

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communication, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

ACTION TEAM MEMBERS

Co-Leaders:

Ron Lesko, Director of Communications

Shawn Morris, President, Albany Common Council

Team Members:

Barbara Smith, Common Council Member

Bill Stoneman, Journalist

Kim Wilkins, Principal, Stephen & Harriet Myers Middle School

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENTS

- 5.1 Research and develop outreach and communication efforts to more effectively reach all families and communities, taking into account how messages are shaped and received.
- 5.2 Develop an annual communication blueprint to guide efforts at the district, building and classroom levels to provide greater integration and enhance clarity and access to information.
- 5.3 Support the establishment of a newsletter in each building of at least monthly frequency during the school year.
- 5.4 Implement a weekly or biweekly TV show featuring a variety of constituents to communicate the work and importance of public education in Albany.
- 5.5 Create public engagement models, including meeting and hearing to ensure that public input on major decisions is heard and processed.
- 5.6 Establish an informational phone line to provide access to information 24 hours a day.

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.1

Research and develop outreach and communication efforts to more effectively reach all families and communities, taking into account how messages are shaped and received.

ACTION STEPS

5.1.1 Assemble individuals from community relations and communications areas for a series of meetings to discuss functions with a goal of creating an integrated office with all outreach and communications functions under one cabinet-level officer.

5.1.2 Based upon above discussion, combine community relations, communications and public information functions into one cabinet-level office in order to unify communications functions.

5.1.3 Create staffing design, with clearly written descriptions of duties and relationships, which may include reassignment of positions and new hires.

5.1.4 Develop “ombudsman”/outreach staff members, including those from underrepresented backgrounds, who will regularly seek out and interact with the public, with the purpose of enhancing student performance by increasing access to information, resources and involvement by underrepresented groups.

5.1.5 Recruit community volunteers, including students, as district “ambassadors” to assist in outreach efforts.

5.1.6 Explore possibility of some kind of reimbursement/per diem or other compensation for ambassadors.

5.1.7 Give newly combined office wide visibility, via outreach to community groups, elected officials, faith-based organizations, etc.

5.1.8 Develop a protocol for disseminating information, using a variety of formats and strategies to reach all constituents, including traditionally unserved and unserved communities. (For example: Use ombudsman and community volunteers to circulate district materials in nontraditional locations such as laundromats, physicians’ offices and social service offices.)

5.1.9 Develop benchmarks to be used for evaluating effectiveness of outreach efforts.

5.1.10 Conduct periodic focus groups, which are reflective of the City’s diverse communities each year to find out how effective the district’s overall communication efforts are, how and where they receive information and how communications can be improved.

5.1.11 Develop in-house database for district-wide and targeted distribution of informational materials.

5.1.12 Code database for multiple and targeted uses, using geographic information, building information, specified interests, etc.

5.1.13 Produce informational materials in a variety of formats in order to reach diverse constituencies. These include media packets, public service announcements, newsletters, brochures, fliers and e-mail and other Web-based outreach.

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Adequately staff integrated Community Relations/Communications Office. For example, reporting to a cabinet-level officer:
 - One full-time clerical/office manager
 - Two full-time Communications professionals
 - Two full-time Community Relations professionals
 - One half-time graphic designer
- Purchase of database software (however, may be resident on computers, e.g. Microsoft Access)
- Staff time (or cost of consultant) to adapt program for district's needs and use.
- Staff time to maintain database
- Possible increased personnel costs, particularly within Ombudsman/Ambassador program.
- \$40,000 -\$50,000 (Grant money may be available for such positions, re: Waterbury, Conn.)

INTANGIBLE COSTS

- Resistance of staff to make departmental changes, as well as changes in duties.

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Definable increase in the number of ways to reach more members of the community.
- Convenient and up to date database makes it possible to quickly notify large groups of people.
- Student performance increases as information about resources is improved.

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Goodwill – benefits of broader connections in the community and community members being better informed about district activities and news.
- More accessible information usually results in more engaged public, which is more likely to support district initiatives.

