



MONTGOMERY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COMMUNICATION PLAN

2018-2021

OBJECTIVE

Simply generating more information does not guarantee an improved flow of communication – especially in the current environment where a single person is exposed to hundreds of ads, tweets, text messages each day. It is imperative that Montgomery Public Schools focus on providing open, two-way methods of communicating with its publics. Communication, public relations and marketing elements are necessary to accomplish this.

The communication office will manage all official publications (including social media and video production), district media relations, marketing, community relations, communication services and strategies for improving public relations between the district and the community it serves. The office will partner with and support the office of **Family And Community Engagement (FACE)** in their efforts to increase parental and community involvement in our schools. The office reports to the MPS chief of staff and superintendent.

This plan will provide the planning for the district’s communication efforts for 2017 through 2019 in four areas:

1. Overall Goals *with Strategies and Tactics*
2. Publics/Key Communicators
3. Research/Evaluation
4. Targeted Timeline/Task List
5. Supplement
 - a. Crisis Communication Plan
 - b. Emergency Communication Plan

CURRENT COMMUNICATION/PR ISSUES – UPDATED APRIL 2018

1. State Intervention and pending changes create a feeling of uncertainty about the future of the system and is fueling concern in employees, parents and the community.
2. Academic performance data from schools creates concern among parents and potential students/parents and impacts enrollment
3. Financial issues are generating concern about the stability of the system
4. There is a perception that there are safety issues in our schools
5. Public conversations and disagreements among system leadership creates tension and a perception that we are not all working together to help students
6. Inconsistent employee participation in good communication practices (in both internal/external communication) hinder marketing and PR efforts

Goals with Strategies/Tactics/Methods:

1. Improve the flow of effective information between MPS and its publics so that annually the percentage of individuals that respond to research indicate they feel they are informed or very informed about the system.
 - a. Encourage school personnel and district staff to keep communication simple.
 - i. Resist the temptation to use education terms and keep written and spoken communication simple.
 - ii. Encourage as much face-to-face communication as possible using PTA and monthly parent meetings as a primary means of both providing information and listening to parents and the community.
 - iii. Encourage principals to communicate effectively (two-way) using staff meetings.
 - iv. As much as possible avoid mistakes in communication.
 - b. Explain to department heads and principals the importance of sharing information with the Communication Office and other departments in advance of events and the release of new programs.
 - c. Emphasize the importance of using email to communicate information, realizing the limitations of that channel.
 - d. Keep the district website up-to-date and encourage local schools to do as well.
 - e. Adjust strategies to improve communication practices based on research.
 - f. Establish a *Key Communicator Network* and a vehicle for *two way communication* between those individuals and MPS.
 - i. Faith-Based Leaders
 - ii. Government Leaders
 - iii. Civic Leaders
 - iv. Business Leaders
 - g. Review and provide training for “frontline” personnel (secretaries, bus drivers, etc.) who have frequent contact with the public to ensure proper communication and public relation techniques are being employed.
 - h. Continue to produce weekly radio spots for broadcast.
 - i. Encourage principals and building PR representatives to share “good news” with the communication office to promote local schools.
 - j. Increase the presence of MPS personnel in media/news outlets, public appearances and speaking engagements to religious groups, clubs and civic organizations.
 - k. Provide a series of collateral pieces to use in providing information about the system. Translate appropriate pieces into Spanish, Korean and other languages.
 - l. Promote the new MPS “APP” for parents and the community.
 - m. Continue the superintendent’s Parent Advisory Committee.
 - n. Support the County Council of PTA’s work and host monthly meetings at the Central Office.
 - o. Continue the Back to School Report as in insert in the *Montgomery Advertiser*.
2. Emphasize “Customer Service” in schools and in the Central Office.
 - a. Provide customer service training to various personnel on all levels.

