



*Every Student Succeeds*



Alexandria City Public Schools Office of Communications

# Strategic Communications Plan

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## 2018-20





## CONTENTS

<b>Overview</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key Research Findings</b>	<b>3</b>
Distribution of Information	3
External distribution of information	3
Internal distribution of information	4
Engagement	4
External Engagement	5
Community Outreach	11
AV/Production Support and Coverage	11
ACPS Image and Reputation	12
National Citizen Survey	12
ACPS 2020 survey	12
Media analysis	12
Superintendent Image	12
Internal Confidence in ACPS	12
<b>Analysis</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Audience Identification, Profile and Analysis</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Goal</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Evaluation: What Does Good Communications Look Like?</b>	<b>19</b>



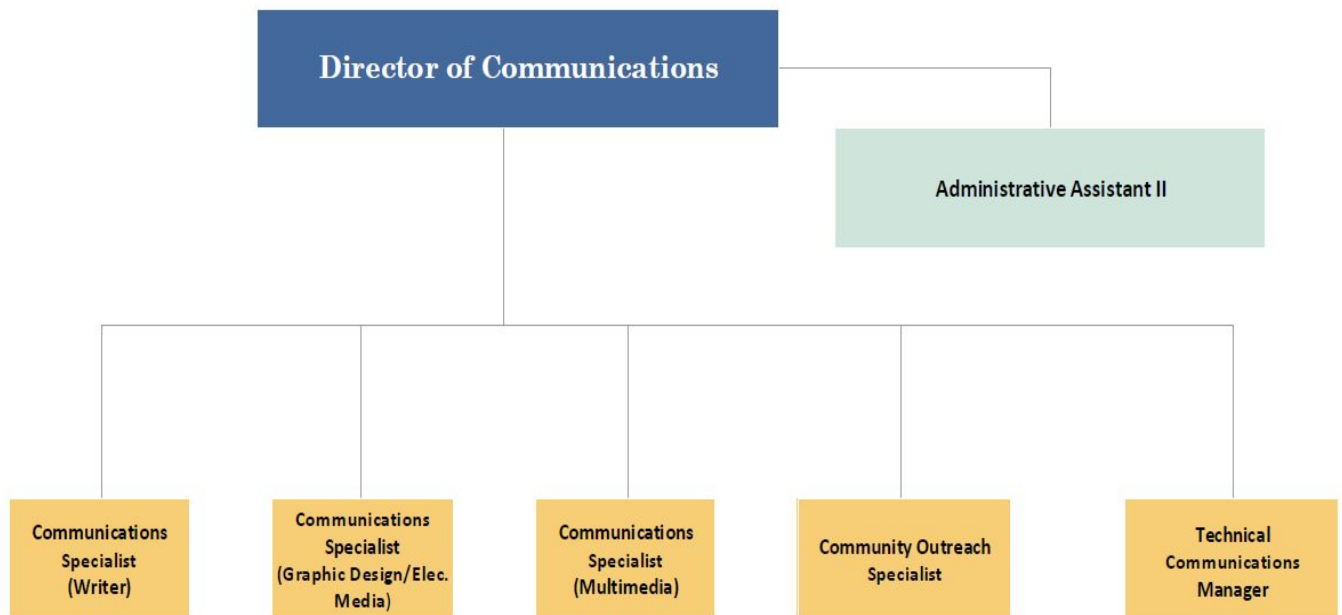
## Overview

The communication strategy for 2018-20 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, in line with Goal 2 of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan.

Effective communication is critical to the ongoing success of ACPS, its programs and ultimately student success. The Office of Communications:

- Provides families with critical and timely information, which can play into student success
- Supports the building and fostering of relationships through engagement that encourages families and the wider community to feel engaged with their schools
- Fosters pride in the school division so that parents and the community are more likely to support it
- Promotes ACPS programs, initiatives and services to enhance community confidence in public education and foster pride

## Structure of the Office





### Key Research Findings

Relevant research findings have been divided into three areas, with the idea that the three areas flow naturally from one another when properly implemented.

**Distribution of information:** Measures the availability of internal and external communication channels and the ability of ACPS to distribute information to both internal and external audiences

**Engagement:** Measures internal and external levels of engagement in the context that engagement is vital to effective communication and delivery of the ACPS message

