



STUDENT AMBASSADORS

Developing K-12 Communications Experienceships

Indian Hill Exempted Village School District

Heather Higdon, Chief Communications Officer

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K-12 School Division | 2,200 students, 4 schools

Number of Communications Staff: 1.3

2025 NSPRA Communication Awards

Gold Medallion Entry: Special Communication Project

SYNOPSIS

ARE STUDENTS LEADING NOW?

This was the question presented by our CEO/Superintendent as we began the 2023-2024 school year. During that fall, it was a question we faced as a 1.3-person communications team working within a public school system ranked consistently as one of the top-performing school districts in Ohio and nationally. We were entering the 2024-2025 school year with the planned celebration of a grand opening for a K-12 Entrepreneurs' Center (EC), equipped with robust research about how our leadership educational opportunities had launched during a pilot Indian Hill (IH) Experienceships program, and we had goals to work hand-in-hand with the new EC to create innovative opportunities for our students to gain communications experience that would both complement and grow the current pilot high school offerings into a K-12 model and with an overall student participation increase by 25 percent.

That is how the Indian Hill Student Ambassadors special communication project was born. By following the RPIE process, we developed a comprehensive plan to share with our entire leadership team to create brand ambassadors who could help us write a story from grades kindergarten through 12 that would celebrate the unparalleled educational experience we offer, while growing their leadership skills and opportunities.

Key communications included a multi-media campaign celebrating our students through print, digital, video, and in-person tours to support their learning, shared with all stakeholders from August 2024 through February 2025, culminating with our district's first student-told State of Schools presentation.



RESEARCH

We were equipped with significant qualitative and quantitative data through the establishment of our new EC, examining both the positive impact of student leadership and the number of our Indian Hill students who had participated in the IH Experienceships program, while using survey data from professional partners to assist us in defining new opportunities we could create in-house.

PRIMARY RESEARCH (INFORMAL, QUALITATIVE)

In addition to the research conducted by the EC team, we used two articles that focused on exploring the role of student involvement in learning processes, particularly focusing on collaborative learning and student-led communication, both of which are instrumental in fostering student leadership in communications:

[Cornell University Collaborative Learning Study](#)

[Research Gate: Involving Students in Communicating About Their Learning](#)

INVOLVING STUDENTS IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT THEIR LEARNING

1. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The "Collaborative Learning" article from Cornell University's Center for Teaching Innovation discusses the benefits of collaborative learning, where students engage in peer-to-peer or group activities to discuss concepts and solve problems. This approach promotes higher-level thinking, oral communication, self-management, and leadership skills.

2. INVOLVING STUDENTS IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT THEIR LEARNING

The second article, "Involving Students in Communicating About Their Learning," emphasizes the importance of student participation in the communication of their educational experiences. It highlights that when students articulate their learning processes, they develop a deeper understanding and take ownership of their education. This practice encourages students to assume leadership roles by reflecting on their learning, sharing insights, and providing feedback, which fosters a culture of open communication and continuous improvement. Engaging students in this manner not only empowers them but also cultivates essential communication skills necessary for leadership.

Both articles underscore the significance of student engagement in collaborative learning and self-communication as pathways to developing leadership skills in communications. By actively participating in group learning and articulating their educational journeys, students enhance their ability to lead and communicate effectively. These helped us set up the model for our Student Ambassadors experienceship.

SECONDARY RESEARCH (INFORMAL, QUANTITATIVE)

Working with our newly established K-12 Leadership and Career Development Department, an [August 2024 retreat](#) was hosted to gain input from professional partners in the Cincinnati area. During the retreat, we collected [survey information](#) on why these professional partners were willing to commit time, energy, and talent into our EC. This feedback was important on two fronts: understanding what motivated our partners, and creating avenues ourselves to develop meaningful leadership opportunities for our students as a district. Additionally, our partners with the EC set up and administered a [student survey](#) that provided a guide as to what opportunities current student leaders wished were expanded.





"I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO CREATE THAT PRIDEFUL FEELING AGAIN FOR OUR SCHOOL THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP TEAM."