- b. Provide incentives for employees to offer good customer service.
 - c. Provide information to “frontline staff” as quickly as possible so they can provide it to publics.
 - d. Update “on-hold” message at least quarterly.
3. Create marketing opportunities to promote MPS in order to establish the system as a positive educational choice for parents.
- a. Focus on expanding “telling stories” to bring to life the positive elements within the system.
 - i. Monthly video series “Two Minutes with MPS” to highlight the positive events for the website, social media and to send to the Key Communicator Network.
 - ii. Continue to produce video pieces for each school – first round complete by May 2018, ongoing.
 - iii. Produce video stories to promote specific MPS programs including:
 - 1. Pre-K
 - 2. Career-Technical Education
 - 3. School-Based Academies
 - 4. Specialized Programs i.e. IB/Advanced Placement/Robotics
 - b. Continue the “We Are MPS” campaign to show MPS personnel as caring professionals.
 - c. Charge principals with providing more information to the communication office concerning activities in their schools that can be promoted to parents and the community.
 - d. Establish a marketing budget that includes funds for some limited paid advertising- digital billboards, radio and television commercials, magazine ads, in addition to pursuing sponsored/in-kind spots.
 - e. Consider filling the open marketing position in the communication office to allow for additional focus on promoting the system.
 - f. Increase the number of people who subscribe to MPS Twitter and Facebook accounts. The 2014 level was 100 for Twitter and 275 for Facebook. August 2017 levels are 1,273 for Twitter and 3,875 for Facebook. Current (April 2018) levels are 1,596 for Twitter, 6,327 for Facebook. They should continue to grow by 15 percent annually through 2021.
 - g. Explore new trends in social media and online marketing to take full advantage of those communication channels.
 - h. Support the FACE office by providing communication support to secure volunteers to address specific MPS needs—mentoring, tutoring, bullying prevention, technology, career technical, service learning, Adopt-A-School programs, etc.
 - i. Establish a special events/promotional calendar to better plan, develop activities, and garner positive media coverage for special “theme months,” or promotional periods. Examples include “Parent Visitation Month”, Teacher Appreciation Week”, “Read Across America”, “Autism Awareness”, “Bus Safety Week”,

- “School Nurses Week”, “Walk to School Day”, Music Education Week, “Bullying Prevention Month”, “Red Carpet Awards”, “Go Green Campaign”, United Way Drive, etc.
- j. Establish written guidelines for the consistent use of the MPS logo, vision and mission statements and any other future district marks.
 - k. Formally establish a schedule for school/district tours for newcomers, military, young professionals, realtors and industry leaders.
 - l. Continue the bus tour several times each school year for community leaders, realtors, ministers, etc. to visit MPS schools.
4. Improve internal communication between departments, schools, and the central office.
 - a. Offer communication training annually to principals and Central Office leadership.
 - b. Survey communication practices and look for ways to make them more efficient.
 - c. Continue the superintendent’s Teacher Advisory Panel meetings.
 - d. Conduct a series of focus groups annually (one per grade level of principals, building level public relations representatives, and one made up of central office administrators) to discuss communication issues and explore solutions.
 - e. Conduct an annual survey of principals and central office administrators and support staff to measure the effectiveness of internal communication.
 - f. Use various communication channels to promote the district vision and mission statements to internal publics.
 - g. Review and evaluate the effectiveness of current recognition/incentive programs. Explore strategies that enhance employee morale.
 5. Increase the effectiveness of two-way communication between parents and schools.
 - a. Provide training as needed on the use of the parent notification system.
 - b. Train principals on using communication tools to provide information to parents.
 - c. Train principals on effective listening techniques.
 6. Continue to foster a positive relationship between the media and MPS.
 - a. Offer annual media training to principals and central office personnel who may be required to work with the media.
 - b. MPS communication staff will meet annually with local editors and news directors.
 - c. MPS communication staff will publish and annually update a media guide which includes basic information about the system and a list of procedures for reporters to follow when covering MPS events.

PUBLICS/KEY COMMUNICATORS

A public is simply a group of people with something in common. It can be age, race, political beliefs or an interest in any specific thread that binds a group of people. Each group has a world view and many have an opinion on public education and MPS.

Each public has leadership – some formal and some informal. These individuals have influence over their public and are known as *key communicators*.

