The “Neu” Guy

NSPRA Gold Medallion Entry

Special Communications Projects/Campaigns
School District: Over 25,000 Students
Total Number of PR/Communication Staff: 12

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In April 2014, the Oklahoma City Public School District (OKCPS) Board of Education selected Rob Neu as superintendent for Oklahoma’s largest school district. With his appointment, Neu became the 10th superintendent to serve OKCPS in the last 15 years; the revolving door of the superintendent’s office resulted in low community trust, poor employee morale and disappointing student performance. The City of Oklahoma City has experienced rapid growth in infrastructure, a successful NBA team, and national attention as one of the most affordable cities and best places to start a business. With the success of the city, residents are quick to point to the school district as the area in most need of improvement to continue the positive momentum of Oklahoma City. The parents, students, staff, business community and other taxpayers are primed for a new leader to engage the community, unite employees and develop a comprehensive student focused plan for improvement.

“The Neu Guy” Communications Plan spanned nine months, beginning with the selection of Rob Neu as OKCPS Superintendent and concluding with the “Neu Focus” 100 Day Transition Plan Report. Mr. Neu spent his first semester as superintendent learning about the district he was tasked to lead; he worked to identify critical issues that stifle academic success and systemic problems that hinder community support of public schools and contribute to low employee morale.

The OKCPS Communications team used community funded research tactics, newly developed engagement opportunities, a broad communication approach and branded marketing materials to build student, parent, staff and community support for Superintendent Neu and his plans for the district.

RESEARCH

The OKCPS Communications team used a community wide survey to gather quantitative research for this project. In spring 2014, OKCPS partnered with The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce and eight additional community partners (United Way, American Federation of Teachers, Greater Oklahoma Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City, Stand for Children OKC, Foundation for Oklahoma City Public Schools, Latino Community Development Agency, City of Oklahoma City) to conduct the community wide “Speak Up OKC for Kids” survey to help determine community perceptions about the strengths and areas for improvement for OKCPS.

More than 5,000 students, district staff, parents and community members completed the bilingual survey making it the largest survey of community members conducted on behalf of Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) to date.

Survey results showed:

A. 29% of employees and parents, and only 13% of community members surveyed expressed general satisfaction with OKCPS.

B. 34% of community members and employees, and 36% of parents, agreed that the district is committed to focusing on results for students.

C. 26% of employees, 27% of parents and 28% community members surveyed indicated that the district is headed in the right direction.

D. 27% of employees, 26% of parents would recommend OKCPS to other parents.
As a result of the survey, it was evident that OKCPS needed a comprehensive communication plan that garnered community support for Superintendent Neu. The plan needed to focus on introducing the superintendent to the community while presenting his plans to move OKCPS forward. Creative marketing, media outreach, grassroots relationship building and increased internal communication would help improve public opinion of OKCPS and persuade the community to suspend all disbelief and give OKCPS and “The Neu Guy” a chance to make a change.

PLANNING/ANALYSIS
After reviewing the survey results, the OKCPS Communications team and Superintendent Neu developed “The Neu Guy” Communication Plan to introduce and connect the new district leader to OKCPS key stakeholders, change public opinion and promote his approach for district improvement.

Primary Audience:
External - OKCPS community (business leaders, community partners, parents, students etc.)

Secondary Audience:
Internal - OKCPS staff (OKCPS Board of Education members, principals, teachers etc.)

Goals of “The Neu Guy” Communication Plan are:
1. Use innovative, internal and external communication strategies to introduce Robert Neu as OKCPS Superintendent and inform the community of his plans to improve OKCPS performance.
2. Connect Superintendent Neu with untapped key community stakeholder groups and opinion leaders.
3. Demonstrate that Superintendent Neu is a leader who practices authentic community engagement, considers multiple perspectives when making decisions and has a new approach to district success.