**ACPS Image and reputation:** Tracks how ACPS is viewed in the community from a long-term perspective

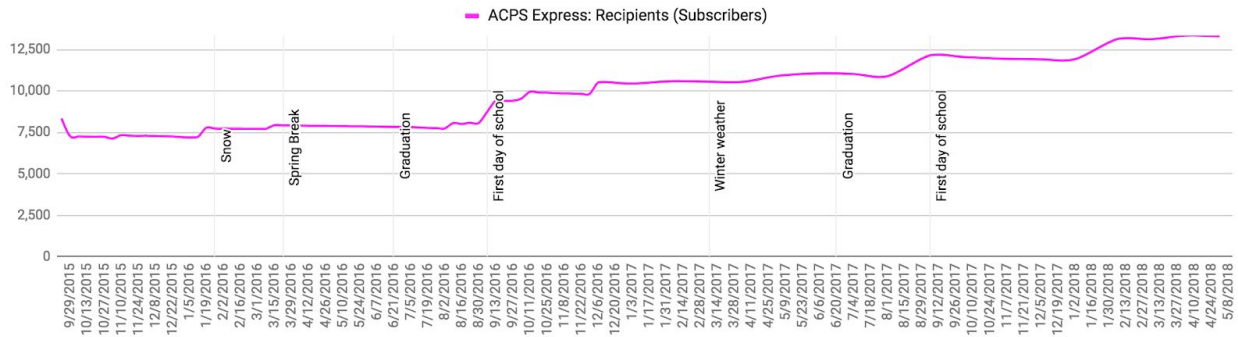


## Distribution of Information

### External distribution of information

ACPS Express currently has 13,290 subscribers, who receive a weekly email with four to five posts, the next ten upcoming division-wide calendar events, and current community fliers. An estimated 90 percent of the subscribers are parents and 10 percent are community members and media, who can opt in to receive this information.

ACPS Express



**Emergency communication channels:** ACPS responds to an average of one emergency communication situation per week. Approximately 12,333 staff, parents and community members have signed up to receive ACPS emergency email and text alerts via the City’s eNews system. This system provides alerts in a major or division-wide emergency situation only. In addition, parents only receive ACPS emergency alerts via Blackboard Connect email, text and phone call alerts. The Blackboard system allows ACPS to send notifications to a specific class or school or to the entire division. This is used for all emergency situations. Alerts are sent out in Spanish, English, Amharic and Arabic. ACPS also uses a phone hotline and local news media to communicate closings and delayed openings. Response to communication during emergencies is generally positive. It is rare that we receive complaints about the way in which a message was communicated. Complaints are usually about the issue itself. This is the reverse of the situation three years ago. The timeliness and accuracy of messages in a crisis remains critical to the image and reputation of ACPS.

**Website:** In the 2017-18 school year, the website received an average of 5,270 visits (sessions) each day.

- The web pages that have received the highest number of pageviews in the 2017-18 school year to date are:
- Homepage (30.28% of all pageviews)
- Canvas at ACPS (3.44% of all pageviews)
- Staff Links (2.51% of all pageviews)
- T.C. Williams Homepage (2.1% of all pageviews)

The goal of the web platform is to provide stakeholders with access to information about key issues through consistent, inclusive, accessible, transparent, two-way, open and timely communication.



- The Feedback/Contact Us form has increased responsiveness to issues across the division – approximately 10 emails regarding issues in other departments have been received this year through this avenue

Some issues remain since the launch of the new web platform in March 2017:

- Timeliness of the posting of vital presentations and information. Given the lack of a division webmaster, responsibility for this was designated to each department. However, although staff in all departments are trained how to post, a mindset remains that the public-facing part of the division belongs to the Office of Communications and ACPS staff is not proactive about posting information.
- In the past 12 months, accessibility has become a major concern for anyone managing a school or school district website. There is still a large amount of documents (PDFs) on the website that are not fully accessible in line with OCR guidelines.
- The Office of Communications has been using a contractor to maintain the website (approximately 16 hours a week) and has resolved some of these issues since April 2018. Although a contract position can do the posting and building of the sites, this person is not integrated into the daily happenings of ACPS and so content is still missed.

### Parent/Guardian Contact Data

- 4,195 out of 15,279 students (27.5%) have no parent email contact information in PowerSchool
- 3,867 out of 15,279 students (25.3%) have no parent cell phone number contact information in PowerSchool
- 1,709 out of 15,279 students (11.2%) have no parent cell phone number or email contact information in PowerSchool

Data collection remains an issue:

- Registrars have multiple other duties assigned to them and don't have enough time to input the contact information from the Welcome Packets
- Even if families update the information themselves online, the registrar has to sign off on the update before it is recognized in PowerSchool. This slows down the process considerably and sometimes does not happen at all. Parents assume they have updated their contact information yet don't receive emails and/or text messages. This erodes trust.
- The adverse political climate has impacted ACPS immigrant families who do not trust official organizations with their contact information/data. These families remain reluctant to share their personal information.

### Internal distribution of information

ACPS Insider is sent to all 2,700 staff weekly by email with four informational posts specifically relevant to them, plus ten upcoming division-wide calendar dates. Six staff members have opted out of receiving this in the past 12 months.



