



OTSEGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Expect Excellence

DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

EXPECT EXCELLENCE



Table of contents

Vision, Mission Goals, Strategic Plan	3
PR / Communications Department & Director Overview & Strategy	4
Communication Goals	7
Communication Tools	9
Media Relations / Crisis Communication	13
Measurement & Evaluation	15
Communications Schedule	16



Strategic Plan Focus Areas & Strengths:

The District Communications Plan is derived from industry best practices, strategic planning, successful outcomes over the last decade and the District Strategic Plan. Public Relations and outreach efforts of the Communications Department focus on the six Strengths and Four Key Focus Areas outlined in that plan:

Focus Areas

- Student Well-Being
- School Culture & Climate
- Individualized Student Success
- Career Exploration & Engagement

Strengths

- Relationships
- Our Community
- Whole Child Approach
- Student-Centered Focus
- Real World Opportunities
- Expect Excellence



Vision:

- Expect Excellence

Mission:

- Otsego Public Schools is a student-centered learning community empowering every individual to achieve excellence.

Belief Statements:

- All students can excel
- Education and learning are the responsibility of the entire community including students, parents, staff, business owners and civic leaders
- Teaching and learning depend upon communication and collaboration among the school, student, family and the community.
- Schools must provide a safe, respectful and caring learning environment.
- Learning improves when educators use data and research-based practice to guide instruction.
- A well-rounded education instills knowledge, skills and social responsibility.
- Our professional learning community supports life-long learning for staff and students.

Communications / Public Relations at Otsego Public Schools

Our Mission:

The Otsego Public Schools' Public Relations / Communications Department is committed to connecting our school community to our classrooms. We will promote various aspects of our teaching and learning, events, initiatives and accomplishments through multiple communication platforms in order to reach our varied audiences. In addition, our PR/Communications department will work to make Otsego Public Schools the trusted source for all official district information and do so with honesty, transparency and timeliness. We strive for a two-way communication model because we believe everyone has a voice and has value in our District.



Key Functions of the Communications Department

The Otsego Public Schools Public Relations / Communications Department is responsible for a variety of communications and community engagement activities. We handle district-wide internal relations, community engagement, media relations, marketing/advertising efforts, social media, website management, crisis communications, reputation management and branding, district promotions and awards and recognition.

Professional Development

Otsego's PR / Communications Director engages in professional development opportunities to continue to stay current with public relations, communications and technology trends relating to the position. The Director also provides professional development on various topics to regional, state and national groups. Professional development keeps Otsego visible to its audiences and allows our team and director to be a leader within the county, state and nation.

Leadership & Support

Otsego's PR / Communications director will maintain membership in the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) and is encouraged to take an active role in leadership opportunities within the state organization as well as the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). These professional organizations provide professional development, networking and support to our own district as well as those across the country. As such, the Director has served as Secretary, President-Elect, President and Past-President of MSPRA.



Strategic Planning

With the development of the District's Strategic Plan, the communications department is also focused on strategy to support that plan and each focus area - getting the right message to the right people at the right time.

Some of those strategic planning highlights from 2023-24 are:

Student Well-Being

Student Health Center - In partnership with the health center's main development team, we developed a communications plan and timeline to coordinate communication materials, website content, media and community outreach and continued promotion of construction and progress.

School Culture & Climate

Building Promotions - OPS strives to highlight all buildings and key events. This takes planning. In a strategic session with each building's staff, we developed a promotional planner with classroom activities, field trips, guest speakers, special events and more to highlight with each department, grade or organization each month. This will be used during the Principal / Communications monthly meetings for planning purposes.

Career Exploration & Engagement

College & Career Week - Using community feedback and the Strategic Plan, the Director of Communications and OHS Student Success Center team worked together to develop a promotional plan to highlight College & Career Week ensuring our students and families knew of activities and opportunities available during the week.

Our Stakeholders

Otsego Public Schools has a far-reaching support network. We believe that our success is a direct result of the community and school pride here in Otsego and at OPS.

