



COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT REPORT

June 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The Neenah Joint School District is committed to improving communication with its diverse stakeholders. To that end, the district has enlisted the assistance of the Donovan Group LLC, a communications firm that works with schools and school districts, in conducting a district communications audit and working with the district to create a communications plan. Joe Donovan, the firm's principal, wrote this draft.

The process began with meetings of the district's Communications Committee, a standing committee that is comprised of parents and other community members, district staff members, school board members and school and district administrators. The charge of this committee is to create and execute a comprehensive communications plan that satisfies the communications needs of district stakeholders.

This communications audit will be the foundation of a strategic communications plan. The facts and perceptions outlined here will form the basis of strategies for improving public relations management and enhancing two-way communication between the school district and its internal and external stakeholders. Its findings will inform committee members on community attitudes and the effectiveness of current communications efforts, providing a framework for the district's future communications. It also offers benchmarks against which to measure future progress.

This draft document will be reviewed by the district's communications committee during its June 20 meeting, and will then be finalized, taking into account any revisions suggested by the group and/or requests for additional information.

Scope and nature of the study

The information that this report is based on comes from two sources. The first is data on the current communications practices of the district. During two meetings, district leaders were asked to report on the regular communications they have with staff and community members, the tools used for past communications efforts and how well they felt past efforts had gone. Special attention was paid to district-level communications practices and tools, such as the district's website. The data collected was then reviewed within the context of established best practices for communications.

The second source of information is the data from communications surveys conducted with community members, staff, administrators and board members between May 2nd and June 8th, 2012. Surveys were offered in both online and hardcopy formats, and efforts were made to ensure a good response rate from all stakeholder groups.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the school district has undertaken this communications audit because it wishes to improve its public relations/communications programs by examining how its work is perceived by others, and it would not enter into an audit unless it was comfortable with doing so.

At the same time, some caution should be taken in approaching this communications review. Whenever opinions are solicited about an institution and its work, respondents tend to dwell on perceived problem areas rather than the potential for change. While this is natural, it is important to note that every audit tends to be more negative in tone in that it focuses primarily on what should be changed in the future to address deficits rather than what the district is doing well.

It is important to note that some of the comments included in the survey summaries may reflect concerns that are outside the scope of our recommendations, but are still issues that the board and administration may want to address in order to resolve community concerns.

Recommendations

In response to the key research findings, this report contains recommendations for improving communications with the district's internal and external stakeholders. The recommendations are intended to provide district leaders with ideas for continuing the Neenah Joint School District's pursuit of educational excellence in all strategically important areas—particularly in the area of communication. They are based on strategies and techniques that have proven to be effective in similar school systems around the country.

Anonymity

Survey and interview participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous. As such, results from each group's survey are reported in aggregate form. This was particularly important for smaller populations, including in the administrator/board survey, where the identity of specific respondents could be more easily determined.

The report also contains direct quotes from survey respondents. Some of these have been paraphrased for clarity, and any direct quotes appear in quotation marks without attribution.

In analyzing qualitative responses, an effort was made to identify themes or trends so that no single respondent within any of the groups surveyed would be able to individually influence the results of the audit.

Limitations of the data

The data received for this survey was quite robust, with respondents providing a good deal of information in their responses. However, it is important to keep in mind that all survey data is, by its nature, limited.

While the district went to great lengths to maximize the number of responses, data was not gathered using scientific sampling methods, nor were any community or staff members required to participate. Also, while there was nothing that suggested that any one person filled out multiple surveys, it could happen.

The survey data is based on a convenience sample, and therefore no statistical analysis has been carried out that requires a scientific sample. The descriptive analysis provides a great deal of insight that is suitable to the committee's efforts.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It is important to note the purpose of this audit. The reason the surveys were conducted and this report written and discussed by the committee is so we can create a clear vision as a group for what we need to accomplish with our communications planning.

As I present this report and my findings, I will remind committee members that the committee is charged with communications. While communications is closely aligned with other important aspects of school district operations, we must be disciplined in our discussions and planning to address only that with which we have been asked to do.

With that, I would like to outline what I feel are some of the communications-related opportunities for the district and ideas upon which the committee can develop a communications plan. The ideas below are presented for the purpose of discussion and may change based on our conversation.

