



COMMUNICATION PLAN

Board approved March 17, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
PART I – PROCESS, STAKEHOLDERS, MESSAGES & EVALUATION	4
A) Communication Audit	4
B) Planning Process	4
C) Stakeholders	4
D) Key Messages	5
E) Monitoring Success	5
PART II – GOALS, STAKEHOLDERS & TACTICS	6
PART III – COMMUNICATION ROADMAP	8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rich Township High School District 227 has engaged in an effort to improve its communication and stakeholder engagement efforts through a comprehensive communication plan. The district began this process by conducting a communications audit, working with Jerry Gallagher of the Donovan Group. This audit examined the district's existing communication practices and included a staff survey, through which district-level administrators, principals and vice principals shared their thoughts and feedback on the district's current communication efforts.

The district then convened a communications committee, made up of building leaders, parents and other community members. From April to August 2019, the committee met three times. It began by discussing the district's current communication efforts, goals, opportunities and challenges. Then, committee members transitioned to determine several communication goals for the district. It then identified which stakeholders the district must reach, the messages it should use to reach those stakeholders and the most effective tools and tactics available to do so.

The following goals have been identified for Rich Township's communication efforts:

- The school district actively communicates news about the great things happening in its schools, along with its vision and initiatives to enhance student learning.
- The school district has a clear process for communicating to its identified stakeholders. All district communicators understand and use this process on a daily basis.
- The school district has a clear and unified brand image that reflects the value Rich Township provides to students, families and community members.
- The school district has fostered a sense of pride and belonging among all families in Rich Township, as indicated through responses in climate and culture surveys.

The plan that follows includes a variety of communication efforts meant to enable the school district to reach these specific goals.

PART I — PROCESS, STAKEHOLDERS, MESSAGES & EVALUATION

A) Communication Audit

The Donovan Group led a communications audit for the district. This process included an inventory of existing communications efforts, which found district communicators used email, school-based websites, surveys, direct mail and social media as their most common tools and strategies.

In March 2019, Rich Township High School District 227 conducted a survey made available to all teachers, support staff, principals/assistant principals, district-level administrators and other staff throughout its schools. A total of 128 staff members completed the survey.

From the survey data, the Donovan Group found several important trends that would help inform the district's communications planning efforts:

- In general, there appeared to be a lack of cohesion related to the methods and channels that staff should use to communicate. Staff members appeared to use the tools with which they felt most comfortable. This can lead to confusion on the part of both staff and the district's stakeholders, who may not know where to go to receive school and district information.
- In their responses to several questions, staff referred to an inability to reach a wide audience of stakeholders through mass email messages. Many also spoke to the need for improvements to the district and school-level websites.
- While email was cited as the most popular communication channel, there was much concern expressed related to a lack of updated email addresses for parents. This may point to a need to use a greater variety of communication methods, beyond email alone.

B) Planning Process

Rich Township High School District 227 engaged in a process to create and implement a communication plan. To do so, the school district convened a communications committee. Facilitating this process and committee meetings was Jerry Gallagher of the Donovan Group.

The Donovan Group's planning process involves considering four key questions, detailed below:

- What are five clear communication goals for the district? For this question, we ask: *What will we have accomplished a year from now if we are successful in our communication efforts?*
- Which stakeholders must we reach under each goal? *To accomplish our goals, who do we need to engage? Who comprises our target audiences?*
- Which messages should we use to reach these stakeholders? *Now that we have determined what our goals are and have chosen our stakeholders, which messages do we wish to convey to them?*
- Which tools and tactics should we use to get our messages to our stakeholders? *How can we best reach our target audience in sustainable and scalable ways?*

The final step is the creation of a written plan that builds on the district's communication strengths while addressing its weaknesses. The plan that follows, even when finalized, exists as a living document in that it will be improved in time and revised according to best practices and the needs of the district.

C) Stakeholders

As Rich Township High School District 227 creates and implements its communication plan, it must carefully consider the audiences with which it will be communicating. These are known as "stakeholders."

