



District Communications Plan

Executive summary

A public school district relies on support from its community. More than 77% of households within the District boundaries do not have school-aged children. District 225 schools maintain the high level of education these communities have known and come to expect for its students.

The District's direct customers (parents, students and staff) also comprise an important segment of the community. These stakeholders represent a more intense, active need for information. While these groups generally support the District and feel informed, there is always room for improved communications.

The Board of Education and Superintendent have demonstrated continuous support for regular evaluation of Glenbrook High School District 225 communications efforts as a means for enhancing community support of its schools.

Situation analysis

District Background

Glenbrook High School District 225, commonly referred to as the Glenbrooks, offers a public education to approximately 4,800 students in Glenview, Northbrook and portions of Golf, and unincorporated Northfield Township. Located just 20 miles north of Chicago in a suburban setting, Glenbrook North and Glenbrook South High Schools have a reputation for offering students an excellent, high-quality, well-rounded educational experience. In addition to our two high schools, the Glenbrooks also offer alternative learning at Glenbrook Off-Campus and Glenbrook Evening High School.

To create a comprehensive high school experience, the Glenbrooks focus on three distinct areas: Academics, Activities and Athletics. Academic success is a top priority for our students and with almost 300 diverse course offerings, there are plenty of opportunity for exploration. In addition to core academic courses in the areas of English, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages, students may pursue special interest classes such as music, debate, architecture, automotives, drama, and graphic design.

Glenbrook students enjoy success inside and outside of the classroom through numerous athletic and activities programs. The schools offer 29 different competitive sports and a series of club sports to satisfy any athlete. Each school also hosts from 70-80 different clubs and activities for students throughout the year.

District Leadership

District 225 is governed by an elected Board of Education consisting of seven members: Skip Shein, President; Robert Boron, Vice President; and members Scott Martin, Joel Taub, Karen Stang Hanley, Bruce Doughty, and Cindy Wilkas. Dr. Michael Riggle serves as the Superintendent.

District/Community Perspectives

GBN serves incorporated and unincorporated Northbrook and is 10 years older than GBS, which serves incorporated and unincorporated Glenview. With a few exceptions, the attendance boundary line between GBN and GBS is generally Willow Road.

Staffing/Department Structure

Following the recommendations of a communications audit in 2011:

- District 225 hired an additional full-time Public Relations and Communications Assistant. While the initial concept for this role was heavily based on feature production and media relations, it has grown to include social media management and website content development as well.
- The department changed its name to Public Relations and Communications.
- The department broadened its focus to include additional facets (beyond media relations) including social media, online communications, staff development, and proactive/strategic communications.

Referendum History

In 2006, the District passed its first referendum in decades by a slim margin. The \$94 million infusion was used to update facilities, address required Life-Safety concerns and retire existing bonds.

Past Surveys

- 2005, 2011, 2014 – A formal telephone survey of community residents (with no students in our schools) was conducted.
- 2011, 2013 – Students, parents and staff provided input via an online survey. An increase in trust and overall communication satisfaction from all three demographics was evident in the 2013 results.

D225 by the numbers

| | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|
| 4,819 | Students |
| 823 | Employees |
| 40+ | Different dialects |
| 25.3 | Average ACT score |
| 97% | Graduation rate |
| 96% | Enter college post-graduation |
| 300 | Course offerings |
| 70-80 | Clubs and activities for students |
| 29 | Competitive sports |
| \$115M | Annual Operating District Budget |

Media coverage

The District receives consistent media coverage in local publications including: *Chicago Tribune* (local section); Pioneer Press (*Glenview Announcements* and *Northbrook Star*); The Journal and Topics (*The Glenview Journal*); The Lantern and the Tower (22nd Century Media) and *Patch.com* (online-only). Occasional coverage by metropolitan outlets are usually a result of a major event, accomplishment, global education piece, or controversy.

Organized support

Both schools enjoy strong support from groups such as the parent associations, athletic booster clubs, fine arts parents and other special interest parent organizations. The District also benefits from the support of the Glenbrook High School Foundation.

Policies

While communications is inherent in numerous District policies, three are directly related to projects associated with the proposed communications plan:

- *BOE Policy 9060 – District World Wide Website (July, 2009)*
- *BOE Policy 9300 – Communications (September 2011)*
- *BOE Policy 9070 – Social Media (July 2011)*

Scope of plan

The communications plan will focus on building trust and support for District 225 among various stakeholders including parents, students, taxpayers, and staff. The strategies and tactics presented in this plan will address ways for the district to enhance its direct communication with both internal and external publics.

