

EVALUATING DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS: KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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In the following report, Hanover Research discusses Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and associated metrics to evaluate school district internal and external communications.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

To support a public school district's Communications Department in tracking progress and performance, in this report Hanover Research (Hanover) identifies a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) and other metrics used by school districts and recommended by relevant secondary sources to evaluate the effectiveness of school district communications efforts. After providing a brief overview of district communications evaluation, Hanover discusses the following two methods used most commonly to evaluate district communications:

- **Qualitative Measurement of Communication Effectiveness** – This subsection discusses KPIs and metrics that align with external (i.e., parents, families, and community members) and internal (i.e., district employees) survey questions and other qualitative data collection methods. Stakeholder surveys allow districts to measure the aspects of communication programs that are not intrinsically quantifiable.
- **Digitally-Based Methods** – This subsection first identifies common metrics used to evaluate social media, website, and other digital forms of communication and then provides recommendations for expanding digitally-based metrics. As digital forms of communication are inherently measurable, districts can choose from a range of KPIs and associated metrics to evaluate external, as well as internal, communications.

In addition, in the **Appendix** to this report, Hanover provides an overview of 20 district communication plans, highlighting their associated evaluation strategies, KPIs, and additional metrics. The examined districts include those identified by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) as having developed exemplary communication plans in recent years.

KEY FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

- **District communication plans often include limited metrics and quantitative goals to guide evaluation efforts.** Focus groups, informal stakeholder feedback, and open-response surveys are common strategies both during communication audits and later communications evaluations. As objective measurement of progress in the area of communication can be difficult, a significant portion of communication program evaluation often centers on whether specific action items, objectives, and deadlines have been met or completed. While these metrics are important in aligning specific tasks to strategic goals, they do not always measure the *effectiveness* of a given strategy or initiative.
- **Common metrics used to evaluate district communication programs typically come from stakeholder surveys or digital communications.** A review of district

communication plans finds that districts most commonly cite metrics related to digital forms of communication (e.g., social media, email, district websites) or surveys of staff, students, parents, and community members. These findings correspond with common metrics cited for evaluating district communications cited by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).

SURVEY-BASED METRICS

- **Measures captured by internal surveys intend to evaluate to what extent district employees feel informed, as well as their general relationship with the district.** For example, West Des Moines Community Schools in Iowa includes the following KPIs, each of which might relate to a single or multiple survey items, in its 2013 communication plan:
 - *Internal stakeholder understanding of the goals the district has for its students and its strategies to achieve those goals (Percentage metric)*
 - *Employee morale and pride in the district (Percentage metric)*
 - *Internal and external stakeholders' trust and confidence in the district (Percentage metric)*
- **External surveys commonly assess parent and family satisfaction with communications, as well as general awareness and broad perceptions of the district.** Many recommended measures to evaluate external communications mirror survey items included common climate surveys. In addition to communication metrics such as “percentage of parents agreeing they are informed in a timely manner of major decisions,” districts commonly develop KPIs and associated metrics around families’ relationships with, and perception of, the school district.

DIGITALLY-BASED METRICS

- **Number of social media followers and website visitors are two common metrics cited in district communication plans.** Less frequently, district communication plans include number of press releases, blog readership, email open rates, number of survey respondents, and social media reach as KPIs or metrics.
- **Experts recommend that districts evaluate digital traffic and engagement through multiple metrics.** Increases in social media followers or website hits provide limited insight into the effectiveness of external digital communications. Social media metrics can provide granular demographic data (e.g., percentage of student vs. adult-aged followers) and engagement data (e.g., the number of times a district Twitter handle is mentioned by other users or the percentage of users hiding specific Facebook posts). Similarly, website analytics metrics can help districts to better understand who their audience is and how visitors react to website navigability and content.

DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS KPIS AND METRICS

This section presents key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated metrics to evaluate district communication programs as identified by secondary sources (e.g., organizations specializing in public relations and communications). Hanover particularly highlights recommendations from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), which is one of the few organizations that focus specifically on *school district* communication and public relations programs.¹

Hanover additionally highlights KPIs and metrics commonly included in district or school communication plans. To identify districts with strategic communication plans, Hanover first examined districts that the NSPRA has recognized for their superior public relations programs since 2009.² To augment this sample, Hanover conducted a general web search for district communication plans. In the Appendix to this report, Hanover highlights communication plan examples and provides an overview of each plan's associated evaluation strategies and metrics, where available.