This plan engages every member of the district's staff, every single student attending the district's schools and their parents and every community member living in the Rich Township community. However, to

effectively implement the plan, the district’s audience has been divided into smaller, more specific stakeholder groups:

- Parents/guardians of current students
- Teachers and staff members
- Current students
- Students attending feeder schools
- New parents in the community
- Local business owners and leaders
- General community members
- Senior citizens
- Municipal leaders and state lawmakers
- Local churches and clergy
- Elder residents
- District alumni
- Homeowners' associations
- Service organizations, including Kiwanis and Lions Club
- Tinley Park Convention Center Convention Center
- Farmers' market attendees
- Real estate groups
- Advocate South Hospital
- Local news media
- Local businesses (including Culver's, Dunkin' Donuts, Dusty's, Flavorful, Hidden Manna Cafe, Holiday Inn, Home Depot, Kenny's Ribs, McDonald's, Panera, Starbucks & Subway)

D) Key Messages

Although Rich Township High School District 227 will communicate about a wide variety of issues, events and accomplishments over the next year, there are several core messages district communicators should keep top of mind as they tell the story of Rich Township, its schools and its students and staff. These messages, along with important talking points, are outlined below:

1) Focused on students and student success

- We expect our students to display grit, determination and integrity in all they do. Those who demonstrate these qualities will do well in school and in life. We believe that building these characteristics will pay huge dividends for our students in the long run.
- We expect our graduates to be prepared to take on the future. In the next few years, we expect our graduates to earn enough credits to be considered college sophomores before they even begin higher education. In the longer term, we expect them to earn a high-paying entry-level career.
- We push our students to reach their full potential through opportunities like 24 Advanced Placement courses, innovative programs, business partnership and dual-credit enrollment with local colleges.

2) Fostering a community of pride

- Rich Township offers welcoming educational environments for students, parents, families and members of our community. Our schools are a point of pride—it truly means something special to graduate from a Rich Township high school.
- The Rich Township community has rallied around its local high schools. Our students play a pivotal role in our engaged in the community through service learning, volunteering, fundraisers and more.
- Our band concerts, theater performances, sports and other events provide opportunities for the entire community to come together. Parents whose children have long since graduated still engage with our schools in meaningful ways.

3) Delivering an exceptional academic experience

- While we have a lot to take pride in, we know that we must always work to get better. We are unwavering in our commitment to continuous improvement through our strategic initiatives, a challenging curriculum and the hiring of outstanding teachers and staff.

- We will continue to improve in offering rigorous academics, discipline-developing athletics and inspiring extracurricular activities that challenge our students in new ways.
- Our highly qualified, talented and passionate educators guide students along their academic journey, offering dynamic learning experiences and the support students need for success in and out of the classroom.

PART II — GOALS, STAKEHOLDERS & TACTICS

Based on the work of the communications committee, the following are several goals for Rich Township High School District 227 to reach over the course of the year. Under each goal are the stakeholders the district looks to reach and the tactics it will use to reach them.

GOAL #1: The school district actively communicates news about the great things happening in its schools, along with its vision and initiatives to enhance student learning.

The district must build the capacity and processes to regularly share positive news and updates on a consistent basis, using a variety of reliable channels. This includes communicating about school events, program updates, fees, deadlines and other highly relevant information. The district must communicate more clearly with incoming freshmen, making for a more seamless transition from feeder schools.

