



# **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

**2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25**

**Sun Prairie Area School District  
Sun Prairie, Wisconsin**

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Donovan Group  
1345 North Jefferson Street #120  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202  
414-409-7225  
[joe.donovan@donovan-group.com](mailto:joe.donovan@donovan-group.com)  
[www.donovan-group.com](http://www.donovan-group.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2021, the Sun Prairie Area School District began a robust communications planning process to replace its last two-year communications plan. The process occurred at an interesting time for the district. The communications department had diligently followed the expiring communications plan and accomplished much over the last two years. The team was also growing, with the addition of a new member of staff. The Sun Prairie Area School Board was in the process of developing a new strategic plan based on the [district's mission, vision and engagement goals](#). At the same time, the district was opening a second high school. Central to the work of the district is its focus on equity, and in meeting the needs of all students, reinforcing and acknowledging the importance of “all.”

To renew its communications plan, the district engaged the services of the Donovan Group, a public school-focused communications firm. The process commenced with the Donovan Group conducting a communications audit that included an inventory and a review of the district's communications efforts. A copy of the audit report can be found [here](#). Furthermore, the district brought together a group of parents and staff members for a four-meeting communications process. A list of committee members and agendas for all the meetings are included in the addendum.

The plan created by the committee was developed by considering the district's mission, vision and engagement goals; survey data from the communications committee and other data collected by the district; the [audit report draft](#) and the committee's feedback on the draft; [the goals and careholders list we created in our second meeting](#); and the [district's current plan](#) and the committee's response to the plan.

## ASSUMPTIONS

A number of assumptions were raised in the creation of this draft plan. Several are outlined below.

1) A focus on equity: Critical to our planning efforts was the focus on equity. Early in the planning process, the district's superintendent, Dr. Saron, reviewed the district's mission, vision and four “pillars.” While most districts have such statements, in the Sun Prairie Area School District, these items are foundational to all the work of the district and very much constitute the district's operating system. It is worth noting here that the words “culture of our diverse community” are included in the district's vision, and “all careholders” is noted specifically in the district's community engagement goal. The idea of equity and engaging all careholders is the cornerstone of this new communication plan.

2) The district does an excellent job with its communications: As noted in the [draft communications audit report](#), the district has an excellent communications operation and does a good job of communicating. While there is room for improvement and efforts must be made to raise expectations, the district's communication excellence is rare, as it does not have significant communication deficits.

3) The items included in the draft audit report should be addressed as much as possible in this plan: Also indicated in the [draft communications audit report](#) are several items that should be addressed in the new plan. Several items noted in the audit document include the following:

*a) Engage the entire school community.*

In aligning with the district's strategic plan and its efforts to fully engage the entire community, the district is obligated to increase its communications efforts to better meet the needs of all its students. For this point, two specific items are included.

- (1) Upwardly revise expectations: From this point forward, effective communication is only that which reaches the entire district community, including those families who may be the most difficult to reach due to the barriers created by language and financial insecurity.
- (2) Upwardly revise the communications plan: Part of changing expectations is the need to revise the district's communications plan, building on what is working.

*b) Use more data.*

The Sun Prairie Area School District uses data for improvement efforts, including for communication. However, in alignment with the district's new communications plan, new longitudinal data should be collected and used to measure improvement.

*c) Cement and scale.*

As noted, the district has extremely good communications, and the effort to continuously improve should not shroud that success. This is especially true because the district will be opening a new high school. Therefore, the district should "cement and scale." By this, we mean that current communications should be cemented by committing them to a set of processes and procedures, and current working processes should be scaled up to account for both the increase in student enrollment and the opening of the new high school.

*d) Create a communications "user guide."*

As the district increases its equity-focused communications, we suggest the creation of a communications user guide for staff and parents and caregivers. This guide simply notes what will be communicated, as well as when and how.

*e) Recognize the quality of the district's communications efforts and "do no harm."*

By every measure of the audit, the district does an outstanding job of engaging its careholders. Change can happen quickly in districts. Therefore, it is important to take stock of all the district does well regarding communication and ensure the tenets of its current communications efforts continue.

*f) Avoid "layering" to improve communication.*

Sometimes, district improvement efforts result in increasingly less discernible progress while new efforts are layered on. In this way, there is a tendency for more communication, adding to an already-robust communication effort. More communication is not always better. Better communication is better.