## Engagement

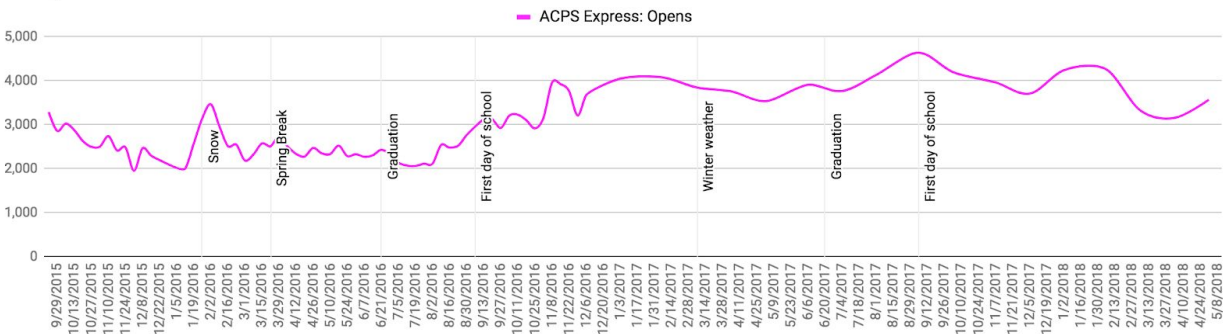
### External Engagement

ACPS Express: Data analysis of ACPS Express show that the popularity of posts depends on:

1. Relevancy
2. Association or connection to the reader
3. Power of the image, graphic, story

Recipients scroll all the way through the four or five posts each week, without preference for the order in which they are posted. The top post is often not the most clicked-on post.

ACPS Express

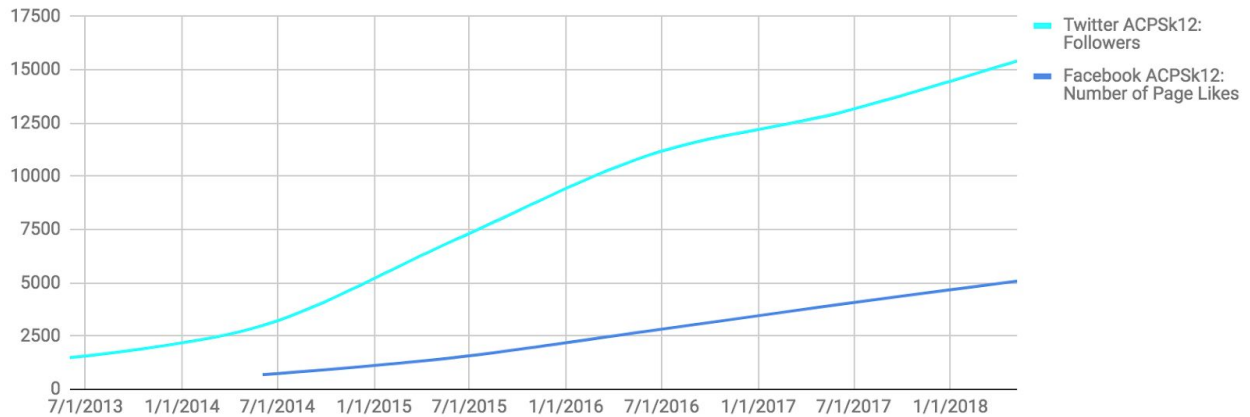


Social media: Although the number of followers/likes has increased by 33 percent for Facebook over the past twelve months, and by 85 percent over the past five years, close data monitoring shows that engagement on social media is cyclical. Engagement spikes primarily for:

1. weather emergencies
2. start of school
3. major media events
4. graduation



Followers on ACPSk12 Twitter and Facebook: June 2013 - May 2018



Twitter’s most successful posts:

Posts since July 1, 2017 with the most Likes:

- “It’s official! The Alexandria City School Board has chosen Ferdinand Day Elementary School...” received 190 likes
- TCWTitans student-athletes who signed with colleges received 150 likes
- “Surprise! Congratulations to Laura Simons @\_Simons\_says, our 2018 ACPS Teacher of the Year!” received 104 likes

Posts since July 1, 2017 with the most retweets:

- WEATHER ALERT: For 3/21/18 received 68 retweets
- WEATHER ALERT: For 3/2/2018 received 63 retweets
- TCWTitans student-athletes who signed with colleges received 61 retweets

Posts since July 1, 2017 with the most clicks:

- “January 5, 2018: ACPS schools are opening 2 hours late.” received 657 clicks
- Reminder on how to stay informed about ACPS weather emergencies received 382 clicks
- Letter regarding evacuation at Hammond Middle School received 364 clicks

Posts since July 1, 2017 with the most impressions:

- ACPS schools are opening 2 hours late, Thursday, January 4, 2018 received 18.1k impressions
- ACPS schools are opening 2 hours late, Friday, January 5, 2018 received 17.3k impressions
- WEATHER ALERT: For 3/22, ACPS schools will be opening 2 hours late received 16.9k impressions

Facebook’s most successful posts:

Posts with the largest reach:

- Superintendent search survey reached 42,000 people
- Introduction of the parent liaisons reached 23,000 people





- Resources about parenting and cell phone use reached 26,573 people
- Emergencies (both weather and other such as the SRO incident) reached an average of 5,900 people

NOTE: Using video on Facebook is particularly successful, working well with their algorithm of selecting posts.

