GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 17, 2022 @ 12:30 P.M.
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 4

Mission Statement: Our mission is teaching and learning.

Board Goals: In richness of cultures and with a respect for all, (1) Provide Dynamic Rigorous Curriculum, (2) Ensure Effective and Engaging Instruction, and (3) Embrace Excellent Learning Environment

AGENDA

1. Set Regular Meeting Date/Time
2. Develop the Statement of Purpose
3. Review Minutes from Previous Communications Committee Meetings (Attachment #1)
4. Review "Groton Public Schools Community Communications Plan 2014 - 2016" (Attachment #2)
5. Communications Plan Development (Attachment #3)
6. Next Steps

GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
AD HOC COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2016
8:30 A.M.
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 5

Members Present: Susan Austin, Gary Baker, Rebecca Boyus, Mark Russell, Marthee Thorndike, Lee White

Members Absent: Karen Bryer, Dennis Colclough, Gretchen Newsome

Chairman White called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

1. Purpose of the GPS BOE Ad Hoc Communications Sub Committee -- the purpose of the committee is to create a Communications Action Plan for Groton Public Schools. Susan Austin shared a draft of what has been done to date along with guidelines entitled, "How to Develop a Communications Plan" (attached).

2. Process, Planning, Results

   - Discussion ensued regarding what we are already doing. Rebecca suggested that we do an internal audit of communications.
   - With the charge of creating an action plan, we need to find out what our short- and long-term objectives would be.
   - Who is the audience? (Parents, Community, Staff, and Board of Education); What is the purpose? (Public relations to promote the schools, facilitate two-way communication, promote learning, manage safety and crisis).
   - Means of communication (such as print, electronic, social media, video, TV, news, forums, etc.), and methods of communication (owned media, earned media, advertisement or sponsorship).
   - The committee discussed magnet competition and how to keep our students here and provide choices in Groton Public Schools; new schools project; end-of-year communications from the schools/Superintendent.
   - It was decided to add teacher and administrator representatives to the committee for the next Ad Hoc Communications meeting.
   - Review surveys that have been done to date; need for feedback and focus groups.

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 4th, at 8:00 a.m. in room 5 at Central Office. Agenda topics are: (1) review short- and long-term objectives and (2) review key stakeholders.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

Groton Board of Education
Communications Committee

Meeting Minutes

Organizational Meeting
January 31, 2000
6:00 p.m., Central Office Room 10

Attendees:

Beth Gianacopolos, BOE member & Committee Chair
Stan Dziurzynski, BOE member
Karin Greene, Personnel Manager
Larry Hurley BOE member
Chuck Muncatchy, Superintendent
Bob Zuliani BOE member

The first topic was to determine whether this committee would be a standing committee or an Ad hoc committee. It was unanimous that the issues of communications and public relations are high priorities and that, therefore, the committee must be a standing committee of the Groton Board of Education.

Bob Zuliani distributed the June 1998 report of the Community Information Services Committee and briefly discussed the work undertaken by that group. The combined group of public relations professionals and GPS employees laid the ground work for this committee.

Karin Greene reviewed the current monthly newsletter, "*Groton Advantage*," and handed out a draft mockup of the "*Town of Groton Quarterly*" which is in progress. The quarterly is a collaborative effort among the school district, the town, and Pfizer's. Anticipated publication date is February - March 2000.

Chair Beth Gianacopolos led the group through the Agenda:

Agenda item #1 - Statement of Purpose
After reviewing the BOE policy book for format, the group worked to develop a statement of purpose:

> "The Communications Committee shall be responsible for increasing and improving community awareness of education ~~issues facing the~~ opportunities available in Groton Public Schools."

"Communications" was chosen over "Public Relations" as the name of the committee. Archie Swindell will deliver the statement to the BOE policy committee.

Much discussion focussed on "how" the committee would operate. Although the committee will "respond" to BOE referrals, it is important to insure that the committee can also initiate action. Once a plan is in place the committee will monitor its effectiveness. It was decided that the statement of purpose defined above would be all that was needed for the Policy manual.

Agenda item #2 – Goals for the year
A brainstorming session brought many ideas.

identify resources, personnel, funding, target audiences
identify effective communication vehicles
identify issues and ideas that we must communicate, i.e., the subjects
consider expanding scope of Groton Advantage, perhaps to all residents

Facilities - The group agreed that the number one Goal for this year must be community awareness in the Facilities Initiative.

Agenda item #3 – Where do we go from here?
Once it was agreed that facilities must be the focus, the group discussed many issues and questions regarding what the BOE can and cannot do, and the time frame from now until the hoped for referendum.