- MIA SULSTED, CLASS OF 2026

"I REALLY WANT TO SEE OUR SCHOOL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND TO BE A PART OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS THAT WOULD HELP FUTURE BRAVES COME THROUGH OUR SCHOOLS."

- DREW ROEDER, CLASS OF 2026



We continued our secondary quantitative research by gathering existing data on current student leadership opportunities with the IH Experienceships program. With the assistance of our newly established K-12 Leadership and Career Development Department, we summarized the following:

FOUR MAIN FOCUS AREAS FOR DISTRICT:

- Entrepreneurship Programming
- K-12 Leadership Development
- Experiential Learning for ALL Braves
- Career Pathway Development

Additionally, we examined the status of our IH Experienceships program from the summer:

- 68 Students took part in Summer Experienceships
- 24 Summer Partners outside the district (67 total)
- 4 students took part in IH internships
- 48 Mentor Coaches have been recruited (22 alumni)
- 6 student Advisory Board Members
- 4 IH Experienceships Internships Fall Cohort

We had fresh numbers to review in the 2024-2025 school year:

- 200 IHHS Students Applied to be part of the Experienceship Program
- 73 mentor coaches recruited (42 alumni)
- 4 New Leadership Student Conference opportunities

Finally, our communications team toured High Tech High in San Diego, California, known for creating opportunities for students to communicate the story of their own learning in a powerful way. This was first hand research to see a potential outcome for investing in the creation of a Student Ambassador program at our district.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Research showed that there was a need to provide increased opportunity in communications Experienceships that was a K-12 model, experiential in nature, and inclusive of all students where learning was articulated by the students to have impact on leadership learning. Additionally, we wanted to use the Student Ambassadors program to help pilot the development of a career pathway to complement the digital media classes the District had invested in at three of our buildings (elementary, middle, and high schools).

Local 12 Anchor Sydney Hawkins Mentors our Student Ambassadors!



PLANNING

In planning for the expanded/new offerings, we submerged ourselves back into the research by the EC to understand student needs along with professional best practices. We centered ourselves on delivering a communication opportunity that was not only K-12 in nature, but also served the needs of individual buildings – and, most importantly, we wanted it to be a true reflection of the excellence within academics, arts, and athletics our District is known for. In order to achieve this, Communications and the EC partnered with Campus Life to meet one-on-one with building leaders to vet ideas together. Additionally, building leaders and Campus Life extended these meetings to our teacher-leader teams to develop even more specific strategies for the overall communication project that became IH Student Ambassadors.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES WERE DEFINED

GOAL STATEMENT:

The Indian Hill School District will create communication leadership opportunities for student storytelling like never before. In partnership with Campus Life, the Communications Department will create a team of Student Ambassadors in grades K-12 who can help share the story of the district in-person with new families, on social media channels, and through monthly strategic video storytelling. This is the pilot season for this new type of student storytelling, which will allow student to articulate their own learning experience, will be created with our intention to scale up and utilize new technology within the facilities on campus to develop an in-house Indian Hill School District Network connecting all members of our district to a student-led news source.

THE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT DEVELOPED STRATEGIES AND TACTICS TO ACCOMPLISH EACH OBJECTIVE.

Objective 1: Increase student participation in IH Experienceships focused on communications by 25 percent through recruiting students in grades K-12 to develop a team of student storytellers district wide and create a sustainable model to coach and capture student storytelling at each building transforming our weekly digital beBRAVE newsletter into a platform to share this news via video, and develop a system to deliver the newscast to all students and staff in the district; make learning relevant for seniors as part of a portfolio for college applications.

Strategy One: Meet with individual building leaders to learn their recommended plan – based on age of child – to recruit student participants, including how to nominate and interact with parents/guardians. Tactics included:

- Develop communication for parents/guardians to explain new program.
- Work with high school counseling team to develop word-count specific narrative to capture participation in portfolios for seniors submitting college applications.