Video/audio engagement across all platforms has increased dramatically from SY 2016-17 – SY 2017-18.

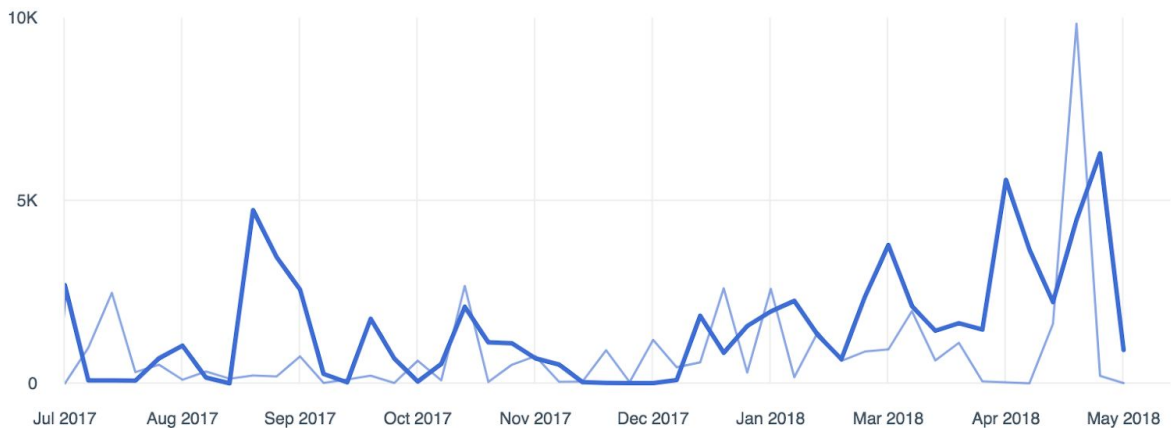
- YouTube views have increased by 13 percent from 54,000 from July 2016–April 2017 to 62,000 from July 2017-April 2018
- Videos posted on Vimeo (a new platform that allows for real-time adjustments) got 4,393 plays
- This school year is the first time that we’ve had a Spanish Language program as one of our top 10 most viewed videos on YouTube
- 2016-17: 193 views of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic videos; 2017-18: 14,700 views of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic videos
- More than 29,000 views were on a mobile phone
- The VOICES audio series, designed to tell the stories of our students and staff, has been highly successful since its launch in March 2018. VOICES is already becoming a recognizable brand in the community and the audio is shared wider as a podcast. See [www.acps.k12.va.us/voices](http://www.acps.k12.va.us/voices).
- Most played videos produced this year were:
  - T.C. Williams VS Mount Vernon Football Game
  - A Conversation about Gun Safety and the Safety of American Schools
  - Meet ACPS’ New Superintendent
  - “Manejo de la ansiedad en adolescentes/Managing Anxiety in Teens,” a program produced through the Parent Resource Center

### ACPSk12 Facebook Video Insights: July 1, 2017 - May 13, 2018

Jul 1, 2017 - May 12, 2018

**71,550 Video Views**    39,751 Previous Period

Breakdown: None ↕





## Most Viewed Videos on ACPSk12 Facebook: July 1, 2017 - May 13, 2018

Video	Published	Minutes Viewed	Video Views
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> 03/23/18 3:20PM	805	2.3K
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> 08/29/17 2:00PM	912	2.2K
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> 04/13/18 8:00AM	945	2K
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> 10/04/17 6:15AM	1.5K	1.9K
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> 03/09/18 12:24PM	2.3K	1.6K

### ACPS-TV

On March 1, 2018, ACPS re-launched ACPS-TV with a goal of better engaging, informing and serving consumers in the digital age (with content that is timely and relevant). The new-look TV is a combination of TV, bulletin board and marketing channel. It aligns ACPS-TV with the other ACPS communication tools, repurposing content from other channels while minimizing the cost to the taxpayer. It features videos that promote a positive image for the school division and promotes opportunities for students, the weather, upcoming events, news updates in English, Spanish, Arabic and Amharic, concert clips and student-produced content. EveryDay Titan and Mac-TV stream daily. The TV transitions to a full-screen format at 7 p.m. each evening to stream school board meetings and community meetings, long-format content produced by Theogony and the TV Production classes, and Smithsonian science programming content, obtained free from the Smithsonian Institute.

