Assessment:
When Dr. Kleinsmith came to Nixa Public Schools in 2000, he instituted a strategic planning process, known as CSIP (comprehensive school improvement plan). Communication always has been, and, with the district’s philosophy on communication, should always be a part of the district’s strategic plan. The great thing about strategic planning is that it requires measurable outcomes and is reviewed yearly by a group of members from the school, student population, and community. We, as a district, get yearly feedback on our communication efforts from a cross section of the community and district.

At the beginning of the strategic planning process, the need for effective communication through various means was identified. In the 2001, the need for a comprehensive communication program and a person (i.e. director of communication) to oversee the district’s communication efforts was added into the district’s goals. In addition to the communication director, the following is a highlight of communication strategies that were implemented in the CSIP process in the last few years in various ways across the district to enhance the district’s communication and outreach efforts:

1. Develop, maintain and utilize centralized databases of friends as a network to support the school district.
2. Unify the district communication procedures.
3. Provide training to all district staff in communication technology.
4. Enhance content and efficiency of district website and intranet.
5. Improve school to home communication.
6. Establish procedures to enhance personal contact between patrons and school employees during operating hours.
7. Promote district events and accomplishments in news media.
8. Establish centralized student registration center.
9. Establish an online registration process for new and returning students.
10. Improve internal communication.
11. Establish a media/news broadcasting program for students at the junior high/high school to produce news and enhance communication in existing classes.
12. Enhance two-way communication between parents/community and the school district.
13. Establish a communication crisis plan.
14. Ensure a welcoming and customer friendly environment in all district buildings.

Planning:
The district has the following main audiences identified as a part of its communication strategies:

1. Faculty & Staff
2. Students
3. Parents
4. Business Community and Community Organizations
5. Non-Parent Residents (which make up over 70% of our district)
6. Alumni

Nixa has a very “plugged in” community, so we are able to use various electronic means. However, since 70% of our community does not have students in the school district, we still publish a print magazine (The Nest) twice a year to all mailboxes in the school district. We also make sure that we do not forget about our students, so we have instituted various methods to reach them through social media, texting, and email.
Since the districts communication programs are budgeted item each year, we strive for excellence in our website, rapid notification system, as well as web managers at each building and for the district. The communication staff handles a majority of the communication issues, but the entire administrative staff, as well as other applicable positions, is responsible for carrying out various parts of the communication plans since we developed guidelines, standards, and expectations for each building.

Nixa has faced many obstacles, but since 1990, just the city population grew from 4,000 to over 20,000 people this year. So, finding money for some programs has been difficult. However, the district implemented an advertising and sponsorship program as a way to help supplement various communication efforts.

This growth has also been difficult to keep up with communication wise. But the district has focused on more saturation efforts and various e-communication, so we have been able to help reach new and existing families and community members more effectively as well as reaching our staff in various methods to keep them informed as well as providing methods for feedback.

**Communication**

What we have learned over the years, is that you let people know what is going to be coming, let them know how they can be trained or sign up for information, and then follow up on that promise to train them or deliver information, you build a bank of trust that you can use when a negative or crisis event happens.

The same goes for when we implement new programs or procedures. Our goal is to always inform internal audiences first so they can be our ambassadors (this may only be a short notice), and then move to the other groups to communicate out a message tailored for them.

Since the CSIP is ingrained into the district’s culture, it is communicated to staff regularly. We have also used the idea of opening up communication tools to staff and see who is an early adopter, then move to those who see that it works with the early adopters, and then work to bring in those are the most reluctant.

Since the adoption of the district’s e-communication efforts, we have a quick and comprehensive way to reach our parents and most members of the community. We also have regular meetings with the city, county, Chamber, fire district, and police department so that we can all let each other know what we are doing and work together. This has helped with election issues so too many bond or tax issues are not on the same ballot so efforts can be made to focus on the one and not confuse people with too many issues at once.

**Evaluation:**

**Effective Staff Communication:**

Through interactions with staff and feedback through various methods, updates to how we communicate with and to them were identified.

After we learned that staff were overwhelmed with emails from various district departments, we developed a Staff Communicator e-newsletter (which just received an Award of Excellence from NSPRA) that would be published once a week as well as archived on the website. This is in addition to a “Staff Resources” link on the website, which acts as a central location for staff information.

We have also instituted a practice of making sure we contact staff first, when possible, to allow them to be the first to learn about information so they don’t feel “out of the loop.”
In addition to informing them, we make sure to equip them. We hold regular website training classes and periodically hold effective communication classes that cover working with the media, parent communication, social media communication, as well as other topics as needed.