OVERVIEW

An effective communication program supports school districts in advancing organizational goals and strategies. To evaluate the success of specific communication and public relations initiatives (e.g., targeted outreach to a group of stakeholders), as well as the program as a whole, experts note that organizations require an initial baseline against which to measure progress.³ Consequently, the NSPRA recommends that districts manage communications and public relations through the RACE model, which guides districts to align communications-related goals, objectives, and strategies with broader district strategic goals.⁴

As Figure 1.1 describes on the following page, the RACE model begins with *research* regarding the effectiveness of the district's current communication program (i.e., the establishment of a baseline) and concludes with an *evaluation* of the program's progress following the implementation of specific strategies and initiatives. While the process is sequential, experts note that organizations should practice all steps of the RACE model continuously, and even simultaneously.⁵

¹ "NSPRA Home." National School Public Relations Association. <https://www.nspra.org/info>

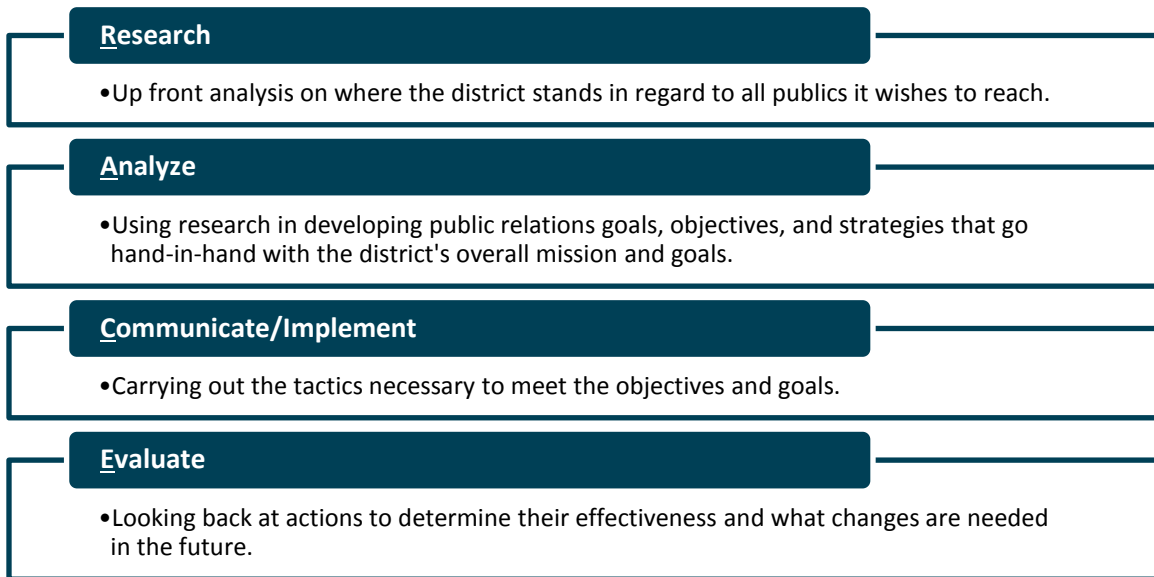
² "Gold Medallion Winners." National School Public Relations Association. <https://www.nspra.org/awards/gold-medallion-winners>

³ "Five Principles of Good PR Campaign Evaluation." November 3, 2013. <http://www.bmmagazine.co.uk/in-business/advice/five-principles-good-pr-campaign-evaluation/>

⁴ "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures." National School Public Relations Association, 2013. p. 51. <https://meeting.nasbonline.org/public/Meeting/Attachments/DisplayAttachment.aspx?AttachmentID=135154>

⁵ [1] Turney, M. "Acronyms for the public relations process." Northern Kentucky University, 2011. https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/process_acronyms.html [2] Sartin, H. "RACE Public Relations Model." Callis Integrated Marketing, April 1, 2014. <http://ecallis.com/new-season-brings-new-pr-opportunities/>

Figure 1.1: RACE Model for Public Relations and Communications



Source: NSPRA⁶

Analysis of district communications and public relations typically involves extensive *qualitative* feedback from a variety of stakeholders. Jim Macnamara, a professor at the University of Technology in Sydney, notes that "human interactions, relationships, feelings, attitudes, loyalties, perceptions and engagement do not yield easily to numeric quantification."⁷ Consequently, experts like Macnamara suggest "interpretative qualitative research" as a more effective measure of public relations outcomes.⁸ NSPRA audits (which align with the "research" and "analyze" steps of the RACE model) accordingly rely on qualitative findings from focus groups, surveys, and interviews, as opposed to analysis of specific communication metrics.⁹

EVALUATION

District communication plans likewise typically include limited metrics and quantitative targets to guide evaluation efforts. As the analyzed sample of 20 district communication plans indicates, plans typically focus on describing *strategies* and *action items* related to a series of broad objectives, rather than on specific KPIs to measure progress (see Appendix). As Hillsboro School District (HSD) notes in its 2014-15 communication plan, "it can be difficult

⁶ Figure text quoted verbatim from: "Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures," Op. cit., p. 51.

⁷ Jain, A. "Emerging Models of PR Measurement." *PR Week*, July 16, 2014.

