



**MEQUON-THIENSVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<u>Subject:</u> Communication Plan Update	<u>Category:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Action <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information
<u>Attachments:</u> May 13 2011 Communications Plan follow up from Joe Donovan	<u>Date for Consideration:</u> August 15, 2011

Background

In spring 2007, a volunteer ad hoc communication committee (15 + members) was formed and coordinated by Ann Brownfield and Suzette Urbashich. The committee was comprised of parents, community members, staff, and administration representatives, for the purpose of creating and distributing positive communication and information about the district, students, schools, and staff. The committee targeted increased/more effective use of the cable channel, press releases, newsletters, MTSD website and other promotional and information pieces. Volunteers initially undertook project responsibilities. However, over the next 18 months it became clear that coordination, completion and expansion of such efforts via volunteer time and expertise were unsustainable. The committee recommended the district work with a consultant to develop a communication plan and a framework for sustainable efforts. The recommendation was approved by the BOE.

The District engaged the services of The Donovan Group in 2009 via a bidding and interview process to assist with the communication/marketing function in the district. Funding was provided partly with a grant from MTEF. The Donovan Group led the design and implementation of a communications audit to assess our communication efforts in the community. The survey revealed 85% of community members responding were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the communication coming from the District. A communications plan was developed based upon the 2009 survey findings and presented in early 2010. The focus of the plan was to improve the District's efforts to better communicate with the community around certain messages, including financial challenges, and to promote the District's vision. The plan articulated month-by-month goals based on specific communication "pillars." The BOE approved a second year of work with the consultant, again with support from the MTEF.

The communication committee reviewed both the survey results and the communication plan with the consultant and provided additional input and direction for future efforts. The committee overwhelmingly supports the continuation of these efforts, recognizing and emphasizing the competitive market for potential students, and the ongoing need to inform and communicate with the community about district/student events, performance, and needs.

Strengths	Needs Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The communications plan resulted in the creation of many foundational communication systems and products: the Annual Report, the Annual Budget Report, templates for press releases, style guides for the aforementioned documents, the HHS monthly e-newsletter, District e-newsletter and a promotional piece for the district. It should be noted that the e-newsletters were not in the original plan. Steps were also taken to present the promotional piece to realtors in the area. The communication plan also resulted in monthly video reports by the superintendent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some goals in the plan were not completed, including more video production for the cable channel, introduction of social networking and more regular website updates. School fact sheets should be added as an offshoot of the District promotional materials and are yet to be created. Other areas which yet need to be addressed include communication with alumni, parents of new grads, and better communication with citizens on an ongoing basis, particularly those who otherwise have no connection to the District. This was particularly evident in communication during the recent community discussion of the trimester issue. The lack of an IT Director this year slowed the process of website upgrades to facilitate easier website updates. While this was not a Donovan Group issue, it affected communications.

Recommendations

1. Work with the new IT Director to ensure there is accountability for upgrading of the website and a process in place to insure there are ongoing updates. This responsibility needs to be expanded to include the social networking piece of the communications plan.
2. Complete the unfinished items noted above.
3. Work with a PR/marketing firm to develop strategies for communicating the appropriate message regarding the strategic planning initiative and the trimester roll-out. Use this to create a framework for doing similar work in the future.
4. The support we will receive for this function from MTEF will be 0 for the 2011-12 school year. The District should continue to fund this function at the same total level, (\$29,772) at least to maintain the communication initiatives already begun and to finish what is still on the list. PR/marketing associated with the strategic planning initiative should be considered as part of the budget for that overall project.
5. Engage the communication committee in an advisory/feedback role going forward as appropriate/needed.

Action Steps Timeline	Funding	Responsible Leadership	Status
Complete recommendation #3 asap; #1 within 6 months, #2 within the year; #4 in Oct. with final budget decisions.	\$29,772	Superintendent, IT Director,	

Submitted By: Ann Brownfield & Suzette Urbashich on behalf of the Communication Committee	
Board of Education Action:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approve <input type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/> Research/Report Back



May 18, 2011

To: Suzette Urbashich, Ann Brownfield and Demond Means
From: Joe Donovan
Re: Communications plan follow-up

The purpose of this brief memo is to follow up on our recent meeting about next year's communications efforts.

As discussed, our work to date has focused on the execution of a communications plan and the institutionalization of a process that allows us to continually improve on that plan. In this way, our work has involved the creation of onetime efforts, such as the creation of the district's e-newsletter template, and ongoing efforts, such as the use of the e-newsletter template to distribute monthly news.

Our work to date has involved the publication of a budget document, a performance document, two monthly e-newsletters, a host of news releases, several brochures and monthly web-based videos, as well as ongoing assistance with the creation and distribution of district news and other communications-related efforts as needed.

In our last meeting, and in that of the communications advisory committee, we have focused on our next year's efforts, which will build on past successes and address additional communications needs in the district. More specifically, over the next year, we plan to develop a robust communications plan that addresses challenges outlined by the committee and includes the following items:

School fact sheets: This project involves the creation of a one-page fact sheet for each of the schools that can be posted to the district's website and printed in small batches. These sheets will be easily shared with families that are considering moving into the district.

Program fact sheets: Similar to the school fact sheets, the program fact sheets will highlight important programs in the district, including co-curricular and academic programs. The program sheets can also be posted to the website and printed in small batches.

Updating the district's logo: The district's logo is in need of an update. We will undergo a process of refreshing or otherwise updating the logo.

Improving the district's website: While the district's website is very functional, and is in fact often used as an example of a good website by other school districts, the nature of online communication means that it must be regularly updated. I suggest that we work with the technology director to update the website, making use of the current site's template and features.

Social media: With the updating of the district website, we should also seek to improve the engagement of the community through the use of social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter. We have done a great deal of this type of work with other districts and can help implement this in the Mequon-Thiensville School District.

Analytics and reporting: The advent of communications through video, emailed news, the website and social media provides opportunities to measure the number of people who are viewing material, the length of time community members are spending on specific pages on the site and the number of clicks they need to find what they are seeking. This data can be aggregated and presented in memo form to the administration, board and if desired, the communications committee as a way of determining our success and establishing future communications plans.

Ongoing efforts: We will continue our existing efforts, as described above.

Based on our recent conversation and the meeting of the communications committee, I would like to present several options related to continuing our work.

OPTIONS

Option 1: The first option involves continuing to provide written materials as in past years, but discontinuing the video production work, the newsletters and the efforts to improve the website. The annual fee for this option is \$15,000.

Option 2: The second option is to continue with all efforts as in previous years, implement the recommendations listed above and also address other district needs, including the creation of additional district videos. The annual fee for this option is \$29,772, as has been charged for the past two years.

Option 3: The third option includes everything listed in option 2, but also involves the creation of additional school-level videos for marketing purposes, which would be posted to the district website. The annual fee for this option is \$35,000.

The fees noted above are for the Mequon-Thiensville School District only, and are considerably less than what the Donovan Group would charge other districts for the same level of services. Put simply, processes have already been created and relationships fostered that allow the Donovan Group to produce the deliverables listed above more efficiently, thereby reducing costs. We greatly

enjoy what we see as a mutually beneficial relationship and are glad to have the opportunity to work with an outstanding district with strong leadership.

As always, we thank you for this opportunity to work together.