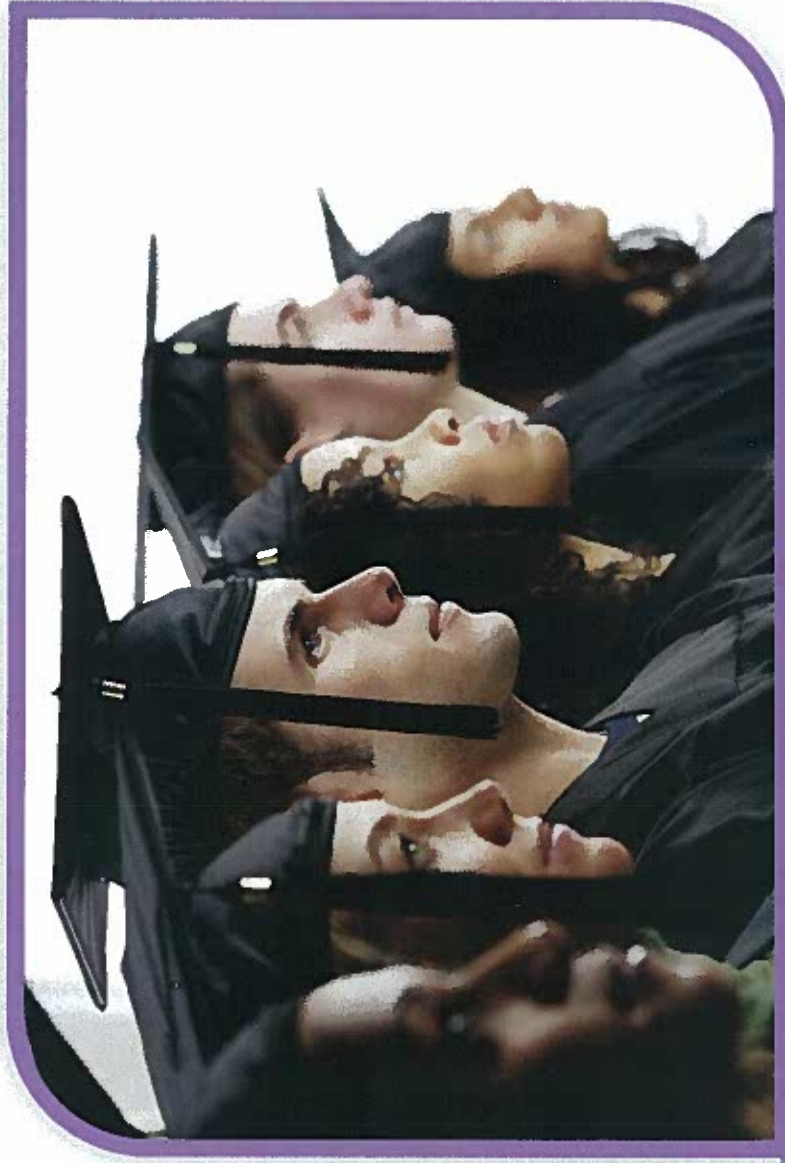


2025 Glenbrook High Schools



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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 authorized a complete review of Glenbrook High School District 225 communications efforts as a means for enhancing community support of its schools.

Situation analysis

District Background

Northfield Township High School District 225, commonly referred to as the Glenbrooks, offers a public education to approximately 4,700 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 is 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 Steve Hammer, Scott Martin, Monica Regalbuto, Joel Taub and Jeffrey Wolfson. 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. District 225 is unique in that there is a clear boundary (approx. Willow Rd.) division between the schools and the communities. This separation has its inherent challenges, especially among taxpayers who may be unaware that both are District 225 schools and therefore funded by their taxes.

Staffing/Department Structure

Following the retirement of a long-term director of community information and the impending retirement of the part-time secretary, the department is ideally poised for a change in overall goal focus and philosophy to better assist the District in its direct communications. **To that end, we will be changing the name of the department from Community Information to Public Relations and Communications.**

A comprehensive review of the department demonstrates that the communication function grew out of a dominant media relations focus that centered on publicity and promotion of student events, accomplishments and activities. While certainly part of a solid school communication plan, the goal is to broaden the focus of the department to include additional facets of 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

As part of the formulation of a comprehensive plan in 2005, the District commissioned a community survey that revealed most notably that residents were satisfied with the schools overall, but felt a lack of awareness about initiatives and services.