The opportunity to communicate as a district

One of the themes noted in the community, staff and board/administrator survey is what appears to be a disconnect in some cases between the schools and the district.

Parents, for their part, seem to appreciate the neighborhood aspect of the elementary schools, but acknowledge concern for their children when they consider them moving to the high school. The high school is perceived as big and seemingly disconnected from the elementary schools. From the staff level, there appears to be a desire from staff to be more meaningfully connected with the other schools and the district office.

From a communications perspective, this situation creates an opportunity to communicate a common vision (something that is discussed in greater detail below) across the entire community. This may include additional district-level communications, media outreach, additional district-related information on the website and other district-related efforts that can be reinforced at the school level. In this way, school-level administrators will communicate common district-level messages that are reinforced by individual, school-specific messages.

I suggest that as one of the components of the communication plan, we work to develop processes and refine or develop district-level communications tools.

The opportunity to communicate a collective vision

Building on what was described above, there is a need to communicate a collective vision for the district and the schools in a way that the entire community can get behind. It is important to note that parents of children who are considering moving into the district, as well as those who already live in the district, have choices about where their children will attend school.

In developing a vision that becomes a brand, the district creates the ability for itself to live up to its ideals. Because the collective vision becomes the lens through which all future communications efforts will be made, it allows the schools and the district to communicate more quickly and with more confidence.

I suggest that as one of the components of our communications plan, we work to communicate a comprehensive vision for the district and, if necessary, the district's brand.

The opportunity to connect the board and the community

Community members and staff were clear in desiring more information about the efforts of the board. Building on the efforts to communicate a vision for the district, the district and board have the opportunity to better communicate about its efforts, both past and present. Part of this effort could be providing more information about the budget, the budget creation process and effect of state and federal level policies on the budget.

I suggest that as one of the components of our communications plan, we work to create a board-specific communications effort.

The opportunity to avoid stakeholder confusion

Especially in these challenging economic times, it is important to anticipate confusion and to do everything possible to get in front of bad news. This is not to

suggest that the district should “spin” bad news or be anything other than completely forthright, but rather it should focus on over-communicating about things we know that staff, parents and other community members will be confused about.

An important component of this is to continue focusing on how information in the news and important decisions that are made by district-level staff and board members will be interpreted by school-level staff and community members, and actively working to get information out quickly to those stakeholders.

I suggest that as one of the components of the communications plan, we work to develop or refine processes for getting ahead of confusion and over-communicating to stakeholders.

The opportunity to engage your local media

The Neenah Joint School District is somewhat unique in that it is covered by a regional daily newspaper, one that also covers several other large districts. Media relations is an effort that takes a lot of work, but pays off in the long run.

In all likelihood, changes in state and federal level educational policy will cause further confusion among parents and other stakeholders. It is important that the Neenah Joint School District can tell its story and, building on what was noted above, its vision.

I suggest that as one of the components of the communications plan, we develop processes to engage your local media.

The opportunity to engage the 80%

I find that nearly as much can be learned from what is not said in a survey as what is said. I found, for example, the relatively low number of community respondents to be surprising, despite the efforts of members of the committee to get a good response rate.

In most school districts, a full 75% to 80% of community members do not have children in the schools, and therefore often have very little connection to the schools or the district. However, we continue to remind ourselves that the stakeholder groups that we as a committee identified included non-parents. In fact, non-parents are critically important to the schools, and as such I suggest that we develop the further engagement of this group.

The opportunity to consolidate communications efforts

The majority of the school districts we work with begin the process of communications planning with very few communications tools and even fewer communications processes. This is not true in Neenah. The district has a long list of very robust and progressive communications tools at its disposal. However, instead of expanding the number of communications tools, through our communications planning we may in fact suggest the elimination of several that are not used, are expensive or do not advance our communications goals.

The opportunity to continue improving the website

The district's website will continue to be more important in the future and will, at least for the foreseeable future, be the cornerstone of the district's communications efforts.

In this way, efforts should be made to continue improving the website over time, including adding more pages, updating it more often and when appropriate, adding new technologies to the site. However, especially in light of the fact that the district website was recently renovated, I suggest that our communications plan include small incremental improvements over time as opposed to large wholesale changes.

COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT SURVEY DATA: COMMUNITY MEMBERS

A communications audit requires a diverse group of survey participants. It is important to note that this study did not call for a random sample. Instead, the respondent selection process was similar to that of a focus group. Because of this, in presenting themes we have provided corresponding comment data in addition to individual answers to questions.

While the surveys that were given to community members, administrators and school staff members differed, all three covered the same general areas. I begin with a review of the community survey.

A total of 342 people completed the community survey. In terms of age, 38 or 11.1% were 18 and under, 3 or .9% were 19-25, 31 or 9.0% were 26-34, 119 or 34.8% were 35-44, 109 or 31.9% were 45-54, 23 or 6.7% were 55-64 and 19 or 5.6% were 65 and over.

Approximately 58.5% of the respondents reported living in the City of Neenah, 9.9% reported living in the Town of Neenah, 9.6% reported living in the Town of Clayton, 1.5% reported living in the Town of Vinland, 13.7% reported living in the Town of Menasha and 6.7% chose "other."

When asked, "How long have you lived in your community?"

- 3.2% of community members answered "less than two years,"
- 8.8% answered "between two and five years,"
- 23.1% answered "between five and ten years,"
- 33.9% answered "between ten and twenty years,"
- 13.2% answered "between twenty and thirty years"
- 17.8% answered "more than thirty years."

There was a fairly even distribution of ages for each of the communities in the district.

When respondents were asked to specify their relationship to the school,

- 62.6% chose "I have school-aged children,"
- 14.9% chose "I have preschool-aged children,"
- 65.5% chose "I have children who currently attend or have attended a Neenah Joint School District school,"
- 3.8% chose "I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a Neenah Joint School District school,"
- 22.5% chose "I have attended a Neenah Joint School District school"
- 7.3% chose "I am a community member who has never had children attending a Neenah Joint School District school,"
- 10.5% chose "I am currently a student at a Neenah Joint School District school,"
- 3.5% chose "other."

When asked "If you have children who attended the Neenah Joint School District but do not now, when was the last year that they attended?" most respondents answered that their child had attended within the last ten years.

When asked, "If you have school-aged children, which schools or districts do your children attend?"

- 18.7% of respondents answered "Neenah High School,"
- 0.9% of respondents answered "Neenah High School - Downtown Campus,"
- 15.1% of respondents answered "Shattuck Middle School,"
- 5.6% of respondents answered "Horace Mann Middle School,"
- 2.2% of respondents answered "Alliance Charter School,"
- 4.9% of respondents answered "Clayton Elementary,"
- 6.5% of respondents answered "Coolidge Elementary,"
- 2.4% of respondents answered "Hoover Elementary,"
- 4.9% of respondents answered "Lakeview Elementary,"
- 3.9% of respondents answered "Roosevelt Elementary,"
- 3.9% of respondents answered "Spring Road Elementary,"

- 1.7% of respondents answered “Taft Elementary,”
- 1.7% of respondents answered “Taft Early Learning Center,”
- 6.0% of respondents answered “Tullar Elementary,”
- 6.7% of respondents answered “Wilson Elementary,”
- 1.1% of respondents answered “TEC House,”
- 1.9% of respondents answered “Public school outside of the district,”
- 2.8% of respondents answered “Private school,”
- 6.2% of respondents answered “I do not have school-aged children,”
- 1.1% of respondents answered “My children are home-schooled,”
- 1.9% of respondents answered “Other”

When this document is revised, additional information will be provided about the representativeness of these results.

Community members’ impressions of the district

The community surveys asked community respondents a series of questions about their general impressions of the school district. When asked to describe Neenah Joint School District to someone who is new to the community, participants gave a wide range of responses. However, the following general themes emerged:

The schools are very good. The vast majority of respondents indicated that that the schools were good or “very good.” These comments were often followed with ways the schools could be improved, ideas that tended to vary considerably. It is important to note that responses to this question were generally positive.

Teachers are outstanding. Respondents, including those whose children have long graduated, indicated that teachers in the school were very good, caring and dedicated. This was a very strong theme.

Concerns about size. Several respondents noted the large size of the schools, especially the high school, and seemed to indicate a lack of connection with larger schools. A common response included praise for the neighborhood elementary schools, but concern for their children when they attend the “very large” high school.