Our stakeholders consist of, but are not limited to:

- Students
- Staff
- Current families
- Future families
- Otsego alumni and families
- Board of Education

- Community leaders
- Community Organizations
- Business owners
- City leaders
- All district residents
- Legislators

Overview



The Otsego Public Schools' Public Relations / Communications Department will cultivate community pride, engagement, and trust among our school community through various outreach efforts for both internal and external audiences. We have the responsibility to communicate effectively with our stakeholders with a two-way communication model; this encourages positive community involvement in our District's educational mission. The OPS PR/Communications Department is responsible for all content creation for our communication platforms, which are outlined in this document, and to ensure all communication needs are met. Our strategy is set to accomplish the following goals.

Communication Goals

1 Promote pride and excellence of Otsego Public Schools by sharing highlights and activities from our classrooms, buildings and district.

- Utilize social media, media outlets and website to distribute information
- Enlist staff, school and community supporters to share items of interest

2 Encourage two-way communication of all stakeholders by providing opportunities at all levels for our audiences to engage us in conversation.

- Provide additional information and/or contact information for follow-up
- Provide opportunities, such as Coffee with the Superintendent and Community forums, for people to directly ask questions
- Create opportunities for parent and community involvement in district events and activities such as PTO groups, volunteer opportunities and family nights/celebrations
- Conduct surveys and ask for input
- Utilize the Contact Us feature on our website and promptly respond to inquiries

3 Inform stakeholders of key district initiatives, trends and issues with timely, accurate information

- Utilize newsletters to reach our families and community
- Hold Community Conversations/Forums to share information of community interest
- Keep website up to date as a key resource for our stakeholders

4 Build trust and relationships with key stakeholders by being open, honest and transparent.

- Create opportunities to build relationships and share information with community partners, leaders and organizations
- Maintain a Key Communicators Network to inform school and community leaders and create a unique two-way communication opportunity
- Answer questions honestly and to the best of our ability

5

Ensure Otsego Public Schools is the trusted and primary source of official information for the school district.

- Develop consistent practices of keeping our school family informed of key information in a timely manner
- Be honest, open and follow up throughout any situation
- Provide accurate information on all topics

6

Assist school leaders in effective communication with their key audiences through promotion, marketing, writing and distribution.

- Regularly meet with building, athletic and club leaders
- Collaborate on effective outreach and communication strategies

7

Use multiple communication channels to reach each target audience.

- Utilize social media, website and direct email to best reach various audiences
- Research new trends in effective communication

Internal Audience Goals:

- Our staff and students take pride and ownership in Otsego Public Schools
- Our staff and students feel informed about key district issues and initiatives
- Our employees are advocates for Otsego Public Schools, its students and families

External Audience goals:

- Stakeholders will feel connected to OPS and its schools
- Stakeholders exhibit community pride
- Share key information and garner support for district initiatives and daily work
- Invite stakeholders to participate in district/building events and committees appropriate to their role

Communication Tools



Communication with our stakeholders is often a multi-tiered approach. Depending on the group identified as the target audience, different forms of communication will be utilized to ensure the most effective communication with the widest reach, within relative parameters. For example, individual classroom information should come from the classroom teacher; building-specific information is best delivered at the building level by the principal or authority on the topic; wide-reaching information or that with community impact is best coming from the District level. We will work to ensure that all of our families and community members understand the best resources of information for them, and use multiple platforms to best reach our audiences.

Website

Otsego Public Schools maintains both a District website and a site for each of our main buildings. Our website houses all relevant information regarding the district and schools, staff directories, contact information, parent and student resources and much more. Our websites are built with the user in mind to provide any key information they might need with just a few clicks.

- District / School webpages
 - Otsego Public Schools: otsegops.org
 - Alamo Elementary: alamo.otsegops.org
 - Dix Street Elementary: dse.otsegops.org
 - Washington Street Elementary: wse.otsegops.org
 - Otsego Middle School: oms.otsegops.org
 - Otsego High School: ohs.otsegops.org
 - Learn 'n Grow Early Childhood Education Center: lng.otsegops.org



Infinite Campus

Infinite Campus is our Student Information System and is used by staff, students and parents. The Parent Portal of Infinite Campus contains household and contact information which is used to distribute emails, text messages and phone calls to share building and district information. Infinite Campus is used by students and parents/guardians to check grades and attendance. Parents can update their information at any time both online or by contacting their child's building office. Parents also need to set notification preferences on how they would like to receive information from the school. It is strongly advised that parents receive email notifications due to the fact that some communication material will only come through email given its content and length.