D225 by the numbers

4,700	Students
823	Employees
40+	Different dialects
24.8	Average ACT score
99%	Graduation rate
96%	Enter college post-graduation
300	Course offerings
70-80	Clubs and activities for students
29	Competitive sports
\$93M	Annual Operating District Budget

Media coverage

The District receives consistent media coverage in four local publications: *Triblocal (Tribune)*; Pioneer Press (*Glenview Announcements* and *Northbrook Star*); *The Journal and Topics (The Glenview Journal)*; 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.

Organized support and opposition

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

Policies

While communications is inherent in numerous District policies, only one is directly related to projects associated with the proposed communications plan: *BOE Policy 9060 – District World Wide Website*.

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. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with the executive parent association group at each school. *(A comprehensive Research Findings Report is available in Appendix A.)*

Key Findings:

Community

- 64% rate the District communications as excellent/good.
- 73% are interested in receiving information from the District.
- 58% believe the amount of information they receive is “just right” and 36% believe it is “too little”
- Local media outlets rate very high as a source of information. District newsletters come in second.
- There is a greater number of people who would prefer to receive information from the website, compared to those who find it to be a good source of information.
- There is virtually 100% Internet access in our communities.
- Fewer than 50% use social media tools.
- Attitudes are generally positive:
 - 83% believe the leadership is doing what is best for kids.
 - 71% believe the leadership is responsive and involves the community in decisions.
 - 70% believe the District provides accessible information.
- After learning that GBN and GBS is part of the same district, the majority of citizens wanted to hear about the District as a whole rather than just the school that serves their community.
- District finances are an identified concern and topic of interest for additional communication, followed closely by public events at the schools.

Students

- More than 71% think the District is doing an excellent/good job in communications.
- Students choose text messaging over email by a significant margin.
- Students use the website most often for assignments, grades, classroom information.
- 61% are interested in receiving information through social media.

- The student newspaper is a strong source of information for students. In contrast, the radio and cable TV stations are not as prevalent.
- Person-to-person communication plays a very large part in how students receive information. It's no surprise that teachers and friends are huge channels.
- Students prefer Facebook to Twitter by a significant margin.
- Almost 75% of students only want to hear news about their fellow students.
- 88% of our students attended our feeder school districts.

Staff

- 78% don't live in District 225 boundaries.
- 40% live more than 15 miles from District 225.
- 85% think the district does a good – excellent job in communicating with staff.
- The student newspaper is a strong source of information.
- Email prevails as the most common means for obtaining information.
- Overall, the District website does not provide a strong source of information.
- The data strongly supports a need for a short Board meeting summary.
- Staff are more interested in board actions, teaching and learning and district finances than student/staff accomplishments or school events.
- Staff use the website most often for calendars by a significant margin.
- Staff believe the name "Glenbrook High School District 225" best represents this District.
- More than half have smartphones.
- There is strong interest in a monthly staff newsletter.
- There is also interest in an Intranet as a resource. Human Resources was an emerging theme in the open ended responses. Staff want access to forms, benefits, etc., in one place.
- Finance was seen as a serious issue facing the district, but communication, and organizational culture also surfaced.

Parents

- 90% think the District does an excellent/good job communicating with parents.
- Again, the student newspaper registered as a fairly strong source of information.
- District controlled sources registered high – *Connections*, website.
- Blogs are generally unpopular as a source, but online publications are gaining popularity.
- Parents desire information about school events and teaching/learning by far.

- Calendars are the most popular reason to visit the website. Events are a close second.
- Parents are most interested in RSS calendar feeds and videos as website enhancements.
- The majority of parents only visit the website once a week or less.
- 66% of parents prefer *Connections* to be email only. By a huge majority (87%), parents cite email as the best way to communicate with them about routine/general items.
- 87% would like to receive a short summary of the Board meetings.
- 99% of respondents have Internet access at home.
- 74% of parents use Facebook; much higher than even YouTube, which showed 51% of parents using the video tool. However, far fewer are interested in receiving information about the District through social media.
- In all of the “feeling” statements, the District scored overwhelmingly positive.
- Parents are equally divided on whether they want District- or school-specific communication.
- The website is a constant frustration for parents. Cited as difficult to navigate, outdated content, and poor calendars.

