

Kearsarge Regional School District



Communications Plan

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Mission

The purpose of the Kearsarge Regional School District (KRSD) Communications Plan is to provide communicators within the District with an effective, two-way multi-channel communications program that serves the district and the community.

Support for and involvement in the plan is essential, particularly that of the school board, teachers, and personnel who directly influence the opinions of the community. External support and input in the process is equally critical to healthy communications throughout the district.

This plan is informed by the District Mission, Vision, Core Beliefs and Values as well as Section K of the KRSD Policies as posted on kearsarge.org, notably the policy on School, Community and Home Relations (KA), and the policy on Public Relations (KBCA). In addition, insights from household surveys and inputs from target audiences (e.g., Blizzard Bag Surveys, Communication Survey, etc.) have been evaluated and incorporated where appropriate.

This Communications Plan will present a framework for communicating with our school community while maintaining the goal to improve public confidence and involvement in the Kearsarge Regional School District schools. Emphasis lies on communicating through a range of identified communication vehicles (initiatives) and by working with news media.¹

The plan primarily addresses communication with two audiences: *internal* (students, teachers, staff, administration, and School Board) and *external* (parents, businesses, civic groups, and other members of the KRSD community).

This plan will be provided to KRSD personnel to use when communicating goals and objectives of our district with students, staff, parents, and other members of the community. This will enable dissemination of information in a consistent manner, providing all target audiences with pertinent and timely information, and should engender public support.

The Assistant Superintendent will implement and manage SAU community relations, publications, marketing, and provide leadership on all comprehensive communication services and strategies for the district under the direct supervision of the Superintendent. Building-level communications will follow procedures and protocols set forth in this plan.

Three questions should be considered regarding every communications program or activity:

- How does this benefit our students
- How will we communicate it to the target audience(s)?
- What are the funding sources/budgetary impacts of this program?

¹ Crisis Communications are handled by the School District Officials in coordination with the New Hampshire Department of Emergency Management and detailed in the "KRSD Emergency Management Plan." For more information on crisis communications, please contact Larry Elliot at lelliot@kearsarge.org.

Goals

The Communications Plan is designed to more fully engage the entire community in the educational agenda. This process includes identifying opportunities to deliver the KRSD message through an approach that is proactive, positive, consistent, multi-faceted, and coherent.

- Improve internal and external communication systems
- Promote open, two-way communication between the school board, administration, staff, students, and KRSD community
- Communicate a unified message at all times
- Communicate district goals and objectives
- Generate engagement with the KRSD
- Increase awareness about the impact of a KRSD education

Strategies

1. Clarify district flow of information

- Distribute communications hierarchy to all staff showing work-flow structure.
- Charts will include areas of staff responsibility for communication.

2. Create a system to encourage flow of information from parents/community to the district

- Encourage parents and community members to subscribe to digital communications.
- Conduct surveys at both district and site levels to provide feedback on flow of information.
- Maintain an “open door” policy to receive input.
- Establish informational email account/suggestion box to receive feedback from community.
- Refine use of the Parent Resources Web Page to facilitate communication between parents and schools.

3. Provide ongoing training and support for effective communication

- Ensure that professional development sessions address communication training regularly.
- Subscribe to school communication publications (National School Public Relations Association and other related periodicals) and relay pertinent ideas and information to administrators.
- Provide administrators and key communicators with access to public relations materials and other easy-to-use communications tools via the ToolKit.

4. Provide periodic information on district-wide issues

- Minutes from district meetings will be available in accordance with state statutes.
- Distribute publications and news releases to all employees via email and post on website.
- Issue short, bulleted fact sheets on issues of immediate concern.
- Create KRSD promotional materials such as informational brochures, newsletters, and videos focusing on a student, staff member, program, school, department, etc.

5. Communicate with civic and community groups

- Include groups in mailings and provide opportunities for them to sign up for our digital subscription.
- Attend community meetings as needed to provide information.
- Provide district communications materials to key leaders.
- Develop partnerships with groups and businesses.
- Develop program for featuring district resources that may include tours of schools and facilities perhaps highlighting successes in the district from all age levels...(athletics, economics team, robotics, culinary, theatrical, arts exhibits...etc)
- Encourage participation in local service clubs.
- Host KRSD community meetings or forums when appropriate.
- Encourage school staff to utilize word of mouth to promote district news.

Initiatives

District staff and organizations regularly disseminate information (the *message*) to target audiences; this is called an *initiative*. Initiatives should be goal oriented for specific target audiences and use a variety of media types and outlets.

Target Audiences

When designing an initiative, care should be taken to ensure that the message is specific and delivered to the target audience. Avoid inundating the community with untargeted initiatives.