Strategy Two: Select professional partner (video production company) to manage the technical aspects of video storytelling needed to garner a professional look for end product and plan for content. Tactics include:

- Develop a calendar of target record dates with partner mapping out entire school year in advance.
- Work with building teams, reviewing knowledge of significant events taking place throughout the school year, to preplan for content that will be covered.

Target Audience Defined: Building leaders, educators, professional partners; ultimately all stakeholders within the district to have access to the shows being produced.

Objective 2: Engage student storytellers to conduct in-person tours to be featured as presenters during the October 2024 national AASA consortium hosted by the Indian Hill School District, with at least eight participating K-12 to build student confidence in sharing their own learning.

Strategy One: Work with building leaders to define which students should participate. Tactics include:

- Meet with buildings to make selections.
- Prepare communications regarding participation for parents/guardians, including pertinent details.

Strategy Two: Develop talking points for each building for the students to have as a guide during the tours.

- Meet with buildings to define standout programs to be featured.
- Meet with student presenters to coach/train them on presentations.

Strategy Three: Brand the Student Ambassadors so they are recognizable visually during the AASA conference.

- Develop Student Ambassadors Logo/Brand look.
- Order shirts.
- Design and develop postcards for students to present to guests with a QR code linking to the introduction video for a high-level overview of the program.

Strategy Four: Share the story of the development of the Student Ambassadors program.

- Keynote during the AASA conference featuring Communications Department, Campus Life, and with Student Ambassadors as part of the Q&A session.

Target Audience Defined: Visitors to the Indian Hill School District as guests with the AASA national conference.

Objective 3: Share the story of the Indian Hill School District through the Student Ambassador program in the format of a recorded State of Schools video presentation featuring Student Ambassadors to showcase our unparalleled offerings in academics, arts, and athletics and share in a multimedia approach so the message reaches 100 percent of stakeholders within the Indian Hill School District with a goal of 500 views captured in metrics.

Strategy One: Develop a comprehensive script that showcases the uniquely Indian Hill story, highlighting programs the district has invested in, including student leadership.

- Work with building leaders to ensure highlights are complete.
- Feature building principals with entire group of Student Ambassadors within the video.
- Develop recording schedule to coordinate all the buildings.

Strategy Two: Utilize social media channels, website, digital newsletter, media outlets, and print publications to share the message.

- Customize each communication to reach target audiences.

Target Audience: All students, staff, and taxpayers within the Indian Hill School District.



BUDGET:

\$61,444.97 Overall

\$44,900.00 Shared Vision Contact; professional video partner

\$15,193.99 Printed Materials:

- AASA Postcard
- IH Promise Welcome Home Newsletter to Community
- IH Promise State of Schools Special Edition

\$1,350.98 Student Ambassador Branded Materials:

- Student Shirts



ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF CORE TEAM:

CEO/Superintendent Kirk Koennecke

- Student Ambassadors program champion communicating with Board of Education, media, parents, staff, and students.
- Active participant within the Student Ambassadors Newscast as a weekly anchor of the show.
- Master of ceremonies for the State of School video presentation.

Chief Communications Officer Heather Higdon

- Visionary leader for Student Ambassadors.
- Final content creator for weekly newscast.
- Keynote presenter to share program: District IH PTO meeting (Fall 2024); AASA National Conference (October 2024).
- Working directly with Student Ambassadors each recording on presentation.

Campus Life Coordinator Lateef Johnson

- Logistic mastermind for Student Ambassadors.
- Manager of content creation with building leaders.
- Working directly with Student Ambassadors prior to the record dates to prep presentations and serving on camera.
- Keynote presenter to share program: AASA National Conference (October 2024).

Director of K-12 Leadership and Career Development Jeff Damadeo

- Co-develop program using research collected as part of the district's student leadership programs.
- Embed Student Ambassadors program as a K-12 communications Experienceship.
- Promote program launch with grand opening of Entrepreneurs' Center.

Executive Administrative Assistant/Communications Specialist Rachel Price

- Developing brand look and feel for Student Ambassadors.
- Assisting in digital presentation for newscasts.

