the intermediate school for third through fifth grades. Henking and Hoffman are cluster schools, along with Lyon and Pleasant Ridge, and Westbrook and Glen Grove. Students from each cluster move on to attend either Attea or Springman middle school for sixth through eighth grades.

The District is committed to its mission, which states: "To empower children to be self-directed learners and responsible decision makers."

District Leadership

District 34 is governed by an elected Board of Education consisting of seven members: Cathe Russe, President; Jackie Lutz, Vice President; and members Sam Ach, John Heggie, Natalie Jachtorowycz, John J. (Jack) Murphy and Chris Northwick. Dr. Mike Nicholson serves as Superintendent.

School Governance

In addition to the Board of Education, District 34 works under an inner, collaborative governance structure and teacher contract called “The Constitution.”

The document assumes, and then puts into action, that teachers are professionals and should be treated accordingly. The Constitution, established in 1989, also outlines a District expectation and support for teachers to be lifelong learners. Additionally, the Constitution is a fluid document, meaning nearly all sections of the Constitution can be modified as opportunities, problems or issues arise during the duration of the contract.

As part of the Constitution, there are three main standing committees and the District Coordinating Council that oversee the working relationship between the Board of Education, GEA, GPA, teachers, administrators, parents and students.

District/Community Perspectives

District 34 is one of eight school districts that serve Glenview residents and is the largest amongst those districts.

Financial history and goals

The District is proud of its financial health and stability. This is evidenced by District 34 earning the highest rating possible (Aaa) from Moody’s Financial Services in 2008, and again in 2014. This is a high honor earned for its fiscal responsibility and shared with only 20 of the 860 school districts in Illinois. Additionally, the District consistently earns state awards for its financial management.

Following a strategic budgeting process that was initiated in 2012, the District renewed its focus to maintaining its strong financial health. An outcome of this was one of the objectives of the strategic planning being that District 34 operates with a balanced budget no later than 2016. This objective was achieved in 2014. Other ongoing goals of the plan include developing a

D34 by the numbers

4,923	Students
344	Teachers
40+	Different dialects
88.3%	Teacher Retention Rate
20%	Low-Income Students
13%	Students with Disabilities
\$65.5M	Annual Operating District Budget

curriculum that reflects the community's values and resources and aligning programs and practices with available financial resources.

Department Structure

Following the departure of the long term and highly regarded executive director of communications and strategic planning, the department is ideally poised for a change in overall goal focus to better assist the District in its direct communications. To that end, the name of the department will change from Communications and Strategic Planning to Public Relations and Communications. A comprehensive review of the department demonstrates different demands of the communication function that requires a more strategic public relations focus.

Media coverage

The District receives consistent media coverage in five local publications: *Triblocal (Tribune)*; Pioneer Press (*Glenview Announcements*); The Journal and Topics (*The Glenview Journal*); 22nd Century Media (*Glenview Lantern*); and *Patch.com* (online-only). Occasional coverage by metropolitan outlets such as television and radio stations and *Chicago Tribune* and *Sun-Times* is usually a result of a major event, accomplishment, global education piece or controversy.

Community Support

All eight of District 34's schools receive strong support from groups such as the PTA, Glenview Education Foundation, Debra Gelfand Fund and other special interest parent organizations.

Policies

While communications is inherent in numerous District policies, one is directly related to projects associated with the proposed communications plan: *BOE Policy 8:10 – Goals of School Community Relations*.

Scope of plan

In evaluating survey data and research, it is clear that past communication methods have been extremely effective, and it is important that those methods be preserved in order to maintain high trust and support in our community. However, the communications plan will pair those efforts with a more proactive, strategic and purposeful direction in order to further build upon that foundation with all major stakeholders including parents, taxpayers and staff. The methods are already in place – now it is about focusing on the content.

The strategies and tactics presented in this plan will also address ways for the District to enhance its engagement with both internal and external publics.

Research

Informal and formal research methods were utilized in the assessment of stakeholder needs, expectations and perspectives. The District conducted an electronic survey of 707 community residents (non-district and district parents) and used additional online surveys to reach out specifically to District 34 parents. In addition, principals at each of the schools were surveyed and met individually with the Director of Communications to further assess their communication needs, which were incorporated into the development of this plan.