A key issue will be development of a program to be presented to various community groups, e.g., Senior Center members, Kiwanias.

Next meeting's agenda was decided upon: Develop the Communications Program.
Issues and focus of meeting

-what do we want in our plan
-identify target groups
-identify specific subjects
-brainstorm on other communication vehicles
-discuss the tax impact to the community
-review facilities facts supplied by administration
-fire houses are better than schools, perhaps a photo comparison

Next meeting: Thursday, February 24, 2000 – 6:00 p.m., Central Office Room 10

Groton Public Schools
Community communications Plan
2014 - 2016

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Community Forums/Meetings **Goal: Improve teaching and learning with fiscal support and long term planning.**	• Professional development for teachers, BOE, families and community on Common Core State Standards • CMT information to BOE • Community events held at each school throughout the year	• CCSS/SBAC – and how instructional shift look in the classroom setting. • BOE monthly updates • School events like Family math, Family Literacy, STEM • PT Council monthly updates • Community event like STEMFEST • Budget advisory involves all stakeholders • Long Term Planning Task Force	Surveys, Forums, Focus Groups at district and school level Re. Teaching and Learning, Budget and Finance, long term planning to improve our schools and equalize opportunities for ALL. *One book, problem, district* –Places You'll Go! March 3, 2016 *Mental Health Summit* at FHS April 7th, 2016 *CTSUBCEN STEMFEST* at WSM May 11, 2016 Subtrail and StoryCore
Internal Communication ~~(Central Office to Schools, Schools to Central Office, etc.)~~ I don't see we need to address in this forum.	• Three-Year Plan for ELA & Math - Shared with Administrators and staff • GPS Committees meets to review priorities • Information about Common Core State Standards presented to administrators (Administrator meetings and Principal meetings) • Information about Common Core State Standards presented to all	• Three-year Implementation Plan ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies; also, Unified Arts, World Language • District Improvement plan aligned to School Improvement Plans and Student Learning Objectives • CCSS PD across disciplines – August and November 2014) • 21st Century Committee meetings per calendar • Curriculum updates shared with Administrators (retreat Aug '14), Principal meeting and Administrator	Third year of Three year plan – extend another 2 years. Focus on supporting delivery of CCSS and GPS curriculum, instruction, assessment and PD Columbia U – Calkins Readers/Writers

Attachment #2

Internal continued	teachers (Tuesday afternoon professional development-collaborative common core Tuesdays)	meeting agenda item and Faculty • District Improvement Team (meet each month), Wellness co. and Safe schools and positive behavior supports. • Form 21st Century Learning Collaborative, Groton Teaching and Learning Collaborative identify Best Practices (begin Readers/Writers/Math workshop model (scientifically research based INSTRUCTIONAL core models) • Information about SBAC (formative and summative) • 2014 presented to administrators (winter)/spring) • Updates about SBAC presented all teachers (winter, spring) • Superintendent Board Notes – Administrators weekly notes	Workshop Lesley U – Fountas Early Literacy NCTM – Austin Math Workshop
Electronic Communication	• Link to CCSS Resources on GPS website • Twitter • Edmodo (math/Sci) • Blogs (elem math/STEM) • plan Community Forum for 2014-2015 • Posting of CCSS information/resources on Public Folder in Outlook and on the website	• Update CT Core Standards - Resources and information on **GPS website** • Twitter facebook • Edmodo (math/Sci/ELA) • Blogs (math/STEM/ELA/IB) • Prepare Community Forum on teaching and learning (district, school, community based) • Update posting on **Public Folder in Outlook and Google Docs, new webpage for teachers to access EZ** • GPS Budget and Ed info to send electronically, post on web, tweet, facebook.	Other ideas for electronic communication? Upgrade website
Printed Communication	• Newsletter focusing on CCSS • Schools participating SBAC Assessment Pilot	• GPS "Our Schools" Brochure to send home, post on web, tweet, facebook. • News articles • School newsletters • Teacher newsletters	Continue publication online and sent home Continue GPS brochures

		• School Brochures • BOE and Administrator Weekly Notes include teaching and learning and budget updates, can be used to communicate with teachers/families • Budget Presentation, Power Point and Brochure	Annual Budget Report to the Community
Special Events/Public Relations	• Visit other schools • Hartford testimonies • Presentations • Assistant Superintendent speaks about CCSS on Capital Hill (April)	• LEARN, CABE, CAPSS, State Dept. of Education - Networking w/other districts across the state and nation. • One District – One book; One District – One Problem (Pocket day) • Symposium Spring • StemFest – parent guides – summer inquire • Children and Families Mental Health and Wellbeing Summitt planning	Stem Fest Math Promise/Reading Promise Science and Math nights Look for state, national, and international outreach and networking opportunities

How to Develop a Communications Plan

Home

How to Develop a Communications Plan

Sample Plan 1 from PRSA

Sample Plan 2 from ARA

Sample Plan 3 from King County Library System

New: Sample Plan 4 from "Any County" School System

Crisis Communication Quick Reference

What is a communication plan? When should it be developed? Where does the information in the plan come from? How do you write one, and why should you bother?

