



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

2017-2018

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Overview:

In January 2010, the Carson City School District (CCSD) and Board of Trustees assessed the need for a strategic internal and external communications plan to help manage information for respective audiences including employees, parents, students, business partnerships, media, etc. The district and trustees felt it important to hire a Public Information Officer (PIO) to assist in building and executing such plans, to maintain an ongoing analysis of the district's brand / public perception and to serve as the district spokesperson in areas of sensitivity or controversy. In February 2017, a PIO was hired and the following communications plan was created. The plan is designed to be evaluated and modified as needs, opportunities and strategies evolve from year to year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A public school district relies on support from its community. Based on figures from the Silver State's KIDS COUNT project, nearly 78 percent of the total population within the CCSD's boundaries are not school-aged children. CCSD schools maintain the high level of education this community has 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 audiences 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.

DISTRICT BACKGROUND

Located in Nevada's capital, CCSD offers public education to approximately 7,600 students in Carson City. The district includes 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools 1 alternative high school, 1 comprehensive high school, 1 charter school, an online school program and an adult and prison inmate education program. CCSD boasts many successes including impressive graduation rates, strict safety measures, programs for gifted students and advanced-placement classes, among several others.

In November 2011, the United States Department of Education awarded \$10 million to CCSD through the **Race To The Top** grant to develop its learner-centered education model. The school district finished No. 1 in the national application process.

Recent results show Nevada students improved scores in **advanced placement** exams for two years straight and Carson High School (CHS) also showed improvement. More than 75 percent of CHS students who took AP exams scored a 3 or higher, compared to 52 percent of the state and 60 percent globally.

In a joint venture with Western Nevada College, the CCSD **Jump Start** College program allows students to complete their junior and senior year of high school and freshman year of college simultaneously. In its first year, 100 percent of CCSD seniors enrolled in the program passed their math and English courses.

By the numbers

7,613	Students
900	Employees
17.62 composite	Average ACT score
86.20 percent	Graduation rate (compared to the state rate of 70.86 percent)
\$59,724,028	Annual Operating District Budget
56 percent	Poverty Level (free & reduced lunch)

COMMUNICATION MISSION

The CCSD Communications Department and Public Information Officer exists to manage communication for the district and the Board of Trustees with their respective internal and external audiences. They are committed to helping the district achieve its strategic plan of providing quality education that prepares all children for a successful future. Their mission is to establish positive relationships and credibility between CCSD and its audiences through the timely and accurate dissemination of information. The department also serves as a crucial link between the media and the district in both proactive and reactive news situations.

DISTRICT VISION

Our Community Empowers Tomorrow's Innovators, Leaders and Thinkers.

DISTRICT BELIEFS AND VALUES

- Every student must have the opportunity to excel and be prepared for success in post-secondary education or a chosen career.
- Every student must continue to learn beyond school hours.
- The measure of success must extend beyond standardized tests to students who are life-long learners.
- Students must be empowered to achieve a lifestyle that is physically and emotionally healthy, and socially responsible.
- Students, families, schools, businesses and the community must work in partnership to pursue academic excellence and civic involvement.
- We must recruit, empower, and retain the most effective educators and staff.
- To move our community and our nation forward, students must receive a world class education.

DISTRICT MISSION

In partnership with families and the community, we will make the most of every day for each student by empowering them with the skills, knowledge, values and opportunities to thrive. We strive to make Carson City education exceptional and inspire our children to be successful, prosperous and thoughtful citizens.

DISTRICT GOALS

To live our vision, support our beliefs and accomplish our mission, we must have:

1. Exceptional staff
2. Curriculum that matters
3. Engaged parents and families
4. Healthy generations of Carson students
5. A community in full partnership

INTRODUCTION

This communications plan will serve as a guide for CCSD communications strategies during the 2017-18 school year. It will ensure the communications efforts align with the district's Strategic Plan and meet the district's public relations and school [communications Accepted Practice](#), the District [Policy No. 901](#) for Public Relations, [Policy No. 265](#) and [Regulation No. 265](#) for Social Media Application and [Policy No. 904](#) for School Visitors. It will also guide the district as it communicates key messages effectively to all its audiences.