The impressions of community members seemed to be similar across all demographic categories, with respondents who currently had children in the schools providing the most detailed information.

When community members were asked “How satisfied are you with the Neenah Joint School District,”

- 21.6% said that they were “Very satisfied,”
- 51.2% said that they were “Satisfied,”

- 19.9% said that they were “Not very satisfied,”
- 3.8% said that they were “Extremely dissatisfied”
- 3.5% had no opinion

In our experience, these responses are normal and largely reflect national averages. Respondents who were older and/or did not have children currently attending district schools were over-represented in the “no opinion” category.

Community members were asked to respond to the following question: “Would you recommend the Neenah Joint School District to others? Why or why not?”

The responses to this question varied considerably and did not form the kinds of discernible themes that we tend to see in other districts in which this question has been asked.

Speaking generally, there are three general ideas that we could discern from the data.

Concern. Respondents seemed concerned about the future of the district, much more so than when they answered earlier questions. Several respondents noted concerns about budgets, taxes and such things as class sizes. Others spoke to their concern about whether the current quality of the schools would be maintained over time. One participant responded to this question in a way that seemed to mirror the opinion of others: “(It’s) too early to make a determination.”

Apprehension about the size of the high school. The issue of school size (as opposed to class size) came up much more often than we tend to see in this kind of survey. This was especially true among parents of elementary school students who said they liked the neighborhood schools, but they themselves felt intimidated by the size of the high school. This response reflects the perceptions of many others: “I would definitely recommend it for elementary school; I can’t say the same for high school. I have concerns about my now elementary-age children getting lost in such a big place.”

No collective perception. In some cases, what is not said in a response to a survey question is as important as what is said. In our experience, the wide range of answers was unusual for this question. We tend to see more clearly identifiable themes in the data, including and perhaps especially based on a common vision for the district that is communicated by board members, administrators and teachers. Therefore, answers to this question, even among those who said they have had good experiences in the schools, tended to be tempered when speaking of the district. One respondent who indicated earlier that he was satisfied with the district and generally positive, noted that he would struggle articulating a reason to recommend the Neenah Joint School District over neighboring ones.

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "I feel welcome in Neenah Joint School District schools,"

- 25.7% of answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 52.6% answered that they "Agree,"
- 10.5% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 2.6% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 8.5% chose "No opinion."

While parents and other community members tend to feel more connected to individual schools than the district as a whole, this is a higher level of agreement than we typically see.

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement "I feel connected to the Neenah Joint School District,"

- 14.3% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 49.1% answered that they "Agree,"
- 23.2% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 4.1% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 8.8% chose "No opinion."

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "When I have questions or require additional information, I am comfortable contacting one of the schools,"

- 31.3% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 46.8% answered that they "Agree,"
- 11.4% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 2.3% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 8.3% chose "No opinion."

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "When I have questions or require additional information, I am comfortable contacting the district office,"

- 17.3% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 36.8% answered that they "Agree,"
- 19.6% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 9.6% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 16.7% chose "No opinion."

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "When I have questions or require additional information, I am comfortable contacting teachers or principals,"

- 41.5% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"

- 40.9% answered that they "Agree,"
- 7.0% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 2.3% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 8.2% chose "No opinion."

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "When I have a question regarding the schools, I know who to contact,"

- 20.8% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 51.8% answered that they "Agree,"
- 14.9% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 4.1% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 8.5% chose "No opinion."

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "When I have questions regarding the district, I know who to contact,"

- 14.0% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 38.9% answered that they "Agree,"
- 29.5% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 9.6% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 7.0% chose "No opinion."

Taken together, it is clear that community members have more familiarity and comfort with their local schools. We find the difference between these numbers to increase with the size of the district. The difference between the schools and the district, as shown above, presents a unique opportunity for the school district to more fully engage community members at the district level.

When asked the level to which they agreed with the statement, "I feel that the Neenah Joint School District does a better job of communicating than neighboring school districts,"

- 5.6% of participants answered that they "Strongly agree,"
- 14.9% answered that they "Agree,"
- 16.7% answered that they "Disagree,"
- 10.5% answered that they "Strongly disagree,"
- 52.3% chose "No opinion."