<http://www.prweek.com/article/1303749/emerging-models-pr-measurement>

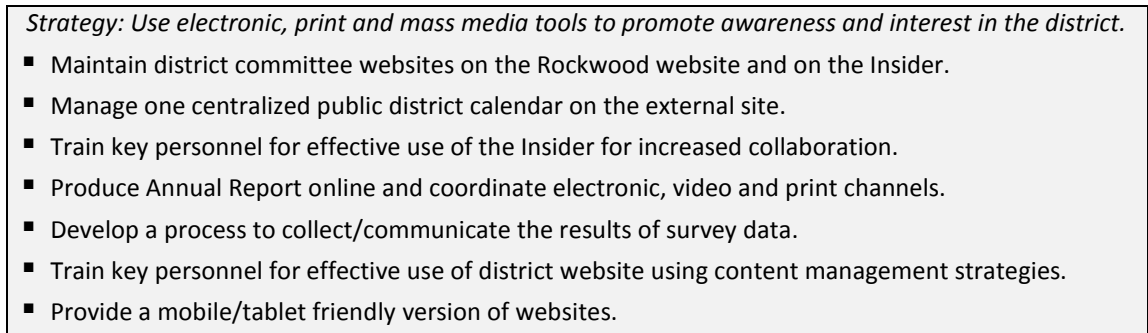
⁸ Jain, Op. cit.

⁹ For example, see: [1] "NSPRA's Communication Audit Report: Prepared for the Mount Prospect School District 57." National School Public Relations Association, 2010. http://www.d57.org/Downloads/D57_Audit_Report.pdf [2] "NSPRA's Communication Audit Report: Hillsboro School District." National School Public Relations Association, 2014. <http://www.hsd.k12.or.us/Portals/0/District/departments/Communications/HSD%20Communications%20Audit%20Report%202014.pdf?ver=2014-08-22-102314-977>

to correlate direct cause and effect, as well as objectively measure progress, in the area of communications.”¹⁰

For example, an evaluation of a communications campaign might focus on whether objectives, deadlines, and budget goals were met.¹¹ Figure 1.2, below, presents a sample of such objectives from Rockwood School District’s 2015-16 communication plan. The strategy and associated tactics support the district’s broader communications goal of using “a variety of media to maximize awareness and support of the district’s goals, objectives and programs.”¹²

Figure 1.2: Sample of Action Items – Rockwood School District (MO)



Source: Rockwood School District¹³

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OTHER METRICS

KPIs and associated metrics should align with high-quality *objectives* that are based on broad organizational *goals*. The American Marketing Association (AMA) states that, to evaluate the success of a communications program, an organization must first “establish clear and meaningful objectives” that align with the organization’s overall needs.¹⁴ Consequently, an effective evaluation program begins with initial goal setting. Once an organization has established a series of objectives, it then continues to develop specific strategies and associated tactics designed to meet each objective. Finally, based on objectives and related strategies and tactics, an organization chooses KPIs and associated metrics to measure quantifiable progress.¹⁵ Figure 1.3, below, depicts the progression of goals to KPIs.

¹⁰ “2015-16 Strategic Communications Plan (HSD).” Hillsboro School District, 2015. p. 8.
<http://www.hsd.k12.or.us/Portals/0/District/departments/Communications/2015-16%20Strategic%20Communication%20Plan.pdf>

¹¹ “Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures,” Op. cit., p. 17.

¹² “Rockwood Communication: Comprehensive Communication Plan: 2015-2016 (RSD).” Rockwood School District. p. 4.
<http://www.rsdmo.org/Other%20Ads%20Images/Communications%20Plan%202015-2016.pdf>

¹³ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

¹⁴ “Social Media Success Metrics: Special Report.” American Marketing Association, 2014. p. 7.
<https://www.ama.org/ECDFileRepository/Special-Report-Social-Media-Success-Metrics.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

Figure 1.3: Alignment of KPIs with Organizational Goals



Source: American Marketing Association¹⁶

Common metrics used to evaluate district communication programs typically relate to stakeholder surveys or tracked communications channels. However, our review of district communication plans finds that, while the majority of plans reference measurement and evaluation strategies, plans less frequently include specific KPIs or associated metrics. For example, districts cite parent, staff, and student surveys as an evaluation strategy but do not always list specific survey items, KPIs, or other metrics.¹⁷

Common evaluation strategies listed include surveys (e.g., staff, administrators, community members, parents, students), focus groups, and web/social media analytics (see Appendix and following subsections).

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

Initial research and subsequent evaluation of communication programs often centers on feedback gathered through surveys and other qualitative methods. As findings from initial research serve as a baseline for communication program operations and efficacy, subsequent evaluations logically rely on similar methods to assess progress.¹⁸ While district communication plans commonly list staff, parent, student, and/or community surveys as an evaluative measure, plans less commonly include specific survey items or broader KPIs (see Appendix). Recognizing the lack of universal survey items to assess district communication efforts, in 2013 the NSPRA collected a series of evaluative measures, the majority of which are survey items, from districts with top performing communication programs. The NSPRA organized common measures into the three following “critical function areas” of district communication programs:¹⁹

- **Comprehensive Professional Communication Program.** Measures to evaluate communications function at the executive management level of the district.
- **Internal Communications.** Measures to evaluate communications with district employees (teachers, administrators, support staff, etc.)
- **Parent/Family Communications** (i.e. External Communications). Measures to evaluate relations and communications with parents and families.