Tactics:

- Creation of a Transition Guide to be shared with parents of incoming freshmen. It will be distributed to all feeder schools and posted on the district's website. The guide will include everything students and families need to know as they transition into District 227.
- Send an email or letter home to parents, informing them of the district's renewed commitment to exceptional communication. The letter should be distributed one week after the communications plan has been finalized.
- Create and distribute a monthly e-newsletter with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
 - Include a sign-up link on the district's home page. Regularly invite community members to sign up via social media.
- Create and post four updates per week to Facebook, Twitter and (when appropriate) Instagram, focused on:
 - Positive news and events throughout the district's schools.
 - An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months.
 - Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
- Write and submit a quarterly guest article for publication in the *Daily Southtown News*. Focus each article on a district initiative, recent news/events or milestone. Also place this article on the district's website, under "District 227 News."
- Issue a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the *Daily Southtown News* and other media outlets that cover the district.
 - Create a template (in Google Drive) to quickly create a news release when there is news to share.
 - Create a list of media contacts for news release distribution.
- Hold a School Shadowing Day, in which students from feeder schools shadow current Rich Township students before they make the transition to high school.

GOAL #2: The school district has a clear process for communicating to its identified stakeholders, including in urgent or crisis situations. All district communicators understand and use this process on a daily basis.

All district communicators must fully understand how and when they should communicate, which should be a process that is clear and easy to follow. Communicators should know exactly what to do or who to contact if they have something to share with the community.

Tactics:

- Creation of a digital Communications Guide, for internal use among the district’s communicators. Formatted in a Google Site, the guide will include how the district should communicate both proactively and reactively in various situations. The guide will also outline guidelines and expectations for social media use.
 - Send an initial email update to all district communicators (e.g., principals, district administrators, teachers and staff) unveiling the Communications Guide and explaining why it has been established.
 - Send a monthly e-update to principals, district administrators, teachers and administrative staff explaining the Communications Guide and how they can use it. Include examples of situations and how the guide can help.
 - Conduct in-person professional development for communicators on how they can best use the Communications Guide.
 - Record a short video explaining the Communications Guide and how it can be used. Make the video available to all district communicators.
- Creation of a one-page fact sheet detailing the steps district administrators, principals, teachers and staff should take when communicating in an urgent or crisis situation.
 - Laminate the sheet and make it available to all personnel responsible for communication in these situations. Also make it available for download through the Communication Guide.

GOAL #3: The school district has a clear and unified brand image that reflects the value Rich Township provides to students, families and community members.

The school district must continue to enhance its image as a unified organization. The district's schools should incorporate this branding into their communications. The external branding should center on the concept of: Rich in Opportunity. Rich in Innovation. Rich in Community. #RichInStudentSuccess. Internally, the district will focus on the branding of #StrongerTogether.

Tactics:

- Create a branding guide for the district, detailing the proper use of logos, colors and fonts to be used across all marketing and communications materials. Include the key messages established in this plan.
- Create a social media guidelines document, detailing how social media profiles should be set up, the types of content that should be posted and other best practices.
- Encourage students to serve as social media content providers for their schools. Create a curriculum to teach students about the long-term benefits and dangers of social media.

- Create a four-panel booklet detailing the school district's core values, academic initiatives and extracurricular opportunities. Distribute to local real estate agents, businesses and other community partners.

GOAL #4: The school district has fostered a sense of pride and belonging among all families in Rich Township, as indicated through responses in climate and culture surveys.

The district must make measurable progress in how its stakeholders come to think and feel about its schools and the educational programs and services they offer.

Tactics:

- Launch a video campaign with the theme "District 227 Stories." The monthly series will feature interviews with current students, alumni, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders to demonstrate the district's core values in action.
- Reach out to local business, civic and church leaders through one-on-one meetings, seeking new ways in which the district and community can work together.
- Conduct a climate survey of district families, seeking feedback on how the district can be more welcoming to all.
 - Develop further actions based on the results of the survey.

PART III — COMMUNICATION ROADMAP

Based on the goals, stakeholders, messages and tactics outlined above, the following is a suggested roadmap for Rich Township High School District 227 to implement between February and July 2020:

February	
Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. • An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. • Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
Template	Create template (in Google Drive) to quickly create a news release when there is news to share. Create a list of media contacts for news release distribution.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Create the first monthly e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Transition Guide	Create draft of a Transition Guide to be shared with parents of incoming freshmen. It will be distributed to all feeder schools and posted on the district's website. The guide will include everything students and families need to know as they transition into District 227.
Email Message	Write an email to all district families, informing them of the district's renewed commitment to exceptional communication. Distribute the email once finalized.