We find that these numbers vary considerably among school districts that share a daily newspaper with other districts and that do not have their own television and radio stations. In many ways, the large number of people who answered "no opinion" to this question is actually quite positive.

Communications sources

When respondents were asked, "Where do you get most of your information about the schools and the district (select all that apply)?" respondents answered as follows:

- 33.9% answered "Parent organizations."
- 50.0% answered "Friends or neighbors."
- 40.4% answered "My children and their friends."
- 44.2% answered "District mailings."
- 54.4% answered "School websites."
- 34.4% answered "District website."
- 58.2% answered "School newsletters (email and hard copy)."
- 27.2% answered "District newsletters (email and hard copy)."
- 12.9% answered "School board meetings."
- 46.2% answered "Teachers and staff."
- 31.0% answered "Appleton Post Crescent newspaper or PostCrescent.com."
- 22.5% answered "Neenah-Menasha Twin City News-Record."
- 3.2% answered "The Satellite (high-school newspaper)."
- 6.1% answered "Rocket News (school blog)."
- 1.2% answered "Local blogs."
- 7.6% answered "Local television."
- 3.2% answered "Local radio."
- 20.5% answered "Facebook"
- 1.5% answered "Twitter"
- 5.3% answered "Other."

It is worth noting here that 31% of respondents, more than expected, said that they received their news about the school district from the Appleton Post Crescent. In most districts where we conduct similar surveys, a newspaper article about the survey is often what informs people of the survey itself, thus creating an artificially inflated number. Despite the fact that district staff tried (without success) to get an article about the survey in the Post Crescent, this number is quite high.

It is important to note the high percentage of respondents who chose the websites, friends and neighbors and especially teachers.

When respondents were asked which of these sources were the most credible, they responded in ways that showed clear themes. The following were popular responses:

- Teachers and staff
- Elementary school website
- Appleton Post Crescent

When respondents were asked which of these sources were the least credible, they responded in ways that showed clear themes. The following were popular responses:

- Local television
- Appleton Post Crescent

Ironically, the local newspaper is listed as one of the most credible news sources. Far and away, however, the most credible news sources are teachers and staff in the district.

When asked, "What technologies do you regularly use to receive news, including national and world news? (Select all that apply),"

- 33.6% of participants answered "Smartphone"
- 32.7% answered "Tablet computer"
- 38.6 answered "Facebook or Twitter"
- 9.6% answered "Blogs"
- 5.8% answered "Podcasts"
- 53.5% answered "News websites"
- 42.3% answered "Radio"
- 65.5 answered "Television"
- 44.2% answered "Email"
- 7.6% answered "Other"

When asked, "What is the best way for the district and its schools to communicate with you?" the most common response was through email and U.S. mail.

When asked, "What types of information would you like to receive from the Neenah Joint School District? (Select all that apply),"

- 74.3% of participants answered "News about academic programs"
- 44.2% answered "News about athletics"
- 40.0% answered "Recreation department information"
- 57.0% answered "School board and committee meeting agenda and minutes"
- 45.0% answered "News about the theatre and performing arts programs"
- 43.6% answered "News about parent associations"
- 58.8% answered "News about the budget"
- 39.2% answered "Accomplishments of present and past students, including college acceptance of recent graduates"
- 20.2% answered "News for alumni, such as class updates and reunion Information"
- 13.7% answered "Other"

Types of information

When asked the degree to which they agree with the following statement, "I receive the information I need about the schools and school district,"

- 9.9% of participants answered "Strongly agree"
- 54.4% answered "Agree"
- 23.1% answered "Disagree"
- 5.0% answered "Strongly disagree"
- 7.6% answered "No opinion"

The percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement is higher than we tend to see, suggesting an opportunity to communicate.

When asked, "What information would you like to receive that you are not currently receiving?" many ideas were communicated. The following response mirrors many others in noting a desire for more information about school board meetings and district-level initiatives:

"Having our first child go through the public schools, it would be helpful to receive more information from the district office about board meetings/minutes, such as reminders of meetings or posting of minutes (just a mass e-mail notice). Feel like our elementary school does an excellent job of keeping us informed of activities and opportunities and know what is going on in classroom and at school, but there is some disconnect to the district office."