The scope of this plan may include communication channels such as print publications and electronic outlets; training; media relations; legal and legislative issues; processing input and inquiries; customer service; communication content; department infrastructure and budget; crisis/critical communication protocols; reputation and issues management; community relations; board and committee communication; branding elements; general surveys and evaluation of services; public presentations; and recognitions.

The communications plan will not seek to address interpersonal communication between publics, including staff; fundraising efforts, alumni relations; business partnerships; volunteer/internship opportunities; student-specific issues; and publicity of student events.

Research

Formal and informal research methods were utilized in the assessment of stakeholder needs, expectations, and perspectives. The District conducted a telephone survey of 300 community residents (excluding current District parents and staff) and used online surveys to reach out to parents, students and staff. (March 2014.)

Key Findings:

Community

- 75% rate the District communications as excellent/good. (Increased 12 percent since 2011)
- 72% are interested in receiving information from the District. (Same as 2011)
- 68% believe the amount of information they receive is “just right” (10 percent increase since 2011)
- Local media outlets rate very high as a source of information. District newsletters come in second. (Same as 2011)
- There is virtually 100% Internet access in our communities.
- Social media use has increased by 18 percent since 2011.
- Attitudes are generally positive:
 - 89% believe the leadership is doing what is best for kids.
 - 73% believe the leadership involves the community in decisions.
 - 76% believe the District provides accessible information.
- In 2011, district finances were an identified concern and topic of interest for additional communication, followed closely by public events at the schools. In 2014, the data is opposite, with slightly less interest in finances, and more in events and activities.
- Surprisingly, more than half of respondents would be interested in attending an informational session at the high schools on the topics of district finances, classroom innovation, and legislative impact on schools.

Students

- More than 76% think the District is doing an excellent/good job in communications. (71% in 2011)
- The top three things students look for on the website: Assignments/grade/class, staff contacts, calendars.
- Students still prefer Facebook, but Twitter is gaining in popularity.
- The school newspaper and friends are the top two outlets for receiving information.

Staff

- 84% believe they receive the “correct amount of information.” (73% in 2011)
- 93% think the district does a good/excellent job in communicating with staff. (85% in 2011)
- 75% of staff read the District 2:25 Update and cite it as a strong source of information.
- Email prevails as the most common means for obtaining information.
- Staff are more interested in board actions, teaching and learning. However, staff are less interested in district finances than they were in 2011.
- By a significant margin, staff use the website most often for calendars and access to outside portals.

Parents

- 94% think the District does an excellent/good job communicating with parents. (90% in 2011) This also represents a rise in the number citing “excellent.”
- 89% say they received the “correct amount of information.”
- District controlled sources registered high – *Connections*, *District 2:25 Update*, and website.
- Calendars are the most popular reason to visit the website. (Events/news, staff contacts, and portal links are each a close second.)
- 80% of parents use Facebook (74% in 2011), by far, the most used social media tool.
- 90% of parents prefer email communications.
- In all of the “feeling” statements, the District scored overwhelmingly positive.

Recent communications enhancements

The current three-year communications plan resulted in numerous improvements including:

- New website
- Social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn)
- Online parent, staff and community publications
- New logo, style guidelines, collateral
- Revised crisis communication procedures
- Staff development in communications
- Editorial calendars
- Relationships with student media
- Increase in communications department capacity and output
- Interactive school calendars
- Mobile website
- Strategic content development (finances, district initiatives, etc.)
- Revised printed community newsletter
- Communication and Social Media policies
- Staff communications guidelines
- Revised photo release policies
- Improved relationships with municipal partners

Evaluation of Growth, Communications Plan 2011-2014

The previous three-year communications plan outlined five measurable objectives, as a means for evaluating our efforts:

RESULTS:

1. By May 2014, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among community residents with no children in our schools will increase by five percent. **RESULT: 12 percent increase. 2011=63 percent (49 excellent, 144 good). 2014=75 percent (83 excellent, 143 good)**
2. By May 2013, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among students and parents will increase by five percent. **RESULT: Both increased by four percent. 2011=90 percent (371 excellent, 425 good). 2014=94 percent (400 excellent, 382 good). NOTE: There were more parents citing “excellent,” an increase of 6 percent since 2011.**
3. By May 2013, the majority of parents will cite the website as a strong source of information, as evidenced by an increase in the average rating from 3.36 (in 2011) to 4.0. **RESULT: Average website rating of 3.54**
4. By May 2013, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among staff will increase by five percent. At least 25 percent of staff will rate communications as “excellent,” an increase of 6 percent. **RESULTS: Eight percent increase in “excellent/good” ratings. 36 percent of staff rated communication as “excellent,” an increase of 17 percent. 2011=85 percent (58 excellent, 205 good). 2014=93 percent (89 excellent, 141 good).**
5. By May 2013, the majority of staff will cite the website as a strong source of information, as evidenced by an increase in the average rating from 2.84 (in 2011) to 3.3. **RESULT: Average website rating of 3.29.**

District Communications Plan

Goal: Continue to build trust and support for the district.