It should also be noted that feedback received as part of the community engagement process – *34Next: Community Views on Glenview 34 Schools* – also was incorporated into this plan. The community engagement program launched in September 2014 and ran until January 2015. *34Next: Community Views on Glenview 34 Schools* was a collaborative effort between District 34 and a group of local residents. The purpose of this extensive community engagement program was for District 34 leadership to gain a deeper understanding of the community’s values and help further shape the District’s priorities for the future. During the program, there were a total of 123 participants at all four sessions and 232 total in attendance.

One of the specific recommendations (Recommendation #1) that stemmed from the program was to “*Develop an effective model of communication on potential program changes that clearly explains the educational and financial impacts. The board must work to confirm the community’s understanding. This type of high-level communication should be proactive in nature, allowing time for the community to respond appropriately, and be translated into other languages.*”

The development of this communications plan should be viewed as one strategy to reach that recommendation. By having a communications plan in place, it will allow the District to be more strategic, proactive and effective in its communication efforts, particularly when it relates to changes, decisions or discussions that impact the entire District 34 system.

Key Findings:

Community (*Findings linked to Community Survey*)

Summary: Across the board, data from the survey shows that trust and support for District 34 is high in the local community. Local residents are most reliant on the local media for information about the District.

- 91% feel they are very well/somewhat informed about the District.
- 62.5% believe the district is doing an excellent/good job seeking community input regarding options (such as increasing tax revenues) before cutting student programming.
- According to the community survey, local media outlets rank highest as reliable sources of information. The community newsletter *Schoolook* is second, followed by the electronic newsletters/ District website/social media accounts.
- Student growth is the top choice of topics most important to be informed about regarding Glenview District 34. This is followed by new educational initiatives, student performance on standardized tests, end of the year summary on district successes and challenges, budget, and Board of Education decisions.
- Attitudes are generally positive:
 - 83.3% believe the District is doing a good/excellent job preparing student to be successful in high school and beyond.
 - 90% believe the District is doing a good/excellent job keeping students safe and secure.
 - 77% believe the District is doing a good/excellent job operating effectively within its annual operating budget.
 - 77.5% believe the District is doing a good/excellent job at using financial resources to effectively impact student learning.
 - 81.8% believe the District is going a good/excellent job at recruiting and keeping high quality staff.

Staff (*Findings linked to Principal Survey/interviews*)

Summary: Most principals have strong communication skills and are interested in further developing those skills in the areas of technology, particularly websites and social media, as well as crisis management. Most would also like to have an assessment tool to determine the effectiveness of internal and external newsletters.

- School newsletters, e-mail and website are considered the most effective ways to communicate with parents.
- Using technology to better communicate with both parents and staff was a common need identified by survey respondents.
- Being properly aligned with cluster schools also was mentioned as a communication need.
- Most would like to have some sort of way to assess the effectiveness of staff/parent newsletters.
- Although Curriculum Nights and school performances are common celebrations at each school, there are many unique activities at each school that speak to the cultural diversity and strong community/parent involvement.
- Respondents would like to see more positive news shared about the outstanding work and progress in all of the schools.
- A majority of the schools are comfortable with the level of media attention they currently receive.

Parents (*Findings linked to Parent Survey*)

Summary: Again, trust and support is high amongst parents. Internal communications, such as the school newsletters and electronic district newsletters, are rated as the most valuable sources of information.

- 94.5 % strongly agree/agree the District does a good job communicating with parents.
- Parents find school newsletters to be the most valuable source of information. This is followed by *34eNews* and then the District website/social media accounts.
- Local newspapers/news sites were not ranked strongly as valuable sources of information.
- 83.8 % strongly agree/agree the district newsletter *Schoollook* is a valuable source of information.
- 93 % strongly agree/agree the district e-newsletter *34eNews* is a valuable source of information.
- 91.2 % strongly agree/agree the district website is a useful tool for information.
- An analysis of the open-ended questions showed that parents found the quality of the teachers and staff to be the biggest strength of District 34.
- The type of individualized attention their child has received also was referenced, as well as the types of resources and services made available, overall district leadership, use of technology in the classroom and high quality education provided to their children also was frequently referenced when asked to comment on the strengths of both the district and their representative school.
- In regards to concerns, when looking at the open-end responses only by school, parents pointed to class sizes and enrollment growth.
- Some additional concerns that were noted included bullying, preparing students for the transition to high school, Common Core transition and continued integration of technology as it evolves.