Social Media

Social media is a fundamental part of any successful public relations or communications department, it's a powerful tool to tell stories in a fun and engaging way. At OPS, our strategy is to use social media for celebration to reach current, past and future families. Otsego has one official site on each platform we use; any other page or account is not affiliated with the district.

Social media sites allow all viewers a glimpse at the highlights, activities, events and celebrations of the great things happening at Otsego Public Schools. Social Media is meant to be social. We invite our followers to engage with us on social media and share their reactions and support; but, we also expect civility from those who engage with us; our [social media guidelines](#) can be viewed here or on our website under Departments/Communications/SocialMedia.

Our sites:

- Facebook & Instagram are the most widely used platforms for OPS. They have the highest reach, engagement and audience. They offer the opportunity for followers to engage with us on our posts as well as use direct messaging.
 - Follow us on Facebook at: facebook.com/otsegops
 - Follow us on Instagram at: instagram.com/otsegoschools
- Twitter / X: twitter.com/otsegoschools
- YouTube: youtube.com/otsegoschools
- LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/otsego-public-schools



OPS Connection

OPS believes that every district resident is a key part of our school community and prints a quarterly newsletter that is mailed (through the Community Shoppers Guide and/or direct mail) to all district residents and our School of Choice families. The OPS Connection is a compilation of highlights and community connections of the past quarter at Otsego Public Schools. Readers learn about our programs and student activities at every level as well as staff accolades and new initiatives. Those who don't receive this publication in the mail can read it online or grab a copy at the Otsego District Library, City Hall, or Chamber of Commerce office.

E-Newsletters

Each of our elementary, middle and high school buildings send out a weekly newsletter to school families with building-specific information, highlights and resources. At times, the superintendent will also share district-wide information through an E-Newsletter which is sent directly to our school families through the contact information entered in the Infinite Campus Parent Portal. Families should make sure their contact information and notification preferences are correct and kept up to date so they don't miss any key communications from the schools or district.

Peachjar

Our schools, district and community groups can use Peachjar to share important information on activities and opportunities for our students. Peachjar is an electronic flier distribution service that sends fliers and important links directly to our families via email; the email addresses used are those in our Infinite Campus Parent Portal system. Families are automatically subscribed to the school where their child attends, but can subscribe to other schools or opt out. Submissions to Peachjar from outside groups must meet our [Flier Distribution Guidelines](#), linked here or can be found on our website under Communications.

District App

Otsego recognizes that our school community is on the move so we've ensured that they can get information wherever they are with the Otsego Public Schools app. This app features links to our news and announcements, calendar, sports schedules, lunch menus, a student's meal account, social media sites, staff directories and much more! Download it for free on iTunes or Google Play.

Community Engagement

There are a number of ways the OPS staff connects with our community at the district level.

- Each month, the Superintendent holds a Coffee with the Superintendent at a local restaurant to meet with community members. The superintendent will share information on a topic from the district and take any questions.
- Our Strategic Plan was created with all stakeholder groups and participants continue to be involved in this living document. OPS created Focus Group Committees around our four focus areas and gets the group together quarterly to review the focus area, short and long term goals and the progress made.
- As new trends, district initiatives or hot topics arise, the superintendent will hold Community Conversations to allow our stakeholders time to learn more and ask questions. These conversations have proven beneficial in giving our community members and school family a voice and input, something OPS greatly values.
- Our families also have the opportunity to participate in the annual district perception survey to share the strengths and areas of improvement on our four key focus areas of the Strategic Plan.



Internal Communications Practices

- The PR/Communications Department will produce News & Notes, an e-newsletter for staff only. This is composed of important information and highlights from around the district to keep all staff connected.
- The Superintendent provides District Updates weekly to the Board of Education and District Leadership Team.
- The communications department connects weekly with buildings to identify items for promotion and maintains monthly communications meetings with principals to develop strategies and priorities for communication needs and outreach.