As the majority of the measures in the first function area (Comprehensive Professional Communication Program) are repeated in similar forms in the lists of measures related to the

¹⁶ Figure adapted from: Ibid.

¹⁷ “K-12 Strategic Plan (SSD 40-2).” Spearfish School District 40-2, 2016.

<http://www.spearfish.k12.sd.us/District/Strategic%20Plan/Documents/StrategicPlan.pdf>

¹⁸ “Five Principles of Good PR Campaign Evaluation,” Op. cit.

¹⁹ Bullets adapted from: “Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures,” Op. cit., p. 2.

two other function areas, Hanover only discusses measures related to internal and external communications. In addition, in the following subsections Hanover provides examples of specific survey items and broader KPIs from district communication plans, as available.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Surveys of internal communications intend to measure to what extent district employees feel informed, as well as their general relationship with the district. As the NSPRA states, “employee communications support employee engagement. Employees are kept informed about the goals, objectives, plans, programs, finances, issues, events and incidents of the district and their school.”²⁰ In addition to supporting employee engagement, effective internal communications indirectly affect employees’ relationships with external stakeholders. As the NSPRA summarizes, “research shows that employees who have positive relationships with their organizations help develop positive relationships with their organization’s publics.” Thus, internal communications may indirectly shape public (i.e., external) perception of the district.²¹ The internal communications measures listed in Figure 1.4 consequently aim to measure district employees’ perceptions of districts leadership, policies, and general communication.²²

Figure 1.4: Internal Communications Survey Measures

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of employees feeling adequately informed about district/breaking news/non-emergency news ▪ Percentage of employees feeling optimistic about the future of the district ▪ Percentage of employees aware of/reliance on key sources of information ▪ Percentage of employees agreeing that school leadership effectively communicates policies ▪ Percentage of employees feeling comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them ▪ Percentage of administrators agreeing district has effective process for making group decisions and solving problems ▪ Percentage of employees agreeing there is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in their school ▪ Percentage of employees agreeing that teachers are respected as educational experts ▪ Employee satisfaction with district’s community partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of employees agreeing that district communications provide useful information ▪ Percentage of employees feeling prepared to tell others about positive aspects of their district ▪ Percentage of staff satisfied with their jobs ▪ Percentage of staff who would recommend district as a good place to work ▪ Staff satisfaction with empowerment ▪ Staff satisfaction with working conditions ▪ Staff rating on communication from site leaders ▪ Staff rating on whether their ideas/suggestions are considered by site/district leaders ▪ Percentage of staff satisfied with their participation in decisions ▪ Trustworthiness of information in district website ▪ Trustworthiness of superintendent ▪ Ranking of specific communications vehicles
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²⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of employees agreeing that district/their school keeps them informed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee perception of parents' expectations for their children |
|---|---|

Source: NSPRA²³

DISTRICT EXAMPLES

While district communication plans commonly cite staff surveys as an evaluation method, plans less commonly include specific survey items. As such, it can be unclear as to whether evaluation plans are carried through to completion. Sixteen of the 20 sampled district communication plans reference a form of staff, student, parent, or community survey in their communication plan as an evaluation strategy. Plans often reference separate surveys to measure employees generally, in addition to district and school leadership (e.g., Jeffco School District), as well as surveys of “key communicators” separately from general staff (e.g., Hillsboro School District).²⁴ However, only two districts include *specific* survey items and/or KPIs related to internal communications as evaluation measures in their communication plans. For example, Figure 1.5, on the following page, lists a sample of KPIs and survey items from Baldwin County Public Schools (BCPS)’s 2007 communication plan. Developed by the NSPRA in 2007, the plan includes specific percentage targets (not listed here) for each item.²⁵

Figure 1.5: Sample KPIs/Survey Items – Baldwin County Public Schools

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of employees, stakeholders, and community members that have an understanding of issues and reasons why decisions are made % of employees who react positively to internal newsletter % of employees who cite school system official channels as source for information on key issues % of administrative leaders, supervisors, and principals who understand the service role of Communication Department % of administrative leaders that express satisfaction with programs and appreciation of the role played by communication department % of employees who have understanding of issues and why decisions are made % of employees who have understanding of the importance of communication |
|---|

Source: NSPRA²⁶

West Des Moines Community Schools (WDMCS) includes broader KPIs, each of which might correspond with a single or multiple survey item(s). Like BCPS, WDMCS includes specific percentage targets, included with the KPIs below in Figure 1.6.

²³ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 28.

²⁴ For example, see: [1] “Communications Plan 2013-2014 (JPS).” Jeffco Public Schools, 2013. http://www.jeffcopublicschools.org/media/2013-14%20Communications%20Plan_newpix.pdf [2] “2015-16 Strategic Communications Plan (HSD),” Op. cit.