SCOPE OF PLAN

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.

RESEARCH

Formal research will be conducted during the fall semester accreditation survey and parent and family engagement surveys. Until then, previous formal and informal research methods were utilized in the assessment of target audience needs, expectations and perspectives for this plan.

The Board of Trustees and Superintendent have demonstrated support for regular research and evaluation. Teachers, administrators, classified employees, nurses and clinical aides provided input in January 2016 via an online survey. More than 481 responses were generated.

Key Findings:

- Attitudes of teachers, administrators and staff are generally positive:
 - Nearly 84% would recommend this district as a good place to work (including 12.68% who remained neutral)
 - More than 80% are satisfied working for the district
 - Nearly 96% are satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues (including the 5.82% who remained neutral).
 - Nearly 84% are satisfied with the physical environment in which they work (including the 9.77% who remained neutral).

- There are no available figures for average daily visits to the website (carsoncityschools.com) for mobile and desktop applications.
- Social Media followers for Facebook and Twitter totaled 2,842 in February 2017.
- There were no previous benchmarks or measures in place to track or evaluate communication efforts.

Recommended questions for the next survey:

- To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I believe the district provides accessible information (agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree or disagree).
- To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I believe the leadership is doing what is best for kids (agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree or disagree).
- To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I believe the amount of information I receive from the district is “just right” (agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree or disagree).
- Please rate the district communications in terms of how well it informs its direct customers (parents, students, teachers and staff, community partners and businesses, and news media) – excellent, good, average, fair, or poor.

OBJECTIVES:

The timeline for these annual objectives will encompass the 2017-2018 school year. So, with the exception of objective No. 2, it is anticipated these will be achieved by July 2018.

1. Recruit, provide professional growth opportunities and **retain exceptional personnel** for all positions within the school district by improving knowledge about, and support for, the district. Measurable successes should include filling all available positions within the district, maintaining monthly employee newsletters and creating a multipurpose promotional video.
2. Actively connect every student with **curriculum that matters** by providing leadership for increasing student performance and academic achievement goals set by the superintendent (measurement will be **evaluated by the end of the 2020 school year**):
 - a. 90 percent of all students will graduate from high school on-time (CCSD is currently at 80.3 percent, with the average graduation rate in the state of Nevada at 72 percent and 81 percent nationwide).
 - b. 80 percent of all eighth grade students will complete and pass Algebra 1 (currently at 32 percent).
 - c. 80 percent of CCSD students will earn a 3 or a 4 on End of Course exams in Math, English Language Arts (ELA) and Science (currently at 33 percent in Math and 51 percent in ELA).
 - d. 80 percent of CCSD students will earn a 3 or a 4 on the Mathematics and ELA portion of the SBAC exam (currently 28 percent in Math and 28 percent in ELA).

- e. Juniors taking the ACT will obtain a composite score of 19 or higher (currently CCSD Juniors score a composite of 18.5 and the 2016 State of Nevada average ACT composite score was 17.7).
- 3. **Empower parents and inspire families** to positively impact their child's education in a welcoming, informative and collaborative school culture. Measurable successes should include maintaining primary points for information with the proactive, positive and accurate information. Efforts should apply social media policies and communication accepted practices to disseminate information through established channels (website visits, social media followers and news media reach).
 - a. Average more than 1,000 daily views of the website by July 1, 2018 (not sure on the specifics of this number because there is no previous benchmark).
 - b. Add more than 400 new followers to social network sites by July 1, 2018.
 - c. Generate a local earned media (advertising equivalent X 3) of more than \$75,000 with the total number of positive or neutral stories averaging greater 90 percent by July 1, 2018.
- 4. Advance **physical, social and emotional wellness** for all students by recognizing more than 100 individual students at School Board Meetings.
- 5. Actively connect every student with a **community in full partnership** and learning beyond the classroom by establishing three (3) new community partners by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS

The Carson City School District Communications Department is dedicated to serving principals, schools, managers and departments to meet communication needs. The following activities will be or are being performed continuously:

Media Relations

A key function of the PIO is to publicize our schools' good news; events, activities and awards. He/she serves as the district spokesperson and as a liaison between schools, the district and the media. Managing a strong relationship with the media is critical in promoting district, student and staff accomplishments. Publicity regarding students shall always be evaluated in terms of the effect on the children.

