

# Stanton Community Schools' Communication Plan



Developed by  
Michael J. Sieh, Superintendent  
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## Component 1: Define the Purpose

The purpose of the Stanton Community Schools' Communication Plan is to establish a protocol by which the district will develop and maintain communications within the district. The plan sets our five major purposes for this plan.

- 1. Develop an understanding, appreciation, and respect amongst the community and school*
- 2. Increase the level of trust between community and school*
- 3. Ensure all sub-groups within the community and school have a voice in the decision-making process*
- 4. Promote the community and school*
- 5. Comply with board policy*

With appropriate communications in place, members of both the community and school will develop a deeper understanding, appreciation, and respect for each other. The district hopes to develop communications that allow easy communications to all. Communications is defined as both listening and responding in appropriate manners.

The communication plan is to also develop and cultivate trust between the school district and constituents. The district understands that for true communications to occur, that a high level of trust between all constituents must be present.

The communication plan ensures that all sub-groups of people who compose our district are part of the communication patterns. To make educational decisions concerning our community, we need to know that all who maybe affected have had input into the decisions. Ownership amongst all will be critical.

The final goal of the communications plan is to ensure that the district follows the 1000 series of board policies. This series of board policies is appropriately named "Community". Within this set of policies is the board of education statement of intent and methods of communications as related to communications between the community and school.

## **Component 2: Define the Objectives**

To further clarify the intention of each purpose statement, the district has outlined several objectives for each purpose.

### **Objective 1:** Understanding and Appreciation

- A. Determine strengths of the community
- B. Determine strengths of the school district
- C. Determine concern areas of the community
- D. Determine concern areas of the school

### **Objective 2:** Trust Building

- A. Discuss the similarities and differences of the community and school
- B. Bridge the concerns and strengths of the school and community
- C. Develop action plans to address common areas of concerns

### **Objective 3:** Sub-groups

- A. Determine the sub-groups within the community and school
- B. Establish a steering committee composed of *ALL* sub-groups
- C. Have steering committee drive the communication plan

### **Objective 4:** Promotions

- A. Start a positive advertisement campaign which includes community and school working together
- B. Determine community and/or school needs that cast a negative light upon the community and/or school
- C. Address area of concerns through action plans
- D. Share positive headlines with local media

### **Objective 5:** Board Policy

- A. Review the 1000 series of board policy
- B. Communicate the contents of the 1000 series of board policy
- C. Address policies that are not in compliance

### **Component 3: Select a Set of Strategies**

To accomplish all the objectives of this plan, seven strategies have been established.

#### **Strategy 1:** Establishing a Steering Committee

The first strategy in accomplishing this set of objectives is to establish a steering committee that will drive the process. Like all other plans of actions, ownership is necessary for a plan to be successful. However, to establish a steering committee, internal and external audiences of the community and school must be determined. The steering committee will be comprised of at least 11 members. This group will encompass as many audiences as possible. The Superintendent of schools will be the facilitator of the process and a non-voting member. Again, worth noting is that the steering committee will be the driving force of this communications plan.

#### **Strategy 2:** Defining the Emotions

The second strategy will be to review with the members of the steering committee possible emotions that they may encounter. Research suggests stages of emotions that the steering committee will stumble through. Group discussions with the steering committee will focus on these emotional stages.

The first stage is the feel-good stage of getting to know each other. The second stage starts when stubbornness arrives and different members are opposed to each other's views. Finally, members start to collaborate and brainstorm. This stage is when the committee is ready to start developing action plans.

Within this strategy, we will talk about resistance to the process and supporting each other through the group. Committee members will develop a deeper appreciation and support for each other.

#### **Strategy 3:** Data Gathering

The third strategy will involve gathering data from both the community and school. During this stage, we will be looking at perceptual data and trying to determine the needs of both the community and school to improve their overall communications and images.

#### **Strategy 4:** Branching from the Steering Committee (Sub-groups)

Once data points us in a direction, sub-groups of the steering committee will be established. This will allow more ownership into the process since we now will be

including more personalities. The sub-groups will be directed to participate in the next strategy of developing action plans.

**Strategy 5:** Developing Action Plans

Like all change mechanisms, strategies will be developed and placed on an action plan. Each strategy will be associated with a timeline to ensure completion of the task. The action plans will look like the school improvement action plan. Each sub-committee will be directed to submit an action plan to the steering committee for approval and so progress can be monitored.

**Strategy 6:** Evaluating the Progress

As the action plans are set into place, the sub-groups will report to the steering committee progress and concerns surrounding the action plans. The plans will be adjusted accordingly as the action plans play out to help assure success.

**Strategy 7:** Celebrating

Once an action plan is complete and success is determined, the steering committee will celebrate the accomplishment. The celebration will be a formal event in which members of the sub-committee will be recognized for their accomplishments.

## **Component 4: Enlist Support from the Community**

As previously described, the community will be actively involved throughout the whole process. To truly make an impact, ownership amongst the constituents is essential. This plan enlists the support from the community initially by the formulation of the steering committee. The community becomes even more involved once sub-groups are formed to address different strategies.