*g) Continue seeking ways to engage the 80 percent.*

In most school districts, about 60 percent of community members do not have children in the schools and therefore often have very little connection to the district. The district should continue seeking ways to engage nonparents and caregivers and those who do not have a natural connection to the schools.

4) The district's current communications plan was well done and used by the district to improve its communications: As noted repeatedly by Joe Donovan, the Donovan Group consultant who assisted in the audit process, while he did not participate in creating the last communications plan, it was very well done. Therefore, efforts should be made to continue to use the same type of plan.

5) The district's current communications plan was built to be revised: A crucial feature of the expiring communications plan that makes it commendable is that it was explicitly created to be updated. The same effort should be made with this new plan.

6) The onboarding of a new school creates new opportunities and challenges for the district: The opening of a new high school changes, in a fundamental way, how the district communicates. It also changes the role of the district in communication and the way that people interact with the district. This must be acknowledged in the new plan.

7) The district's communications plan is aspirational: The district's mission and vision leave no doubt about what the district should be doing, and the inclusion of "all careholders" in the district's engagement goal leaves no room for error. All means all. From a practical sense, this means the district will always strive to do a better job with its communications and engagement efforts. Therefore, all its communications plans, from this point forward, will be somewhat aspirational in nature. There will be no such thing as "good enough" in the district.

8) The district will need to grow into this new communications plan: More specifically, the district must continue growing to fit into this communications plan. Just as the last plan pushed the district forward, this one must too—perhaps even more aggressively.

## BEING ASPIRATIONAL

The district set an ambitious goal in recognizing its great diversity in its vision while also establishing a goal of engaging all careholders. In creating this plan, I believe this committee dutifully considered these two items and created a series of huge goals that are worthy of accomplishing. The same is also true of the massive careholder list the group created to define the concept of *with whom* we need to communicate.

We must recognize, however, that the district may not be able to engage with every careholder group to the degree that it would like in the first year. The district's communications efforts will need to grow to expand its reach. This is not to let the district off the hook or somehow eliminate its responsibility as it works to achieve the goals the committee has created for it. On the contrary, it is an acknowledgment that, just as the communications office cannot rest on past successes, this plan, and the goals aligned with it, are aspirational in nature.

## DESIGN STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

As noted, in creating this plan, it was important to create a series of strategies that can be implemented in year one as the objective data is being collected. The term "design strategy" is used here instead of the more simple "strategy" for a specific purpose.

A design strategy is used to describe the connection between an organization's strategy and "design thinking," which is defined as a solution-based approach to solving problems that seeks to understand, in our case, the careholder and to challenge assumptions in an effort to create alternative solutions.

In the following section, a design strategy is presented that is aligned with the goals identified above. This is followed by a brief description of the strategy. This, in turn, is followed by a series of corresponding tactics.

### **Design Strategy #1: Trust**

Building trust AND fostering pride in a post-pandemic, post divisive era

- Work with the Board to update Operating Expectations 3 (Building relationships) and Operating Expectation E9 (Adequately informed)
- Create Video #3 - Showcase video to be used for promotion of the District
- Maintain website excellence - review areas for opportunity
- Support the Board in the execution of its Community Connections Plan
- “Trust Building” by steady communication with key communicators like PLC, DSEIC etc., develop a process for collecting their contact information
- Increase “3rd Party Endorser” voice across publications and communications strategy
- Board Governance video refresh
- Explore marketing campaign with the firm as it gets closer to the end of this plan: refresh the brand of the district, show the why
- Monitor public opinion and attitudes on social media and debrief weekly
- Respond to negative trends by posting factual information and directly contacting sources of misinformation
- Reuse screencasts, Board meeting presentations, and articles through NextDoor, etc.
- Develop a list of “influencers” in the community and scale communication to them in proactive and timely ways. (e.g. Key influencers in the African American community and ensure the ECED Newsletter is directly sent to them.)
- Leverage social media to tell the District stories and successes

### **Design Strategy #2: Engagement**

Redefining engagement as the district transitions from a state of change to a state of configuration consistency

- Leverage partnership with community schools to engage the community
- Showcase and support facilities requests with community partners - engage with the system
- Launch Teacher/Staff profiles for social media - inspiring stories
- Connect the community to the schools - Grand Openings events
- Classroom IG takeovers - show people the inside of a classroom
- Facilitate and support Parent Leadership Collaborative - demonstrate work and progress
- Support and showcase district work with Booster Clubs
- Support and showcase the work of the Community Cabinet
- Develop a plan to roll out the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan
- Support site SCO development in the new configuration and post-long-range facilities plan completion
- Monthly “Environmental Scans” across the District to showcase parent, caregiver, careholder engagement
- Board meeting engagement
- Create opportunities for Superintendent engagement