District Communications Plan

*Build trust and support for District 34 schools | Support the educational mission of District 34
Enhance and protect the District 34 brand*

Goal 1: Develop a strategic purpose for all communication content that is directly linked to the year-to-year District Goals and Indicators while utilizing best practice methods to effectively execute messaging.

Measurable Objectives:

- By May of 2016, the average open rate of district newsletters will have increased by 3%.
- By May of 2017, the combined number of parent survey respondents who “agree” that district communications (*34e-news, Schoolook, website*) are a valuable source of information will have increased by 5 %.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline	Budget
Become more purposeful, proactive and strategic in communications	Design editorial calendar to ensure all printed and electronic publications as well as the website are more focused on key issues. Key content areas include student growth, educational initiatives and assessments. (JN/MW/TS)	Parents, Staff, Community	2015-2016	Staff
	Put issues into context by utilizing comparisons, FAQs, analogies,	Community, parents	As needed	Staff

(Continued...) Become more purposeful, proactive and strategic in communications	historical data, trends, finances, etc. (JN/TS)			
	Develop Superintendent e-communication dedicated to key issues (JN/MN)	Community, Parents	2016-2017	Staff
	Redesign District website keeping in mind key audiences (JN/BE/NP/MW/TS)	Parents, Staff, Community	2015-2016	\$10,000* Contingency for website design Staff
	Increase communication about mission, vision, goals, strategic plan <i>Storyboard</i> (JN/MN)	Community	Ongoing	Staff
	Develop access roles in content management system of website for all contributors	Staff	*In conjunction with website redesign	Staff
	Draft key messages that are audience specific	Community, Parents, Staff	2016-2017	Staff
	Weekly website updates relating to any of the following areas: (JN/MW)	Parents, Staff, Community	In conjunction w/web redesign	Staff

(Continued...) Become more purposeful, proactive and strategic in communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance - Student Achievement - Curriculum - Assessment - Instruction - Technology - Board of Education 			
	Develop and implement policy and social media strategy to enhance the use of the District's Facebook and Twitter accounts (JN/MW)	Parents, Staff	2016-2017	Staff
	Implement translation criteria to ensure all vital documents are translated into identified home languages (JN/Admin)	Parents, Community	2015-2016	TBD
Enhance media relations and continue to work both locally and regionally for placement	School Notes – Local Media (JN/MW)	Community, Media	2015-16, Weekly	Staff
	Pitch media on stories of interest (JN)	Community, Media	Monthly	Staff
	Update media contact list (JN/MW)	Community	Immediate	Staff
	Host a Media Day (JN/MW)	Media	Start 2016-2017, Ongoing yearly	Staff
	Post positive news coverage on web (JN/MW)	Parents, Community, Media	In conjunction w/ web redesign	Staff

	Enforce objectives in editorial calendar to ensure key messages are strategically communicated (JN)	Parents, Staff, Community	2016-2017	Staff
Leverage existing publications	Make printed publications available online in more engaging format (JN/MW)	Parents, Community	*In conjunction with website redesign	Staff
	Develop District e-newsletter publication schedule to ensure consistency (JN/MW)	Parents	2015-2016	Staff
	Use e-newsletters to drive traffic to website (JN/MW)	Parents	*In conjunction with website redesign	Staff
	Develop district news section in all school newsletters (JN/MW)	Parents	2017-2018	Staff

Continue to maintain Board and District's credibility	Develop e-newsletter recapping highlights of Board meeting summary <i>BOE meeting in two minutes</i> (JN/TS)	Parents, staff, eNews subscribers	Start: August 2015, 24-36 hours after every mtg.	Staff
	Issue press releases for all major District initiatives/BOE actions (JN)	Community, Media	Immediate	Staff

Goal 2: Provide opportunities for stakeholder engagement to ensure community perspectives are heard and considered regarding major district initiatives or program changes.