MPS communication staff will continue to put together a comprehensive list of local and state-wide publics that have an interest in public education in general and MPS in particular. The list will include the names and contact information of the leadership of each public and any specific areas of interest in MPS. As issues arise that match those interest, MPS communication staff will provide information to those key communicators in each group. Depending on the group and the leader, the information may be channeled through the superintendent, board or another office within the system.

List of General Key Publics

Internal

- School Board
- Staff – certified and classified
- Students
- Parents

External

- Business Leaders
- Religious Leaders/Communities
- Government/Elected Officials
- Civic Groups
- Military Personnel
- Non-MPS Educational Groups (Colleges, Private Schools)
- Home Schoolers
- Realtors
- Neighborhood Associations
- Media Reporters and Editors
- Established Social Media Groups Interested in MPS

Research/Evaluation of Plan

The MPS communication staff will annually conduct a series of surveys and focus groups to provide a measurement of the current opinions, concerns, and desires of the community concerning Montgomery Public Schools. Every June, a report will be made to the superintendent to document and report the findings of the research and suggested adjustments to the marketing and communication efforts to meet our public's needs and concerns.

Proper research takes resources and many hours to complete. Should resources or personnel not be available to accomplish all of the planned research, every effort will be made to do as much as possible. Existing research and surveys (including the ACIP/accreditation/etc. efforts) will be used to help determine the perception of publics. Should funds or donated services be available, these surveys and focus groups could be conducted by professional firms dedicated to that work.

Research will include questions to determine opinions on the level of confidence in the system, perceptions about academic performance, school climate, safety, communication effectiveness, general views, etc. and explore ways to improve those perceptions and improve communication. Care will be taken to ensure the surveys and focus groups are done using standard/proven protocol.

1. Track media stories (traditional and as much as possible social media) and determine if they are positive, neutral or negative in nature. If possible use
2. Annually conduct parent surveys online and using SchoolMessenger. While this will be an unscientific survey, it will provide an insight into the general opinions and feelings of the general public.
3. Annually conduct a series of parent focus groups in each grade level; elementary, middle and high school.
4. Annually conduct a series of employee focus groups: one for each grade level of teachers, principals, one of office support staff, one of custodial/CNP staff, one of transportation staff, one of operations staff to determine satisfaction with communication practices and general attitudes about the system.
5. Annually conduct a series of community member surveys and/or focus groups for business leaders, government officials, senior citizens, parents with children in private schools, and young adults with no (or infant) children.

ANNUAL TARGETED MONTHLY TIMELINE/TASKS (Does not include most routine tasks)

JULY

- Principal communication training
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Update on-hold message.
- Update *MPS Media Guide* and *Guide for Media*.
- Track media stories.
- Update emergency response team contact information.

AUGUST

- Annual meeting for Key Communicators (begin 2018)
- Provide information to school level PR representatives
- Get names/contact information from principals on the superintendent's teacher and parent advisory council.
- Push Social Media sign-up.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Visit editors/news directors
- Track media stories

SEPTEMBER

- Customer service training
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Form committee for the next year's academic calendar – begin process.
- Promote INOW parent portal sign-up.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Update on-hold message.
- Track media stories.
- Set up advisory council meetings/contact members.
- Emergency team drill.

OCTOBER

- Activate the Key Communicator Network (2017)
- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Bus Tour
- Track media stories

NOVEMBER

- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet.
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Principal and Central Office surveys and focus groups
- Track media stories

DECEMBER

- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Update on-hold message.
- Track media stories.

JANUARY

- Write and prepare Code of Student Behavior to be published in June/July
- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Push social media sign-up.
- Magnet school applications go online.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Bus Tour.
- Teachers and support staff surveys and focus groups.
- Track media stories.
- Emergency team drill.

FEBRUARY

- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Parent surveys and focus groups.
- Track media stories.

MARCH

- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Update on-hold message.
- Bus Tour.
- Track media stories.

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- Community/Key Communicator surveys and focus groups.

APRIL

- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Track media stories
- Produce survey reports and focus on data/needed changes.