²⁵ “Strategic Communication Plan (BCPS).” National School Public Relations Association, 2007. p. 1. <https://www.nspira.org/files/docs/Baldwin%20County%20Public%20Schools%20Strategic%20Communication%20Plan.pdf>

²⁶ “Strategic Communication Plan (BCPS),” Op. cit.

Figure 1.6: Sample KPIs/Survey Items – West Des Moines Community Schools

- **Internal stakeholder understanding of the goals the district has for its students and its strategies to achieve those goals** (25 percent by June 30, 2014; 65 percent by June 30, 2015; 80 percent by June 30, 2016)
- **Employee morale and pride in the district** (By 15 percent by June 30, 2014; by 20 percent by June 30, 2015; by 25 percent by June 30, 2016)
- **Internal and external stakeholders’ trust and confidence in the district:** (By 20 percent by June 30, 2014; by 30 percent by June 30, 2015; by 40 percent by June 30, 2016)

Source: West Des Moines Community Schools²⁷

In addition, communication plans may include survey response rate as a KPI. For example, while North Boone Community Unit School District 200 does not include specific survey items in its evaluation criteria, the district does include an evaluation measure related to increasing the number of respondents to public and staff surveys.²⁸

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Surveys of external stakeholders broadly assess parent and family satisfaction with district and school communications, as well as awareness of important events and issues in the district. Effective external communications support parent and family involvement in their students’ learning. As the NSPRA notes, “communications include information and resources on how parents/families can become and stay involved in their children’s education and how they can support and reinforce learning.”²⁹ District and school communications should inform parents and families about “the goals, objectives, plans, programs, finances, issues, events and incidents of the district and their children’s schools.”³⁰ Consequently, survey-based evaluations of external communications partially aim to assess: (1) family and parent satisfaction with district and school communications, and (2) program effectiveness in spreading awareness of district initiatives and other aspects relevant to their child’s learning experience. Figure 1.7, below, lists a series of common measures (KPIs and/or specific survey items) focused on assessing these areas.

Figure 1.7: Parent/Family Survey Measures – Communication and Awareness

- | | |
|--|---|
| ▪ Top sources of information for learning about district/school issues (rank from a list) | ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing they are informed in a timely manner of major decisions |
| ▪ Parent awareness of key information media | ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that their opinions/input is valued/used when making decisions |
| ▪ NSPRA Communication Accountability Program (CAP) Survey; Percentage of parents who feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Informed about events, activities, issues at school | |

²⁷ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: “WDMCS Strategic Communication Plan.” West Des Moines Community Schools, 2013. http://www.wdmcs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WDMCS-Communications-Plan_Final.pdf

²⁸ “North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plans.” North Boone Community Unit School District 200, 2013. p. 9. <http://www.nbcusd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NBCommunicationsplan20130326.pdf>

²⁹ “Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures,” Op. cit., p. 29.

³⁰ Ibid.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are adequate opportunities to express concerns and opinions about important school issues ○ Concerns and opinions expressed by parents and the community are seriously considered by the principal and district administration ○ Informed about issues impacting education ○ There are adequate opportunities to express concerns and opinions about important issues impacting schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of parents agreeing that they feel comfortable expressing their ideas or concerns ■ Parent awareness of district strategic plan and motto ■ Percentage of parents aware of different ways they can support their child's education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Help with homework ○ Communicate with teachers ○ Be involved with school ○ Encourage child ○ Know what they are studying ○ Make sure they get enough sleep ○ Be there when needed ○ Ask child about day ○ Observe in classroom ○ Listen to them ■ Parent satisfaction with teachers communicating expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of parents aware of district's performance in key areas ■ How well district keeps parents informed ■ How responsive district is to requests ■ Percentage of parents agreeing there is good communication from the school to parents ■ Percentage of parents agreeing that school staff responds to their needs/concerns in a timely manner ■ Percentage of parents agreeing that they receive the information they want/need from the district 	

Source: NSPRA³¹

Evaluations of external communications may also include survey items and KPIs focused on school-level communications. For example, the NSPRA finds that districts with effective communication departments commonly survey parents and families on their agreement with the National PTA Standards for Family-School Involvement, listed below:³²

- Understand the rules and their responsibilities
- School keeps families informed about important issues and events
- School communicates in multiple ways
- School communicates timely alerts on health/safety issues
- School connects them with somebody who can help if school cannot
- School provides information on other learning opportunities outside school
- Teachers communicate with them regularly
- Teachers help parents understand how to best work with their child at home to improve academic progress
- School considers parent input before making important decisions

³¹ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 46–48.

³² Bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

In addition, surveys to evaluate external communications often assess family and parent perceptions of the district more broadly. District communication programs support positive relationships between families, teachers, and other school-based staff, as well as shape families’ opinions of and feelings toward the district overall. Consequently, the NSPRA finds that effective district communication departments evaluate external communications based on parents and families’ perception of, and relationship with, the district more generally.³³ Figure 1.8 lists a sample of related measures (KPIs and/or specific survey items).