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.2

Develop an annual communication blueprint to guide efforts at the district, building and classroom levels to provide greater integration and enhance clarity and access to information.

ACTION STEPS **

5.2.1 Contact each building principal in early August to schedule a meeting in September to discuss communications tools and tactics currently in place as well as unmet needs and strategic goals, defining issues that will need to be addressed during the coming year.

5.2.2 Contact the Albany City Council PTA and select other community organizations in early August to schedule a meeting in September to seek community input on unmet communications needs.

5.2.3 Meet with the Administrative Cabinet in August to identify strategic district-level communications and marketing goals, aligned with the district's mission, for the upcoming school year.

5.2.4 Meet with each building principal in September to identify communications tools and tactics currently in place as well as unmet needs and strategic goals.

5.2.5 Meet with the Albany City Council PTA in September to seek community input on unmet communications needs.

5.2.6 Develop strategic communications and marketing goals for the next fiscal year at the district and building levels by mid-October.

5.2.7 Provide an opportunity for each building principal to provide feedback on draft communications and marketing goals, with one opportunity for revisions. To be completed by the end of October.

5.2.8 Review draft communications and marketing goals with the superintendent in early November, revising as necessary to gain final approval.

5.2.9 Identify achievable tactics at the district and building levels, based on budget and staffing projections for the Community Relations/Communications Office and each school for the next fiscal year, that will address the approved communications and marketing goals.

5.2.10 Align communications and marketing tactics along a timeline that follows the fiscal year to create an annual communications blueprint by mid-November.

5.2.11 Provide an opportunity for each building principal to provide feedback on draft communications blueprint, providing one opportunity for revisions. To be completed by the end of the first week in December.

5.2.12 Review draft communications blueprint with the superintendent in early December, revising as necessary to gain final approval before the end of the calendar year.

5.2.13 Present a budget proposal to the superintendent by mid-January that reflects cost estimates for the Community Relations/Communications Office to execute the approved communications blueprint in the next fiscal year.

5.2.14 Revise annual communications blueprint as necessary through the budget development process, and pending the outcome of the school budget vote in May, providing an opportunity for the superintendent and each building principal to review any substantive changes to the plan.

5.2.15 Finalize the communications blueprint following adoption of the school budget, providing final versions to the superintendent, all members of the Administrative Cabinet and each building principal before the end of the current fiscal year.

5.2.16 Present the district's annual communications blueprint at an Albany City Council PTA meeting in July.

5.2.17 Present the district's annual communications blueprint at the district's Administrators Meeting at the end of August.

*** The timeline identified in these action steps is necessitated by the district's budget development process, to ensure proper resources to execute all elements of the final plan.*

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Time for building principals (or designee) – approximately 1.5 hours each
- Time for Director of Communications – approximately 120 hours

INTANGIBLE COSTS

- People reluctant to engage in planning process
- Disappointment when an idea isn't in the plan

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Opportunities for more proactive communications year-round
- Better able to plan for events

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Increased good will with community organizations
- Increased community support

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.3

Support the establishment of a newsletter in each building of at least monthly frequency during the school year.

ACTION STEPS

5.3.1 Select two staff members at each school to serve as editors, being sure that the editors are trained and adept at using the appropriate technology.

5.3.2 Charge editors with responsibility for meeting predetermined deadlines and ensuring that families of students are well informed about schools, including information such as classroom activities, deadlines for upcoming assignments, participation in activities and events, report cards being sent home, special events and important contact information.

5.3.3 Solicit ideas for newsletter content on regular basis, asking other staff members to prepare notes or narratives about interesting and important activities that they know about. Take special care to get information from all corners of the building, not just from teachers who talk about their own activities with greatest ease.

5.3.4 Encourage information to be provided to editors electronically, making it easier to handle than notes written on paper.