MAY

- Remind principals to update their uniform and classroom supply lists for the next school year before their technology coordinators leave for the summer.
- Superintendent's teacher and parent Advisory Councils meet.
- *Two Minutes with MPS* video due on the 15th.
- Graduation ceremonies broadcast.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Update on-hold message
- Track media stories

JUNE

- Print Code of Student Behavior – English, Spanish, Korean.
- Prepare the back to school insert for the *Montgomery Advertiser*.
- Prepare for teacher inservice/convocation on the first day back for teachers.
- Begin promoting registration.
- Produce weekly radio spots.
- Track media stories
- Report to superintendent on communication plan results – update plan as needed.

SUPPLEMENT

While there are similarities between a crisis and an emergency they are not the same. In a crisis only reputations, policies and school systems are under attack. In an emergency, life and property are at stake. It is possible that both can be combined in a single event. In that case, life and property take precedent over reputation.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

The MPS Crisis Communication Plan provides roles and responsibilities for staff and the necessary protocols to effectively provide information to internal and external publics in the case of an emergency – an event that could cause significant damage to the reputation of the system or disrupt the normal operations of the district.

AUDIENCES

1. Internal Publics – Internal publics always get the top priority to receive communication. They include:
 - a. Superintendent and Senior Staff
 - i. Those responsible for answering telephones or questions from the public.
 - b. Staff of Effected Schools
 - i. Principal
 - ii. Staff
 - iii. Parents
 - c. MPS Board
 - d. All Other MPS Staff
 - e. Parents of Other MPS Schools
2. External Publics
 - a. City/County Officials
 - b. Community as a Whole
 - c. Media
 - i. Local Media – given priority over national media. They will still be in Montgomery after the national media loses interest.
 - ii. National Media

OBJECTIVES

1. Be honest and transparent and as complete as possible in communication.
2. React quickly but thoughtfully.
3. Don't overreact – audiences (especially the media) will ask for more information than is available and answers to questions that may not be ready yet.

PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOL

1. Superintendent or the chief of staff (COS) approve all official communication beyond simple/routine information such as general statistics and other information that is considered public and readily available.
2. Having multiple spokespersons can cause misinformation and confusion. All communication from the district should be released by one of three individuals:
 - a. Superintendent (or COS in his/her absence)
 - b. Chief communication officer
 - c. Board president
3. Important announcements should be issued by the superintendent.
4. Routine or follow-up information should (usually) come from the senior communication officer.
5. Board president should react to issues concerning policy that may need to be altered due to the crisis.
6. Email, the parent notification system (School Messenger), MPS website, social media channels and traditional media should be used as necessary to notify identified internal and external publics as soon as information is ready to be released.
7. Communication office staff will monitor traditional and social media and track other public responses.
8. The COS will assign additional staff to assist with communication practices as necessary.

RESPONSE

1. Superintendent or COS convene the cabinet or appropriate staff to discuss the issue as soon as possible and determine the district's response (if any) to the event. District subject matter experts/department heads should be included in discussions as needed.
 - a. Review the available information and surmise the impact on the district.
 - b. Decide if a response is necessary and what the impact is likely to be should the decision be not to respond.
 - c. If a response is warranted, the group works with the communication office to craft a message – including the desired outcome/response – and who the initial information should come from (superintendent/COS/senior communication officer) and if specific messages are required for specific audiences.
 - d. The communication office provides guidance on the target audiences and specifics on the release of information.
 - i. Statement or live event
 - ii. Different communication channels for different audiences
 - e. The chief communication officer delivers the message (whoever it is from) to the appropriate audiences – focusing on internal communication first.
 - f. Communication office monitor's the response from internal and external publics and provides feedback to the superintendent/COS and other identified leadership.
 - g. Additional communication is issued as needed to provide information or answer inquires as the event continues.

POST EVENT PROCEDURES

1. Senior staff meets to discuss the event and the district's response.
 - a. Specific communication released is reviewed along with audience response.
 - b. Changes to the communication plan and procedures are made as needed based on the event and response.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PLAN

The MPS Emergency Communication Plan provides roles and responsibilities for staff and the necessary protocols to effectively provide information to internal and external publics in the case of an **emergency** – an event where life or property is in immediate danger.