Measurable Objectives:

- By May of 2017, the number of community members who believe the District is doing an excellent/good job seeking community input regarding options (such as increasing tax revenues) before cutting student programing will have increased by 5 %.
- By May of 2018, there will have been a minimum of two focus groups or community forums conducted about major initiatives in the district.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline	Budget
	Establish and maintain Key Communicators Group/Committee (MN/JN)	Opinion Leaders	2015-16	Staff
Create opportunities for engagement/input	Conduct focus groups on major initiatives (JN/MN)	Parents	As needed	Staff

(Continued....) Create opportunities for engagement/input	Schedule Community Forums related to key decisions (JN/MN)	Community, Parents	As needed	Staff
	Utilize two-way communication through social media (JN/MW)	Parents	2017-2018	Staff
	Continue to develop strong, collaborative relationships with key parent groups (GEF, Gelfand, CFAC, PTA) (JN/MN/MW)	Parents, Community	Ongoing	Staff
	Implement scientific community survey to develop further strategies to reach non-parent taxpayers (JN/MN/MW)	Community	2016-2017	\$14,000

Goal 3: Enhance internal communication support (socialization).

Measurable Objectives:

- By May of 2018, all staff will have been surveyed; data pulled from that survey will be used as a baseline to determine further communication needs and strategies.
- By May of 2018, all administrators will have participated in media training.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline	Budget
Assess effectiveness of internal communication	Develop and implement survey of staff	Staff	2017-2018	Staff

Assess effectiveness of internal communication	Develop a Style Guide for UTTM	Staff	2017-2018	Staff
Provide communications training opportunities	Conduct media training (JN)	Administrators	2017-2018	\$4,000
	New Teachers Orientation (JN/HH)	New staff	Ongoing	Staff
Increase exposure to official District communication	Utilize monthly staff newsletter to include (JN) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board meeting summaries - High level District news - Items from monthly e-newsletters 	Staff	2015-2016	Staff

Evaluation:

- Utilize annual communications surveys for parents, staff and community members.
 - May 2016
 - May 2017
 - May 2018
- Conduct a formal telephone survey of community residents with no children in our schools in May 2017. Utilize similar questions from the survey in May 2018 for comparisons. (COST: \$11,000)
- Utilize informal focus groups of parents, students and staff as needed for major projects such as the website redesign.
- Upon web redesign, track the number of hits monthly and use analytics to monitor popular pages. Make adjustments to the site as needed, based on data.
- Monitor media coverage and placement. Cite positive/neutral/negative articles.
- Monitor and report on social media use and interactions.
- Present annual update on the progress of the District communications plan to the Board of Education. (Summer)

Formal Recommendations:Annual Communications Plan Budget

In order to carry out the actions detailed in this plan, an appropriate budget level must be established and maintained.

1. **Rationale:** It is imperative that staff receives appropriate, continuous professional development and training.

***Recommendation:** Add an additional \$5,000 to the Communications Budget to support professional development for staff.*

2. **Rationale:** Although much of the website redesign will be led by the Technology Department, it is important to have additional funds to support needs that require specific technical needs that impact the functionality or design of the site.

***Recommendation:** Add an additional \$10,000 to the Communications Budget to support possible technology needs associated with website redesign.*

3. **Rationale:** Given the importance of training and interest amongst all principals for additional training or support related to media training, it would be in the best interest of the department to provide an opportunity to further develop these skills.

***Recommendation:** Add an additional \$4,000 to the Communications Budget to hire a consultant or firm to conduct media training.*

4. **Rationale:** The diversity in District 34 is a celebration as well as a communications challenge as we look to the diverse needs of our different families. In order to ensure we are engaging and effectively communicating with all community members, it is vital that we develop and implement a translation criteria that determines what documents and official communications should be translated.

***Recommendation:** At the time this plan is being developed, it is still being determined the financial impact of this need. However, given the amount of time that will be required by staff as well and expected expense, a plan should be phased in over a 2-3 year period district wide.*

5. **Rationale:** With 80 % of Glenview residents not having children in District 34, it is critical that a plan be developed to determine best strategies to communicate with and engage these non-parent taxpayers. By conducting a community survey, it will allow us to gauge and, moving forward, track our effectiveness as well as determine new methods.

***Recommendation:** Add an additional \$14,000 to the Communications Budget for the use of conducting two community surveys.*