And you can’t communicate if you don’t listen. While the district has had a professional committee (Pro-Com) since 2007 that is a few members of the teaching staff and administration that meet quarterly to discuss salary and benefits, a new “Academic Huddle” was established as well to expand the district’s listening and information dissemination. The Academic Huddle meets quarterly with a representative from every building to discuss areas of common interest in the district. Staff need to feel included and as the saying goes, “it’s hard to know what play to run when you’re not invited to the huddle.” This is a great opportunity to have two-way communication from all buildings and gather great information on perceptions and feelings of staff.

We know that our staff communication is working (yet there is always room for improvement) because in our most receive internal communication survey, 96.4% feel informed, 97.3% feel information provided is useful, and 91.9% get information from Staff Communicator.

We have created at staff login for you on our website. When you go to www.nixapublicschools.net, click on “Sign In” and then use NSPRA as the screen name and Eagle1 as your password.

Effective Community Communication:

To increase the likelihood our community is informed, we employ several methods to reach them. We have a Facebook page (over 4000 “likes”), a Twitter account (over 1500 followers), a separate athletic website (avg. 18,000 page views a month), our QuickNews e-newsletter (4000 subscribers), as well as the district and athletic magazines (links to our communication tools and publications can be found at www.nixacommunication.net, the district website at www.nixapublicschools.net, and the athletic website at www.nixaathletics.net).

Through our various interactions and surveys, we know that the community feels informed and trusts the schools. We have regular meetings with our PTA and have administrators plugged in to community groups to both inform and listen so we can assess how we are doing in the community.

Dr. Kleinsmith also holds a “Koffee with Kleinsmith.” This has become a destination for many community members and parents to learn about various scheduled topics (drug use, safety, wellness, etc.). With average attendance at 50 members, this is a great asset in our communication program.

Also, the district has never lost a Bond Issue, and the last few have passed with over 70% “yes” votes, including our 2010 and 2012 Bonds.

In addition to this, the district just launched a Legislative Corps. This group is a volunteer group that receives information from Dr. Kleinsmith describing how legislation impacts Nixa and how they can be active in contacting our elected officials to advocate for Nixa Public Schools. In just a few weeks, there are over 40 members.

We also utilize our mailings, social media, and e-news to communicate and reach out to our alumni to increase their knowledge about and support of Nixa in various manners. We have seen their interaction increase because of this.
We also know that our communication efforts are effective because the Nixa Fire District and Nixa Police Department have asked to use our systems to communicate out information to the community (fire safety, child abduction, etc.) because they see the system as effective and comprehensive.

Effective Student Communication:
As our students get older, we adjust how we communicate. At the high school level, we have focused on developing various methods to reach our students through social media and we will be instituting a school-wide texting procedure to inform students in addition to information sent to parents.

We also have various student advisory groups as needed to make sure the student perspective is always seen and heard (safety team, CSIP, lunch choices, etc.).

Effective Parent Communication:
In addition to the community communication methods addressed above, the district has also added to its parent-specific communication methods. These includes text alerts, social media usage by teachers, e-communication on various platforms, which helps us keep our parent involvement high in various events (we currently have a 95% or higher parent-teacher conference participation level at all buildings).

We've also begun the process of equipping all our teachers with the ability to send notification messages out to parents so that they can effectively communication quickly to everyone and then spend more focused time with families that may need their attention more.

Copying What We Do
One of the best ways we have learned that what we do is effective is that other school districts hear how our parents and community love our communication and outreach efforts. In turn, they send their communication professionals and superintendents to Nixa to duplicate what we do in ways that will work in their community.

This “copying” has also led to the development of workshops that are given at state and national conferences on how we do things. One of those, “Lessons Learned from PR Rookies,” is a favorite of both state and national audiences because it has taken what Nixa has done and other districts have copied and seen as effective, and broken it down into digestible information for the new PR professional.

Future Plans:
There will always be room for improvement and communication methods will always be changing, so we adjust and adapt to make ourselves relevant and effective to our community. We will be implementing more mobile and app-based communication in addition to expanding our texting since the younger parents prefer that (as identified in many national surveys and studies).

We have also adjusted our e-newsletter content and our website design and content to guarantee staff and the community can find information effectively and quickly. Depending on when you view our website, you will see changes occurring to better meet the needs of our various audiences.

Also, based on the communication survey and customer service surveys, we have areas in the district to target and adjust so that our staff and community have a more positive experience. This can be anywhere from how an administrator communicates to adding in more specific tools to reach out even more to the various audiences in the buildings.

One of the main methods of reviewing and adjusting will be when we begin our next strategic planning cycle in May of 2014. This will be where we are able to fully review and develop action plans to carry out what our community feels are needed methods of or adjustments in communication.