Comcast is unable to provide formal data around ACPS-TV viewership and all data is informal.

A combination of Comcast and national survey data shows that the number of viewers of government/educational channels is decreasing annually.

- A 2016 Comcast survey showed that approximately 5 percent of the Alexandria community has watched a School Board meeting or viewed ACPS-TV content.



- 5.3 percent of the wider community responding to the ACPS 2020 survey in 2017 said they found it useful.
- Only eight percent of current parents (2017) said they obtained information from ACPS-TV.

However, ACPS-TV is one of the ways that ACPS can reach the general Alexandria community, aside from targeted and specific outreach to certain community groups. Unlike Facebook, Twitter, the ACPS website or ACPS Express, the wider community is not asked to actively seek out information via this platform. Instead, they are most likely to access it for a few minutes while browsing other Comcast channels.

ACPS has explored the option of a shared channel with the City, but the practicalities of a shared channel (shared equipment, conflicting air time) were not regarded as reasonable. School Board meetings have been streamed live on Channel 71 since 1999 and this is a public service ACPS should continue. Last year, ACPS switched to a model of recording and producing live school board meetings and work sessions that allowed for closed captioning and improved on-demand online viewing. School Board meetings and all video material posted on the website is now captioned to meet web accessibility guidelines, with much of it translated into Spanish, Arabic and Amharic.

School Communications: From September 2017, all schools have had an electronic newsletter, Facebook account and Twitter, with School PR Liaisons trained and managed through the Office of Communications.

- School Twitter followers have increased from 4,418 in June 2016 to 10,537 in May 2018
- School Facebook followers have increased from 2,809 in June 2016 to 9,242 in May 2018
- The number of non-staff subscribers regularly reached via school newsletters is currently 11,011

Some issues remain with school newsletter communications:

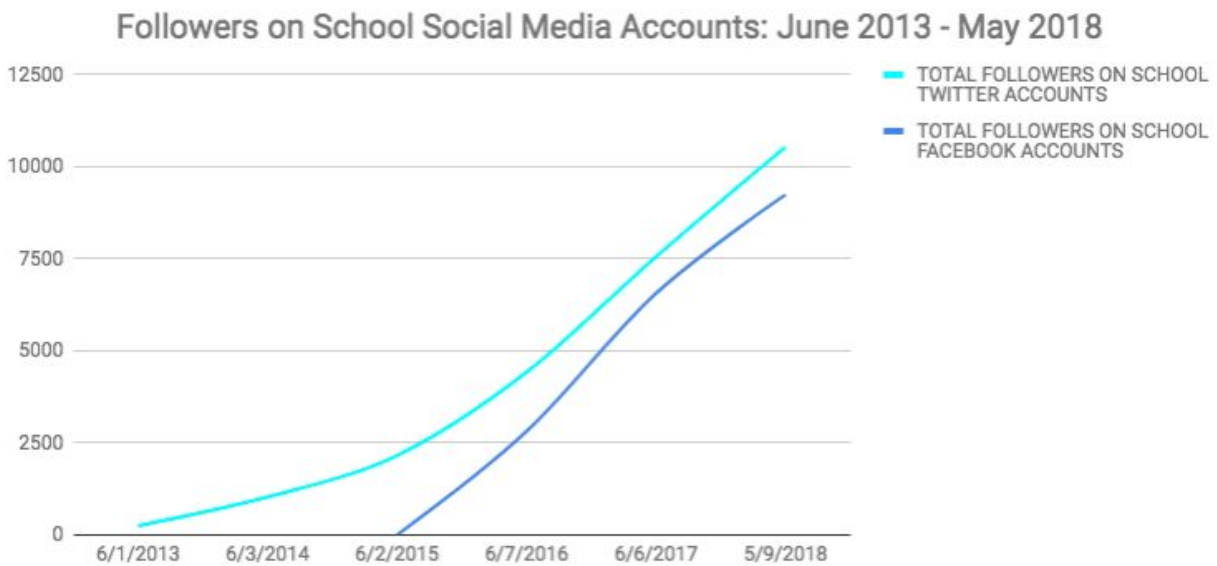
- Staff need additional support throughout the year from the Office of Communications
- Newsletter usage/social media usage is not equitable across the division

	<b>Number of email newsletter issues sent in 2017-18 SY</b>	<b>Average open rate for 2017-18 SY</b>
<b>Jefferson-Houston</b>	14	30.75%
<b>John Adams</b>	16	30.32%
<b>Charles Barrett</b>	15	36.88%
<b>Patrick Henry</b>	0	-
<b>Cora Kelly</b>	7	31.4%
<b>Lyles-Crouch</b>	50	36.43%
<b>MacArthur</b>	60	41.88%



<b>George Mason*</b>	51	49.58%
<b>Maury</b>	4	43.91%
<b>Mount Vernon</b>	10	39.83%
<b>James K. Polk*</b>	63	31.47%
<b>Ramsay</b>	7	27.38%
<b>Tucker</b>	11	37.24%
<b>Hammond</b>	58	25.08%
<b>GW</b>	26	39.54%
<b>T.C. Williams</b>	39	23.74%

\*James K. Polk and George Mason also send grade-level newsletters supported by the Office of Communications.