Figure 1.8: Parent/Family Survey Measures – General Perceptions and Involvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whether school/district is doing a good job/headed in the right direction ▪ Whether district has safe schools ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that school staff responds to their needs/concerns in a timely manner ▪ Whether district spends taxpayer dollars wisely ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that they trust the Board of Education to make good decisions that improve student achievement ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that district is trustworthy ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing they are treated with dignity and respect ▪ Percentage of parents satisfied with opportunity to be involved in their child’s education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that the overall public image of the school is good ▪ Parent grading of district (A, B, C, etc.) ▪ Percentage of parents that would recommend district to a friend ▪ Reasons for disenrollment (exit survey); ▪ Attendance/participation in parent-teacher conferences ▪ Percentage of parents feeling valued as partners in their child’s education ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing their school encourages parent involvement ▪ Percentage of parents agreeing that they participate with the school in their child’s personal plan of study
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Source: NSPRA³⁴

DISTRICT EXAMPLE

Seven examined district communication plans specifically include an external survey (either parent, family, or community) as an evaluation measure. However, only WDMCS includes more specific survey items and/or KPIs in its evaluation plan. Figure 1.10 lists these below.

Figure 1.10: Sample Survey Items/Themes – West Des Moines Community Schools

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the external stakeholder understanding of the goals the district has for its students and its strategies to achieve those goals (<i>By 10 percent by June 30, 2014; by 25 percent by June 30, 2015; by 50 percent by June 30, 2016</i>) ▪ Increase community and parent engagement in the district and its goals for student learning (<i>By 10 percent by June 30, 2014; by 15 percent by June 30, 2015; by 20 percent by June 30, 2016</i>) ▪ Increase internal and external stakeholders’ trust and confidence in the district: (<i>By 20 percent by June 30, 2014; by 30 percent by June 30, 2015; by 40 percent by June 30, 2016</i>)
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³³ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 46–48.

Source: West Des Moines Community Schools³⁵

DIGITALLY-BASED METHODS

In addition to qualitative perspectives, districts commonly measure communications effectiveness through digital communications tools. Engagement with digital components of district communications, including district websites, emails, social media, and other digital forms of communication, are objectively measurable, to a certain degree. Over half of the sampled district technology plans cite a form of data analytics as an evaluation strategy and over a third list specific metrics and KPIs, including website hits, email open rates, and the number of followers on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (see Appendix). Correspondingly, the NSPRA notes that communication departments with established evaluation systems often leverage the digitally-based metrics listed below in Figure 1.11.

Figure 1.11: Common Digital Metrics to Inform Evaluations of District Communications



Source: NSPRA³⁶

As districts often use digital forms of communication (e.g., social media, email, websites, text messaging) to reach external audiences, associated metrics typically provide insight into the effectiveness of *external* communications. However, districts may leverage the same forms of communication and digitally-based metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of *internal* digital communications.

Notably, however, these methods cover high-level approximations of the volume of engagement but may not be directly related to efficacy or satisfaction.

COMMON DIGITALLY-BASED METRICS

The number of social media followers and website visitors are two common metrics cited in district communication plans. For example, Jeffco Public Schools in Colorado, North Boone Community USD in Illinois, and Pasco County Schools in Florida all include the number of followers on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) as metrics. Similarly, several other district plans include website traffic as a metric (see Appendix). Districts may measure social media followers at the district and school levels, if schools have individual pages and/or accounts.³⁷

³⁵ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: “WDMCS Strategic Communication Plan,” Op. cit.

³⁶ Figure text quoted verbatim from: “Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures,” Op. cit., p. 17.

³⁷ “50 Schools, 3 Months, 1 Social Media Plan.” Blackboard, 2015. P. 3.

http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/273815/pdf/CollierCounty/Bb_CollierCounty-CaseStudy-PR.pdf?hsCtaTracking=57188a09-87dd-4631-bec7-e1bd33d2c86b%7C253bb51e-856c-4c0d-9159-bb1875441130&__hstc=164144224.163a438ce62ba98230d141bbb8ff3ff7.1486393511752.1486393511752.1486393511752.1&__hssc=164144224.1.1486393511753&__hsfp=3393377187

Notably, as Figure 1.12 shows on the following page, North Boone’s communication plan references both of these metrics and distinguishes between web traffic to specific sites.³⁸

Figure 1.12: Data Analytics – North Boone Community Unit School District 200

- Increase the traffic on the district website
- Increase the Facebook traffic for North Boone Facebook page
- Increase readership of the North Boone Blog and principal blogs (where used)
- Increase the number of Twitter followers for NBCUSD200

Source: North Boone Community Unit School District 200³⁹

EXPANDING DIGITALLY-BASED METRICS

Experts recommend that districts evaluate digital traffic and engagement through multiple metrics. In a communication guide for school districts, the software company Blackboard notes that district websites and social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) are some of the most effective components of community engagement efforts.⁴⁰ Through platforms such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insight, communication departments have access to a variety of digitally-based metrics to evaluate communications effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. While volume metrics (e.g., number of followers or website hits) are common measures, Blackboard recommends that districts consider multiple metrics to evaluate digital communications with external stakeholders. For example, both Facebook and Twitter have deeper analytical tools that show “weekly analytics including reach, video views, page likes, page views and even specific demographics on your audience composition.”⁴¹ These data points can better indicate whether a district is producing content that both reaches and matters to its audience.⁴²

SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS

In addition to growth in total followers, social media platforms can provide in-depth metrics related to page or account reach, as well as follower engagement and demographics. For instance, CRM giant Salesforce notes that receiving “replies to your content and replying to the content of others is the basis of any social network.”⁴³ However, a metric related to total (or growth in) followers is not necessarily indicative of stakeholder engagement with district content. Consequently, experts recommend that organizations consider additional metrics to evaluate engagement. For example, Sprout Social, a company specializing in social media management software, recommends that, in addition to total number of followers,

³⁸ “North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plans,” Op. cit., p. 8.

³⁹ Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: “North Boone CUSD 200 Communications Plans,” Op. cit.

⁴⁰ “A K-12 Communications Leader’s Guide to Social Media Success,” Blackboard. p. 4.

http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/273815/pdf/Social-Media-ebook/Bb_K12-CommLeadersGuideToSocialMediaSuccess-PR.pdf?submissionGuid=9dd606d7-5373-4021-9737-0487fa961d76

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “A K-12 Communications Leader’s Guide to Social Media Success,” Op. cit.

⁴³ “Beyond Followers: How to Achieve True Engagement with Social Media.” Salesforce Canada, November 20, 2014. <https://www.salesforce.com/ca/blog/2014/11/engagement-with-social-media.html>

organizations leverage metrics additional metrics that Twitter provides in a 28-day account summary.⁴⁴ Figure 1.13 lists these metrics below.

Figure 1.13: Additional Twitter Metrics

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tweets. The number of Tweets posted from an account. ▪ Tweet Impressions. The number of people that have viewed an account's Tweets. ▪ Profile Visits. The number of people who have visited an account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentions. The number of times an account's username has been mentioned by others. ▪ Followers. The number of total and recently added account followers. ▪ Tweets Linking to You. The number of Tweets that link to an account.
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Source: Sprout Social⁴⁵

Similarly, Facebook provides additional metrics to analyze page reach, engagement, and follower demographics. Figure 1.14 provides a sample of additional metrics identified by Sprout Social.⁴⁶

Figure 1.14: Additional Facebook Metrics

METRIC CATEGORY	SPECIFIC METRIC
General Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Page Likes. Total Page Likes is the number of unique people who like your Page. New Page Likes shows the number of new Likes your Page received during the last seven days, compared with the previous seven-day period. ▪ Post Reach: Total Reach is the number of unique people who have seen any content associated with your Page, including ads, during the last seven days. Post Reach shows the number of unique people who have seen your Page posts. ▪ Engagement: People Engaged is the number of unique people who have clicked, Liked, commented on or shared your posts during the last seven days.
Post Reach Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engagement (by engagement type). Reach metrics include a breakdown of overall likes, comments, and shares. Examining post reach over time can identify particularly effective content. If these metrics increase, content will reach more people organically. ▪ Disengagement. Reach metrics also include the number of users who hide a specific post, hide all posts, or unlike a page.
Demographic Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Location, age, gender: The People tab includes a demographic breakdown of fans, people posts have reached, and people that have engaged with posts. This information can be utilized to focus on specific audiences (e.g., students vs. parents).

Source: Sprout Social⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "All of the Social Media Metrics That Matter." Sprout Social, 2016. <http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-metrics-that-matter/>

⁴⁵ Figure bullets adapted from: Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Figure text adapted from: Ibid.

In addition, districts may wish to create metrics to evaluate responsiveness over social media. For example, Salesforce suggests that customer service organizations “track replies and comments (conversations) related to customer service: questions, problems, and requests.” A specific metric might refer to the number of total responses, the percentage of questions answered, or the timeliness of the response.⁴⁸

WEBSITE ANALYTIC METRICS

Platforms such as Google Analytics similarly provide comprehensive metrics related to website traffic. While total website hits or traffic may serve as a proxy for general engagement, additional metrics allow districts to determine whether new visitors are routinely finding the website, how long visitors stay on the website, and which specific pages are most of interest. Figure 1.15 identifies a series of website visitor metrics particularly relevant to school marketers.⁴⁹ Note that metrics correspond with those offered in Google Analytics.⁵⁰

Figure 1.15: Key Website Analytics Metrics

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	IMPLICATIONS
Pages Per Session	The number of pages a visitor viewed during their time on the site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A low pages/session ratio may indicate that content is not linked across multiple pages. A high pages/session ratio may indicate that the site requires too many clicks to navigate
New vs. Returning Visitors	The number or ratio of first-time visitors to the site vs returning visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high number of new visitors indicates that many people are discovering the website. A high number of returning visitors indicates that people like the website (because they’re coming back for more).
Unique Page Views	The number of unique sessions in which a specific page was viewed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of unique page views indicates a page’s popularity. If key pages have low numbers of unique page views, site navigability may be ineffective.
Average Time on Page	The average amount of time visitors spend on an individual site page per visit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content-heavy pages should have higher average times; a low duration on a page may indicate that content is not holding the audience’s interest
Bounce Rate	The percentage of people who came to the website and visited just one page	<p>Typically, lower bounce rates are preferable. A high bounce rate could indicate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> readers are typically satisfied with the information on that page and move on, or readers are not compelled to explore the site further.