- Showcase Heritage Month efforts
- Support a reorientation from district-wide engagement initiatives to site engagement plans

### **Design Strategy #3: Excellence in School Communication**

Excellence and consistency in communications and engagement as individual schools

- Timely, consistent, and clear crisis communication at sites when events occur
- Staff signature uniformity
- Support school Family Engagement Plans
- Share website and newsletter analytics
- Showcase "Points of Pride" in athletics, curriculum, and extracurriculars
- Launch a "Why I love my school" campaign
- Audit and standardize site communications practices and social media usage best practices
- Leverage google analytics to trim weight off pages and focus on most used pages
- Create and Implement a Handbook provided with communication tools and expectations
- Support individual teacher to parent communication (positive personalized notes)
- Evaluate the various social media accounts at sites. Get all passwords in one place. Make recommendations for current social media

### **Design Strategy #4: Strategic Plan Outcomes**

Showcasing the work and progress on shared goals and what unites us as a district

- Focus on showcasing safety efforts in articles, images, videos, and other communication - show in pictures what safety looks like
- Tell the story of Social Emotional Learning (including Engagement) - SEL curriculum in action
- Demonstrate variety of curricular offerings
- Showcase work through all pillars
- Define "Big Days" and foster excitement and interest around these events
- Feature timely program highlights, and show responsiveness to community concerns (e.g., The community is concerned about student social media use. Response would feature programming, recent screencast updates in school newsletters, the NextDoor app, staff newsletters, and to students, etc.)
- Support the rollout of the Rituals, Ceremonies, and Traditions committee recommendations
- Showcase the Facilities Plan (e.g., Flagship HS, remodels of all Elementary, BoSPS@AF, Ice Rink, Pools, Tracks, Gymnastics rooms, etc.)
- Analyze showcase programming and develop collateral marketing asset packages for each area

### **Design Strategy #5: Marketing**

Continuing our commitment to being a district of choice - Staff, Big Resignation, Market Share for students

- Explore best practices in websites and publications through WSPRA, NSPRA, Finals site and other resources
- HR web page enhancements - survey to find out what is missing/working well
- Enhance the website on pages where families are most engaged

- Marketing campaign close to enrollment - target 5th and 8th graders and pre-K opportunities
- Work in tandem with HR for marketing materials including the website - use 3rd party endorsements
- Allow staff to tell and show what makes SPASD a great place to work
- Develop a "Stay and Thrive" plan that showcases dedication to staff
- Support the Board in its school liaison connections
- Start a "See for Yourself" campaign with student voice, video tours, vignettes, etc.
- Develop a "What's life like" webpage (e.g. [www.hendrix.edu/life](http://www.hendrix.edu/life))
- Develop a topic-based video series
- Support the district's brand identity - evaluate trademarking
- Showcase the District to developers, realtors and Autumn Lakes residents

### **Design Strategy #6: Return on Investment**

Demonstrating value and excitement to our shareholders (ROI)

- Invite and welcome the community to Grand Opening events
- Showcase events that bring revenue into the city
- Partnerships with the Chamber and the Tourism Commission
- Print/post passes to events in a newsletter to get the community involved
- Explore alternative venues for events like the Annual Meeting - couple with a tour of the facility
- Explore interest in community touring other schools to see what learning spaces look like now
- Post "Thank You" to our community campaign. Post referendum work completion, create a newsletter and online marketing campaign showing students using the spaces
- Video tours and phone call home campaign from students about what they love about their school
- Launch a student campaign that showcases our students (like the Promise of Oregon campaign), future-focused
- Develop ways to engage non-parents

### **Design Strategy #7: Staff/District Communication**

Cement and scale inside out communication

- Develop a District statement to use during crisis communication
- Develop a student communication portfolio of strategies
- Standardize site communication with staff
- Develop a focus group of staff to "audit" the effectiveness of weekly newsletter and implement changes
- Support Board in Board meeting summary distribution
- Support the Department of Systemic Equity and Inclusion and the HR Department in effective Affinity Group communication
- Support the TLE Sunday Night Update to LC
- Support the LBLF to Board and to LC