### Staff/Teacher Engagement

Tell survey data shows that 81 percent of teachers in 2016 and 83 percent of teachers in 2018 rated community support and involvement at their schools as good or above. This is a two percentage point increase from 2016 to 2018. This was highest overall rated area among the eight constructs of the survey.

### Community Outreach

- This school year is the first time that we've had a Spanish language program as one of our top 10 most viewed videos on YouTube.
- Original content videos in multiple languages: 2016-17: 193 views of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic videos; 2017-18: 14,700 views of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic videos.
- 96 community events, community meetings and school events through face-to-face outreach supported from September 2017 to May 2018.
- 18 connections between organizations to support school and community events. These included: Episcopal H.S. Summer Camps offering 20 free summer slots, Volunteer Alexandria, City Libraries, City Recreation Centers, Casa Chirilagua, Casey Clinic, Chirilagua Clinic, Shiloh Baptist Church, Touch A Truck, Dar Al Hijrah Islamic Center, BB&T Bank Lighthouse Grant Program, AVID program support for community events, Mobile Art Program, Alexandria Sheriff's Department and Tenants & Workers.
- The response rate for the ACPS 2020 survey went up by 30 percent in 2018 compared to 2017. In addition the number of responses were balanced around race and ethnicity rates for ACPS students/families for the first time.
- The diversity of advisory groups is not specifically tracked. However, informal research indicates that the make-up of advisory groups is not representative of the division as a whole. There is a core group of community members and parents who are on more than one advisory group.
- Community engagement and strategic communications around capital projects consumes up to 20 hours a week of staff time. This involves strategic communications for the new stadium, Patrick Henry, Ferdinand Day and the naming of the new school. Support for other projects (Mount Vernon playground, Pre-K center) frequently gets lost in the focus on other larger projects. Given the time requirements and strategic level of staff required for these projects, it is challenging to give these projects the attention they need to make them fully successful.
- ACPS continues to attend civic association meetings, the Chamber of Commerce, the mosque, but is not as far reaching in engagement with religious institutions, City organizations and civic associations as it should be.

### AV/Production Support and Coverage

Communications fulfilled 75 requests from schools for AV from July 2017 to April 2018. This was approximately 305 contractor hours at a cost of \$12,500.

School Board Meetings and Work Sessions telecast, streamed and archived:

- 2017-18: 39 School Board meetings, totaling 62 hours of programming (all closed captioned)
- 2016-17: 35 School Board meetings, totaling 80 hours of programming (none closed captioned)



- November 2017 – April 2018: 67 editions of Good Morning MacArthur closed captioned and posted
- July 2017 - April 2018: 128 editions of Everyday Titan produced and telecast with studio support

In May of 2018, MacArthur’s studio was upgraded to become ACPS’ first multi-camera HD school-based production facility.

## ACPS Image and Reputation

### National Citizen Survey

The 2017 National Citizen Survey indicated that the number of people who viewed the quality of K12 education in Alexandria as excellent or good has risen by 2 percent each year since 2016 from 52 percent in 2016 to 54 percent in 2017 and 56 percent in 2018. Similarly, 20 percent said it was poor in 2016, compared with 16 percent in 2017. Both years, Alexandria was lower than both the area comparison and the national benchmark. There was no rating for 2018. Only a third of the 350 annual respondents have children in schools so answered the education question.

### ACPS 2020 survey

A comparison of the results of the ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan surveys from 2016, 2017, 2018 shows: **COMING IN June 2018**

### Media analysis

Analysis of Media Coverage indicates:

- ACPS still maintained 90 percent positive media coverage around its messaging which was featured prominently.
- According to media coverage, transparency is no longer an issue. Whereas it had been a hot topic three years ago, it has been non-existent as an issue in the media since June 2016.
- The coverage of academics is generally positive. The coverage of facilities is generally negative.
- Focus groups with staff showed ACPS staff and key community influencers are highly focused on getting ACPS stories into the media and view it as a public endorsement for the school division.

### Internal Confidence in ACPS

Data analysis of ACPS Insider show that the popularity of posts depends on:

1. Relevancy (policy changes were top posts)
  2. Association or connection
  3. Useful resource (professional development is a consistently high performing post. They want to see more snippets of School Board updates and HR job postings on ACPS Insider)
- Informal primary research conducted through staff focus groups found that 50 percent of staff say they value ACPS Insider and liked it as a tool to receive information. They liked to receive information on a weekly basis, but not more frequently. “All-staff” emails (not via ACPS Insider) are viewed as corrections to ACPS Insider.
  - Staff like being asked for input. They value giving their opinion. However, they do not feel comfortable giving their opinions via email or a blog where they can be identified.



