Every Student Succeeds

ACPS — Alexandria City Public Schools

Alexandria City Public Schools Office of Communications

Strategic Communications Plan
2016-18

Overview

The communication strategy for 2016-18 is focused on fulfilling the goals of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan. The Office of Communications supports the ACPS mission to ensure that *Every Student Succeeds* by providing transparent, timely and accessible external and internal communications.

Effective communication is critical to the ongoing success of ACPS, its programs and ultimately student success. It supports improved relationships with, and the engagement of stakeholders in school communities. The communications program promotes ACPS programs, initiatives and services to enhance community confidence in public education, to attract and retain the best staff and to maintain student enrollment.

The Office of Communications currently has six full-time employee positions:
- Director
- TV/Video Program Manager
- AV Manager
- Public Relations Specialist (writer)
- Public Relations Specialist (graphic designer)
- Administrative Assistant

All staff have contributed to and been heavily involved in the drafting of this plan.

Who Are We Trying to Reach?

Four separate audiences are deemed essential to reach:

1. **ACPS external community**: students, families, school community groups and PTAs, anyone who has a direct connection to ACPS
2. **ACPS internal community**: staff (teaching and non-teaching), administrators, cabinet, Superintendent, School Board
3. **Wider Alexandria community:** City and elected officials, businesses and business leaders, educational partners, media, prospective students and their families, realtors, residents
4. **Northern Virginia community**: We need to acknowledge the inherent competition between school divisions in terms of recruitment and attracting families

All content should be entirely focused on what those audiences want/need to be kept informed, engaged and inspired, and therefore support ACPS.

Key Research Findings

(For a full outline of research used in drafting this plan, see the section entitled: *Research Used to Steer Communications Strategy*, page 15)
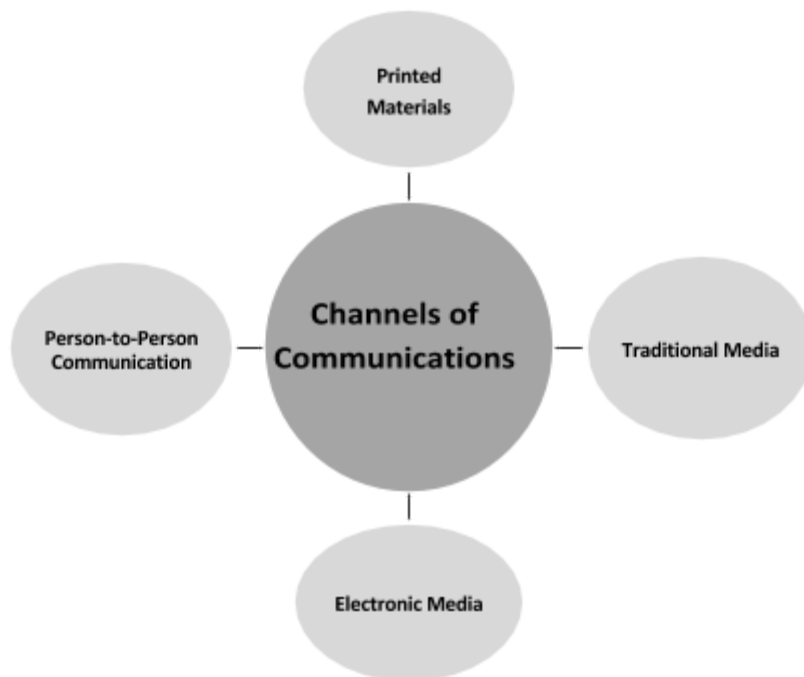
ACPS now has 10,100 followers on **Twitter**, compared to 3,600 followers 18 months ago. Data for Twitter and Facebook clearly show that engagement was considerably higher this year than it was last year over the same period of time. This is largely due to a concerted effort and multiple successful campaigns directed at engaging the ACPS audience.

Storify (which compiles tweets and Facebook content into a story) has also seen high engagement with some posts receiving more than 1,000 views.

ACPS **Facebook** has 2,700 users, four times the amount 18 months ago.

The **ACPS app**, launched six months ago has had 1,713 downloads.

Periscope (an app that broadcasts live video content) attracts between 50 and 250 views each time an advisory or community meeting is broadcast through the app.

ACPS Express, launched in September 2015, sends to 7,428 recipients weekly.

ACPS Insider, launched in November 2015, sends to 2,692 staff weekly. Both offer the ability to target communications to specific audiences and have been well received.

The number of Cable TV viewers who say they have watched programs or School Board meetings on **ACPS-TV** has fallen from 2014 to 2015.

External users of the ACPS **website** homepage have also fallen slightly when compared to 2014.

The Office of Communications has built strong relationships with reporters and editors at both local newspapers, The Alexandria Gazette and The Alexandria Times. Mentions of the ACPS brand are up and **media coverage** is generally positive. Staff facilitates and meticulously manages the media coverage to ensure the best coverage possible.

The feedback that the communications team is getting on the ground and in the schools indicates overall much more positive than in previous years. The response to ACPS Express, ACPS Insider and school eNewsletters has been overwhelmingly positive through feedback received on Twitter, Facebook and at community events.

The ACPS Communications team's **key strengths and assets** include emergency and crisis management, event management and promotion, media relations, data analysis, marketing and social media. The ACPS Communications team is well poised to adapt to and effectively address the challenges facing the division.