All school district employees shall notify the PIO's office whenever they are contacted by the media. If the topic is sensitive or significant, the employee will notify the PIO directly and immediately.

Nothing in this strategic approach is intended as a restraint on the expression of personal opinion by any employee of the School District, but rather is designed to promote uniform and accurate communication with all media outlets.

Public Relations Counsel and Training

The PIO develops communications plans, trains staff and parent groups. The PIO also provides public relations, marketing and communications counsel on issues that impact schools, departments and the district. Finally, the PIO also provides advice on written and oral communications, including school newsletters, letters home, brochures, talking points, key message development, media requests, etc.

Community Relations and Outreach

This area of focus is designed to build support and reach out to the greater Carson City community. The PIO will work with dozens of community groups; service clubs and organizations; and key business and opinion leaders to inform, recruit and promote community involvement.

Crisis Communication and Management

The PIO provides counsel to schools and district leaders to resolve crisis situations and/or emergencies, including the use of communication vehicles like parent letters, social media, talking points and key messages. He/she also provides crisis media relations when schools are locked down or have experienced an incident.

Employee Communications

The PIO and superintendent are responsible for the content and/or publishing of e-newsletters and online information for Carson City School District employees.

CCSD Website

The Communications and Information Technologies team regularly posts information on employee pages and coordinates content creation and web architecture.

Multimedia Production

The communications team will produce informational videos for employees with messages from the superintendent and other district employees about budget issues, assessment scores and other timely topics. The videos will be available through the website as well as in emails and the newsletters. Multimedia presentations will be produced for community meetings, budget forums and internal leadership meetings. CCSD photographs are also used in all publications, presentations, district website and on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

Superintendent Email Newsletters (direct email from the superintendent)

An email newsletter from the superintendent directly to employees. Sent as frequently as deemed necessary.

The Leadership Memos

This is email publication sent (as regularly as deemed necessary) to all administrators (principals, assistant principals, department managers and

supervisors and principal's secretaries), featuring brief updates on current district issues in a quick, easy-to-read manner. Information is divided into "action items," "management items," "instructional news," "training and development opportunities," and "FYI reminders." Administrators receiving the Leadership Memo are encouraged to share the information with their staff.

Employee Newsletter (direct email from the communications department)

A monthly (or as deemed necessary) e-newsletter for employees published during the school year, available to district employees via email and on the district website. The newsletter contains district news and information, job opportunities and announcements. The newsletter would be a subscription based email using a third-party provider such as Constant Contact. Emails will be added at the beginning of each school year; any duplicate emails will be automatically written over. Recipients, if they feel inundated, may unsubscribe at any time.

News Briefs

A brief synopsis of the latest news coverage and public information sent daily (or as deemed necessary) to CCSD leadership. Topics may be related to CCSD and notices from the communications team, other school districts and public statements and programs, national education news, etc.

Other Publications and Social Media

Annual Report

The annual report showcases the district's achievement and accomplishments of the strategic plan. The annual report is published online each year and should be available via the website. Members of the public may request a printed copy.

Community E-newsletters

A semi-annually (or as deemed necessary) e-newsletter sent to community subscribers. The goal of the publication is to provide a snapshot of the many accomplishments that occur in CCSD schools every week. Recipients include parents, community members, business leaders, media and organizations. The newsletter would be a subscription based email using a third-party provider such as Constant Contact. Emails will be added at the beginning of each school year; any duplicate emails will be automatically written over. Recipients, if they feel inundated, may unsubscribe at any time.