Communications audit recommendations

As part of the development of the communications plan, Chicago-based public relations firm Jasculca/Terman conducted an audit of our current program. After careful review of the research findings, Jasculca/Terman provided District 225 with a thorough list of recommendations to enhance communication efforts. (*The full audit report is available in Appendix B.*) Priority recommendations included:

- **Infrastructure:** More strategic department focus; additional staff support for the communications function.
- **Website:** Enhance the calendar feature; complete website redesign for improved function and navigation.
- **Media Relations:** Host annual media day; develop editorial calendar; update media lists; work with student paper.
- **Content Development:** Focus on finances, innovative programs, Board action summaries.
- **Opinion Leader Outreach:** Create a formal key communicators network; host VIP receptions.

District Communications Plan

*Build trust and support for District 225 schools | Support the educational mission of District 225
Enhance and protect the District 225 brand*

Goal 1: Increase awareness of the District.

Measurable Objectives:

- 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.
- By May 2013, community residents with no children in our schools will be able to recall key facts about District 225.
- By May 2013, at least 100 identified community opinion leaders will have attended a reception or formal gathering with Board members and the Superintendent.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline
Increase taxpayer exposure to official District message	Establish and maintain Key Communicators program (MR/KG) Invite selected residents to events (Variety show, Musical, etc.); host VIP reception w/ Supt. Welcome (KG/MR) *Consider adding State of the District in Conjunction. - Leverage video, Board meetings; use info in all publications and outlets.	Opinion Leaders Opinion Leaders	Quarterly Start: 2012-13 Spring, annually Start: 2012-13

<p>(Continued...) Increase taxpayer exposure to official District message</p>	<p>Produce community newsletter (2x year) (KG) - Key content includes finance, innovative learning, and events.</p> <p>Redesign website; (KG/PG/Admin) - Help taxpayers interact with District</p> <p>Establish an e-newsletter subscription/list-serve (KG)</p> <p>Revise crisis communications procedures (KG, Admin)</p>	<p>All community residents</p> <p>Parents, students, staff, community</p> <p>Community, parents</p> <p>Community, parents</p>	<p>Fall/spring, annually</p> <p>Immediate 2011-12, 12-13</p> <p>2011-12</p> <p>2011-12</p>
<p>Infuse District brand into communications</p>	<p>Formalize District 225 brand: (KG/Contract) - Determine brand "name" - Consider new logo - Draft and enforce style guidelines - Create tagline</p> <p>Draft District key messages (KG)</p> <p>Increase communication about mission, vision, goals, progress <i>Dashboard</i> (KG)</p> <p>Infuse brand into all publications, including website (KG, All)</p>	<p>Community, regional</p> <p>Community, parents, staff</p> <p>Community, parents</p> <p>Community, parents</p>	<p>2011-12, 12-13 *w/Website</p> <p>2011-12, 12-13</p> <p>Immediate</p> <p>Upon completion of branding project</p>

(Continued...) District brand	Produce a District video (KG/Contract)	Community, regional	2011-12, 12-13
Continue to maintain Board's credibility	Distribute/post Board meeting summary immediately (KG) <i>BOE meeting in two minutes</i>	Parents, staff, eNews subscribers	Start: July 2011 24-36 hours after every mtg.
	Honor students and staff at meetings <i>Those Who Excel</i> (KG)	Students, parents	At most mtgs.
	Establish Board policies regarding Public and Media Relations (KG/BOE)	Community, media	2011-12
	Issue press releases for all major District initiatives/BOE actions (KG)	Community, parents	After most mtgs.
	Host annual State of the District address (video/meeting) (MR/KG)	Community, parents, staff	Annual, (Jan or May)
Increase timeliness, frequency, transparency of information	Daily website updates (KG/Admin) - News Sections - Finances - Dashboards	Parents, Community	In conjunction w/web design
	Utilize social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter (KG/ITCs) -Develop policies	Students, alumni, parents	2011-12
Enhance understanding and awareness about District issues	Put issues in context by utilizing comparisons, analogies, historical data, trends, etc.	Community, parents	As needed

