

Tucson Unified School District Communications Plan

2013-2014



TUSD



Our challenge

Tucson Unified School District is committed to honest, transparent, and consistent communications with our stakeholders. We have substantial and diverse outreach needs similar to any large organization whose mission includes meeting the expectations of multiple audiences.

The act of communicating means different things to different people. For example:

- A parent who wants to know how to access their child's grades online and reach a teacher to ask questions.
- The student who needs academic resources to excel and avenues to discover additional opportunities that enhances the ability to learn.
- An employee who needs to find out when the next training session will be held and what is expected of them.
- An interested taxpayer who is seeking details on how bond dollars have been spent before deciding on how to vote in the upcoming bond election.
- The marketing team that is eager to increase enrollment by promoting the value of magnet schools.

Whatever the need, the onus of ensuring that TUSD structures a viable, sustainable, and credible communications system falls not only on the Communications Department but on leadership throughout the district.

A communications system is only as good as the commitment to contribute to its success. Planning for and requiring shared responsibility will ensure a system that is worthy of a leading organization and meets the needs of our stakeholders.

We must not take communications for granted. Providing frequent, clear and results-driven communications is the key to fostering trust and increased loyalty to the district. An absence of information creates a void where individuals and the community fill in the blanks with determinations of their own – more often than not, resulting in misperceptions and destructive opinions.

We allow for communications that are reactive when appropriate. But, the goal is to establish a district-wide communication style that is both proactive and

interactive. We will lead with our message, encourage conversation, seek feedback from our constituents, and measure our progress.

TUSD communications is about delivering the right message, to the right audience, at the right time. To this end, we must stay focused on the needs of internal audiences, external audiences and the target groups among them.

To get started, we must build an infrastructure that will allow robust communications, reach to our customers, and be sustainable through district-wide participation.

Communication Goals

The Communications Department will provide leadership and counsel to accomplish the following goals:

1. Develop and maintain positive relationships with all stakeholders to strengthen support of the district.
2. Create key messages and talking points to establish “one voice” for the district.
3. Establish brand identity for the district and build on that image and reputation.
4. Improve community engagement through consistent and dynamic interaction.
5. Support customer service needs through robust information channels and printed materials.
6. Maintain proactive media relations to enhance the district’s image on local, state and national levels.
7. Identify opportunities for public visibility through event participation.
8. Empower staff to improve interactions with our customers by coaching them on communication techniques and best practices.
9. Increase transparency to improve public perceptions about the district.

Communications & Media Relations Department Staff

Director of Communications

Cara Rene

Video Producer

Mary Canty

Web Editor

Cathy Thwing

Graphic Designer & Photographer

Jes Ruvalcaba

Web Developer

Donna Goble

Multimedia Technician

Andrea Marafino

External Communications

Information • Public relations • Reputation management • Partnerships

We must build solid relationships with stakeholders to build a foundation of trust.

External communications is how we make the district visible to our community. We disseminate news of the district, market our programs, promote our image, provide reports, and ask our stakeholders to come along for the ride – stakeholders who ultimately will ask “what’s in it for me?”

To maximize our chances of improving our dealings with our stakeholders, we must first embrace relationship building as the basis toward improving perceptions about the district.

To understand the scope of this necessity, it’s vital we know our stakeholders and what we can do for them:

Parents

Parents are our primary customers. They make the decisions about where to send their children to school, and have many available choices in the community including dozens of charter and private schools and other districts with open enrollment. Efforts must be initiated and maintained to address the decision-making process, including creating awareness, ensuring consideration of TUSD as an option, and attaining enrollment.

As important constituents, parents deserve the highest level of customer service from the district. We must stay connected with them as their needs demand and must be proactive in our approach. A review of all ways we connect with parents is essential – taking the extra step to ensure our communications are friendly, clear, and timely.