Greater involvement by Communications leadership in proactive strategic decision-making at the Cabinet level will facilitate more effective and efficient communications division-wide. Updated equipment and increased training for staff will better align the team with modern communication needs.

Communication Goals

Each of the strategic communication goals of the Office of Communications is directed by the mission statement and goals of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan.

The goals of the Office of Communications are:

Communications Goals	ACPS 2020 Goals
Goal A: Ensure confidence in ACPS by providing stakeholders with access to information about key issues through consistent, inclusive, accessible, transparent, two-way, open and timely communication	• Family and Community Engagement • Facilities and the Learning Environment • Effective and Efficient Operations
Goal B: Ensure the ACPS community has timely access to the information and support needed for all students to succeed academically	• Academic Excellence & Educational Equity • Family and Community Engagement
Goal C: Foster strong relationships that promote high stakeholder engagement in public education in the community	• Family and Community Engagement
Goal D: Ensure ACPS is viewed as an attractive place for teachers and families and maintains a positive reputation in the wider ACPS community/Northern Virginia community	• Academic Excellence & Educational Equity • An Exemplary Staff • Health and Wellness
Goal E: Ensure the effective use of available resources to maximize efficiency in communication efforts	• An Exemplary Staff • Effective and Efficient Operations

How Do We Know We Have Achieved Success?

- **Increased positive image and satisfaction with ACPS**, as measured by:
  - A higher percentage of students staying in ACPS at critical transitions (middle and high school)
  - An increase in the 2016 – 2018 TELL survey results around communications and communication support
  - An increase in positive responses to the ACPS brand year on year as benchmarked in annual teacher surveys, parent surveys and in the media

- **Increased trust and satisfaction with the timely, transparent and clear way that information is shared**, as measured by:
  - 90 percent of community stakeholders happy with the communication process at the end of each modernization project
  - ACPS is viewed in a positive light by 90 percent of our educational partners and business partners
  - The implementation of a clear color-coded emergency system with an incident complaints-rate of less than one percent and increased emergency communication in our four main languages
  - All schools equipped and trained in the tools necessary to keep their families informed
  - 100 percent increase in usability of the new website over the current website

- **Increased community engagement**, as measured through:
  - Increasing video output by 100 percent, increasing engagement via video by 100 percent and increasing click and open rates for ACPS Express and ACPS Insider by 50 percent
  - A 100 percent increase in the output of school-based news and information
  - Establishing and maintaining active social media accounts in Spanish and a 100 percent increase in the amount of material put out in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic
  - Year on year increase in the number of people attending similar division-wide events
  - Consistent 90 percent positive media coverage, an increased presence in the Spanish media and The Washington Post

- **Increased sense of development and growth by the Communications Team**, as measured by:
  - Positive team feedback via an annual SWOT analysis

Implementation: How We Get There

This operational plan focuses on the high priority areas that Communications will need to put in place in order to reach each goal.

Communications Goal A

Ensure confidence in ACPS by providing stakeholders with access to information about key issues through consistent, inclusive, accessible, transparent, two-way, open and timely communication

This goal supports the following ACPS 2020 goals:
- *Family and Community Engagement:* Partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.
- *Facilities and the Learning Environment:* Provide optimal and equitable learning environments.
- *Effective and Efficient Operations:* Efficient, effective and transparent in business operations

Strategies (We will reach this goal by...)

- **Supporting school modernization efforts by ensuring community engagement, support and trust are maintained throughout the process by promoting the concept of transparency around modernization**
- **Ensuring transparent and effective emergency communications**
- **Increasing the use of current communications tools to more efficiently and effectively share information in a transparent way to ensure accountability and public trust**

Implementation Tactics (What actions will we take to achieve this goal?)

Develop the Website as a Welcoming, Self-Explanatory Portal

From February 2016 to December 2016, the website will undergo a complete redesign to bring it into line with current technology, improve efficiency, and allow public access to better and more timely content. The more intuitive design and backend will empower schools and departments to update and own the information posted on their pages, with training and coaching provided by the communications team.

The new website will go online over the winter break and will be managed and owned by the Office of Communications, with support from Tech Services. This will be an additional new responsibility for the Office of Communications and will require restructuring staff in order to manage the extra tasks involved.

Expand the Use of School and Department-Produced eNewsletters

Increase targeted communications to specific audiences by working with schools and departments to continue to train them on the eNewsletter platform and coach them to develop eNewsletters to meet their communications needs. Work with school PR liaisons to ensure news is collected, researched, written and posted on school eNewsletters.

Encourage Community Engagement and Trust by Promoting Transparency around Modernization

We will continue to:

- Support and have Communications presence at all advisory group and community meetings.
- Supply mechanisms for public to share comments, ask questions and give feedback. Responses given within 48 hours.
- Post all public documents and videos in full online and via email updates.
- Maintain email subscription list for regular updates, feedback.

Regularly assess and revise emergency communications to ensure they are up-to-date, efficient and effective

- Expand emergency communications to reach households in their preferred language
- Translate all emergency communications into Spanish
- Develop and introduce color-coded emergency alert system
- Schedule regular drills to evaluate responses to various emergency situations
- Ensure integration of ACPS emergency communications with city-wide agencies

What Does Success Look Like?

90 percent of community stakeholders happy with the communication process at the end of each modernization project. *This will be assessed through a survey conducted at the end of each community engagement process.*

The implementation of an emergency plan that can be understood by all regardless of language and is trusted by the majority of stakeholders, according to complaints data collected for emergencies.