⁴⁸ “Beyond Followers: How to Achieve True Engagement with Social Media,” Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Firth, S. “The Google Analytics Basics School Marketers Need to Know.” Cursive Content Marketing, August 2, 2016. <http://cursivecontent.com/google-analytics-basics-school-marketers-need-know/>

⁵⁰ “Analytics.” Google Analytics Solutions. <https://www.google.com/analytics/analytics/>

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	IMPLICATIONS
Exit Rate	The number of visitors who leave a site from a specific page	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Like bounce rate, exit rate might just indicate that the visitor read a page and was satisfied. Some pages (e.g., form and contact pages) will naturally have high exit rates.▪ However, bounce rate may indicate that the visitor did not find the content helpful and was not encouraged to read additional content.

Source: Cursive Content Marketing⁵¹

⁵¹ Figure text adapted from: Ibid.

APPENDIX

As part of this research, Hanover reviewed a series of district and school communication plans, as well as broader strategic plans with a communications component. Figure A.1 lists plans by district and includes a summary of associated evaluation strategies and specific KPIs and associated metrics. Note that the district name is a hyperlink to each plan.

Figure A.1: Examples of District Communication Plans and Related Metrics

DISTRICT	NSPRA RECOGNIZED	PLAN DATE	EVALUATION STRATEGIES	KPIs/OTHER METRICS
Bloomington School District (MN)	Gold Medallion Award	2009-11	Focus groups; surveys; information clearinghouse	No
Rockwood School District (MO)	Gold Medallion Award	2015-16	Surveys (staff, community); website analytics; media coverage; social media; mobile app; focus groups; community feedback	No
Arlington Public Schools (VA)	Gold Medallion Award	2015-16	No	No
Fairfax County Public Schools (VA)	Gold Medallion Award	2015-20*	Website analytics; levels of engagement and satisfaction by division stakeholders	No
Jeffco Public Schools (CO)	No	2013-14	Surveys (principal/leadership, employee, Chalk Talk, media, key communicator, community); media hits; website usage	Social media usage: Facebook friends and Twitter followers
Hillsboro School District (OR)	No	2015-16	Website and social media metrics; thought exchange process results; surveys/feedback (staff, parent, key communicator)	No
Barrington Public Schools (RI)	No	2012-17	No	No
North Boone CUSD 200 (IL)	No	2013	Website and social media metrics; surveys (public and staff)	Increase: traffic on district website; Facebook traffic; district blog readership; number of Twitter followers; number of parent and staff survey respondents; number of press releases

DISTRICT	NSPRA RECOGNIZED	PLAN DATE	EVALUATION STRATEGIES	KPIs/OTHER METRICS
<u>West Des Moines Community Schools (IA)</u>	No (NSPRA audit in 2013)	2013-16	Surveys (staff; community; parents)	Specific goals for staff, community, and parent perceptions and engagement (related to specific survey items)
<u>Moberly School District (MO)</u>	No	2014-17	Surveys (external, internal)	No
<u>Excelsior Springs School District (MO)</u>	No	2016-17	Surveys (staff, community); website hits and traffic reports, media coverage, community feedback	No
<u>Jefferson County Public Schools (MO)</u>	No	2013-18	Linear data of district communication tools; focus groups; surveys (district and staff)	No
<u>Baldwin County Public Schools (AL)</u>	No (Plan developed by the NSPRA)	2007	Survey (administrators, employees, key stakeholders, community members)	Specific survey response goals for staff and other stakeholders (related to specific survey items)
<u>Rapid City Area Schools (SD)</u>	No	2015-16	Surveys (student, staff, community, departments); focus groups; media coverage; community feedback	Website hits
<u>Spearfish School District (SD)</u>	No	2016*	Surveys (parents, staff, students)	No
<u>Spring Branch ISD (TX)</u>	No	2013-18	Surveys; operational responses; web analytics	Increase web traffic, open rates, and general analytics; Increase in Spanish partner participation
<u>Newport High School (RI)</u>	No	N/A	Surveys; interpersonal contact	Email receipt requests
<u>Hampton City Schools</u>	No	2011	Benchmarking, focus groups, surveys, website analytics, interpersonal contact	No
<u>Pasco County Schools (FL)</u>	No	2015-16*	Web and social media analytics	Internet/social media reach; social media engagement; number of community presentations/speeches;

* denotes a general strategic plan with a communication focus, rather than a separate communication plan.

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