Electronic communications

When asked the degree to which they agreed with the following: "The school and district electronic communications that I receive are helpful and informative,"

- 13.2% of participants answered "Strongly agree"
- 50.0% answered "Agree"
- 11.4% answered "Disagree"
- 2.9% answered "Strongly disagree"
- 22.5% answered "No opinion"

When asked to explain their answer to the question above, two related themes emerged. First, respondents seemed to like the communication they received from the elementary schools. However, they desired more district-level information. The following response is representative of many others:

"The school information is great. The district information is incomplete."

When asked, “What is the most important thing that the district and schools could do to immediately improve their communications with you,” some fairly strong themes developed.

First, respondents noted that they desired more easy-to-read information about the district rather than individual schools. The following responses mirror many others:

“Become more global with information so that more is known about the district as a whole rather than just the immediate school(s) that your children are a part of.”

“I would like to get a district newsletter- an overview of what is going on in Neenah and a newsletter from NHS.”

Several respondents noted that the district-level correspondence was too dense, contained too much “education-speak” and tended to be overly positive instead of providing the “straight scoop.” Finally, respondents wanted faster and more frequent communications.

When asked about the level to which they agreed with the following statement, “The new website is helpful and informative,”

- 11.2% of participants answered “Strongly agree”
- 52.9% answered “Agree”
- 12.2% answered “Disagree”
- 2.2% answered “Strongly disagree”
- 21.5% answered “I have not visited the new website”

As a follow up, community members who had experience with the website were asked how it could be improved. This question prompted several different responses. However, the only discernible theme from the data was that finding information on the site was difficult. No additional detail was provided.

COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT SURVEY DATA: STAFF

A total of 281 staff members took the staff survey. This included 210 teachers, 53 educational or administrative assistants, one maintenance or food service staff member and 18 staff members who listed their position as “other.”

When staff members were asked, “Including the current year, for how long have you worked for the district?”

- 12.1% said “Fewer than 5 years.”
- 50.7% said “Between 5 and 15 years.”
- 37.2% said “More than 15 years.”

When staff members were asked, "In which building do you work (Check all that apply)?"

- 47.9% said "An elementary school or early learning center"
- 20.2% said "A middle school"
- 31.9% said "A high school"
- 3.5% said "The central office"
- 0.0% said "Other"

When staff members were asked, "Do you live in the Neenah Joint School District?"

- 50% said "Yes"
- 50% said "No"

When asked, "How would you describe the Neenah Joint School District to someone who is new to the community," the most common response was the quality and dedication of the staff. The following responses mirror many others:

"We have the most dedicated teaching staff anywhere! It is a great district to raise your family in."

"Great teachers"

A minor theme among staff members was a desire for a clearer long-term vision for the district and general concern about the future, which was very similar to that reported by community members.

When asked, "What information would you like to receive that you are not currently receiving?" the most common response was more district-level information, especially information about their jobs and impact on their areas of work. Also, many staff members reported wanting to have what they described as more meaningful input on district-level decisions. The following responses mirror many others:

"Communications about district decisions."

"More input on decision that directly impact students, classrooms, teachers, etc."

"I would like to receive more information at the district-administrative level. Some of the "big" happenings I have had to read about in the paper."

When asked, "Where do you get most of your information about the school in which you work?"

- 10.6% said "Friends or neighbors"
- 18.4% said "District mailings"

- 31.2% said "School websites"
- 17.7% said "District website"
- 57.1% said "School newsletters (email and hard copy)"
- 19.5% said "District newsletters (email and hard copy)"
- 73.4% said "Staff meetings "
- 55.0% said "Staff memos"
- 7.1% said "School board meetings"
- 72.0% said "Other staff members"
- 19.5% said "Appleton Post Crescent newspaper or PostCrescent.com"
- 6.4% said "Neenah-Menasha Twin City News-Record"
- 1.4% said "The Satellite (high-school newspaper)"
- 2.5% said "Rocket News (school blog)"
- 0.7% said "Local blogs"
- 5.7% said "Local television"
- 2.5% said "Local radio"
- 3.2% said "Facebook"
- 0.0% said "Twitter"
- 6.2% said "Other"

When asked, "Where do you get most of your information about the Neenah Joint School District?"