5.3.5 Provide building editors – via e-mail approximately once a week – with district-wide information from Community Relations/Communications Office on an ongoing basis. For example, information about snow days, report card distributions, district-wide testing, policies and procedures, and news about activities that relate to more than one building, such as the All-City music program.

5.3.6 Provide page layout templates to editors from Community Relations/Communications Office in desktop publishing format available to all schools, creating more professional design and ensuring similarity in appearance of newsletters from all buildings. Include standard guidelines regarding elements for each newsletter, including the name of the school in at least 30-point type, the name of the principal, the name of the editor(s), the building's phone number, the district's "We choose" logo and a section for district-wide information.

5.3.7 Schedule two annual meetings, organized and coordinated by Community Relations/Communications Office, to allow editors of all school newsletters to share best practices and receive training on publishing software and journalistic practices, i.e., identifying “news” when others informally mention activities and information that families ought to learn about.

5.3.8 Divide work between editors such that an “editor” writes text, headlines and photo captions and a “copy editor” reviews all material either before page layout, after page layout, or both to ensure accuracy, spelling, grammar and consistency in style. Copy editors flag any content that could cause some offense, ensuring that thorough consideration is given by editor or principal, if warranted, before publication.

5.3.9 Provide electronic copy of newsletters to webmaster for placement on the school’s and district’s websites.

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Desktop publishing software in each building (Publisher, PageMaker, etc.)
- District Communications and/or Technology staff time to train building personnel with software and support
- Printing/production
- Staff time of building personnel to research, write, edit and produce
- Staff time of Communications Office personnel to assist with production]

INTANGIBLE COSTS

- Resistance that it has to be done and that the district is telling building personnel how to do it

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Families, community and staff better informed
- Better support of building and district activities

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Building school/community spirit
- Better opportunities for family involvement

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.4

Implement a weekly or biweekly TV show featuring a variety of constituents to communicate the work and importance of public education in Albany.

ACTION STEPS

5.4.1 Define criteria for what would constitute a successful City School District of Albany public television show, such as regularity and frequency of airing, appealing content, substantial viewership, and a capacity to present difficult issues as well as good news in an informative and useful way.

5.4.2 Identify school district television shows in the area and evaluate them according to the above criteria.

5.4.3 Decide upon and describe the format and content of Albany's public education television show, e.g. a "60 Minutes" magazine format, a newscast format or a talk show format.

5.4.4 Determine the access to cable television production facilities.

5.4.5 Designate staff producer and production team to include representatives from key stakeholder groups, i.e., Community Relations/Communications Office, teachers, students, parents/PTA. Work to ensure demographic diversity in the show's production team and in the show's content.

5.4.6 Develop the district's public television show in conjunction with the district's existing television courses.

5.4.7 Define the length and frequency of each program.

5.4.8 Develop an ongoing mechanism for identifying content for the public television show, with attention toward standard policies specifying rules for handling topics such as school board elections, budget votes and other topics in which a public decision could be affected by the timing and presentation of information.

5.4.9 Develop standard policies specifying rules for handling topics such as school board elections, budget votes and other topics in which a public decision could be affected by the timing and presentation of information.

5.4.10 Establish relationships with local media outlets and media professionals who will share expertise with student participants in television courses.

5.4.11 Establish relationships with local corporations and business organizations to enhance funding and in-kind support for television activities.

5.4.12 Develop a polling mechanism to find out about the viewership for the show and what the audience wants to watch.

5.4.13 Use the polling to improve and enhance the district's television offerings.

5.4.14 Develop an ongoing publicity and public relations campaign to inform parents and the community about the district's television show.