AUDIENCES

1. First Responders – Critical information is passed quickly to police, fire and other first responders to ensure the protection of life and property.
2. Internal Publics:
 - a. Superintendent and Senior Staff
 - i. Those responsible for answering telephones or questions from the public.
 - b. Staff of Effected Schools
 - i. Principal
 - ii. Staff
 - iii. Parents
 - c. MPS Board
 - d. All Other MPS Staff
 - e. Parents of Other MPS Schools
3. External Publics
 - a. City/County Officials
 - b. Community as a Whole
 - c. Media
 - i. Local Media – given priority over national media, they will still be in Montgomery after the national media loses interest.
 - ii. National Media

OBJECTIVES

1. Be honest and transparent and as complete as possible in communication.
2. React quickly but thoughtfully.
3. Don't overreact – audiences (especially the media) will ask for more information and answers to questions that may not be ready yet.
4. Show, as much as possible, that the district reacted as it should – however, admitting mistakes, if needed, helps to rebuild public trust.

PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOL

1. Chief communication officer ensures district leadership and security staff are notified of the event.
2. Communication office notifies the emergency response team to aid in evacuation protocol (if needed).
3. Chief communication officer goes to the scene of the event to provide information to the superintendent/COS and assist law enforcement PIOs in gathering or releasing preliminary information.
4. Having multiple spokespersons can cause misinformation and confusion. All communication from the district should be released by one of three individuals:
 - a. Superintendent (or COS in his/her absence)
 - b. Chief communication officer
 - c. Board president
5. Important announcements should be issued by the superintendent.
6. Routine or follow-up information should (usually) come from the senior communication officer.
7. Board president should react to issues concerning policy that may need to be altered due to the crisis.
8. If a school is involved, the principal should be available for questions or discussions after the event to show talk about moving forward.
9. The communication office will use email, the parent notification system (School Messenger), MPS website – activate the emergency page, social media channels and traditional media as necessary to notify internal and external publics as soon as information is ready to be released.
10. The communication office secretary should take as detailed notes as possible to document questions/responses/events.
11. The COS will assign additional staff to assist with communication practices as necessary.

RESPONSE

1. **Under no circumstances will MPS personnel release the names or any other identifiable information about ANY person who may have been injured or killed during an event. That information will be released by law enforcement after proper notification of family.**
2. Initial public comments beyond the routine expression of concern or basic demographic information about a campus will come from the first responder (police/fire/EMA etc.) in charge of the scene. They are in charge in the initial stages of an emergency.
3. Superintendent or the chief of staff (COS) approve all official communication beyond simple/routine information such as general statistics and other information that is considered public and readily available.

4. Superintendent or COS convene the cabinet or appropriate staff to discuss the issue as soon as possible and determine the district's response (if any) to the event. District subject matter experts/department heads should be included in discussions as needed.
 - a. Review facts as they are available – with the understanding that the “facts” change often during an emergency.
 - b. Take note of any specific damage, injuries or loss of life – reminding all that we do not release information on people injured or killed.
 - c. The group works with the communication office to craft a message – including the desired outcome/response.
 - d. The communication office provides guidance on the target audiences and specifics on the release of information; noting that specific information may need to be targeted to specific audiences.
 - e. The communication office works with law enforcement or other first responder PIOs to coordinate release of information and ensure that release does not interfere with the ongoing investigation or safety.
 - f. The communication office delivers the message to the appropriate audiences – focusing on internal communication first.
 - i. Notify internal audiences impacted most – school leadership, staff, parents etc.
 - ii. Notify those employees with first contact with the public.
 - iii. Change website to emergency page and populate it.
 - g. The communication office monitor's the response from internal and external publics and provides feedback to the superintendent/COS and other identified leadership.
 - h. Additional communication is issued as needed to provide information or answer inquires as the event continues.

POST EVENT PROCEDURES

1. Senior staff meets to discuss the event and the district's response.
 - a. Specific communication released is reviewed along with audience response.
 - b. Changes to the communication plan and procedures are made as needed based on the event and response.