Objectives of “The Neu Guy” Communication Plan include:
1. Average a 30% open rate for internal e-newsletters.
2. Secure at least 100 newspaper, television or radio interviews on Superintendent Neu’s 100 Day Plan before the end of the fall semester.
3. Develop comprehensive key stakeholder network database and conduct face-to-face meetings with Superintendent Neu and 75% of the members on the list.
The OKCPS Communications and Community Relations Team delegated responsibilities among the team and created a budget to support the communications plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Superintendent</strong> Rob Neu</td>
<td>Crafted content for State of the Schools speech, created 5 Guiding Principles and 100 Day Transition Plan Report</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Senior Communications Officer</strong></td>
<td>Developed “The Neu Guy” comprehensive communications plan, created internal and external communication strategy for superintendent announcement, organized “Neu Day” school tour and media availability, worked with Superintendent Executive Assistant in scheduling meetings with key stakeholders, created content for TEAM OKCPS newsletters and “Neu’s Report” staff messages, implemented regular central office staff meetings with Superintendent Neu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilingual Communications Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>Identified English and Spanish media opportunities to promote “The Neu Guy” Communications Plan, crafted press releases and media advisories to support communications plan, scheduled “Neu’s Report” taping, organized topics and schedule for morning radio interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web &amp; Visual Communications Manager</strong></td>
<td>Created superintendent page on okcps.org, created and monitored all social media postings to support “The Neu Guy” Communications Plan, created “Neu Move” document, created welcome letter from Superintendent Neu for student parent handbook, created State of the Schools PowerPoint presentation to support speech, developed budget for printing of created marketing materials, developed guidelines for live tweeting at OKCPS Board of Education meetings, created Board Action newsletters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilingual Community Relations Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>Developed and updated community partnership list, organized Diversity Council welcome reception for Superintendent Neu, identified key Hispanic leaders and provided counsel to Superintendent Neu on diverse policy makers in Hispanic community in preparation of face-to-face meetings, translated Board Action Newsletters in Spanish for community engagement, created OKCPS en Español Facebook page to increase community engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graphic Design Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Created “Neu Focus” executive summary, assisted in creating “Neu Focus” videos, designed TEAM OKCPS newsletters.</td>
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Strategies
Marketing/Branding & Promotion:
To support the communication’s plan to introduce Superintendent Neu as the new leader of OKCPS, the OKCPS Communications Department creatively used “Neu” in all campaign branding and key messaging to increase name recognition.

- #NeuSuper was selected as the official hashtag for all social media posts relating to Superintendent Neu.
- “Neu Move” - 100 Day Transition Plan
- “Neu Focus” - 100 Day Report
- “Neu Day” – First Day of School Tour featuring Superintendent Neu
- “Neu’s Report” – official internal video message from Superintendent Neu. (see appendix)

Engagement
The OKCPS Communications Department implemented several tactics to foster authentic community engagement. Results of the “Speak Up OKC” survey helped Superintendent Neu identify and prioritize which key stakeholder groups were in most need of engagement strategies. The Communications Department used the data from the tutor/mentor/community partner database to compile a detailed list of the community partners who give the most time, talent or treasure to support district schools. Superintendent Neu scheduled face-to-face meetings with those groups along with elected officials and other policy makers. Student, parent and principal advisory boards were also created to encourage two-way communication and develop professional relationships to support increasing engagement. With a focus on improving internal communication, Central Office staff meetings were scheduled and three internal newsletters (TEAM OKCPS, Neu’s Report and Board Action) were created and sent to all staff on a regular basis.

Internal Newsletters: Team OKCPS and Board Action
“Neu’s Report” Email to Staff

Media
The OKCPS Communications Department developed comprehensive media plans that included a social media presence to support the hiring of Superintendent Neu and to promote his “first” first day of school with OKCPS. The Communications Department scheduled visits with the editorial board, The Oklahoman (largest newspaper in OK), El Nacional Newspaper (largest Spanish newspaper in OKC) and secured monthly radio interview opportunities with AM 1520 KOKC.

“The Neu Guy” Media Coverage Links
- http://www.thelivingroomgb.com/listen/m.blog/225/100-day-goals-and-3-pointers
• http://www.okgazette.com/oklahoma/article-21723-school-board-welcomes-new-superintendent.html
• http://www.okcfox.com/story/25928952/new-superintendent-takes-over-okc-district
• http://www.okcfox.com/story/26189464/okc-public-school-students-head-back-to-the-classroom
• http://okgazette.com/2014/08/04/new-superintendent-joins-students-on-first-day-of-school/
• http://www.okcfox.com/story/26189464/okc-public-school-students-head-back-to-the-classroom
• https://www.google.com/url?rct=j&sa=t&url=http://www.koco.com/news/drivers-reminded-that-okcps-students-return-to-class-monday/27294726&ct=ga&cd=CAEYASoTNTE1ODU0MTgzMTMzMTIyMjIaOWUzNzUzMTMzYjBhYmE0ZTpjb206ZW46VVM&usg=AFQjCNE0qibSkaaBWWLJ0D5_gltRiSfmw
• http://kfor.com/2014/08/20/new-okcps-superintendent-poverty-is-not-a-learning-disability/

Budget Information
All publications were designed in house. Video production was provided by Southeast High School Technology students. Some printing of materials was completed in house; items out sourced are listed below.