Overworked and underfunded communicators (Are there any other kind?) have a right to ask whether the work involved in developing a plan is worth it. The answer is yes because a written communication plan will

- give your day-to-day work a focus,
- help you set priorities,
- provide you with a sense of order and control,
- help get the chief staff executive and staff to support your program,
- protect you against last-minute, seat-of-the-pants demands from staff and members, and
- prevent you from feeling overwhelmed, offering instead peace of mind.

What is a Communication Plan?

A communication plan is a written document that describes

- what you want to accomplish with your association communications (your objectives),
- ways in which those objectives can be accomplished (your goals or program of work),
- to whom your association communications will be addressed (your audiences),
- how you will accomplish your objectives (the tools and timetable), and
- how you will measure the results of your program (evaluation).

Communications include all written, spoken, and electronic interaction with association audiences. A communication plan encompasses objectives, goals, and tools for all communications, including but not limited to:

- periodic print publications;
- online communications;
- meeting and conference materials;

- media relations and public relations materials;
- marketing and sales tools;
- legal and legislative documents;
- incoming communications, including reception procedures and voice mail content;
- committee and board communiques;
- corporate identity materials, including letterhead, logo, and envelopes;
- surveys;
- certificates and awards;
- annual reports;
- signage;
- speeches; and
- invoices.

When to Develop the Plan

The best time to develop your plan is in conjunction with your annual budgeting or organizational planning process.

Where to Get Information

Grist for the plan generally comes from five sources:

1. your association mission statement,
2. a communication audit,
3. membership surveys and focus groups,
4. committee and leadership input, and
5. discussions with other staff and departments.

How to Develop the Plan

Take the following steps to develop an effective communication plan:

Conduct a research-communication audit. Evaluate your current communications. Some associations hire firms to do this, but the price for the objectivity of an outside auditor can be high. To conduct your own audit, find out

- what every staff person is doing in the way of communication,
- what each communication activity is designed to achieve, and

- how effective each activity is.

To get the answers you need,

- brainstorm with communication staff,
- talk to other departments,
- interview the chief staff executive,
- interview the board,
- talk to communication committee members,
- survey the membership,
- host focus groups, and
- query nonmembers.

Define objectives. Armed with information from your audit, define your overall communication objectives-the results you want to achieve. These might include

- excellent service to members,
- member loyalty,
- centralization of the communication effort,
- increased employee teamwork,
- improved product delivery,
- visibility for the association and the industry or profession it represents, and
- influence on government, media, consumers, and other audiences.

Define audiences. List all the audiences that your association might contact, attempt to influence, or serve. Included on your list may be

- members;
- nonmembers;
- consumers;
- related associations;
- adversarial associations;
- educators;
- federal, regional, and local governments;
- related industries; and
- the media.

Define goals. With stated objectives, and considering available human and financial resources, define goals-in other words, a program of work for each objective. Goals include general programs, products, or services that you will use to achieve stated objectives. For example, if the

objective is to improve member service, goals might include improved training for the member-service function, special communications directed at first-time members, a reference manual for handling complaints, and ongoing information for members.

Identify tools. Decide what tools will be used to accomplish stated goals. These tools can be anything from a simple flyer to a glossy magazine. Don't overlook less obvious tools such as posters, report covers, Rolodex cards, and Web sites. Brainstorm ideas with your staff.

Establish a timetable. Once objectives, goals, audiences, and tools have been identified, quantify the results in a calendar grid that outlines roughly what projects will be accomplished and when. Separate objectives into logical time periods (monthly, weekly, etc.).

Evaluate the result. Build into your plan a method for measuring results. Your evaluation might take the form of

- a monthly report on work in progress,
- formalized department reports for presentation at staff meetings,
- periodic briefings of the chief staff executive and the department heads, and
- a year-end summary for the annual report.