Building Principals

Dr. Erin Owens, IHPS; Cash Hayden, IHES; Lauren Gentene, IHMS; Andy Gruber, IHHS

- Work directly with Communications and Campus Life to curate content for biweekly newscasts.
- Champion the program with students and staff by showing the biweekly newscasts to entire buildings on the Friday launches.
- Champion the program with all parents in the recruitment of student participants.
- Work with Campus Life to develop talking points for AASA student-led tours.

Communication Vehicles:

- Video
- Digital Newsletter
- News Release to Indian Hill/Cincinnati Media Outlets
- Printed Publications
- Keynote Presentations
- Postcards
- Social Media
- Website
- Email

IMPLEMENTATION

Overarching Key Messages:

Steeped in research, our team developed key messages to support the launch of the Student Ambassador program

- As a district, we are strategically growing a Student Ambassador program within our Entrepreneurs' Center that positively impacts student leadership K-12.
- Student Ambassadors is open to ALL students; as students and parents/guardians learn about this Experienceship and want to participate the answer is: YES!
- Student Ambassadors are articulating their own learning in academics, arts, athletics, showcasing leadership skills both on video and in-person.

Tactics

With our key messages in place, we implemented our tactics:

- Develop communication for parents/guardians to explain program.
- Work with high school counseling team to develop word-count specific narrative to capture participation in portfolios for seniors submitting college applications.
- Develop a calendar of target record dates with partner mapping out entire school year in advance.
- Work with building teams, reviewing knowledge of significant events taking place throughout the school year, to preplan for content that will be covered.
- Meet with buildings to make selections.
- Prepare communications regarding participation for parents/guardians, including pertinent details.
- Meet with buildings to define standout programs to be featured during tours.
- Meet with student presenters to coach/train them.
- Develop Student Ambassadors Logo/Brand look.
- Order shirts.
- Design and develop postcards for students to present to guests with a QR code linking to the introduction video for a high-level overview of the program.
- Keynote during the AASA conference featuring Communications Department, Campus Life, and with Student Ambassadors as part of the Q&A session to talk first-hand about their experience.
- Work with building leaders to ensure highlights are complete.
- Feature building principals with entire group of Student Ambassadors within the video.
- Develop recording schedule to coordinate all the buildings.
- Customize each communication to reach target audiences.

Timeline Overview

April 2024 – July 2024:

- Meet with internal stakeholders to collaborate on development;
- Define recruitment by age group/building;
- Develop communications for parents/guardians.

August 2024 – September 2024:

- Finalize Student Ambassador participants;
- Develop content with buildings;
- Prepare for in-person AASA student-guided tours;
- Take program public through print, digital, and in-person presentation with community;
- Develop external communications celebrating new program for media release.

October 2024: AASA National Convention

- Develop keynote presentation to include Communications, Campus Life, and Student Ambassadors;
- Develop postcard with Student Ambassadors Overview;
- Develop Student Ambassador brand for event.

Timeline Overview Continued

November 2024 – January 2025:

- Develop script for State of Schools video presentation;
- Develop print publication for State of School presentation;
- Record and edit presentation;
- Release all communications.

Student Ambassador Program Setup

Robust organizational documents were developed in implementation to help guide our process from nominations of Student Ambassadors, to securing parent/guardian permission, to content development:

- [Planning Overview](#)
- [Parent Permission Letter](#)
- [Parent Permission Signup](#)
- [Master Content Planning Document](#)

Student Ambassador Newscast Schedule through State of Schools Presentation:

- [Video 1: Record Date Tuesday, August 27 /Air Date Friday, August 30: All Buildings - Meet the Student Ambassadors!](#)
- [Video 2: Record Date Tuesday, September 10 /Air Date Friday, September 13](#)
- [Video 3: Record Date Tuesday, September 24 /Air Date Friday, September 27](#)
- [Video 4: Record Date Tuesday, October 8 /Air Date Friday, October 11](#)
- [Video 5: Record Date Tuesday, October 22 /Air Date Friday, October 25](#)
- [Video 6: Record Date Tuesday, November 5 /Air Date Friday, November 8](#)
- [Video 7: Record Date Monday, November 18 /Air Date Friday, November 22](#)
- [Video 8: Record Date Tuesday, December 3 /Air Date Friday, December 6](#)
- [Video 9: Record Date Tuesday, December 17 /Air Date Friday, December 20](#)
- [Video 10: Record Date Tuesday, January 21 /Air Date Friday, January 24](#)
- [Video 11: Record Date Tuesday, February 4 /Air Date Friday, February 7](#)
- [Video 12: Record Date Tuesday, February 18 /Air Date Friday, February 21](#)