However, we all know that no committee can include all members of the community; therefore, other means to engage the community need to be explored. For example, media coverage of the activities that the action plans produce offer an excellent way to communicate the purposes and actions of the committee.

Although the proceeding paragraph cited a specific example of how to exploit the purpose of the group to the whole community, other strategies will be applied as brainstorming activities take place amongst all members of the steering committees.

## **Component 5: Formulation of the Message**

An important aspect of this plan is to communicate the purposes and actions of the committee to all members of the community and school. The main message the communication plan portrays is the community and school have common mission and goals; and both entities working together would produce a higher success rate as opposed to both working independently.

Currently, both entities are successful. However, both can achieve a higher potential than they are currently experiencing. In other words, the community and school can both expand in a positive direction. The community would benefit from more patrons and the school would benefit from more students.



## **Component 6: Positive Impression on Your Target Group(s)**

To leave a positive impression on our targeted groups, certain material items will be necessary. The following paragraphs list these material items.

First, use of computers (technology) is essential for this plan to be successful. Members will be using e-mail to constantly communicate with each other. E-mail provides a non-expensive means to quickly communicate. The committee will also be using the Internet to research tactics to help us meet our strategies.

To communicate on a broader basis, we will need access to the local and regional media outlets. The committee will be using both radio and print media to communicate our messages to the public.

The school district's newsletter will also be utilized to spread specific information and surveys to patrons of our community. Since the newsletter is distributed to all Stanton addresses, there should be minimal expense.

Another source of information will be the action plan template already used in the school improvement process. The action plan will be modified to meet the needs of each sub-committee.

To host meetings, we will be using the school's library. This facility will provide a large enough space and access to video project equipment to assist in presentations.

And finally, we will be preparing a small budget. We must decide on where we will find revenue and what we are willing to accept for expenses.

## **Component 7: Use of Professional Media Agencies**

This plan will break media into local and regional. Local media will be defined as media that primarily is distributed and read by the patrons of Stanton, i.e. – Stanton Register, School’s Newsletter, etc. Regional media will be defined as media that covers the entire Northeast Nebraska area, i.e. – Norfolk Daily News, Norfolk Radio Stations, etc.

The local media will be used in all stages of the communication plan. These stages will include initially setting up the committees, brainstorming strategies/tactics, gathering/displaying data, developing of action plans, and expressing results.

The regional media will be used more as a positive outlet for our successes. We want to express the positives to this group of readers/listeners. In other words, the regional media will serve as our agent to portray the final image.

Regardless of the media outlet, the committee will abide by the following rules:

- A. Understand/know reporters
- B. Understand/know timelines
- C. Understand the value of being honest
- D. Treat reporters with respect
- E. Speak in understandable terms
- F. No speaking in “off the record” agreements

## **Component 8: Demonstrate Progress**

To assure that progress is being made, the steering committee will meet with all sub-committees at least bi-monthly. The purpose of the meetings will be for the sub-groups to brief the steering committee on any progress. Also, reported will be any changes in strategies/tactics on the action plans. And finally, the steering committee along with the sub-committees will be determining the next steps for each sub-committee.

Also, to ensure progress is being made, informal polling will take place amongst all members. All members' perceptions will be measured on all action plans regardless of committee membership. This will allow for cross-references as to the actual progress being made.

And finally, short/formal surveys will be sent out to patrons of the community via the schools' newsletter. These surveys will give the committee an immediate snapshot of the perceptions of the community. This information will be used to determine the next direction for each action plan.

## **Component 9: Anticipate and Prepare Responses to Criticism**

To accept criticism, the members of the communication plan will take a pro-active approach. Since we already anticipate criticism, an objective of the plan requires a discussion concerning criticism. By completing this objective, the hope is to help committee members control their emotions.

The plan starts with a small steering committee and branches out. This will help develop ownership early. As ownership develops amongst constituents, a natural support group for criticism emerges.

As the plan starts to gain momentum, conversations will occur about the fact that not everyone will buy into the process. Our group will be instructed not to lose focus or commitment. We need to listen and respond to everyone including our critics. In fact, our plan will be to invite critics of the plan aboard to serve on sub-committees.

## **Component 10: Evaluate**

Evaluation of the communication plan will be cyclical. We recognize that the process of communications is on-going and so is the evaluation of the process. However, as we implement our action plans, we want to make sure that positive results are present. The committee will monitor the action plans at both the individual strategy level as well as the plan. This approach will point to small gains and help us to determine if the large picture is being accomplished.

Opinion polls both formal and informal will also help us to determine if gains are being made per our action plans. By polling patrons of our district, we should be able to determine if we are communicating appropriately.

And finally, the purpose of the plan is to increase commitment towards the school and community. An increase in sub-group membership would indicate that the plan is making a difference towards the overall commitment level. In other words, more people would be involved within the community and school.