HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
2023-2024

MISSION

Together with students, staff and community, we cultivate an equitable, inclusive, innovative learning environment that empowers all students to contribute to their local and global community

HPS Communications Plan 2023-2024

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Introduction

The communications plan for the Hingham Public Schools (HPS) aims to enhance communication with various stakeholders within the district. This plan incorporates a range of initiatives designed to improve overall communication with students, staff, families, and community.

A communications plan was introduced at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year and the identified activities were carried out throughout the year. To evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented communications strategies, a survey was conducted in the summer of 2023. The findings have helped to form this year's communications plan that addresses areas for improvement and strengthens the connection and engagement with HPS' stakeholders. This plan represents HPS' commitment to fostering efficient and responsive communication practices within the district.

Research

In the summer of 2023, a survey was conducted to evaluate current communications strategies and helped identify other communications themes that needed improvement. There were 155 total responses with the majority of responses coming from parents or caregivers. While the number was small, the feedback was valuable in identifying areas of strengths and potential next steps. This communications plan is heavily based on data-driven results. The themes that were reflected in the survey results are as follows:

1. The majority of users use their mobile devices to access HPS information (64%). The second most utilized device was laptops (27%) with desktop computer usage at only 8%. This finding encourages the optimization of mobile-friendly platforms.

2. Another main theme we found is that there are mixed reviews about the school and district websites. Specifically, out of 144 parent/guardian responses, 44 found the school website difficult to use (31%) and 52 out of 144 found the district site difficult to use (36%). Conversely, 85 respondents found the school website easy to use (59%), and 82 respondents found the district site easy to use (57%). Despite a higher percentage of respondents finding the sites easy to navigate, we must tailor our website to the needs of all stakeholders. In terms of the dissatisfied respondents, they were encouraged to leave comments as to why they found it difficult. The main themes of the comments were that the sites are difficult to navigate, the menus are not intuitive, and important information such as lunch menus and calendars are difficult to locate.

3. We found that the most preferred contact is email, however, many respondents had a preference to receive information through multiple avenues. Other than email, the largest

categories respectively were text (35%), social media (28%), principal's weekly newsletter (28%), mobile app (17%), and website (15%). It is evident that we must spread communication efforts equally among the above avenues to reach the largest audience and ensure equity among stakeholders. Please note that only parent/guardian results were utilized due to other groups not utilizing the websites.

4. A main indicator for interest in a mobile app was reflected in a question that asked about the likelihood that respondents would use an app to access HPS information. We found that the majority of respondents would either likely or very likely use it (67% total). Additionally, due to the identified preference for both texting and a mobile app, a technology committee will research the viability of these options during the 2023-2024 school year.

5. The preferred social media platforms are overwhelming Meta-based totaling 78% of respondents using them. Specifically, 44% of respondents prefer Facebook, and 34% of respondents prefer Instagram. Twitter and LinkedIn were the lowest utilized coming in at 4% and 1% respectively. Additionally, 17% or 24 respondents do not use social media altogether. These findings encourage the utilization and focus to be on meta products and less on Twitter (X) and Linkedin. Also, other mediums of communication must be utilized in order to communicate effectively to the 17% who do not use social media.

6. It was also found that communications regarding emergency notifications, holidays, and school closures are the most important to parents/guardians. Specifically, 98% of respondents found the above to be either important or very important. As will be discussed below, a multi-pronged approach will be used to communicate these items.

Target Audiences

While school communication may specifically target our students, staff, and families, for the purpose of this broader communication plan, we define the audience as including a wide range of community stakeholders. These stakeholder groups are subsets of people that our communication strategies hope to reach. In the plan, the term "All" will be used. "All" is inclusive of the stakeholder groups below.

- Students
- Parents/Caregivers
- Faculty/Staff
- School Councils
- School Committee
- PTOs
- Nonprofits/ Community-Based Organizations
- Hingham Educators Association
- Taxpayers
- Businesses
- Alumni
- Media

- Residents of Hingham without children in the district
- New residents to the district
- Prospective residents of Hingham
- Local legislators
- Other town agencies-fire, police, library, DPW, elder services

Communication Platforms

The Hingham Public Schools intend to engage various target audiences through a host of communication strategies. These strategies include a variety of social media, electronic, and print materials. Due to the range of stakeholder preferences, we strive for diversity in our communication efforts to reach the widest audience possible.

Direct Email
These mailings include monthly newsletters, upcoming events, and emergency notifications. Oftentimes the items above will be communicated via Aspen X2 and the newsletter software Smore.

Website
Our school and district websites serve as a hub for announcements and alerts, calendars, documents and resources, school policies and procedures, and good news stories.

Social Media
HPS uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Mass Notification or "Robo Calls"
School Messenger is utilized to call all families and staff when an emergency notification occurs such as snow days.

Print Materials
Collateral items such as brochures, posters, postcards, and lawn signs are used.