Senator Square

Senator Square is a partnership between CCSD and the Nevada Appeal newspaper. It is distributed to approximately 25,000 daily and 35,000 on Sundays. It includes district news, events, budget information, feature stories, district resources and more.

Quarterly Newsletter (electronic for parents)

This quarterly newsletter serves as an information tool to communicate district news and events to the community. The e-newsletter is available in English and Spanish. The newsletter would be a subscription based email using a third-party provider such as Constant Contact. Emails will be added at the beginning of each school year; any duplicate emails will be automatically written over. Additionally, subscriber requests will be available on the homepage of the website. Recipients, if they feel inundated, may unsubscribe at any time.

CCSD's Facebook and Twitter pages

CCSD's Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/carsoncityschooldistrictccsd/> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/carsonschools> pages provide real-time district and school news to the community. The pages are used as a tool to relay information of school closures, emergencies, good news and events. The pages aim to engage community about local, state and national education news/topics, report from live board of education meetings and other district meetings and events and post student and staff pictures and achievements.

CCSD Website

The district's website, <http://www.carsoncityschools.com/>, is a comprehensive source of information about district programs, schools, curriculum, policies, events and operations. It was designed to meet the information needs of parents, students and the community. The site was created using web best practices, which included a usability study conducted with parents, students and staff. The performance of the site is monitored using analytics and a yearly online user survey is conducted to ensure the site meets key indicators and the goals of the district's Strategic Plan.

- School Profiles: The online school profiles provide parents and students detailed information about CCSD Schools. Individual school leadership maintains these profiles which are updated regularly.

COMMUNICATION VISION

It is the vision of the communications department to develop a high level of support from the community for CCSD. Through efficient and productive communications with all audiences, the district will be known for providing a quality education for all students and for being a good steward of taxpayer money. The district will actively pursue two-way communications by listening to its staff and community to continuously improve and evaluate communications efforts. Communication efforts will help CCSD students be known for their educational excellence and for their community leadership. Communication efforts will also help employees be knowledgeable ambassadors for the district, communicating key messages to the community.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Internal

1. CCSD employees (educators, certified employees and administrators)
2. CCSD leadership (district office employees and administrators)

External

3. CCSD parents
4. CCSD students
5. Northern Nevada businesses and partners
6. Northern Nevada community members with school-aged children (parents and grandparents)
7. Northern Nevada news media

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Goal 1: Establish an effective community relations program to build collaborative relationships and strengthen support for and confidence in CCSD.

Strategy 1.1: Cultivate and strengthen relationships with the district’s “Opinion Leaders” to engage them in the district’s vision; help them understand district beliefs and values and ultimately engage in the mission by considering challenges.

Tactic 1.1.1: Ongoing update of the “Opinion Leaders” database.

Tactic 1.1.2: Exchange information for use in communications for the following outlets:

- Established parent organizations (PTA)
- Student Councils
- Student News weekly using the Nevada Appeal as a district communication tool for Carson City residents with and without children in school

Strategy 1.2: Determine public attitudes toward the district and increase awareness and support for CCSD schools.

Tactic 1.2.1: Update list of strategically selected community organizations.

Tactic 1.2.2: Continue to evaluate groups for their strategic relationship to the district.

Tactic 1.2.3: Conduct public opinion research and feedback through website (<http://www.carsoncityschools.com/>) and social media.

Strategy 1.33: Leverage external communications through existing community and civic publications such as neighborhood newsletters, municipal newsletters and other targeted community publications.

Tactic 1.3.1: Use local publications to communicate strategic information:

- Carson Now
- Northern Nevada Business Weekly
- Carson City Chamber of Commerce
- Carson City Government
- Travel Nevada
- MyActiveChild.com
- Reno Moms Blog
- Reno Tahoe USA

Tactic 1.3.2: Develop an editorial calendar to pitch articles on a regular basis to targeted publications.