All schools will be equipped and trained in the tools necessary to keep their families informed.

On time delivery of the new website with an increased usability rate of 100 percent over the previous website. *This will be measured through three usability testing sessions with a broad selection of stakeholders at the beginning, middle and end of the website development.*

Communications Goal B
Ensure the ACPS community has timely access to the information and support needed for all students to succeed academically

This goal supports the following ACPS 2020 goals:
- *Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:* Every student academically successful and prepared for life, work and college
- *Family and Community Engagement:* Partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth

Strategies (We will reach this goal by...)

- **Partnering with families and the community to ensure the mission statement and vision statements of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan are met**
- **Meeting our community where they are (provide information and resources in the ways and places that are relevant to them)**

Implementation Tactics (What actions will we take to achieve this goal?)

Reassess Strategic Value of ACPS-TV
We will conduct structured research over three months to collect data around the current and prospective use of ACPS-TV to determine a course of action regarding the long-term focus of ACPS-TV resources.

Increase Usage of Video to Inform and Engage
- Assess the video needs of communications and devise a plan to create video that is designed to move, motivate and engage.
- Work with existing staff and freelance videographers to enhance video content by producing short, creative videos to hold attention, designed with social media in mind and posted immediately. This would enable us to quickly share video content that users can access on the device of their preference on Twitter, Facebook and Storify with video content uploaded to the ACPS-TV YouTube account.
- Create a series of professional videos for each school, highlighting their strengths and capturing the feel of each school. These videos would be posted on the schools' websites and used at back-to-school nights, formal public events and community-wide events to promote the schools' image and provide the community with a more intimate portrait of the schools and the families they serve.

Increase Strategic Digital Media Use
Design a strategic plan for digital media to:

- Teach social media responsibility to students and offer guidance to staff and parents
- Provide access to social media in schools and provide training tools to effectively manage its use
- Use the best media available to distribute video
- Provide social and digital media training for communications staff to maximize use of digital media tools in all communications roles
- Explore trends in new and growing digital media tools and their applications for staff and school use

Enhance existing video production by:

- Employing two interns from the TV production classes to assist ACPS-TV with filming live events, providing them with opportunities to learn and work
- Providing training to the interns to enhance the quality of live video output produced for ACPS-TV and maximize opportunities to use video footage to reach targeted audiences

- Increasing the number and type of events from which ACPS streams live on Periscope or Channel 71, including community meetings, graduation, concerts and sporting events

Increase Community Engagement with Non-English-Speaking ACPS Families

- Increase digital media presence in languages other than English
- Attend regular FACE Center meetings in the community to carry the message about divisonwide projects/developments/updates
- Translate all emergency communications into Spanish
- Translate more material into Arabic and Amharic
- Offer translated versions of ACPS material, fliers, handbooks as standard
- Increase the number of languages we offer for interpretation at events
- Hold weekly meeting with FACE staff to increase collaboration and integrate our efforts
- Encourage FACE staff to review all communication plans prior to execution to add FACE Center activities into the plan and to ensure consistency of action plans across ACPS
- Support the 13 school parent liaisons to train and coach them in communication tools, including social media and eNewsletters
- Work with parent liaisons at schools to ensure material is available in the languages required by families
- Offer registration for interpretation services for languages other than Amharic, Arabic and Spanish for events
- Continue to produce and print the Family Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, Program of Studies, fliers and FAQs in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic as well as English

Expand social media accounts to additional languages

- Set up Twitter account in Spanish
- Post on ACPS Facebook page in Arabic and Spanish

What Does Success Look Like?

Increase video output by 100 percent *(from an average of 6 videos per month to 12 videos per month,)* **and increase engagement via video by 100 percent** *(from an average of 74 views per video per month to 150 views per video per month).*

Increase click and open rates for ACPS Express and ACPS Insider by 50 percent.

- *ACPS Express currently has a click rate of 5.5 percent and an open rate of 30 percent. These would increase to 8 percent and 45 percent by July 2018.*
- *ACPS Insider currently has a click rate of 8 percent and an open rate of 12.6 percent. These would increase to 12 percent and 19 percent by July 2018.*

Consistently maintain a less than one percent complaint rate for late information of any kind including weather emergencies. *This is measured by tracking complaints data as of February 2016.*

A 100 percent increase in the output of school-based news and information. *This is tracked by measuring the output of each school prior to the launch of the PR Liaison program and monthly thereafter.*

Increase the amount of material put out in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic by 100 percent. *Currently, Communications requested an average of one piece of translated material per month in 2015. This will increase to a minimum of 2 pieces of material per month being translated into Spanish, Amharic and Arabic.*

Establish active social media accounts in Spanish.

Communications Goal C
Foster strong relationships that promote high stakeholder engagement in public education in the community

This goal supports the following ACPS 2020 goal:
- *Family and Community Engagement:* Partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.

Strategies (We will reach this goal by...)

- **Keeping the community informed of resources they need when they need them to be able to support the ACPS mission through real and active engagement**

Implementation Tactics (What actions will we take to achieve this goal?)