### **Design Strategy #8: Equity**

Equity is a foundational thread throughout the communication plan



- Seek non-technical and creative ways to communicate with families
- Work with Equity Director to showcase the work of the DSEIC and the work of the department
- Explore new web translation software. Translation and captioning should be integral parts of communication, Every Family. Every Day quarterly e-newsletter
- Support the work of the PLC as they work towards more equitable practices

### **Design Strategy #9: Unity**

Unity across schools and District - Two high schools, one community

- Pennant campaign - get every school and district to take photos. New Era - One CommUNITY, all activities and sports and schools
- Support the work of the Rituals Committee
- Showcase our “Points of Pride” in athletics, curriculum, and extra curriculars
- Support efforts to engage alumni and showcase the history of the district

## **ADDENDUM A: COMMUNICATION PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The following is a roster of the communicators planning participants. The district thanks participants for their participation.

- Karen Anderegg
- Renee Coleman
- Irene Cook
- Kayla Haas
- Latoya Holiday
- Bryn Horton
- Patti Lux
- Diana McFarland
- Adam Mumm
- Tara Muszynski
- Juan Navarette
- Heather Reeder
- Brad Saron
- Carson Schmoldt
- Manny Turrubiarres
- Chandu Vemuri

## **ADDENDUM B: COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE CHARGE**

The Communications Committee shall review the Sun Prairie Area School District communication work as a group to develop a written plan that details a comprehensive communication strategy for the district within the context of the parameters detailed below.

### **The Committee develops a communication plan that:**

- Seeks robust two-way communication with all members of the school district community

- Provides honest information to all members of the community and increases transparency in a way that builds trust
- Engages all community members who may not have a natural connection to the district in a thoughtful and meaningful way
- Is based on the District's Strategic Plan
- Builds on best practices in communication and successful communication efforts in the district

Committee membership and the work of the committee, including meeting minutes, will be posted on the district's website.

## **ADDENDUM C: COMMUNICATION PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDAS**

### **Communication Committee Meeting #1**

Monday, September 27, 2021 4:30-5:45 pm

- I. Welcome – Dr. Brad Saron, Superintendent (3 min)
- II. Welcome – Patti Lux, Communications & Engagement Officer (2 min)
- III. Introduction by Joe Donovan (5 min)
- IV. Introduction of committee members – Group (15 min)
- V. Review of the committee's process and its charge – Joe Donovan (5 min)
- VI. Review of district's mission/vision/beliefs – Dr. Brad Saron (20 min)
- VII. Discussion: What are the district's communication goals? – Group (35 min)
- VIII. Review of next meeting's agenda – Joe Donovan (5 min)
- IX. Adjourn – Patti Lux

### **Communication Committee Meeting #2**

Wednesday, October 13, 2021, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

- I. Welcome and Review Work to Date
- II. Review Notes from Last Meeting
- III. Review Joe's "Synthesized Notes"; Discussion
- IV. Determination on High-Level Goals
- V. Discussion: Who are our stakeholders?
- VI. Review of next meeting's agenda

### **Communication Committee Meeting #3**

Monday, October 25, 20221, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Sun Prairie High School Room

- I. Welcome
- II. Review Work to Date: Goals, [measures and stakeholders](#)
- III. Review [communications audit](#)
- IV. Discuss the 2019-21 communications plan
  - A. What is still relevant?
  - B. What should be removed or updated?

- V. Discuss messages: What do we want our stakeholders to know and feel?
- VI. Review of next meeting's agenda

### **Communication Committee Meeting #4**

Wednesday, November 10, 2021, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

- I. Welcome and review work to date
  - A. [Review Vision, Mission and Engagement Goal](#)
  - B. [Created new goals](#)
  - C. [Defined stakeholders](#) (*scroll down*)
  - D. [Responded to a draft communications audit](#)
  - E. [Reviewed and responded to the old plan](#)
- II. Where are we?
  - A. Today we will review a draft of a new plan that Joe drafted.
  - B. Based on your feedback tonight, Joe will revise the plan and Patti will send it back to you for your individual review and feedback.
    - 1. The final plan will include pages that look like the old plan.
    - 2. The new plan uses a different planning framework: Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics.
    - 3. The focus of the new plan is on using data to create objectives. (Adding specific objective is a heavy lift by the communications department)
    - 4. Joe will finalize the audit survey with any additional feedback you have
- III. Review draft communications plan
  - A. What is GOST (Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics) and why am I suggesting it?
  - B. Review the plan's goals, objectives and strategies
  - C. As time allows, discuss specific tactics.
- IV. Update and improve plan
- V. Finalize plan
- VI. Adjourn