Measurable Objectives:

- By May 2018, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among community residents with no children in our schools, students, parents and staff will increase by three percent.
- By May 2018, the overall level of trust of our district will increase by three percent.

Informal Objective:

- Demonstrate internal staff growth in the areas of communications.

| Strategies | Tactics | Target | Timeline |
|--|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Increase awareness of district initiatives, challenges, and successes. Encourage action when appropriate. <i>(See engagement strategy)</i> | Host informational sessions on finance, legislation, innovation. | Parents, community | (1)/year Start 2015-16 |
| | Implement emergency web presence | Parents, community | 2014-15 |
| | Increase communication about District Initiatives, mission, vision, goals, progress (<i>Dashboard</i>) | Parents, staff community | 2015-16 |
| | Produce videos: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District promotional • Issue-driven, from the Supt. • Continue to work w/ school Broadcast programs | External Parents, students | 2015-16 2014-15 Ongoing |
| | <u>Established Channels:</u> Community newsletters (2x year) Website/Mobile website Parent newsletters District 2:25 Update Social media outlets Local media, proactive press releases Students and Staff Who Excel | | Fall/spring Ongoing |

| Strategies | Tactics | Target | Timeline |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Enhance the district brand | Formalize District 225 brand: - Create tagline - Revise school logos, as needed - Continue enforcing style guides | Community, regional, staff | 2015-16 2015-16 Ongoing |
| | <i>Enhance channels for sharing the Glenbrook story:</i> | Various internal and external | 2014-15 |
| | 1. Implement social media strategies | Various internal and external | 2014-15 |
| | 2. Instagram FACES campaign | Students, external | 2014-15 |
| | 3. Conduct website audit | Internal | 2015-16 |
| | Implement recommendations | External | 2016-17 |
| | Mobile website enhancements | External | 2016-17 |
| | <u>Established Channels:</u> | Community | Ongoing |
| | Media relations | Various | Ongoing |
| | Publications | Various | Ongoing |

| Strategies | Tactics | Target | Timeline |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Increase stakeholder engagement <i>(Awareness leads to action)</i> | Social media considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SnapChat • Youtube • Twitter challenge | Students External Students | 2015-16 2015-16 2015-16 |
| | Future Enrollment Initiative | Parents, students | 2014-15 |
| | Student internships | Jr/Sr students | 2015-16 |
| | Social Media Club | Students | 2015-16 |
| | Focus Groups | Parents Students Staff | 2014-15 2014-15 2014-15 |
| | Provide professional development for staff | Enhance Opening Institute | Staff |
| Provide training: Social Media Communications Media relations How to present to the BOE Crisis Communications | | Staff Staff, students Staff, students Leadership Staff, admin | 2015-16 |
| Staff lunch drop-ins | | Staff | 2015-16 |
| Implement StoryLab | | Staff | 2015-16 |

| Strategies | Tactics | Target | Timeline |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| Continue to enhance collaboration with partner organizations (i.e. feeder schools, municipal partners) | Continue regular meetings with feeder districts; area high school districts, village and municipal entities; government officials. | Municipal PR partners | Ongoing |
| | Act as lead host for annual communications workshop | Municipal partners, leaders | Annually, winter |
| | Develop emergency webpage | 1. Parents, students, staff 2. All Externals | 2014-15 |

Evaluation:

- Establish regular online communications surveys for parents, students and staff.
 - May 2015: Students, Staff and Parents of freshman
 - May 2017: Students, Staff and Parents of freshman and juniors.
- Conduct a formal telephone survey of community residents with no children in our schools in February 2018. Utilize similar questions from the surveys in January 2011 and March 2014 for comparisons. *(Approx. COST: \$15,000)*
- Utilize informal focus groups of parents, students and staff as needed for major projects.
- Quarterly analysis of website, social media, and newsletter analytics.
- Present annual updates on the progress of the District communications plan to the Board of Education. *(Summers)*