- Desire for text messages regarding emergency announcements and a desire to receive notifications ahead of parents and the community. This was a source of frustration, but not a trust issue.
- They want transparency from senior staff and honesty when things were not going according to plan (particularly HR and C&I). They felt this was one of the biggest impacts on staff morale.



## Analysis

The ability to deliver information to key stakeholders is dependent on our ability to collect and manage contact data. The contact information for families is primarily collected through the forms in the Welcome Packets distributed at the start of the school year. This data is input or updated in PowerSchool by school registrars and is used as a source for all other division and school communications for the entire school year.

Data analysis over the past two years has shown that while some schools make inputting and updating this data in PowerSchool a priority, many do not. The registrars are overseen by principals. Oversight for this data is the principal's responsibility. Experience has shown that although the registrars are trained by Tech Services, Central Office has little to no influence over whether data updates are a priority or not. By May 2018, some schools only had a third of their families with contact information in PowerSchool. This means that ACPS has no means of delivering information to these families.

Families can update their own information online, but for this information to be used registrars must approve the information. This creates a trust issue as families assume they have updated their information yet are not receiving ACPS communications. It can take days or sometimes weeks or months for registrars to approve this update.

In addition, families who regularly attend FACE workshops and are in contact with Parent Liaisons often give their contact information to FACE. This data is put into a FACE database, but is not cross-populated into PowerSchool. This means that some families believe they have given their contact information to ACPS, but are not receiving ACPS communications. This complicates the situation and adds to the mistrust, particularly emergency communications.

This contact information is also used to deliver school communication via electronic newsletters. School communications is erratic and is a source of external complaints. Some schools do an excellent job of using their electronic newsletter platform, updating their web pages and posting their day-to-day success stories on social media. However, the quality of the communication is dependent on the principal and the ability and motivation of the PR Liaison. Due to incomplete contact information in PowerSchool, any important information has to be delivered in print, which can impact the timeliness of the delivery.

Until the launch of Canvas, ACPS has had no means to collect staff contact information into a single database, except for those staff with a work cell phone. Staff has to sign up for external City alerts (a communication tool used by ACPS to communicate in division-wide emergencies and weather events). They have to actively seek information in an emergency, through a notification on the website or by checking an email for an all-staff email. ACPS Insider has adjusted its content to need-based only and has an open rate of around 30 percent, high for any newsletter. There is no two-way process for feedback for staff or anywhere where they can feel they get questions answered in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Staff still occasionally turn to the media to make their complaints heard. The way staff communications is handled affects morale, particularly around Curriculum





and HR issues. They want transparency and direct answers and complained that circular answers from senior staff had a direct impact on the way they felt about the school division.

There is no doubt that ACPS' inability to update and maintain updated student data has a negative impact on the public reputation of ACPS and affects trust.

Community contact lists are managed through the City. Databases for civic association contacts rely on voluntary updates when board positions change and so are invariably out of date. They do not include religious organizations or realtors or a comprehensive list of City-wide preschools or child-care employees. Although the Office of Communications gets out to civic associations, private pre-K meetings and some religious institutions, this is still erratic and there is a need to go to already-established community meetings to communicate the ACPS mission and solicit feedback. In addition there is a clear discrepancy between the makeup of advisory groups and the make-up of the ACPS community and a glaring omission of alumni in the external target audience - both issues that have been encouraged by introverted methods of operating.

As modernization projects increase, there is also an increasing need for community engagement and high-level strategic communications support. Communications staff frequently spend more than 20 hours a week on capital improvement project planning and still do not plan sufficiently to strategically support these projects in the way that would genuinely impact community engagement, reputation, trust and outcomes.

There is a clear need for strategic communication planning across all departments in ACPS. All too frequently staff requests a video or a brochure without a plan of how that tool will impact the desired outcome. There is little doubt that thoroughly thought-out strategic planning, along the lines currently being initiated in Arlington Public Schools, would have a genuine long-term positive impact on all communications outcomes across ACPS.

## Audience Identification, Profile and Analysis

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 and staff

## Goal

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.