AASA National Convention

Again, in planning for in-person, student-led tours, we developed an overview for the event along with a comprehensive set of talking points for the visit:

- [AASA Full Planning Document](#)
- [Indian Hill Primary School \(IHPS\) Talking Points](#)
- [Indian Hill Elementary School \(IHES\) Talking Points](#)
- [Indian Hill Middle School \(IHMS\) and Indian Hill High School \(IHHS\) Talking Points](#)
- [AASA Video Presentation](#)

State of Schools

We worked as a team to compile a final script that was the flow for our record date for the State of Schools video presentation:

- [State of Schools Master Script](#)
- [State of Schools Printed Publication](#)
- [State of the Schools Presentation: Launch February 24, 2025](#)

EVALUATION

Objective 1: Increase student participation in IH

Experienceships focused on communications by 25 percent through recruiting students in grades K-12 to develop a team of student storytellers district wide and create a sustainable model to coach and capture student storytelling at each building transforming our weekly digital beBRAVE newsletter into a platform to share this news via video, and develop a system to deliver the newscast to all students and staff in the district; make learning relevant for seniors as part of a portfolio for college applications.

Evidence

Student Ambassadors Participation: 59 Students

- Indian Hill Primary School: 13
- Indian Hill Elementary School: 14
- Indian Hill Middle School: 14
- Indian Hill High School: 18

Evaluation

Through the Student Ambassador Program, we increased K-12 student participation in the communication Experienceship by 29.5%, exceeding the goal. We are thrilled with the response of not only our students, but also our parents/guardians, who have approached our team to be added during the course of this school year. Showing the newscast in-house to all students and staff on the Friday air dates has helped garner excitement for not only the program, but also the learning it features building community K-12.

Objective 2: Engage student storytellers to conduct in-person tours to be featured as presenters during the October 2024 national AASA consortium hosted by the Indian Hill School District, with at least eight participating K-12 to build student confidence in sharing their own learning.

Evidence

Student Ambassadors Participation: 34 Students

- 14 students served on the welcome team over 2 days
- 4 IHPS Student tour guides
- 8 IHES Student tour guides
- 3 IHMS Student tour guides; 1 Student who addressed entire group for a single class – fab lab
- 2 IHHS Student tour guides
- 2 IHHS keynote presentation presenters (one was also included in the tour guide count)
- 1 IHHS student addressed entire group for a single class – EC

Evaluation

We were absolutely thrilled to exceed our original goal of student participation at AASA by an outstanding 26 students, and additionally, we appreciated that our students wanted to take part in every aspect of hosting this national conference, with students as young as primary school greeting our guests.

Objective 3: Share the story of the Indian Hill School District through the Student Ambassador program in the format of a recorded State of Schools video presentation featuring Student Ambassadors to showcase our unparalleled offerings in academics, arts, and athletics and share in a multimedia approach so the message reaches 100 percent of stakeholders within the Indian Hill School District with a goal of 500 views captured in metrics.

Evidence

State of Schools Video produced, shared via digital newsletter and through printed publication mailed to 100 percent of taxpayers within the Indian Hill School District. We have to the State of Schools presentation, currently with a combined total of 2,784 views via YouTube (includes X and Facebook sharing), IG, and LinkedIn.

Evaluation

By leveraging our social media, we significantly exceeded our goal of capturing a minimum of 500 views for our State of School video presentation. This was an outstanding success having not produced anything like it featuring our students in this way previously.