Media Relations
The Communications Specialist proactively sends press releases to share news updates about the schools. Teachers and administrators work collaboratively to share information with the Superintendent and Communications Specialist. The main press sources are The Boston Globe, Patriot Ledger, and Hingham Anchor.

Goals

The following goals are identified for the 2023-2024 school year to build upon the progress made last year.

Goal One: Create effective two-way communication between the district/schools and community stakeholders.

Goal Two: Optimize communications technology to meet the evolving needs of the school community.

Goal Three: Better support students and families during transition years.

Implementation Plan

Goal One: Create effective two-way communication between the district/schools and community stakeholders.

Objective 1: Develop clear and consistent messaging that is delivered in one clear voice.

Action Steps:
1. Create and distribute new branding materials (brochures, K-5, HMS, HHS handouts).
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Finalize and distribute items to realtors and display at events beginning September 2023
2. Research the viability of introducing different swag items to distribute at district, school and community events.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Finalize and distribute items to realtors and display at events beginning September 2023
3. Research the viability of introducing an online school store and also research the ability to open a store within the high school.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Finalize and distribute items to realtors and display at events beginning September 2023
4. Discuss communication needs/expectations quarterly with the leadership team.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, Leadership
   - Evaluation: Meet four times during the school year

5. Increase communication from the building level by implementing a Meta social media platform for all schools.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Building Leadership with the support of Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Establish one meta platform for Foster, South, HHS, HMS.
6. Evaluate the branding of HPS logos and materials.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, Leadership
   - Evaluation: Possible survey to review branding.
7. Share the HPS style guide email signature with all staff
   - Target Audience: Staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Style guide created and distributed by Nov. 1 2023

Objective 2: Expand communication methods to district and school staff.

Action Steps:
1. Introduce frequent, predictable communication to staff with important information such as human resources, community news, and professional development.
   - Target Audience: Staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Central Office members
   - Evaluation: Send the first edition by Winter 2023
2. Establish staff intranet with curriculum materials, HR and payroll documents, and other important documents.
   - Target Audience: Staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Business Director with support from Central Office staff
   - Evaluation: Establish by January 2024

Objective 3: Employ multiple communications tactics to support recruitment and hiring.

Action Steps:
Collaborate with district/school leaders and human resources to develop strategies and plans that support the recruitment and hiring of new staff.
- Target Audience: Prospective Employees
- Timeline: 2023-2024
- Responsibility: HR Department, Central Office, Support from Communications Specialist
- Evaluation: Recruitment Action Plan

Objective 4: Increase community relations efforts to support communication.

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Action Steps:
1. Attend community events and share efforts from district and building initiatives
   - Target Audience: Community Stakeholders, community groups, families.
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Leadership
   - Evaluation: All identified events attended by at least one member of leadership.

Objective 5: Strengthen opportunities for collaboration with families with students with special needs.

Action Steps:
1. Complete a special education program evaluation and disseminate the results to the community.
   - Target Audience: Special Education Families, students and staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Interim Executive Director of Student Services, Superintendent, with the support of the identified external agency.
   - Evaluation: Completed evaluation by June 2024.
2. Create opportunities for special education families to provide feedback on their experiences and build supportive two-way relationships.
   - Target Audience: Special Education Families, students, and staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Interim Executive Director of Student Services, Superintendent, with the support of the identified external agency.
   - Evaluation: Completed evaluation by June 2024.

Goal Two: Optimize communications technology to meet the evolving needs of the school community.

Objective 1: Establish a communications technology committee to review current communications software.

Action Steps:
1. Form the communications committee from the current technology committee to include school principals, department directors, teachers, and Communications Specialist.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Technology Committee
   - Evaluation: Completed evaluation and possible selection of products by spring of 2024.
2. Review the survey results and begin to demo new products such as websites or mobile app.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024

- Responsibility: Technology Committee
- Evaluation: Completed evaluation and possible selection of products by spring of 2024.

Objective 2: Streamline Smore Newsletters and optimize for mobile devices.

Action Steps:
1. Create categories of items that need to be shared weekly, and monthly and disseminate amongst district, department, building, and teacher emails.
   - Target Audience: Parents
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, Building Principals, Dept. Directors
   - Evaluation: Finalize itemized list by Nov. 1
2. Monitor Smore Newsletter length to ensure the use of bullets, hyperlinks, and a reduced amount of paragraphs.
   - Target Audience: Parents
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, Building Principals
   - Evaluation: All Smores to have less than 25% of narrative style paragraphs
3. Create and share important dates one-pager.
   - Target Audience: Parents
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Shared in all seven beginning-of-year emails (district and six buildings).

Objective 3: Strengthen social media presence.