- 15.6% said "Friends or neighbors"
- 37.6% said "District mailings"
- 24.8% said "School websites"
- 42.9% said "District website"
- 28.7% said "School newsletters (email and hard copy)"
- 49.6% said "District newsletters (email and hard copy)"
- 59.2% said "Staff meetings"
- 40.4% said "Staff memos"
- 16.3% said "School board meetings"
- 59.9% said "Other staff members"
- 37.9% said "Appleton Post Crescent newspaper or PostCrescent.com"
- 11.0% said "Neenah-Menasha Twin City News-Record"
- 1.1% said "The Satellite (high-school newspaper)"
- 1.8% said "Rocket News (school blog)"
- 0.4% said "Local blogs"
- 12.4% said "Local television"
- 4.3% said "Local radio"
- 3.9% said "Facebook"
- 0.0% said "Twitter"
- 3.9% said "Other"

For the previous two questions, respondents were then asked, "Which of the sources above do you consider to be most credible?"

By far, the most common responses from staff members were staff meetings and email from school or district leaders. It is important to note that many staff members asked that email messages were brief and to the point.

Again, for the previous two questions, respondents were then asked, "For both questions, which of the sources above do you consider to be least credible?" By far, the most common answer among staff was the Appleton Post-Crescent newspaper.

When asked, "What is the best way for the district/schools to communicate with you?" the most common answer was email and face-to-face meetings.

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "I receive the information about the schools that I need to do my job,"

- 9.2% said "Strongly agree"
- 75.2% said "Agree"
- 10.6% said "Disagree"
- 2.8% said "Strongly disagree"
- 2.1% said "Does not apply"

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "The opinions that I share with my principal seem to make a difference,"

- 14.2% said "Strongly agree"
- 48.9% said "Agree"
- 20.6% said "Disagree"
- 7.4% said "Strongly disagree"
- 7.8% said "Does not apply"

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "The opinions that I share with district-level administrators and board members seem to make a difference,"

- 2.8% said "Strongly agree"
- 20.2% said "Agree"
- 35.8% said "Disagree"
- 28.4% said "Strongly disagree"
- 12.8% said "Does not apply"

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "The schools do a good job of communicating with the community,"

- 10.3% said "Strongly agree"
- 55.3% said "Agree"
- 18.1% said "Disagree"
- 2.8% said "Strongly disagree"

- 13.5% said “Does not apply”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following:
“The district does a good job of communicating with the community,”

- 2.1% said “Strongly agree”
- 33.3% said “Agree”
- 37.2% said “Disagree”
- 9.6% said “Strongly disagree”
- 17.7% said “Does not apply”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following:
“The schools do a good job of communicating with teachers and other staff members,”

- 11.3% said “Strongly agree”
- 58.2% said “Agree”
- 17.7% said “Disagree”
- 5.0% said “Strongly disagree”
- 7.8% said “Does not apply”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following:
“The district does a good job of communicating with teachers and other staff members,”

- 1.4% said “Strongly agree”
- 36.9% said “Agree”
- 41.1% said “Disagree”
- 11.3% said “Strongly disagree”
- 9.2% said “Does not apply”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following:
“The school and district electronic communications that I receive are helpful and informative,”

- 13.5% said “Strongly agree”
- 72.7% said “Agree”
- 9.2% said “Disagree”
- 1.1% said “Strongly disagree”
- 1.4% said “Does not apply”

When asked to explain their answer, the most common theme among responses was “email.” However, many respondents asked that any messages be brief and to the point.

Respondents were then asked a capstone question: "What is the most important thing that the district and schools could do to immediately improve their communications with you?"

The questions brought a wide range of suggestions. Among them, the following themes emerged:

- Staff wanted more communications, more timely information, more transparency and two-way communication between themselves and school and district-level leaders.
- They wanted to be aware of and engaged with long-range goals and planning. According to one respondent, "The immediate goals are pretty well known, but not everyone is privy to what the future of NJSD is going to be like. It might help the staff make more sense of what is happening now."
- Finally, staff repeatedly noted their concerns for the future and what challenges are ahead of both themselves and the district as a whole.