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

- More students and families wanted to participate in the Student Ambassadors program than we initially planned for, and we appreciated the appetite to develop these types of communication skills. We are exploring the addition of marketing roles within the District as we continue to develop this program through the EC.
- Our students ARE ready to lead now, and were confident in the in-person presentations during the student-led tours of AASA. As we continue to evolve this part of the Student Ambassador program, we want to expand this offering to all building tours conducted at each level when potential families/educators come to see the learning that happens within our buildings.
- The recorded State of Schools was an absolute celebration of our Student Ambassadors program; we are looking to take what was recorded for all taxpayers within our district and transform that into an in-person experience for the future. Additionally, we will continue to enhance the presence of our Student Ambassador on our social media channels.



WATCH OUR NEWSCAST!

Click each image below for a link to the video!





READ OUR IHPROMISE NEWSLETTER - FALL 2024

Click the image to the right to view!



LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT WITH AASA

Click the image to the right to view!



Indian Hill School District partners with AASA for National Educational Consortium

Postcards Students Handed Out:





READ OUR STATE OF THE SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2025

Click the image below to view!



WATCH OUR STATE OF THE SCHOOLS PRESENTATION - SPRING 2025

Click the image below to view!



NEWS RELEASES & SOCIAL MEDIA

Highlighted in our weekly Newsletter **BeBRAVE**. Available online and sent to district mailing list via email.
Click image below to view example.



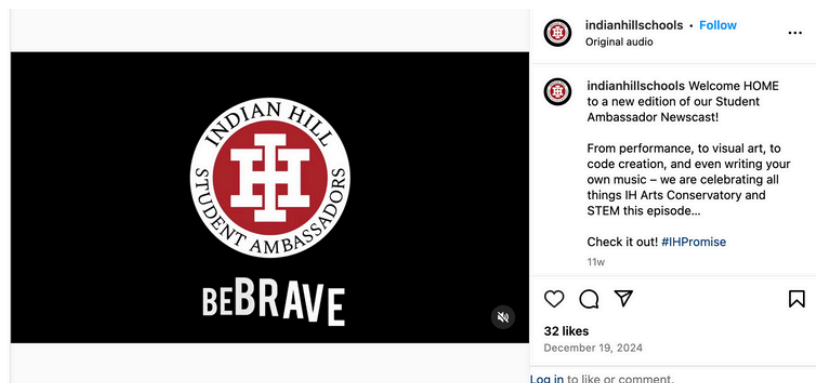
Student Ambassador Newscast: Episode 12

Welcome HOME to a new edition of our Student Ambassador Newscast – from STEM Night to *Footloose* – we are dancing to a uniquely Indian Hill beat this week on the show.

Click the image below to check it out!
(Video runs 6 minutes 42 seconds.)



Shared through X, Instagram, & Facebook.
Click images below to view examples.



District Website Homepage - State of the Schools Highlight Video



Each video Shared Through District News Releases.

Article Archive

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Student Ambassador Newscast: Episode 12

Welcome HOME to Indian Hill...

[Read More...](#)

Posted: Friday, February 21, 2025

Student Ambassador Newscast: Episode 11

Welcome HOME to Indian Hill...

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Posted: Friday, February 7, 2025

Student Ambassador Newscast: Episode 10

Welcome HOME to Indian Hill...

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Posted: Friday, January 24, 2025

Student Ambassador Newscast: Episode Nine

Welcome HOME to Indian Hill...

[Read More...](#)

Posted: Thursday, December 19, 2024

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LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Indian Hill Living Coverage

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Local 12

Live Coverage of Student Ambassador Newscast;
Story Unavailable Online



AASA Coverage

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A Transformative Visit to Indian Hill Exempted Village School District: Lessons in Leadership and Innovation

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Indian Hill Bulletin Coverage

Click image below to view article.

September 25, 2024—Indian Hill Bulletin— Page 11

INDIAN HILL SCHOOL DISTRICT LAUNCHES DEBUT STUDENT AMBASSADORS NEWSCAST

Today the Indian Hill School District launched a new way to communicate that turns the microphone over to in partnership with AASA, The School Superintendents Association during October.