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

- Costs (many will be unknown until contracts are in place between the city and Time Warner, such as equipment, studio time, production costs)

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Time of Community Relations/Communications Office staff in developing program – writing, editing, scheduling
- Time of Community Relations/Communications Office staff in developing survey/polling mechanism for ongoing community feedback
- Time of Community Relations/Communications Office staff to publicize and establish relationships with media professionals to share expertise with student participants
- Time of Community Relations/Communications staff to establish relationships with local corporations and business organizations to enhance funding and in-kind support

INTANGIBLE COSTS

- Competition for air time

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Families, community and staff better informed
- Better support of building and district activities
- Increased partnerships with businesses and community organizations
- Students gain experience in television journalism and production, enhanced career opportunities
- More people choosing Albany's public schools

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Building school/community spirit
- Better opportunities for family and community involvement
- Better public image for the school district
- Higher student satisfaction

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.5

Create public engagement models, including meeting and hearing to ensure that public input on major decisions is heard and processed.

ACTION STEPS

5.5.1 Identify personnel in the Community Relations/Communications office that will handle district public engagement process.

5.5.2 Identify tools for public engagement using organizations like The Public Agenda and the International Association for Public Participation. See attached addendum.

5.5.3 Identify agencies (locally, Mediation Matters and Cornell University School of ILR; nationally, the Public Agenda) that provide training in meeting facilitation and community engagement.

5.5.4 Engage school board in exploring new models and locations for meetings that enhance public engagement. It is likely that special consultants would be needed.

5.5.5 Secure services for training.

5.5.6 Identify district personnel, community volunteers and students to be trained as facilitators, including all building principals.

5.5.7 Develop modules that take into account different types of training for various facilitator roles, e.g., students, principals, community volunteers, etc.

5.5.8 Review district issues to determine which are likely to require a public dialogue, working with district administration and Community Relations/Communications Office.

5.5.9 Develop consistent protocols for each model, for instance, development of briefing materials, effective public notice, media packets, etc.

5.5.10 Determine primary constituencies for each issue.

5.5.11 Utilize district's new database (Result Statement 1) to ensure widespread distribution of materials and invitations to participate in the public engagement process.

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Staff time
- Training of staff, students and community volunteers
- Mediation Matters charges about \$800 per day to train up to 30 individuals.
- Costs of using outside facilitators
- Development and printing of informational material

INTANGIBLE COSTS

- Resistance to public outreach/participation
- Resistance to training

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Greater inclusion of broad constituencies
- Better management of controversial issues
- Greater support of district initiatives
- More people choosing Albany's public schools
- More transparency in district decision making
- More support for the school budget and bonding

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Increased community satisfaction

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

RESULT STATEMENT 5.6

Establish an informational phone line to provide access to information 24 hours a day.

ACTION STEPS

5.6.1 Establish 475-INFO (4636) as the dedicated phone number for this service.

5.6.2 Meet with the Administrative Cabinet to identify Frequently Asked Questions and content areas following the information available on the district's Web site, www.albanyschools.org.

5.6.3 Once content areas are selected, meet with department leaders of each area to review information available on the Web and select specific sections for the phone service.

5.6.4 Write a script for each content area.

5.6.5 Provide an opportunity for each department leader to provide feedback on drafts, with one opportunity for revisions.

5.6.6 Present revised scripts to Administrative Cabinet for final approval, revising as necessary to get final approval.

5.6.7 Identify Community Relations/Communications staff member responsible for setting up the service and proactive maintenance of information.

5.6.8 Establish "0" as the number to press to be redirected to the district's main number – 475-6000 – and to leave a message.

5.6.9 Publicize and promote the information phone service, with a special focus on reaching all families and communities.

5.6.10 Establish a process for evaluating use to ensure that information available through the phone service is relevant to and meeting community needs.

COST BENEFIT ESTIMATION

TANGIBLE COSTS

- Staff time for initial meetings with Administrative Cabinet and department leaders – approximately 1.5 hours each
- Staff time to write the scripts – approximately 40 hours
- Staff time for revisions and final approval process – approximately 20 hours
- Cost to establish a dedicated phone line outside the district's current 6000 series.
- Cost to develop novelty items such as magnets, pens, etc. to advertise the phone number.

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Opportunities to provide additional options for families and community members to receive important district information

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

- Increased good will with families and community organizations
- Increased community support