Media Relations

Otsego's Public Relations / Communications department maintains relationships with our local media and engages them with potential story ideas to help promote our district, students, programs and events. We value a positive partnership with our media outlets and welcome requests to offer our expertise if we can assist with providing information or resources on educational topics. Additionally, our media relations practices include:

- All media inquiries must be made through the Director of Communications; no interviews or information will be shared without prior approval.
- If an employee is contacted by a news agency/reporter, they must refer them to the Director of Communications and alert their supervisor of the request.
- The Director of Communications will work with the supervisor or Superintendent to discuss the media request and approval/denial.
- In times of crisis or an emergency, we will keep our media partners informed as we are able and respond to all inquiries to the best of our ability.
- The media must receive permission from the Director of Communications to be on any of our campuses. They can be on public roadways and sidewalks nearby, but the district has the right to allow/deny access to our property.
 - If media outlets are on campus without an employee's prior knowledge, the employee should alert their principal or supervisor to then contact the Director of Communications.

(This does not to apply to the Open Meetings Act.)

Crisis and Emergency Communications

In a time of crisis or an emergency when we need to quickly disseminate information to our school community, Otsego Public Schools will communicate from the district level. The primary source of all communication will be direct emails to our families using the contact information provided in Infinite Campus. This is the primary source of our information for families; it is vital that families keep this information up to date and set up notification preferences so that information is received in times of crisis or an emergency.

Crisis and Emergency Communications cont.

- When an emergency takes place, the district may publish a brief statement on the District's Facebook page along with communication via email to families using our alert system through Infinite Campus.
 - All subsequent communication will be direct email to families through Infinite Campus as information might be sensitive and not necessary for widespread distribution.
- The District will also send communication, as appropriate or needed, to local media outlets and our Key Communicators Network members.
- The District will continue to update families as we are able until the crisis or emergency situation is resolved. No other outlet will be responsible for providing official information so families need to have their contact information through OPS updated to stay informed.

When an emergency situation arises, the Superintendent will assemble the District Leadership Team to assess the situation and inform everyone of the facts. If the situation warrants, the principal will work with the Communications Department to determine if a phone/email message should go to parents and develop that message.

- All staff are equipped with a binder of information to let them know how to proceed in a given situation. If further instruction is needed, the principal will inform staff through email and intercom announcements.
- The Superintendent or Administrative Assistant will inform the Board of Education.

Please note:

- *Not all emergencies will warrant mass communication to all families in a building or the district. Some information can be communicated with a targeted set of people to resolve a situation.*
- *Detailed information may not be possible in different circumstances; we will always do our best to provide the facts when we are able.*

Measurement / Evaluation

It's important that communication strategies are effective, which takes a review of our practices and measuring outcomes. We will conduct ongoing audits of our work in several ways.

Annual Survey Results - The District conducts a perception survey each spring which includes questions on communications. Using these results, we'll evaluate our communication efforts and strategies for improvement.

Analytics - The Communications Department conducts a monthly review of several of our communication platforms to gauge engagement successes and areas for improvement.

- Website: We track the number of website visits and most viewed pages
- Newsletters: We track the number of opens, views and links clicked
- Videos: In our video campaigns, we track the number of views and time spent viewing the video
- Social media: We track several measures of engagement including number of followers, number of people reached, post engagement, site engagement, top posts and topics
 - It is our goal to share at least one highlight from each of our schools weekly.

Weekly Log - A log is kept weekly of possible promotional ideas and event. Those that are covered through one of our communication channels (website, social media, media, staff newsletter, etc.) are documented to ensure coverage is evenly distributed across the district as much as possible.



Communications Schedule	
Building Newsletters	Weekly
Social Media	Daily
OPS Connection	Quarterly
Coffee w/ the Superintendent	Monthly
Key Communicators Network Newsletter	Monthly
News & Notes (Staff e-newsletter)	1-2 x / month
Emergency Communications	As needed
Peachjar	Daily or weekly as submitted / approved
Media Outreach	Weekly / Monthly

Contact Information:

Holly McCaw, APR
 Director of Communications
hmccaw@otsegops.org
 269-694-7910

