

School Website Project



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Inspiring Community Engagement with School Websites

Inspiring passion for our schools is a key goal of our enrolment strategy. Our 53 schools had tired and dated websites or none at all. We know that the way people experience our schools has changed dramatically. Today, they expect to communicate on multiple levels and without appealing websites, we were falling behind. Providing a great visual experience and getting people engaged is what we set out to achieve with our school website project. By demonstrating the absolute need for and benefits of having a great website design and current content, we persuaded our schools to join our website project. As a result, we have achieved great success with brand enhancement, increased enrolment and we ensure that the needs of our target markets are met.

Research Evidence of Need

- Undertake a full review of the existing school websites – evaluate consistency, content, accessibility standards, design, layouts and architecture
- Hold focus groups with parents, students, staff and other stakeholders to determine needs
- Establish a team of students, staff, parents, to research “best practices” to refine the needs identified in focus groups and explore what kind of web tool/software will meet these needs
- Host demonstrations of potential software tools – invite principals, staff, parents, students, union representatives in schools to the session
- Ensure all stakeholders are part of decision-making – but give them the information they need to assist them in making the decision

Planning and Analysis

- Continue to engage community – work with school principals and parents to develop a “look and feel” that would be consistent for all schools – have a few design options narrowed down to present to the larger principal group and parents
- Continued consultation to determine what school site headers should look like (consistent with the district) allowing for some unique identity (e.g. school colours, school photos)
- Consult with parents, students and staff for a consistent architecture for the schools - have options for them to choose from
- To get principals on board, establish an implementation team and invited a small number of schools to be part of a pilot group
- Create a template for the schools to undertake their own consultation with parents and students regarding architecture, content and design
- Develop in-house training tools and resources for schools – also develop template or “boiler plate” content that is the same for all schools (e.g. bus transportation policy)
- Have principals consult with their peers on the look, design and content – and get support
- If unionized, consult early with unions and get their support, also consult with senior staff and trustees

Implementation and Communication

- Use pilot group to evaluate all tools, processes and plans
- Create a comprehensive in-house training module geared for staff, including step-by-step processes
- Refine training process and tools after pilot group
- Keep training group small to allow for one-on-one focus
- After the launch of the pilot school websites, make any adjustments, then implement a comprehensive communication and roll-out strategy
- Engage a principal as peer-leader for the project who can help promote it to others and to assist with peer support and training

- Conduct presentations after pilot schools go live to parents, students, school staff, principals, trustees, and others to get people engaged
- Continue to incorporate input/feedback during the roll-out into plans. Create detailed work plans and a critical path for the project so that there is a start and end date and goal (e.g. all schools have a website within a two-year time frame)
- Create other tools to support schools, such as Web Publishing Guidelines
- Share school successes to generate enthusiasm and interest
- Provide other helpful tools, such as webinars, on-line training and on-line resources to support schools
- Continually push out positive messages about the success of schools

Evaluation

- Publish achievements at each critical milestone of work plans – provide continual updates at meetings to key groups, especially principals and parents, but also trustees and unions
- Use web analytics and traffic volumes to demonstrate success
- Monitor enrolment changes
- Do surveys of parents, students and staff – ask for feedback at key steps
- Also promote the sites and help schools with this (e.g. develop a launch strategy each school can use on their own)
- Track the number of content authors who get involved and use the site
- Track the number of phone requests for more training on advanced features to help gauge success and interest from users
- Check on the number of subscribers for e-features such as e-newsletters and e-calendars
- Continue to seek input for upgrades and enhancements to the web tool
- Enjoy your success!