Printing
• Neu Move Handout - $478.93
• Neu Focus Handout - $345.91

Constant Contact Email Management System - $548.00 per year

Total: $1372.84
COMMUNICATION
Communicating “The Neu Guy” was a three step approach that spanned from April 2014 through December 2014.

Step 1: April - June 2014
The OKCPS Communications Team used the following strategies to announce the selection of Rob Neu as superintendent:
1. Press Release sent to full media list announcing OKCPS board selection
2. Internal newsletter sent to all staff immediately following the board vote.
4. Staff meeting with all district principals, central office staff and operations team.
5. “Moving Forward” community meet and greet event featuring new OKCPS superintendent.
6. “Meet Neu Super” webpage on district website
7. Shared press release and posted announcement via social media, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Step 2: July – November 2014
The OKCPS Communications Team used the following strategies to commemorate Superintendent Neu’s first 100 Days leading the district.
1. “Neu Move” 100 Day Transition Plan was developed to outline the goals of Superintendent Neu’s first 100 days on the job. 500 copies of the plan were printed to be distributed during community outreach events and face-to-face meetings. A copy of “Neu Move” was posted online on the superintendent’s page, presented to the OKCPS Board of Education, shared via district social media pages and sent to all staff. A media advisory was sent to the full media list inviting them to the July 1st board meeting as Superintendent Neu presented his plan to the district.
OKCPS Board of Education; a press release was developed to accompany the plan.

2. Comprehensive **media tour and availability** commemorating Superintendent Neu’s first job day on the job (July 1, 2014). Each media outlet was given an opportunity for **a sit down interview** with the new superintendent and to pose pointed questions regarding the “Neu Move” 100 Day Transition Plan.

3. Presentation and speech to more than 300 community leaders during the annual “**Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce State of the Schools**” annual luncheon.


5. “Neu Day”, wide-ranging first day of school media and community tour marking the first day of school for the 2014-2015 school year. Superintendent Neu appeared LIVE on local television morning shows before spending the day visiting 4 school sites. The media was invited to follow Superintendent Neu as he had breakfast at an elementary school, read a story to a third grade class, had lunch with seniors at a district high school and visited with teachers at a middle school.
6. An online form was developed to capture concerns, opinions and suggestions on the 100 Day Transition Plan. (see appendix)

Step 3: December 2014

The Communications Team used the below communication strategies to release the findings of the “Neu Focus” 100 Day Transition Plan.

1. “Neu Focus” was developed to communicate with all key stakeholders what Superintendent Neu discovered during his first 100 days. Through face-to-face meetings, reviewing student performance data, and district processes and procedures; Superintendent Neu identified four critical issues that require intentional urgency.

2. The “Neu Focus” plan findings were presented to the Board of Education and shared with all staff through a Board Action Update, and previously identified key stakeholder groups also received the information via an e-newsletter.

3. The “Neu Focus” document was also shared with community via social media, including Twitter and Facebook.

4. An accompanying press release on “Neu Focus” was shared with local media.

5. The “Neu Focus” was posted on the superintendent’s page of www.okcps.org and posted on the district’s homepage for several weeks after its release.
The Oklahoma City Public School District Communications Team developed “The Neu Guy” Communications Plan to garner support for the district’s new leader. Superintendent Neu met with untapped key community stakeholder groups, conducted several well planned media events and demonstrated that he is a leader who practices authentic community engagement and has a plan for improving the district.

Google analytics, Constant Contact newsletter stats, weekly media summaries and Superintendent Neu’s weekly board updates were used to track the progress of the plan to ensure the below objectives were met.