Digital communications

When asked about the degree to which they agreed with the following: "The new website is helpful and informative,"

- 11.6% responded with "Strongly agree"
- 66.8% responded with "Agree"
- 9.3% responded with "Disagree"
- 2.7% responded with "Strongly disagree"
- 9.7% responded with "I have never visited the website"

Finally, staff members were asked, "What kind of information should be added to the website to help you do your job?" There were very few responses to the question. The only identifiable theme from the question was from staff suggesting changes be made to allow the site to be more easily navigated.

COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT SURVEY DATA: BOARD MEMBERS/ADMINISTRATORS

A total of 21 administrators and six board members took a specially designed online survey. Unless noted otherwise, the answers for board members and administrators tended to be similar.

When asked, "Overall, how effective are the schools' and district's communications efforts,"

- 7.4% said "Very effective"

- 66.7% said "Somewhat effective"
- 22.2% said "Not very effective"
- 3.7% said "Extremely ineffective"

When asked to describe their answer, the following were some responses:

"It seems as if district-wide communications are afterthoughts instead of integrated efforts. A communication should be attached to any major district change with appropriate parties learning news at appropriate times."

"I think the schools' communication with parents and staff is effective. I believe communication from district office to schools/school personnel is somewhat less effective."

"Staff are often frustrated by the lack of communication about MAJOR things."

"District wide internal communication - timeliness can be frustrating - delay in communication or decisions being communicated."

"Have one person with responsibilities to establish contact with the media and be the spokesperson for the district. This would be important in crisis situations, but also in reporting good news and new initiatives. The new website is already a huge improvement in the right direction."

"Get ahead of the rumors and gossip. Proactively communicate key issues. Communicate more - more information, more often."

"Yes, we must begin to think of ways to bringing in community members who do not have children attending our schools."

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "I receive the information that I need about the schools and district,"

- 7.7% said "Strongly agree"
- 73.1 said "Agree"
- 19.2 said "Disagree"
- 0.0% said "Strongly disagree"

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: "Our schools and district do a good job of acquainting new families with our curriculum, services, and programs,"

- 7.7% said "Strongly agree"
- 76.9% said "Agree"
- 15.4% said "Disagree"
- 0.0% said "Strongly disagree"

When asked to elaborate on how they answered the questions above, most board members said they had difficulty answering the question, but had several ideas. These ideas included:

“How easy would it be to place a prominent box on the main web page that says “New to the area -- Click here” and they can either see or print all kinds of info about the District and community. The same with people who stop into our schools or Admin Building--have a readymade packet of materials (that are up to date) that makes them want to find out more about the District or want to come here.”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: “The district does a good job of responding to the questions and concerns of parents and other members of the public,”

- 18.5% said “Strongly agree”
- 59.3% said “Agree”
- 22.2% said “Disagree”
- 0.0% said “Strongly disagree”

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: “The schools do a good job of responding to the questions and concerns of parents and other members of the public,”

- 29.6% said “Strongly agree”
- 66.7% said “Agree”
- 3.7% said “Disagree”
- 0.0% said “Strongly disagree”

When asked to elaborate about the previous question, there were concerns, mirroring those from earlier, from some administrators that they do not have enough information to communicate on behalf of the district or about district-level items.

When asked to respond with the degree to which they agreed with the following: “I feel comfortable in my role as someone who communicates on behalf of the Neenah Joint School District,”

- 29.6% said “Strongly agree”
- 59.3% said “Agree”
- 11.1% said “Disagree”
- 0.0% said “Strongly disagree”

For this question, administrators tended to disagree more than board members.

When asked, “How would you describe the level of effectiveness of communications between board members and administrators,” two themes emerged.

First, several board members and administrators noted the relationship was getting stronger. Second, despite improvements, some noted that efforts should be made to continue improving communications between the board and administrators in the future.

When asked, “What is the most important thing that the district and schools could do to immediately improve their communication with internal and external stakeholders?” the most common themes involved working to improve communication and making communications a priority. One respondent said, “In nearly every situation, ask the question, what needs to be communicated to whom and how?”

Other suggestions included making sure that staff voices are heard, making the communications as consistent and simple as possible, being more transparent (especially about big decisions) and working to communicate to the entire community rather than just parents.

When asked to provide any additional communications-related comments, the prior comments were reinforced, often by different respondents.