Action Steps:
1. Share graphics on social media for all early releases, holidays, important dates, and school closures.
   - Target Audience: Parents, students, staff
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Create a graphic and post all 34 important dates
2. Research the viability of introducing features current and retired teachers/staff as well as students and alumni. Implement strategies as needed.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Create a graphic and post all 34 important dates
3. Shorten social media post descriptions by breaking them up into smaller, bite-size paragraphs. Additionally, use more emojis to engage a wider audience.
   - Target Audience: All
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist

- Evaluation: Work towards 100% of posts to have a header sentence with emojis
4. Focus time and resources on Meta (Facebook and Instagram).
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: 3-5 Meta posts/week
5. Follow all student groups, teachers, departments, and community organizations that relate to the schools.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Gather information at the beginning of the year and follow 100% of identified groups
6. Increased outreach to encourage increased collection of special events and project-learning events.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Monthly reminder to principals and quarterly to staff
7. Post on Instagram and Facebook a minimum of 5 posts per week.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Complete 5 posts per week

Objective 4: Optimize the website for all users.

Action Steps:
1. Retitle the "Students & Families" tab on the district site to "Resources". This page will include links to the calendar, lunch menu, program of studies, guidance contacts, staff directories, student handbooks, bus schedules, testing days, important academic dates, and important dates calendar.
    - Target Audience: Parents
    - Timeline: Fall '23
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Add all items to the retitled page
2. Make an instructional page that explains how to subscribe to each calendar and place it below the website calendar.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: Fall 2023
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Complete and upload by Oct. 1
3. Post all important dates to the Live Feed on the website.
    - Target Audience: Parents
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist

- Evaluation: Post all 34 events as well as all important announcements (snow days/school closures)
4. Audit highly trafficked website pages to optimize for mobile and laptop.
    - Target Audience: Parents, students, staff
    - Timeline: Sept. '23-Dec. '23
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Run a report to identify pages with more than 200 visits/month. Complete 100% of pages
5. Optimize home pages of all websites to have images displayed correctly across devices.
    - Target Audience: Parents, students, staff
    - Timeline: Sept. '23-Dec. '23
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Complete uploads for three sliders per website across seven sites
6. Create a dedicated athletics and fine arts calendar to display on the website.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: Fall 2023
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, AD, Fine Arts Director
    - Evaluation: Complete all schedules by Oct. 1
7. Transfer important PDFs to text so that the website search function works properly.
    - Target Audience: Parents, Students, Staff
    - Timeline: Fall 2023
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, School Admins
    - Evaluation: All PDFs migrated by Nov. 1
8. Shorten press releases/ news posts to be optimized for mobile devices.
    - Target Audience: All
    - Timeline: 2023-2024
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: 100% of PR to have no more than four sentences per paragraph

Objective 5: Distribute communications survey to students, staff, and community members.

Action Steps:
1. Redeploy communications survey but with minor tweaks depending on stakeholder group.
    - Target Audience: Students, staff, community members
    - Timeline: Winter 2023
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Complete survey by Feb. 1 2024.
2. Analyze survey results and tweak current communications plan while also planning for the 2024-2025 school year.
    - Target Audience: Students, staff, community members
    - Timeline: 2024-2025
    - Responsibility: Communications Specialist
    - Evaluation: Evaluate survey results and create additional plans by spring of 2024.

Goal Three: Better Support Students and Families During Transition Years (PreK to Kindergarten, Grade 5 to 6, Grade 8 to 9, Grade 12 to Post Grad).

Objective 1: Improve outreach efforts for special transitional events.

Action Steps:
1. Ensure all events are listed on the website calendar.
   - Target Audience: Parents, students
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, School Admins
   - Evaluation: 100% identified events placed on the calendar
2. Dedicated direct messaging prior to the event. These communications will be sent directly to the target for which the event is associated with.
   - Target Audience: Parents
   - Timeline: 2023-2024
   - Responsibility: Building Principals
   - Evaluation: Messaging sent for 100% of identified events
3. Continue to communicate the many supports available to transition students from high school to college and career.
   - Target Audience: High school parents, students
   - Timeline: Fall '23
   - Responsibility: Guidance with support from the Communications Specialist
   - Evaluation: Complete checklist by Nov. 1
4. Update the HPS school counseling website to be inclusive of college prep and timeline information, testing dates, and resources.
   - Target Audience: High school students and families
   - Timeline: Fall 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, Building Principals
   - Evaluation: Schedule a leadership meeting prior to Sept. 20 to discuss viability

Objective 2: Employ a new student registration campaign.

Action Steps
1. Research best practices for increasing enrollment in public schools.
   - Target Audience: Prospective families
   - Timeline: Fall and winter 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, leadership
   - Evaluation: completed new student registration campaign by Feb. 1, 2024
2. Identify the timeline with senior leadership.
   - Target Audience: Prospective families
   - Timeline: Fall and winter 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, leadership
   - Evaluation: completed new student registration campaign by Feb. 1, 2024

3. Optimize all communications tools to publicize open registration (press releases and media engagement, home page on the website, social media videos and graphics, and yard signs.
   - Target Audience: Prospective families
   - Timeline: Fall and winter 2023
   - Responsibility: Communications Specialist, leadership
   - Evaluation: completed new student registration campaign by Feb. 1, 2024