Developing a written communication plan will take effort. Plan on three or four days the first time you do it. Once in place, the written plan will smooth your job all year long, earn you respect from the CEO and other staff, help set work priorities, protect you from last-minute demands, and bring a semblance of order to your chaotic job.

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Questions or comments? Email Robin Mayhall

Communications

Planning with a Purpose

Setting the Stage

1. A vision of what a high-school graduate should look like
2. Key questions to guide school improvement
3. Vision and mission statements that actually inspire

The Plan

4. Making the mission statement *real*
5. Making the shift from annual to embedded improvement planning
6. Developing theories of action

Making the Plan Compelling

7. The importance of a clear, concise strategy statement
8. A formula for transformational change in hospitals and schools

Implementation

9. Eight steps to high-achieving schools
10. Avoiding common mistakes in strategic planning
11. 'Pre-mortems' are better than post-mortems

Communicating in the Midst of Controversy

As the country moves into its third year of a global pandemic, superintendents continue to face significant headwinds as they lead their districts with skill and resolve, despite having to deal with an array of political cross-currents, nationally and locally. During difficult times, **beyond character and judgment, communication is perhaps the most essential component of leadership,** particularly when dealing with sensitive, or controversial matters. Leaders who are able to communicate effectively have a greater chance of having their motivations understood and their decisions respected.

Realities

The dangers and disruptions intrinsic to the pandemic have contributed to an unstable and, at times, turbulent environment. Yet, despite our polarized political environment, the overwhelming number of interactions in school districts are civil and productive. Most people, regardless of their beliefs are open to listening, and available for dialogue.

There are some individuals who are more interested in promoting their points of view, or proving group allegiance, than considering reason or facts. Working with this reality becomes part of the challenge, which involves **being realistic about what is possible,** even with the best approach to communication.

School **districts have unique needs,** histories, and cultures. Likewise, Connecticut's superintendents manifest a range of experiences, skills, and leadership styles. In leading their districts and responding to their communities, superintendents calibrate communication approaches with their districts in mind, in a manner that is congruent with their beliefs, and available resources – including time.

Communication Strategies

Ideally, developing a comprehensive district communication plan where goals are clear, roles throughout the district are well-defined, and sufficient resources are allocated, **serves as a powerful ally.** Informing the community on a consistent basis with essential information, along with inspiring images and stories, creates a positive narrative – one that educates the public and bolsters the district from negative forces. Special care should be taken so that images from all segments of the school community are included.

The district's crisis plan should be readily available and contain a communication section, which could be reinforced when conducting "table top" or practice sessions. Knowing **who speaks for the district** during a crisis is imperative.

Tell the truth as best you can in as complete a manner as possible. Truth and integrity build up over time. Conduct yourself in a manner that will fill the reservoir of good will. Tap into the reservoir during difficult circumstances.

During difficult times leaders need to have a greater sense of "audience", i.e., to whom is your communication directed. The internal audience, which includes staff, students, parents, and board of education members, are important recipients as well as contributors to the network.
External publics include elected officials, town departments, the news media, community advocacy groups, social service agencies, business groups, and individual "influencers".

Customizing messaging is key, particularly with respect to those that might be directly impacted by an event or decision. Reaching out to traditionally marginalized communities such as racial and linguistic minorities, those with disabilities, and the LGBTQ community, is fundamental to creating a unified school district. To the extent practicable, provide correspondence in a language(s) beyond English that is pertinent to your school community. Similarly, the technology exists for board meetings to be translated into a second language during broadcasts.

The **superintendent's entire leadership team is central to any communication plan.** During a crisis or controversy, administrators must have a constant flow of information, be on the same page, and understand their roles. Union leaders should be involved through communication from the superintendent or designee. A superintendent visit to a school faculty meeting is an effective way of generating support.



Communicating with board of education members should take place within the context of an agreed upon system for providing timely information. Within their roles, well-informed board members can play a powerful part in providing the community, including town bodies, with accurate information about the work of the district. Board of Education meetings must be conducted in a civil and respectful environment. At meetings, boards can deal with controversial topics through the board chair's report, superintendent's report, discussions, staff presentations, and special board meetings organized to ensure public dialogue. Orientation sessions for new board members and board retreats can strengthen the board/superintendent communication system.

Establishing a relationship with members of the press can reap important dividends. Reach out to reporters regarding new programs and initiatives. Contact reporters to explain the district position and your actions with respect to controversial issues. Be aware that your press relationship involves an educational component – particularly given the turnover in reporters and media sites. When dealing with the press **be available, straight forward, err on the side of repeating and over explaining.** If possible, prepare for phone calls or interactions. Be wary of sharing information off the record and cognizant about what information cannot be shared. Try not to react emotionally to an inaccurate or disappointing article; however, it is important to correct significant mistakes via a phone call or email.

