

## **Newton School Committee: Communications Review Team**

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### **Meeting Minutes**

**Education Center (#214)**

**November 12, 2014, 8:30 - 9:30 am**

**Present:** Margie Ross Dector, Angela, Pitter-Wright, Margaret Albright, Ellen Gibson, Cynthia Bergan, Megan Smallidge

Cindy Bergan began the meeting at 8:30a.m. and team members introduced themselves. Each member then took a few minutes to brainstorm two or three key outcomes they would like to see come to fruition as a result of the Communications Review Team. Team members then shared their ideas in a round-robin format (see below for specific ideas.)

Once all ideas were shared, the team categorized their various thoughts into four topics which helped them to better define the “who, what, when, where and why” of communications within our district.

#### **1. Stakeholders**

We must better understand who our stakeholders and audience members are (see next steps) and, consequently, understand how best to collaborate, coordinate, and work together.

#### **2. Strategies & Communication Channels**

How do we better use technology to leverage communication including our website, social media, NewTV partnership, and more. How do we clarify to our stakeholders where to find the information they need, determine the capabilities of the various communications channels and define best practices around this kind of communication.

#### **3. Content**

Establishing parameters around what kind of content we will communicate, striving for informational, proactive and defined messaging is important. We want to be sure to cultivate listening strategies and solicit feedback to generate a culture of respect and inclusion. Highlighting student achievement will be a priority, but we will not shy away from discussing challenges or mistakes. We may take a look at other districts or organizations for modeling and ideas.

#### **4. Process**

The following ideas were discussed:

- Define our next steps, a timeline and a comprehensive plan
- Better understand the priorities of our stakeholders
- Coordinate communications between School Committee, Newton Public Schools and stakeholders as well as integrate with the city

- Provide training and guidance on social media and communications strategies - consider whether an external consultant is necessary
  - Establish a citywide social media and communications policy
  - Develop a plan for managing content
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### **Identified Needs**

The team identified a number of needs including someone to coordinate and work with the city, a policy around social media, and a communications plan and policy.

We also identified immediate, time-sensitive topics around which communication will be particularly important including NPS building projects, PARCC, student reassignment, and assessments.

To address all of these areas, the team plans to develop both short term and long-term communications strategies.

### **Next steps**

1. Learn about the new website platform - Megan will provide a tour and overview at the next meeting
2. Each member will make a list of who our stakeholders are and bring this to the next meeting
3. Cindy and Megan will report back on communications tools that Newton Public Schools currently has and employs, as well as an understanding of new systems NPS may use in the future

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### **Specific ideas from each team member**

**Angela:**

Brainstorm and make sure we're all on the same page with What is communications: the Who, What, When, etc.

**Cindy:**

Use and leverage technology to bring ourselves into the 21st century

**Margie:**

Develop a comprehensive communications plan

**Ellen:**

Establish the parameters of the content - what is it we want to communicate, what's appropriate, and how will we communicate it?

**Margaret:**

Identify communication as not just a written format. Every employee is a communicator. Communication can happen informally. How do we prepare for this?

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**Meg:**

Work together as a team and a community to address many of the issues we've discussed (i.e. engaging non parent community)

**Angela:**

Would we benefit from hiring a consultant? Should we bring someone in for additional help? Could we outsource some of the tasks we are discussing?

**Cindy:**

Would like to meet with PTO representation/other stakeholders to understand their priorities better. How can we be less reactive and understand better the concerns and interests of others. How can we leverage the communities that already exist and collect the feedback and reach our stakeholders wherever they are.

**Margie:**

Our goals in communication should be: informational, opportunities to solicit feedback and promotes respect and inclusion. They should be intentional and planned

**Ellen:**

Should we do some kind of assessment in terms of what we already have and whether or not we need to bring in additional resources?

What are our current vehicles for community engagement?

Also, how do people think we're doing already with the quantity, quality, and frequency of our communication. Lets challenge our assumptions.

**Margaret:**

Identify best practices for social media, how do we utilize additional tools, highlight student achievement (presentations at school committee meetings) DESE, listening strategies, not being afraid to talk about challenges.

**Meg:**

Think carefully and intentionally about HOW we communicate, especially with regards to social media - policies

**Cindy:**

What additional entities need to be involved? Legal, the city,

What wording can we employ within our policies to allow for growth.

**Margie:**

Make it clear where to find information. Enable teachers and students to share what's great about what's happening in your classroom