Recommended actions:

- Evaluate readability and friendliness of all current form letters, documents, and other materials that are sent to parents. Update as needed for appropriateness.
- Collect email addresses, cell phone numbers and preferred mode of contact from all parents during registration to build substantial contact lists.
- Create a monthly district e-newsletter that features parent-centric information. Recruit TUSD parents to write columns or other content.
- Create an online interactive help center for parents– an information clearinghouse that aggregates must-have content and provides an avenue for direct contact with those who can react to the needs of parents.
- Develop a parent hotline to assist parents with information, questions, concerns, and other needs. Volunteers, such as retired teachers or other former employees, could help staff the hotline.
- Provide quarterly public forums where parents can meet with district and school officials.
- Produce a quarterly printed newsletter to ensure reach to the parents who may not have computer access at home.

Students

TUSD has more than 50,000 students. The district’s job is to educate our students and prepare them for their lives after graduation. Our students are also our youngest brand ambassadors and are a representation of their experience at TUSD.

We cannot underestimate the influence that students have on their parents when it comes to selecting a school or choosing a particular program. Providing students with age-appropriate content designed to inform them about available opportunities will support efforts to increase enrollment and increase satisfaction.

We must also acknowledge and celebrate student successes to reflect the quality of the work being done throughout the district and provide a venue for their voices.

Recommended actions:

- Attract students to the district through age-appropriate portals that provide information and outline opportunities for involvement.
- Develop a student-centric social media presence focused on dissemination of information and honoring TUSD students.
- Develop a robust online resource center that features information on scholarships, internships, volunteer and summer job opportunities,
- Engage media students to help tell the stories of their schools.
- Celebrate student achievements through all available communication channels.

School councils

Community members and parents who are dedicated to the support and advocacy of the district and schools are a valuable constituent group often involved through school councils. We need to maintain open conversation with school councils, communicating often and proactively to get their feedback and keep them informed.

Recommended actions:

- Encourage council members to sign up for newsletters and social media channels.
- Include council members on news releases and other public information.
- Incorporate school council messages into district communications.

Taxpayers/voters

The general taxpayer may seem far removed from those knee-deep in the workings of the district. Yet taxpayers and voters develop perceptions about the value of the district to the community and our fiscal trustworthiness – perceptions that can impact the direction of the district for years to come.

Recommended actions:

- Develop a user-friendly web presence that presents budget information, bond project expenditures and tax credit spending, to show that tax dollars are being used wisely. Over-communicate news and information as needed for reaching our constituents.
- Develop themed bus tours to introduce the public to the district: historic schools, magnet schools, high schools, fine arts programs, etc.

Community partners

Organizations such as Educational Enrichment Foundation and Tucson Values Teachers exist for the sole purpose of aiding district families and teachers in the region. As partners, we should support their efforts by making their work visible and accessible to our community.

Recommended actions:

- Create a visible place on the district website to feature our partners
- Link to partner newsletters as appropriate from district communications
- Develop new strategic partnerships that are supportive of district goals

Business community

Local businesses are the future employers of our graduates and rely on a strong public education system to grow a viable workforce and recruit workers to Tucson.

Recommended actions:

- Recruit business leaders to mentor students on career opportunities
- Create a centralized database that features internships available to our students
- Engage business leaders to advocate on behalf of the district

Media

Media relations is not about firing off a press release and hoping to see a good news story splashed across the front page or leading the 10 p.m. news. Media relations requires working the phones, meeting with reporters and editors, engaging in story placement techniques, and being accessible.

Recommended actions:

- Establish a monthly district roundtable where media representatives are invited to learn about TUSD initiatives and programs. The district sets the agenda and allows media to ask questions and set up opportunities for interviews.
- Establish quarterly media bus tours to provide media representatives access to see bond projects, school programs, and a look inside the district's schools.
- Identify best opportunities with local media for consistent story placement/engagement, such as a weekly spot on news programs to reach target audiences.

Staff

While staff is generally considered an internal audience, it's imperative to remember that our employees are community members that see the same news stories, marketing initiatives, and outreach efforts as everyone else. They will be influenced by what they see and that can impact whether they become ambassadors with positive messages to share or develop a negative perception.

Recommended actions:

- Develop staff forums to facilitate an exchange of ideas and to attain feedback.