Objectives of “The Neu Guy” communication plan include:

1. Average a 30% open rate for internal e-newsletters.
2. Secure at least 100 newspaper, television or radio interviews on Superintendent Neu’s 100 Day Plan before the end of the fall semester.
3. Develop comprehensive key stakeholder network database and conduct face-to-face meetings with Superintendent Neu and 75% of the members on the list.

Results:

1. The OKCPS Communications Team sent 29 internal e-newsletters (TEAM OKCPS, Board Action and “Neu’s Report”) with an average open rate of 28%; the office learned that staff responded well to receiving information relating to the results of the Board of Education meeting. “Board Action” newsletter averaged a 31% open rate among staff. The video messages known as “Neu’s Report” averaged a 30% open rate; “Neu’s Report” lacked timely information and consistency other internal newsletters experienced. TEAM OKCPS averaged a 22% open rate among staff.

2. The OKCPS Bilingual Communications Coordinator secured a regular monthly morning radio interview for Superintendent Neu to discuss topics concerning the district. The communications team crafted and sent 5 press releases and 5 media advisories that specifically introduce and promote the new district leadership. During the months of April 2014 through December 2014 117 radio, television or newspaper stories were published related to Superintendent Neu and/or the programs he implemented as a result of his “Neu Move” 100 Day Transition Plan Report. The OKCPS Communications Office developed a stronger partnership with 1530 AM radio and the OK Gazette, which resulted in an increase in stories on OKCPS compared to last year.

3. The OKCPS Community Relations Team developed a comprehensive key stakeholder list which was used to prioritize face-to-face meetings and ensure all areas of the community were touched. More than 144 partners and community members were included in the list; Superintendent Neu had contact with 74% of organizations on the list. These contacts included face-to-face individual meetings, large group presentations, speaking events and small group sessions with students, Central Office employees and principals. Through this plan, the OKCPS Communications Office learned family engagement is not streamlined or aligned with district goals; OKCPS community relations office will use the list of parents groups to conduct a facilitated conversation to improve family engagement in the district. The event is scheduled for April 9th and 16th.

4. The OKCPS Communications Team received numerous comments via social media and web comments related to Superintendent Neu’s arrival to OKCPS. The general consensus is hope and excitement for what the district’s future holds. Feedback during Superintendent Neu’s face to face meetings with community members, principals and other staff have indicated the OKCPS
community is glad Superintendent Neu is here and feel he is a change agent that can courageous with his changes/goals to support all kids.

“The Neu Guy” Communications Plan laid the foundation needed to authentically engage the community in the district’s “The Great Conversation” Strategic Alignment Process which kicked off in late November 2014. The strategies in “The Neu Guy” Communications Plan helped the public to consider suspending all disbelief and previous disappointments in OKCPS so that Superintendent Neu would have a fair opportunity to succeed.

The results of the plan can be easily demonstrated via a rare positive editorial in The Oklahoman on “The Neu Guy”.

“The superintendent was right in saying that “brutal honesty” was a must in facing the current state of affairs. It’s “the first step we must take to make Oklahoma City a model urban school system.” Neu has sounded the clarion. Bravo!” –Oklahoman Editorial 12/10/14
APPENDIX
Speak UP OKC Survey
  • Survey Email to Staff
  • Survey Results

5 Guiding Principles
  • Rob Neu’s 5 Guiding Principles

State of the Schools
  • Video of Presentation

Neu Move 100 Day Transition Plan
  • Neu Move Transition Plan
  • Neu Move El Plan de Transición
  • Neu Move Staff Newsletter
  • Neu Move Engagement Survey
  • Neu Move Engagement Survey Results

Neu Focus 100 Day Transition Plan Results
  • Neu Focus Executive Summary
  • Neu Focus El Reporte de los Primeros 100 Días del Plan de Transición
  • Neu Focus Full Report
  • Neu Focus PowerPoint – Used to present findings to Board of Education
  • Video of Presentation
  • Neu Focus Staff & Community Email

Community Partners
  • List of OKCPS Community Partners

Media Advisory
  • Neu Day – First Day on the Job

Press Releases
  • OKCPS Announces New Superintendent

Staff Newsletters
  • Board Selects Rob Neu as OKCPS Superintendent
  • Neu’s Report – Welcome from Superintendent Neu
  • Neu’s Report – The Great Conversation