Promote Educational Partnerships
- Promote educational partnerships by highlighting their contributions to our schools through video, eNewsletters, and digital media posts

Foster Business Partnerships
- Support the Office of Business Development in developing partnerships with local businesses
- Foster relationships and partnerships with the business community and business leaders to strengthen connections with the wider-Alexandria community and capitalize on the benefits they can bring to our schools

Promote and Foster Relationships with Media
- Maintain and foster relationships with local media organizations (newspapers, blogs, Washington Post)
- Develop relationships with The Washington Post reporters in areas other than education to cross purpose our news

- Develop relationships with national media to enable better placement of stories
- Develop relationships with Spanish media to boost coverage of ACPS events and news in Spanish

What Does Success Look Like?

ACPS is viewed in a positive light by 90 percent of our educational partners and business partners. *This will be assessed by regular surveys with partners.*

The Office of Communications is working directly with the Office of Business Development and Partnerships to support an increase in positive outcomes for ACPS.

90 percent of all media stories relating to ACPS are positive. *This is measured via the data dashboard where media stories are tracked weekly.*

A 100 percent increase in the number of stories in Spanish media. *This is currently 2-3 per year. The number would rise to 4-6.*

A 100 percent increase in the number of positive stories about ACPS in the Washington Post. *This is currently 0 – 2 per year and will increase to a minimum of 4 per year.*

Communications Goal D
Ensure ACPS is viewed as an attractive place for teachers and families and maintains a positive reputation in the wider ACPS community/Northern Virginia community

This goal supports the following ACPS 2020 goals:
- *Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:* Every student academically successful and prepared for life, work and college
- *An Exemplary Staff:* Recruit, develop, support and retain a staff that meets the needs of every student.
- *Health and Wellness:* Promote efforts to enable students to be healthy and ready to learn

Strategies (We will reach this goal by…)

- **Promoting ACPS as an attractive place for teachers and families, bolstering teacher retention and recruitment and ensuring that the academic and other needs of every student are met by the school**
- **Expanding our ability to tell our own stories through collaboration with school PR liaisons, parent liaisons, FACE and students via classroom programs**

Implementation Tactics (What actions will we take to achieve this goal?)

Design and Implement an ACPS Alumni Campaign to Boost the Titan Pride Brand
- Continue to boost ACPS alumni, which helps promote the *Titan Pride* brand and helps families feel part of a larger successful community
- Launch alumni campaigns, highlighting the successes and stories of our alumni
- Host Twitter chats with famous alumni
- Set up alumni database

Boost Media Coverage across Northern Virginia and National Media Presence
- Profile Superintendent in The Washington Post
- Cultivate and nurture connections to encourage a channel for story ideas
- Increase national media coverage to boost the status of ACPS

Strengthen the Public Image of the Superintendent
This increases the visibility and awareness of the ACPS brand.
- Revise of State-of-Schools message: One spoken State-of-Schools presentation per year by the Superintendent, followed by a written presentation to be published in local newspapers, blogs, ACPS Express and ACPS Insider; supported by a survey handed out at the same time for immediate feedback
- Increase the visibility of the Superintendent by providing more avenues for discussion/feedback and increased engagement
- Broadcast Superintendent's Chats live on social media
- Offer Twitter chats or webinars as alternatives for those who cannot attend in person. Take questions that can be answered in real time by the Superintendent
- Submit regular newspaper columns to the Alexandria Gazette
- Secure school profiles in The Washington Post
- Increase the number of speaking engagements and appearances at conferences

Strengthen Understanding of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan and Brand
- Continue to work with each goal owner to ensure the Strategic Plan is both known and understood by both the external and internal audiences. The Strategic Plan campaign will focus around breaking down the meaning of *Every Student Succeeds* into *What does the Strategic Plan mean for me?*
- Continue to ensure strong consistent messaging around the Strategic Plan to promote it as an integral part of the work of ACPS.
- Monitor brand mentions and keep the ACPS 2020 brand as a talking point in the media.

Develop Branding for Individual Schools
- Work with the principals and PR Liaisons to identify the strengths of their school and develop a brand for each school
- Develop a video for each school that can be shown at open houses and events that promotes the individual school brand

Visual Rebranding

Conduct soundings and research on the ACPS brand with the intention to visually rebrand ACPS in the next two years.

- Obtain Board approval for rebranding initiative
- Conduct research to inform rebranding process
- Appoint internal staff committee to oversee the process: 'Picture of the Future Committee'
- Procure a design - new visual identity (logo, colors)
- Develop plan for integration of new visual identity into branding throughout the division

Boost the perception of ACPS with school rating websites and best places to work listings
- Collaborate with Human Resources to determine feasibility and propose a plan to get ACPS listed on the "best places to work" lists.
- Boost ACPS presence on the GreatSchools website and other survey websites for schools.
- Continue to develop on-boarding check-sheet and training for new members of the Communications team

What Does Success Look Like?

Increase in the TELL survey results around communications and communication support

Establish a credible database for T.C. Williams High School alumni

Year on year increase in the number of people attending similar division-wide events

Increased positive response to the ACPS brand year on year as benchmarked in annual teacher surveys, parent surveys and media TAG clouds

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Communications Goal E
Ensure the effective use of available resources to maximize efficiency in communication efforts

This goal supports the following ACPS 2020 goals:
- *An Exemplary Staff:* Recruit, develop, support and retain a staff that meets the needs of every student
- *Effective and Efficient Operations:* Efficient, effective, and transparent business operations

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Strategies (We will reach this goal by...)