- Develop staff-only web chats to increase interaction, idea generation, and problem solving.

Crisis management

TUSD should work with an outside entity to manage crisis communications. The district does not have the resources required to suitably handle such needs.

External Communication Channels

There are numerous channels to use for storytelling and marketing needs. Here are a few that must be a regular part of our communications strategy:

News releases (TV, radio, web, print)

Letters to the editor

Media tours

District website

School websites

TUSD-TV

Newsletters (digital and print)

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc.)

District events

School events

Community events

School buses

Schools marquees and exterior spaces

Measuring Results

TUSD must begin to document activity to build a baseline from which to measure results in PR campaigns, marketing initiatives and general community outreach.

To assess our reach or level of success, we must do the following:

- After each campaign, sit down and review the results with parties involved.
- Assess if defined objectives and goals were achieved.
- Modify plans as appropriate.

Internal Communications

Information • Connectedness • Understanding • Satisfaction

We must develop consistent communications to foster confidence and a sense of belonging. Internal communications can run the gamut from large-scale distribution of official information to smaller, niche communications that are less formal and more akin to conversation around the dinner table. Both are necessary and appropriate as are the varying approaches that fall in between.

Information exchange within an organization should be rooted in the familiarity of being part of the same team. Keeping a keen awareness that we are communicating with our own – the people we value – should cultivate exchanges that develop a sense of connectedness, and, ultimately, satisfaction, for our staff.

Preparing employees to be well informed is not just about the delivery of information. The district must invest in quality customer service training for all staffers to support the conveyance of key messaging and talking points.

Administrators – Administrators are the leaders of our organization and therefore must lead by example in communicating with each other and with their staffs. Better utilizing of media channels for timely, clear information exchange will lay the groundwork for the expectations we have of others.

Teachers – Our teachers are the “face” of the district and the primary conduit of information about TUSD to parents. We must keep them informed, seek feedback from them on district initiatives, and solicit their suggestions for reaching parents.

Staff – Many employees in the district are not intuitive users of modern technology and media devices, but they deserve and require the same consistent level of communications to stay informed. While the district should embrace the digital realm as our primary communications strategy, we must not abandon alternative outreach methods so we can ensure all staff are part of the team and, therefore, well informed.

Recommended actions:

- All TUSD staff must be made aware that checking emails, letters, notices and other internal communications such as intranet messages is compulsory for their jobs.
- Provide training throughout the year in communications and accessing information, especially for those who are not familiar with the use of digital media.
- Empower departments and schools to develop talking points and marketing language that best reflects their mission and uniqueness in the TUSD system.
- Provide staff training in writing news releases and attracting media coverage.
- Develop more staff interaction events that focus on team building.

Internal Communication Channels

There are numerous channels to use for information needs.

Here are a few that must be a regular part of our communications strategy:

District website
School websites
TUSD-TV
Newsletters (digital and printed)
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc.)
Intranet
Video conferencing
Web chats
Events
Employees of the month awards
Employees of the year awards
Teacher of the Year awards

Let's go!

Establishing results-driven communications requires the following:

Leading with OUR message

We must tell our own stories first and develop an information machine on our website.

A Fresh TUSD Brand

TUSD lacks brand identity. The proliferation of competing educational entities means our parents, our customers, have a crowded marketplace from which to choose the best option for their child. We are in a competition to increase our customer base and must develop a strong brand and market it broadly.

Consistency

There is inconsistency district-wide in email message taglines, business cards, websites, newsletters, and numerous other visual touch points. We need consistency to support the brand identity.

Social Media

The world communicates through social media and so must we. TUSD uses social media to promote achievements and events, but we must increase our efforts to include a focused marketing push for recruitment and to establish further reach to new audiences. The district should commit to allowing staff to

access TUSD's social media channels at their worksites to facilitate internal communications.

Face Time

We need to develop opportunities to have staff participate in and attend our events and community events to foster relationship building.