Be clear about who speaks for the district during a crisis. Holding a press conference where you have the opportunity to explain, for example, the superintendent's budget can save time by reducing reporter errors and increase the likelihood of telling your story. Well-written press releases help. If the information includes police involvement, be sure to share with the police the content of your press release in advance of issuing it.

Anchoring the justification for a controversial decision in board of education policy can serve as a way to focus discussion. Boards of education frequently have policies and regulations that address: controversial issues, challenged material, complaints, curriculum development, equity, diversity, inclusion, social justice, and LGBTQ rights. Emphasizing the need to consider district mission statements, strategic plans, established law, negotiated contracts, executive orders, state board of education policies, state department of education directives and public health guidance, can serve as guardrails in discussions or presentations.

When a particular decision has been arrived at, it can be helpful to **explain one's reasoning through the use of guiding principles**. Example: 1. The health and safety of students, staff and visitors. 2. BOE Goals and priorities 3. The educational impact, including social and emotional learning, that it will have on students. 4..., 5...

Communication strategies vary depending on the circumstance. Maintaining a bank of sample letters to refer to is a real time saver, and particularly useful during emergencies.

While addressing controversial issues tied to teaching and learning it would be best for all to be as specific and district-based as possible, and for educators to use concrete examples when speaking of the taught curriculum, texts, and instructional goals.

Settled topics such as those that are the subjects of **executive orders or established law** don't require much discussion or debate. Every concern should be listened to respectfully; however, each point of view does not have to be given equal time or weight.

A letter from the superintendent is a powerful and effective method of communicating, particularly when heading off or dealing with a controversy. When formulating a letter consider the following questions: What am I trying to achieve? Who is my audience? What is the best way to communicate with this particular audience? What is essential to explain? How can I write this letter in an accurate, clear, grammatically correct manner – free of jargon and acronyms? How can I convey that I understand the problem or concern? What is the best way of knocking down a false narrative? Did I promise something that will be hard to deliver? Who has proof-read my letter?

Developing a bank of sample letters in anticipation of specific events and controversial issues is a time-saver. What are the most likely high frequency or high stakes incidents that can occur? Who on my team can help with research or writing?

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram can be a **quick way of sending out a message** to counter an unfounded rumor. An interactive district website, with a superintendent section, is a vital source of timely and ongoing information – much in evidence during the pandemic. Video blogs are being used more frequently by superintendents as a way of personalizing their messages.

Respond to emails in a timely fashion – within 24-48 hours. Unless an emergency, the response doesn't have to be immediate. If, however, the volume is overwhelming it will take more than 48 hours to respond. In those instances, develop a standard email response to the most frequent theme and, if necessary, customize it. Also, consider asking another administrator or administrative assistant to help respond. Most people are appreciative of a response even if they disagree with your position. In the event of a rude email wait at least 24 hours before responding and respond professionally. Depending on the content of the message, you might let the writer know that there are district expectations regarding civility and respect that need to be adhered to. There is probably specific language to that effect in a board policy, district handbook, or acceptable use policy. Question: Who responds to emails that are addressed to the superintendent and entire board?

And Finally

Listening is a vital and underemphasized communication skill. Listening patiently and intently in a 1-1 or group setting can be an especially valuable tool for developing trust and strengthening relationships. After listening to a complaint, good listeners clarify that they understand the nature of the complaint before responding. Developing a reputation as a good listener often comes with the added benefits of being known as fair and respectful. Listening and respect go two ways. If necessary, point that out in a professional manner. If appropriate, set ground rules during a discussion or meeting.

When an apology is warranted offer it. CAPSS is aware of superintendents who sent out "oops emails" to the staff when they felt that the expectations for district initiatives were unclear or unrealistic. Likewise, a letter of apology to members of the school community can have a salutary effect. One caveat: Be judicious about apologizing. Take into account the massive number of decisions, often high stakes, that you make on a relentless basis – and the great job that you typically do in making them.

How you project yourself is critical. Carry yourself in a positive manner. Convey enthusiasm for the mission, empathy for constituents, and appreciation and support for the staff's work.

Keep a file of thank you cards, laudatory letters and emails that you receive – detailing the outstanding job that you do each and every day. Take time to **read them from time to time**. You'll be surprised how quickly you forget "the good stuff." When someone praises you don't downplay what you have done – thank them. **You deserve it!**