- **Consistently collecting and using data to analyze strategic decisions**

- **Coaching, training and empowering staff to communicate clearly, concisely, effectively and on a timely basis**
- **Realigning and training communications team to be able to better cross-purpose in their roles**

Implementation Tactics (What actions will we take to achieve this goal?)

Strengthen Systems for Evaluating Performance and Growth
- Conduct research and use existing data to drive decision-making processes
- Regularly conduct surveys that assess brand and engagement
- Expand the use of data dashboard tool to inform team meetings and assessments

Expand the Reach of Communications by Empowering, Training and Coaching ACPS Staff in Communications Tools
- Create an additional layer of Blackboard Connect training to include guidelines on when to send robocalls, emails and texts
- Offer bi-annual training sessions to school staff on technical use and best practices for using the ACPS eNewsletter platform, Mailchimp
- Provide training and guidance for posting school and department content on new ACPS and school websites
- Offer structured training on social media
- Provide quarterly check-ins with Mac TV and Tucker TV staff concerning equipment needs and staff training needs to ensure the continued success of their TV stations

Develop a Communication Services Toolkit
Create an online toolkit for staff, *What Can Communications Do For You?*

- Emergency and Crisis Communications 101
- "The Media and You"
- Link to AV forms
- Link to video requests
- Link to notification requests
- Criteria for ACPS Express
- Criteria for ACPS Insider
- Graphic design requests
- Training we offer
- Create a video that explains all of our services
- Create FAQs for staff on services offered by Communications
- Individualize the tool kits according to each department/schools
- Post the tool kit on Blackboard

Set up a prioritization system for communication projects so that the most urgent can be completed quickly

Launch School PR Liaison program

Develop, design and launch the School PR Liaison program, in which a designated staff person at each school serves as a liaison between their school and the Communication department and a link to the community for that school. This will enable schools to provide targeted communications to their individual school audiences. Provide quarterly training sessions and evaluation and coaching throughout the year as needed.

Promote the ACPS Office of Communications as a National Benchmark for Best Practices

- Build expertise across ACPS in certain areas of Communications (eNewsletters/data collection/emergency communications/innovative community engagement) and present at the Chesapeake Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (CHESPRA) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) so that we become a key resource for best-practices
- Regularly apply for awards

Formalize Standard Processes for All Aspects of Communications Work

- Document standard processes for running campaigns
- Develop standard checklists for event planning, execution and management
- Standardize processes for pushing out notifications and alerts
- Create a centralized location to store all checklists/processes with easy access by all team members

Boost Training Opportunities for Communications Staff

Ensure all members of the team have the opportunity to receive training both internally and professional development externally to ensure their own goals are met and that they continue to develop as individuals.

- Provide staff with membership to relevant professional development associations
- Participate in local chapter activities, events and learning opportunities
- Attend CHESPRA's two one-day conferences each year as a team
- Attend NSPRA's annual conference for professional development (public relations specialists)
- Enable production team to attend production conferences
- Ensure time is allocated for in-house training courses for the team
- Focus on training to realign technical skillsets to bring them up to date
- Ensure time is allocated by Director of Communications to coach and train admin and casual PR specialists
- Assess feasibility of realigning task assignments and roles in line with skillsets and modern communications needs

What Does Success Look Like?

100 percent increase in the effective collection of communications data

90 percent positive feedback in training availability and usefulness

All members of the communications team cross-trained, working as a cohesive team as shown by a 25 percent decrease in the negative aspects of the annual SWOT analysis in both 2017 and 2018

All members of the communications team attend external training or a conference once a year and bring one idea each from that training or conference to improve the workings of the department

Implementation Timeline

Communications Goals	Feb '16	Mar '16	Apr '16	May '16	Jun '16	Jul '16	Aug '16	Sep '16	Oct '16	Nov '16	Dec '16	Jan '17	Feb '17	Mar '17	Apr '17	May '17	Jun '17	Jul '17	Aug '17	Sep '17	Oct '17	Nov '17	Dec '17	Jan '18	Feb '18	Mar '18	Apr '18	May '18	Jun '18	Jul '18	Aug '18	Sept '18
Develop the website as a welcoming, self-explanatory portal	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																					
Encourage community trust through transparency modernization	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Regularly review emergency communications						█				█									█			█										█
Reassess strategic value of ACPS-TV			█	█	█																											
Increase usage of video to inform and engage						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Increase strategic digital media use	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█			
Increase engagement w/ non-English speaking families						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█					
Translate more material into Amharic, Arabic and Spanish						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Set up social media accounts in Spanish						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Expand the use of school/dept produced eNewsletters	█	█	█	█	█	█																										
Promote and foster educational partnerships						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Promote and foster business partnerships						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Promote and foster relationships with media	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Design and Implement and ACPS Alumni Campaign						█	█	█	█									█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Boost Washington Post coverage across Northern VA						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Strengthen the public image of the Superintendent						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Strengthen understanding of ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Develop Individual branding for schools						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█															
Visual rebranding																		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Boost ACPS presence on website listings						█												█									█					
Strengthen systems for evaluating performance and growth						█												█									█					
Empower ACPS staff by boosting staff training/opportunities						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Develop communications services toolkit						█												█														
Launch PR Liaison program						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Promote communications as a national benchmark						█												█														
Formalize standard process for all aspects of comm. work						█												█														
Boost training opportunities for communications staff						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

Research Used to Steer Communications Strategy

Research was compiled on every currently used communication platform in order to paint as complete a picture as possible of communication trends and ACPS engagement levels. The Office of Communications has been collating data on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, ACPS Express and ACPS Insider for the past 6 months.