Strategy 1.4: Maintain and improve the superintendent's outreach programs.

Tactic 1.4.1: Arrange speaking engagements for the superintendent at strategically selected community and civic organizations.

Tactic 1.4.2: Maintain and continue to build the "Opinion Leaders" database.

Tactic 1.4.3: Use of videos with the superintendent to reach parents, employees and the community at large.

Goal 2: Establish an effective media relations program that enhances the district's image in the community.

Strategy 2.1: Develop a strategic media communications program that is proactive and reactive.

Tactic 2.1.1: Provide the local and national media with proactive stories about CCSD.

Tactic 2.1.2: Respond in a timely, reliable fashion to media inquiries and requests.

Tactic 2.1.3: Assist media by providing access to schools/classrooms and district education experts who can provide interviews and background information about important education-related topics.

Tactic 2.1.4: The PIO will act as district spokesperson when necessary.

Tactic 2.1.5: Social media has become part of media relations; many reporters follow the district's Twitter feed and Facebook page. Communications services will continue to use Facebook and Twitter as an additional resource to inform the media.

Goal 3: Establish an effective employee communications program that improves knowledge about, and support for, the district.

Strategy 3.1: Continue to strengthen the content and design of key communication tools for employees.

Tactic 3.1.1: Deliver daily media monitoring reports (News Briefs) of current CCSD and other education-related media stories to district cabinet members, department leaders and other employees as requested.

Tactic 3.1.2: Deliver a monthly employee e-newsletter, to provide timely district and education news, board of education agendas and action items, CCSD events, photographs/videos and feature stories to all CCSD employees.

Tactic 3.1.3: Use an employee-only (login) page on the website to post important information for employees.

Tactic 3.1.4: Produce videos with stories and topics that impact employees which are then incorporated into district publications and social media.

Tactic 3.1.5: Use social media and E-Learning to enhance employee communications.

Goal 4: Establish a strong, positive connection between individual schools and their communities.

Strategy 4.1: Develop tools and resources to help principals become more effective in their roles as communicators for the district.

Tactic 4.1.1: Provide assessment and assistance to schools as needed for:

- Marketing analysis, brochures, web pages, “Opinion Leader” networks, etc.
- Review schools’ current communications methods and tools as requested including video and still shots.

Tactic 4.1.2: Provide media training that will help principals understand how to work with the media and develop skills to communicate appropriate messages for their schools (as needed).

Tactic 4.1.3: Write and distribute articles for school newsletters on important topics; include photographs/video when appropriate.

Tactic 4.1.4: Review school websites and make suggestions for improvements.

Tactic 4.1.5: Review school social media sites and make suggestions for improvements.

Tactic 4.1.6: Invite to attend networking seminars (Chamber Luncheons, WIN Breakfast Meetings, Rotary Meeting, PRSA, NSPRA, etc.)

Goal 5: Support members of the Board of Trustees in their efforts to engage the community around district issues and initiatives.

Strategy 5.1: Develop strategies for effective community engagement for the Board of Trustees.

- Tactic 5.1.1: Communications Services team will utilize social media to inform the public about board meetings (i.e. Twitter and Facebook).
- Tactic 5.1.2: Support board members with talking points and frequently asked questions on district issues.
- Tactic 5.1.3: Support board members with informational videos and PowerPoint presentations to be used during public meetings.
- Tactic 5.1.4: Utilize Twitter and Facebook regarding regular Board of Trustees meetings.
- Tactic 5.1.5: Invite board members to attend networking seminars (Chamber Luncheons, WIN Breakfast Meetings, Rotary Meeting, PRSA, NSPRA, etc.)

Goal 6: Communicate the district's vision and goals through strategic messaging.

Strategy 6.11: Develop message/position statements that represent the district's vision, goals, challenges and accomplishments.

- Tactic 6.1.1: Evaluate the district's strategic plan to determine messaging points.
- Tactic 6.1.2: Communicate challenges and opportunities with appropriate shareholders.
 - Produce video stories and interviews for website, Facebook, and internal and external e-newsletters that represent the district's goals and challenges.