Events

Civic events are a good way to keep our brand front and center for the public. The district needs to invest in some road-show materials to make it easy to participate in major community events. To ensure that the public is receiving the same brand message, there should be a review of all materials being used at major events, updated talking points presented to those working the events, and an effort to bring attention to the district's participation at an event to attract the public – such as “Please stop by our booth at the street fair to learn more about magnet schools.”

Community engagement

Dynamic and consistent interaction with the public is key toward improving perceptions. We must identify engagement opportunities that can be launched throughout the year that will allow people to get involved in shaping the district and the voices in our community to be heard.

Recommended frequency of messaging:

Daily: External websites, FB, Twitter

Weekly: Intranet

Monthly: Community engagement, school newsletters, district newsletter

Quarterly: Printed newsletter for parents

Annually: TUSD magazine (Full color, glossy publication that features district achievements, columns from leadership, photo spreads, etc.)

Recommended actions:

- Redesign the district website to improve information capabilities and promotional messaging
- Redesign all school websites to reflect the district brand and to ensure that a consistent level of information, navigation, and interactivity is maintained
- Prioritize messaging to focus on strategic needs
- Identify and train appropriate school site employees to make better use of websites and other information tools

Resources needed to accomplish communications goals:

- Communications director (also acts as media relations director/content editor/event coordinator)
- Writers (also act as social media editor/assistant content editor)
- Multimedia producer (also acts as TV studio manager/multimedia trainer)
- Videographer/photographer
- Web designer
- Web editor
- Graphic designer (also acts as commercial artist)
- Administrative assistant
- Multimedia tech

Communications Plan Rollout*

First Phase

Step 1

- District website redesign – Content management system, archives, photo galleries, video imbed, robust district calendar, interactive features, and deep content. **Release RFP in Oct/Nov 2012. Launch site in SY 2013-14.**
- Centralize and grow email database for messaging purposes: Parents, community members, and business community. **Complete first phase by May 2013.**
- Develop marketing plan to support efforts to increase student enrollment. **Release RFP in October 2012. Launch plan in early 2013.**
- Establish communications advisory group. **Completed by April 2013.**

Step 2

- Develop district newsletter – Monthly messaging about district initiatives, superintendent letter, highlights from schools, parent column, student leaders blog. **Launch initial newsletter Spring 2013. More robust newsletter Fall 2013.**
- Establish strategic messaging opportunities for TUSD-TV. **Begin testing by March 2013.**

Ongoing

- Upgrade content on school websites.

- Facilitate relationships with staff, media, and the public.

Second Phase

- Mass outbound messaging capability/emergency messaging. **Launch SY 2013-14.**

- Redesign of school websites – Content management systems to facilitate ease of messaging and marketing for school communities. **Launch SY 2014-15.**

Ongoing

- Investigate honors and awards opportunities
- Identify avenues for staff training and coaching

*The rollout of many elements of the communications plan is dependent on the launch of the district website and available resources for ongoing needs.

Advertising

The district needs to assess monetization opportunities from advertising. Advertising on the website, e-newsletter, and through other channels should be considered. Revenues can support additional messaging and may be the best stream of funding for the production of printed materials, which are more costly.

Marketing & brand identity

It is recommended that the district work with marketing professionals in the community to develop a new brand identity that will support improving public perception and increase student enrollment.

A marketing plan would encompass the specific needs and requirements of the communications, desegregation, and magnet school departments.

A comprehensive plan that results in a cohesive voice and message for the district is key toward ensuring stakeholders have a clear understanding of who we are, what we do, and where we're going as the region's largest educational entity.

A strong foundation

The Communications Department team and Technology Services team are working collaboratively to develop the number one most important tool to support credible and robust messaging: a new district website.

Most district communications will emanate from the site and it will be the go-to source for deep content. Growing out of that project will be the development of a mobile app, mass messaging capabilities, resources for schools and departments, and niche products. The website and resulting future products will only be as good as the generation of ample amounts of quality content going in and the resources to repackage and push out content to target audiences.

Quality communications takes a commitment from the district and the resources to support its success.

Our stakeholders require a higher level of service. With the right approach, we can deliver.