This data will be used to benchmark percentage point growth across each of the five communication goals. Both qualitative and quantitative data and information from this section will be used in the benchmarking the evaluation process.

ACPS Express and Insider were launched in September and November 2015 respectively. Previously, the joint internal/external Daily Digest email newsletter was sent to 2,400 subscribers plus 2,400 staff.

ACPS Express and ACPS Insider allow ACPS to differentiate between internal and external audiences and target communications toward them separately.

ACPS has criteria that postings have to be of divisionwide relevance, of divisionwide interest and/or promote the ACPS brand of *Every Student Succeeds*. A weekly ACPS Express email goes out each Monday morning to all ACPS parents with an email address listed in PowerSchool, plus any other parents or community members who self subscribe. There is also an option to sign up for daily updates rather than weekly. A weekly ACPS Insider email goes out to all ACPS staff on Monday morning.

Review of External/Internal Communications
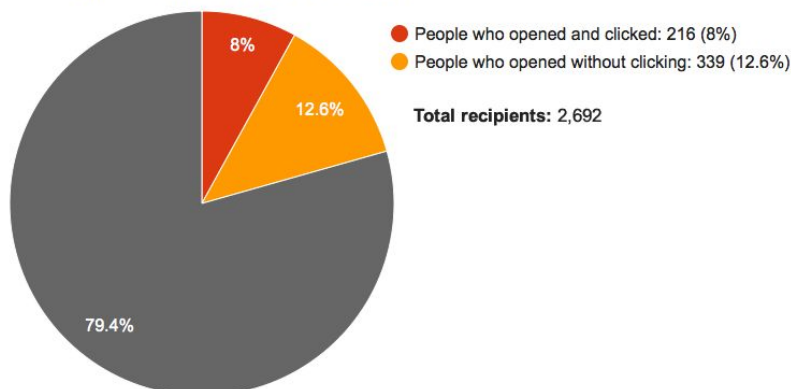
ACPS Express (external newsletter):

ACPS Express: People who clicked (Averages)

- 5.5%
- 30%
- 64.4%

People who opened and clicked: 411 (5.5%)
People who opened without clicking: 2231 (30%)

Total recipients: 7,428
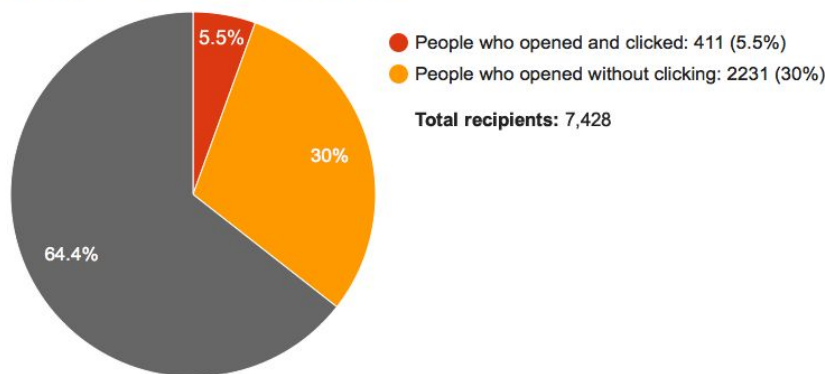
ACPS Insider (internal newsletter):

ACPS Insider: People who clicked (Averages)

- People who opened and clicked: 216 (8%)
- People who opened without clicking: 339 (12.6%)

Total recipients: 2,692

Press releases:

This traditional method of publishing news serves the purpose of formulating a formal message that reaches City Council and key community partners, but rarely communicates the message on its own to the wider ACPS and Alexandria population. ACPS is limiting its use of press releases and instead reserving them for heavyweight announcements. They are then reprinted in ACPS Express and ACPS Insider.

Twitter:

Twitter has continued its rapid increase in followers.

- July 2014: 3,600 followers
- July 2015: 7,200 followers
- February 2016: 10,100 followers

Instead of measuring the number of followers, however, it is more valuable to measure the number of engagements. This is represented by the sum of link clicks, retweets, likes and replies. This gives a more accurate picture of how many people are actually engaging with us via Twitter.

The data shows that there are spikes related to weather emergencies. However, the data clearly shows that our engagement and reach (impressions) on Twitter has been considerably higher than it was last year at the same time. This is due to a concerted effort and multiple campaigns directed at engaging the ACPS audience.