(Continued...) Enhance understanding and awareness about District issues	Conduct School Finance 101 courses/publications/videos (HS)	Community, parents	Semi-annual 2012-13
	Establish District brand (Admin)	Community, regional	On-going
Enhance media relations and continue to work both locally and regionally for placement	School Notes – Local Media (KG)	Community	Weekly
	Pitch media on stories of interest (KG)	Community	Monthly
	Revise current student photo policies and procedures regarding media (KG, Admin)	Community	Immediate 2011
	Develop an editorial calendar (KG)	Community	2012-13
	Update media contact list (KG)	Community	2012-13
	Host an annual Media Day (KG)	Media	2012-13
	Post positive news coverage on web (KG/Admin)	Parents, students, staff	In conjunction w/new website
Provide opportunities for stakeholder engagement	Consider allowing two-way communication through official social media sites (KG/ITCs/Admin)	Alumni, parents, students	2011-12
	Collaborate with the Glenbrook High School Foundation (MR/KG)	Community	On-going

Work collaboratively with similar organizations

Continue regular meetings with feeder districts; area high school districts, village and municipal entities; government officials. Identify any potential for enhancements (Admin)
*Consider guest columns in other publications (KG/Admin)

Community

On-going

Community

Twice/year

Goal 2: Improve official District communication with parents and students.

Measurable Objectives:

- By May 2013, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among students and parents will increase by five percent.
- 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.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline
Create opportunities for engagement/input	Conduct focus groups on major initiatives Consider utilizing two-way communication through social media	Parents, students Students, parents	As needed Start: 2011 On-going
Leverage existing publications	Collaborate with student newspapers - Pitch District story ideas - Meet regularly - Consider student interns	Students, parents (staff)	Start: 2011-12 On-going
Leverage high levels of internet accessibility	Produce <i>e-Connections</i> only, Supply District-level articles Send new District eNews automatically Redesign website - Improve calendar functionality Coordinate school-based mailings among depts. to reduce frequency.	Parents Parents Parents, students Parents	Start: Aug. 2011 Start: 2011-12 2011-12, 12-13 2011-12

(Continued...)	Leverage high levels of internet accessibility	Begin utilizing electronic means for more routine items.	Parents	2011-12
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Goal 3: Improve internal communications.

Measurable Objectives:

- By May 2013, the overall, combined communications rating of “excellent/good” among staff will increase by five percent. At least 25% of staff will rate communications as “excellent,” an increase of 6%.
- 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.

Strategies	Tactics (R)	Target	Timeline
Enhance staff understanding of PR function	Provide official communications guidelines (KG/Admin) -Explain PR/Com -Provide samples Implement a tip line	Staff	On-going August 2011
Providing communications training opportunities	Crisis level media training (KG) Media training (KG) How to design a website (ITCs) Social media for promotional purposes (ITCs, KG) Publicity (KG) New Teachers Orientation	Administrators Administrators All staff Clubs, sports Clubs, sports New staff	2012-13 2012-13 2011-12, 12-13 2012-13 2011-12 Start: 2011

Increase exposure to official District communication	Implement a monthly staff newsletter	Start: 2011-12
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board meeting summary - High level District news - Items from monthly <i>Connections</i> 	
	Build a new staff intranet	Staff
	-Forms, news, etc. (SC/KG/PG)	2013-14

Evaluation:

- Establish annual communications surveys for parents, students and staff.
 - May 2013
 - May 2014
- Conduct a formal telephone survey of community residents with no children in our schools in May 2014. Utilize similar questions from the survey in January 2011 for comparisons.
- Utilize informal focus groups of parents, students and staff as needed for major projects such as the website redesign, calendars, publications.
- 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.
- Track the number of participants in district-level events such as VIP receptions, State of the District addresses, etc.
- Monitor media coverage and placement. Cite positive/neutral/negative articles.
- Monitor and report on social media use and interactions.
- Evidence of Communications Guidelines Handbook; Crisis Communications Procedures; Communications Staff Training; Press Releases.
- Present annual update on the progress of the District communications plan to the Board of Education. (Summer)