March	
Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. • An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. • Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Distribute the first monthly e-newsletter.
Newsletter	Create the April e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent

	news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Email Message	Send an initial email update to principals, district administrators and administrative staff unveiling the Communications Guide and why it has been established. Reinforce that it is a resource to help them communicate better and more easily manage crisis situations.
Transition Guide	Finalize the Transition Guide and post to the district's website. Distribute the guide to all feeder schools.
Planning	Begin planning for the first School Shadowing Day, in which students from feeder schools shadow current Rich Township students before they make the transition to high school. The event will be held in mid-May.
Fact Sheet	Create a one-page fact sheet detailing the steps district administrators, principals, teachers and staff should take when communicating in an urgent or crisis situation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laminate the sheet and make it available to all personnel responsible for communication in these situations.

April	
Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. • An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. • Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Distribute the April monthly e-newsletter.
Newsletter	Create the May e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Guest Article	Write and submit a quarterly guest article for publication in the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> . Focus the article on a district initiative, recent news/events or milestone. Also place this article on the district's website, under "District 227 News."
Video	Record a short video explaining the Communications Guide and how it can be used. Make the video available to all district communicators.
Branding Guide	Create a branding guide for the district, detailing the proper use of logos, colors and fonts to be used across all marketing and communications materials. Include the key messages established in this plan.
Social Media Guide	Create a social media guidelines document, detailing how social media profiles should be set up, the types of content that should be posted and other best practices.

May

Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. ● An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. ● Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Distribute the May monthly e-newsletter.
Newsletter	Create the June e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Event	Hold first School Shadowing Day, in which students from feeder schools shadow current Rich Township students before they make the transition to high school.
Email	Send a monthly e-update to principals, district administrators, teachers and administrative staff explaining the Communications Guide and how they can use it. Include examples of situations and how the guide can help.
Booklet	Begin creation of a four-panel booklet detailing the school district's core values, academic initiatives and extracurricular opportunities. This will be distributed to local real estate agents, businesses and other community partners.

June

Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. ● An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. ● Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Distribute the June monthly e-newsletter.
Newsletter	Create the July e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Email Message	Send a monthly e-update to principals, district administrators, teachers and

	administrative staff explaining the Communications Guide and how they can use it. Include examples of situations and how the guide can help.
Booklet	Distribute the four-panel booklet to local real estate agents, businesses and other community partners.

July	
Item	Description
Social Media	Create and post daily social media updates to the district's Facebook and Twitter pages. Focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive news and events throughout the district's schools. • An important milestone the district has reached in recent weeks or months. • Key initiatives to increase student achievement.
News Release	Write and distribute a news release or media advisory whenever there is a positive event or news from the district or one of its schools (at least two per month). Send the release to specific reporters at the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> and other media outlets that cover the district.
Newsletter	Distribute the July monthly e-newsletter.
Newsletter	Create the August e-newsletter, with articles detailing the district's initiatives, recent news and upcoming events to which the entire community is invited.
Guest Article	Write and submit a quarterly guest article for publication in the <i>Daily Southtown News</i> . Focus the article on a district initiative, recent news/events or milestone. Also place this article on the district's website, under "District 227 News."
Planning	Begin planning for in-person professional development for communicators on how they can best use the Communications Guide. This PD will start in the 2020-21 school year.
Booklet	Continue distributing the four-panel booklet to local real estate agents, businesses and other community partners.
Video Campaign	Launch a video campaign with the theme "District 227 Stories." The monthly series will feature interviews with current students, alumni, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders to demonstrate the district's core values in action.
Survey	Create draft of a climate survey of district families, seeking feedback on how the district can be more welcoming to all. This survey will be open to families in September 2020. Results will be used to develop further actions.
Planning	Begin the process of encouraging students to serve as social media content providers for their schools. Create a curriculum to teach students about the long-term benefits and dangers of social media.