Twitter: 2-year engagement comparison
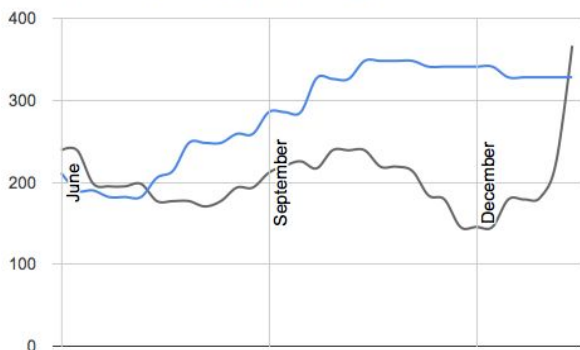
Twitter: 2-year impressions comparison
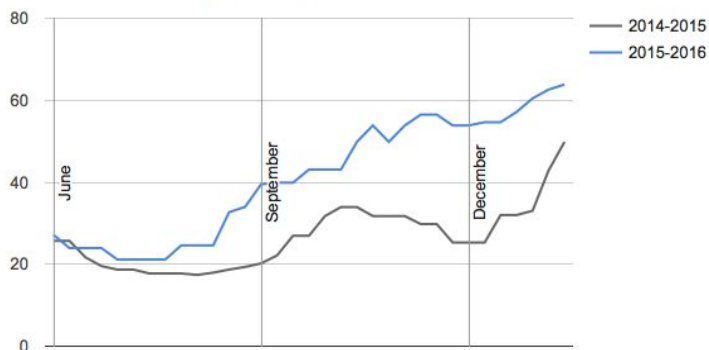
ACPS Twitter followers are 52 percent male, 48 percent female, 49 percent single (possibly indicative of students) and 17 percent have a $1 million or more net worth. ACPS now has a verified Twitter account, which makes our account the definitive, official ACPS account.

Data shows us that the best times to tweet are 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on a Monday, between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on other weekdays or around 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Sundays.

Storify:

Storify (www.storify.com/acpsk12) allows ACPS to collate social media posts and web content, compile them into a story about an event and resend out to the public audience via Twitter, Facebook, ACPS Express, ACPS Insider and the ACPS website. These stories attract large numbers of viewers, likely due to the fact they are a strong, visual form of community engagement. The ACPS community sees their own tweets and messages publicized via Storify.

Stories covered via Storify:

- *ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan launch:* 808 views
- *Titans sporting wins:* 305 views in less than 24 hours
- *T.C. Williams famous alumni roundups:* 762 views and 308 views
- *T.C. Williams sports signings:* 391 views
- *T.C. Williams 50th anniversary:* 598 views
- *Athletic Hall of Fame:* 476 views
- *National History Day:* 358 views
- *Snowzilla roundup:* 1,131 views
- *School Board induction:* 521 views
- *Scottish Walk:* 560 views
- *Redistricting Twitter Townhall:* 367 views
- *Walk to School Day:* 404 views
- *Power outage disruptions:* 431 views
- *Back to school night:* 302 views

- ***First day of school for 2015-16:*** 1,005 views

Facebook:

The number of people who "like" the ACPS Facebook page has also continued to rise rapidly.

- July 2014: 760 likes
- July 2015: 1,850 likes
- February 2016: 2,700 likes

ACPS now has a verified Facebook page, which makes our account the definitive, official ACPS account, and allows our account to show up higher in search results.

The majority of current ACPS Facebook users are women ages 25-34 (36 percent), likely to indicate a representation of both mothers and staff. The majority of people access Facebook through a mobile device.

Data shows us that the best time to be on Facebook is between 8:30 a.m. and 9 p.m. and is consistent throughout the day.

YouTube:

YouTube has seen a 22 percent increase in total views and 18 percent increase in subscribers since July 2015. The ACPS-TV YouTube channel is a convenient place to host video material that is shown elsewhere on Twitter, Facebook, the ACPS website, ACPS Express and ACPS Insider. The increase can largely be accounted for by the increase in media platforms and archive data on which video is shown (Twitter/Facebook/Storify/ACPS-TV).

The most popular recent videos to be viewed are the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan video (435 views), and the 2016 Hall of Fame video (230 views). The all-time most popular videos continue to be seminar sessions, including a presentation on how to stimulate your gifted child.

Research indicates that more viewers are watching videos on mobile devices and tablets. Half of ACPS-TV YouTube viewers are 18 to 34 years old, with the next highest group aged 35-44 years old (18.6 percent).

ACPS-TV:

Alexandria City Public Schools has been hosting a TV channel on Comcast Channel 71 for the past 17 years. At the time of its launch in 1999, TV viewership was increasing each year and looked set to continue.

When the new T.C. Williams High School building was built in 2007, the design included a large TV studio. However, although this studio looks modern on the surface, the equipment was not replaced at this time and much of it is 17 years old. This equipment is expensive to repair or replace when it breaks because it is now out-dated. Because of its age, the equipment is starting to break on a regular basis. Budget requests to upgrade the entire TV studio have been rejected by the leadership team in the past three years.

Modern recording equipment records in High Definition (HD). The TV studio cameras are not equipped to film in HD. The ACPS-TV channel continues to show material in Standard Definition mode because Comcast continues to transmit in Standard Definition.

In fall 2015, the Office of Communications purchased one HD video camera for use in the production of high quality creative video material. ACPS also has a limited ability to edit material in HD.

The Office of Communications has some limited data available via Comcast to assess recent viewing trends.

The trends show that of those surveyed by Comcast, who said they watched ACPS-TV:

- The percentage who said they have ever watched ACPS-TV for School Board meetings:

  48 percent in 2012

  52 percent in 2014

  49 percent in 2015

- The percentage who said they have watched programs on ACPS-TV has fallen over the same period:

  21 percent in 2012

  16 percent in 2014

  11 percent in 2015

- The percentage of viewers who have no children in ACPS has also changed:

  6 percent in 2012

  12 percent in 2014

  9 percent in 2015

Comcast, which distributes ACPS-TV, has 55,000 subscribers. There is no precise data for how many watch ACPS-TV.

ACPS website:

The ACPS division public homepage (www.acps.k12.va.us) received an average of 90,366 page requests per month in 2015. This average excludes internal traffic.