Internal Audiences

- *District*
 - a. School Board
 - b. Municipal Budget Committee
 - c. Administration
 - d. Staff
- *School Building Staff*
 - a. Leadership
 - b. Faculty
 - c. Staff
- *Students*

External Audiences

- *Parents/Household of Student*
- *Community-at-Large* (includes all seven towns of the district)

Examples of Community-at-Large include: Parent Organizations; Key Communicators (Directors of Community Centers/Organizations/Parks & Recreation Programs/Youth Sports Organizations/Others); Business Community; Elected Officials; Elected State and Federal Legislators; Community & Civic Groups; Education—school districts and local colleges and universities; Private Schools (including after-school programs); Electronic Media—Website, email, podcast, listserv, etc.; and Print Media—newsletters, newspapers, flyers, etc.

Media Types

The following communication tools are utilized by the district. These will be evaluated for effectiveness on a periodic basis and adjusted accordingly. Examples of media types include:

Printed Material

- Annual Report. District information provided following the annual Deliberative session. Available at municipal offices, libraries and the SAU.
- “*KRSD Newsletter*” Monthly (when school is in session) newsletter printed in local printed media.
- Advertisements and news that features district-wide information.
- Brochures—as needed to highlight district programs or provide general district information.
- Notices—includes principal newsletters, classroom, and organizational information as well as forms that require a response.

Email Communication

Surveys within the district indicate that email is a very effective method for communications. It is environmentally friendly and easy to use, but care should be taken to ensure that email initiatives are focused and the frequency is appropriate (not excessive).

KRSD has a subscription method that individuals can sign up for on the district website. This provides the ability to send periodic notices (including links) to KRSD’s latest:

- Publications
- Board minutes, agendas and notes
- Press releases

All schools should send out periodic email communication and encourage student households to subscribe.

AlertNow

KRSD’s automated telephone/email alert system. Examples include:

- School Closings
- Attendance Notifications
- Major Event Notifications

Online Publications

The district saves money and time by providing information digitally, reducing the volume of printed communications. Examples include:

- KRSD Mission Statement
- Strategic Plans
- Goals and Objectives
- Board agenda/notes/minutes
- Public Notices
- Event Calendars
- Link to periodic district newsletter
- Student Newspapers
- Balanced Scorecard

Video

Video is a delivery method that could encourage community participation and involvement. Use of video is encouraged. Examples could include:

- Streaming School Board Meetings
- Event Highlights
- Features of District Programs
- Internal Communications
- Promotional Information About the District
- Superintendent "State of Schools"

Media Outlets

These are the mechanism by which materials are distributed. A more complete list of local media outlets is available online through the KRSD Communications Toolkit (<http://www.absomagic.com/krsd/tools/>). Examples include:

- Kearsarge Shopper
- Intertown Record
- Yankee Cable Network
- Kearsarge.org
- WNTK
- Bulletin Boards
- Community Organizations

Assessment and Accountability

Measurement of Specific Initiatives

With a clear call to action, specific initiatives can and should be evaluated on a case by case basis (refer to toolkit evaluation tools available online).

Measurement of District Communication Goals and Overall Communication Progress

The broader goals of district-wide communications can be measured by setting benchmarks and tracking the movement of these metrics. A dashboard to get a quick read on public communications activity on a regular basis is recommended for future development. This dashboard would provide insights particularly when compared to the calendar of outgoing communications at the district level and other events that might influence media coverage.

- Subject-specific surveys have been used with high response rates from student families and less response from the general public. This provides a source of quantitative information for analysis. Repeating the survey after concerted communications efforts will indicate effectiveness.
- Keep a watchful eye on public participation on committees, School Board meetings, events, such as sports, theatre, science fairs. Is there active participation? Are events being well attended?
- Monitor and analyze district voting results and deliberative session attendance over time.
- Monitor traffic to areas of kearsarge.org where communication messaging is pertinent (i.e., budget pamphlet at budget season, the ToolKit.) Be sure key content is easily available from the home page at Kearsarge.org.

The Communications Plan will be reviewed and updated as deemed necessary by the Superintendent, School Board and/or Communications Committee.

Technology Statement

This plan acknowledges that technology can reduce the costs and increase efficiencies of many communications. Where applicable, communications plans will make use of any available technologies and reviewers will regularly seek advice and input from technology stakeholders on best practices.

Resources

The KRSD Communications Toolkit is an online resource that provides centralized access to Communications Tools. <http://www.absomagic.com/krsd/tools/>

Future Considerations

- Develop a method to maintain records of district coverage in newspapers and media for commentary on the school district. This information is a gauge as to how information is being received or translated from district sources such as minutes, meetings or publications.
- Overhaul district website.
- Integrate audio/video distribution into practice.
- Develop targeted email that can be tracked to evaluate usage.
- Develop/refine data collection/analysis to evaluate communications/allocate resources.
- Expand toolkit to include online step-by-step resource for online distribution (select audience(s), then transmits message to targets).
- Develop intuitive email web page organized for better use of end-user (not alphabetic of all employees, context driven menu based).
- Refine Initiative/Delivery Matrix to include frequency and reflect current practice.
- Consider emerging technologies and their ability to increase communications effectiveness.