Goal 7: Improve the public's access to online district information and facilitate the flow of information.

Strategy 7.1: Provide online tools that empower the public to interact with CCSD.

- Tactic 7.1.1: Improve the Web governance structure and organizational policies that define responsibilities, relationships, and rules involved in managing the district's online communications.
- Tactic 7.1.2: Gather data and analyze the needs of target audiences (web and social media users) in order to develop an appropriate online structure and content.
- Tactic 7.1.3: Work with IT to identify technology that will facilitate accurate and timely communications with target audiences.
- Tactic 7.1.4: Write appropriate content for the identified web audience.

- Tactic 7.1.5: Identify news and other content that can be published online to keep targeted audiences informed.
- Tactic 7.1.6: Use website analytics data to monitor usage and ensure best practices.
- Tactic 7.1.7: Provide access to online tools such as Parent Portal, SchoolMessenger and E-Learning.

Strategy 7.2: Use social media to provide immediate two-way communications with targeted audiences and build relationships and awareness of issues.

- Tactic 7.2.1: Create and maintain Facebook and Twitter sites to reach targeted audiences who use these forms of online communications.
- Tactic 7.2.2: Use Facebook and Twitter to extend the reach of our communications and maintain the district's brand.
- Tactic 7.2.3: Use Twitter and Facebook to provide real-time communications about events, school board meetings, activities, crisis situations, etc.
- Tactic 7.2.4: Use social media to monitor conversations about CCSD and manage rumors and misinformation.

Goal 8: Create an effective crisis communications strategy that ensures the public and staff are informed, safeguards student and staff privacy, maintains safety and protects the educational process.

Strategy 8.1: Identify and prepare communications tools to be used during a crisis.

- Tactic 8.1.1: Ensure that staff is trained on SchoolMessenger – the district's emergency messaging system for communicating with parents via phone, text and email (providing an ESL/Spanish translation component).
- Tactic 8.1.2: Create and maintain an emergency school closure/alert web page and social media sites.
- Tactic 8.1.3: Maintain an emergency school closure/alert phone line.
- Tactic 8.1.4: Develop a media call list for school emergency alerts.

Strategy 8.2: Identify key roles and responsibility to be instituted during a crisis.

- Tactic 8.2.1: Determine decision points and timeline for release of alerts and notifications.
- Tactic 8.2.2: Coordinate with law enforcement on the release of information to ensure accuracy.

Strategy 8.3: Develop and use key messages.

- Tactic 8.3.1: Gather background information.
- Tactic 8.3.2: Identify target audiences.

- Tactic 8.3.3: Write key messages for parents, media, students, staff, and other applicable targeted audiences.
- Tactic 8.3.4: Identify timelines for communications.
- Tactic 8.3.5: Identify affected individuals and ensure their privacy.
- Tactic 8.3.6: Work in conjunction with law enforcement / first responders to ensure uniformity in key messages.

Strategy 8.4: Develop media plan.

- Tactic 8.4.1: Identify a media staging area.
- Tactic 8.4.2: Identify media onsite at crisis area.
- Tactic 8.4.3: Determine coordination with law enforcement / first responders.
- Tactic 8.4.4: Identify and communicate timeline for updates to the media.

Strategy 8.5.5: Work with schools to prepare for crisis communications.

- Tactic 8.5.1: Communicate to principals how the communications team will support them during a crisis, which may include media relations / spokesperson, School Messenger, Facebook and/or Twitter.

EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

The following resources will be utilized to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of this communications plan.

- Principal/leadership survey
- Media survey
- Employee survey
- Media hits – proactive
- Social media usage: Facebook and Twitter followers
- Opinion Leaders survey
- Community feedback
- Website usage and average daily visits

CONCLUSION

This communications plan is an outline for communications efforts in 2017-18. Should the district's needs change significantly during this time period, this plan will be adjusted. This plan will be updated each year to reflect progress and new goals.