Feedback also shows us that this is the first impression that outsiders have of ACPS and many parents and community members also regularly use our website. This is currently in the process of being redesigned.

Page Requests to homepage only (www.acps.k12.va.us) *Does not include internal requests (devices on the ACPS network, in ACPS schools and offices)*

2014	Number of page requests
January	220,564
February	159, 749
March	198,573
April	57,498
May	57,590
June	55,721
July	53,731
August	66,751
September	71,775
October	65,548
November	59,103
December	48,768
2015	**Number of page requests**
January	276,117
February	76,243
March	159,016
April	69,505
May	70,453
June	67,599
July	51,628
August	69,531
September	71,974
October	57,540

November	65,170
December	49,617

Most active month in 2014 is January: 220,117 requests handled.
2014 monthly average: 92,947 requests handled

Most active month in 2015 is January: 276,117 requests handled.
2015 monthly average: 90,366 requests handled

ACPS Mobile App:

The ACPS mobile app launched in September 2015 and is available on Android and iOS devices. It can be used to receive notifications, track lunch money, see breakfast and lunch menus, give feedback, see divisionwide news, view the ACPS Events Calendar, log in to Blackboard for Parents, see sports scores, and link to the ACPS Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages. The app has been download 1,713 times.

Media

Local newspapers:

The two local newspapers are still a place where a large percent of key community members and ACPS staff and families get their information.

- **Alexandria Times:** 19,300 readership

  9,700 copies delivered to homes in zip codes 22314, 22301, 22302, 22305 in Alexandria

  9,600 copies delivered to high traffic areas in 13 other zip codes

- **Alexandria Gazette:** 20,625 readership for zip codes 22301, 22302, 22304, 22305, 22311, 22314

  Statistics show their biggest readership is people with children. The Alexandria gazette has increased its readership by 9,000 since July 2015.

The Office of Communications has built strong relationships with reporters and editors at both newspapers. The School Board Chair has a regular monthly column in the Alexandria Times and the Alexandria Gazette is willing to take columns from the Superintendent whenever we supply them.

The Washington Post: ACPS regularly features in The Washington Post. Articles are becoming more positive and regular as relationships are built and maintained with reporters.

The Washington Post is a trusted source of news for the ACPS community. It is also read widely by other communities across Northern Virginia and is the perfect place to pitch ACPs success stories that may help boost recruitment.

Local television channels: NBC4, ABC7, WTOP and WUSA9 regularly pick up on ACPS stories.

Local Spanish-speaking media: Telemundo regularly carries ACPS stories.

News Coverage
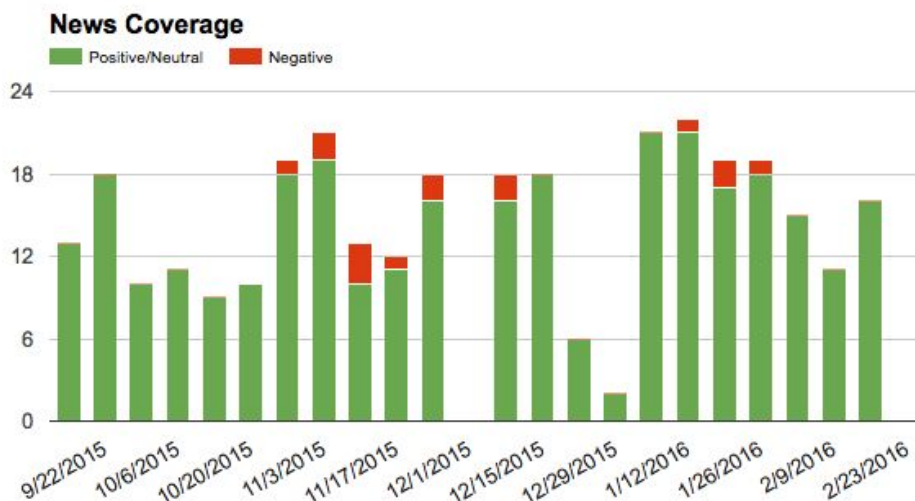
The majority of negative coverage is letters to the editor (Patrick Henry/ T.C. Stadium/Academic Performance)

Surveys

There is insufficient data from surveys to paint a full picture of ACPS from surveys. There is only one question in a past survey that is useful from a communications perspective.

The Middle School Survey conducted in December 2013 asked teachers if they would send their own child to an ACPS middle school. While a high number said they enjoyed working at ACPs middle schools (75 percent), 37 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they would send their own child to an ACPS middle school. 27 percent were neutral while 36 percent said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Three questions in the 2016 Curriculum Survey, conducted in February 2016, will help assess the ACPS brand image. The results of this survey will be published in June 2016.

Translation

During 2015, The Office of Communications requested translation services 11 times. The total cost of all the services was $15,277.13.

Emergency communications were not translated as standard until September 2015. A member of the Central Office admin staff translates emergency as a favor. As of September 2015, A FACE employee is paid overtime to do weather emergency translation.

Emergency Messages

ACPS Communications has sent out the following emergency messages via Blackboard Connect since November 2014 when we started using this method of emergency communication:

2014-15 (November 2014 - June 2015): 63 emergency messages

2015-16 (July 2015 - February 2016): 44 emergency messages

This includes weather, lock-ins, evacuations and other crisis communications. This does not include outreach communications, such as event reminders.