**OVERALL GOAL: To ensure staff, parents, students and the community have timely access to information that encourages confidence in ACPS and boosts the reputation of the organization and its mission across the region.**



## Objectives

**Objective 1: ENSURE CONFIDENCE:** 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 with minimal complaints by June 2020

1. *90 percent of newly posted web content will be compliant with Section 508 and 504 requirements by June 2020*
2. *100 percent of web pages deemed essential will be offered in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic by June 2020*

**Objective 2: FACILITATING ENGAGEMENT:** Ensure all families are aware of opportunities and resources needed to be engaged with their school by June 2020

3. *All schools will have the supports needed to send a minimum of one newsletter per month*
4. *All schools will have received a “satisfactory” rating in the PR Liaison Program audit*
5. *Establish criteria to increase the diversity of ACPS of applicants for Advisory Committees to better reflect the diversity of the ACPS population*
6. *Establish a leadership pipeline to increase access to ACPS engagement opportunities*
7. *All schools will have 90 percent of their parents with up-to-date contact information in PowerSchool by the end of each October*
8. *All families will be provided with information regarding critical family supports, in addition to the Welcome Packet, by the end of each October*

**Objective 3: FOSTER INTERNAL PRIDE:** Foster increased engagement among staff to develop a sense of pride in the school division by June 2020

9. *10 percent increase in the percentage of staff that rate ACPS as “good or excellent” in response to the ACPS 2020 survey in June of 2020*
10. *90 percent of staff will report satisfaction with internal communication channels and the timeliness of responses by June 2020, as measured by data collected through an internal staff survey in spring 2020*

**Objective 4: STRENGTHEN REPUTATION:** 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 by fostering strong relationships that promote high stakeholder engagement in public education in the community by June 2020

11. *10 percent increase in the percentage of respondents to the ACPS 2020 survey in June 2020 who rate ACPS schools as “excellent or good”*
12. *A 10 percent increase in actively positive/ACPS-generated media coverage between June 2018 and June 2020 will be positive or neutral*

**Objective 5: ENSURE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS:** Ensure the effective use of available resources to maximize efficiency in communication efforts so that all output is aligned to a concrete strategic outcome



13. 100 percent of all Office of Communication initiatives will be aligned with a communication plan by June 2020

## Implementation

### **Strategy No. 1: Increase timely access to vital documents and information via the ACPS and school websites and other platforms**

- Conduct an accessibility audit of pages supported by external vendors
- Expand the number of actively translated web pages and languages (include Pashto/Farsi)
- Increase awareness of accessibility requirements for staff posting on Canvas
- Ensure relevant information is posted on the website within 24 hours of being made publicly available, requiring the Office of Communications to lead through solicitation of content
- Ensure all new content on the web will be compliant with Section 508 and 504 requirements by June 2020
- Create a division webmaster position (eliminated when Tech Services relinquished control of the website in March 2017) to manage timely posting of content and accessibility by June 2019
- Collaborate with Tech Services to resolve technical issues preventing real-time cell phone communication and access to the web/internet for students, staff and community at T.C. Williams High School King Street Campus

### **Strategy No. 2: Increase access to information and opportunities for engagement by families who do not have English as a first language**

- Design and implement a data collection campaign around the Welcome Packet data for the first two months of the school year to ensure the collection of updated contact information for all families
- Strengthen cross-departmental communication with FACE to ensure coordinated campaigns around a unified message reaching all parents via Parent Liaisons
- Strengthen channels to assist parents from non-English-speaking families to become active in their PTAs, PTA leadership and eventually advisory groups

### **Strategy No. 3: Strengthen staff communications to boost morale, staff engagement and foster pride in the division**

- Actively target Education Week and The Washington Post with nationally accredited programs to boost staff credibility
- Promote the public image of the superintendent to boost the image of the school division and increase public confidence and connectedness
- Support the superintendent in hosting informal staff feedback sessions
- Develop methods of formal staff feedback for all staff groups



- *Develop and implement an internal kudos program in coordination with HR*
- *Attend principal meetings*
- *Develop Outstanding Support Staff Member of the Year award program*
- *Develop and implement a text message system to communicate with staff in the case of emergencies/urgent all-staff communication*
- *Develop and implement a two-way platform where staff can post questions/feedback and get an immediate response*
- *Increase the ability of ACPS to tell our own story by strengthening the VOICES brand, increasing the number and depth of staff success stories highlighted*
- *Introduce a customer service incentive program for front office staff*

**Strategy No. 4: Strengthen staff communication support to foster pride and improve alignment across the division**

- *Strengthen relationships with other groups within ACPS – such as Scholarship Fund of Alexandria, Parent Resource Center to make sure their communication is supported and streamlined so that it is effective and aligned with the rest of ACPS*
- *Conduct an audit of school communications and implement the findings of that audit to strengthen the ability of schools to better communicate*

**Strategy No. 5: Nurture previously less-tapped community groups to foster support for the division**

- *Develop an alumni database and monthly alumni newsletter*
- *Develop a monthly community newsletter to civic associations, religious institutions, private pre-Ks*
- *Conduct a series of face-to-face feedback/update sessions on ACPS 2020 and the division’s progress towards high performance*
- *Strengthen the community leadership pipeline and hold monthly community meetings for this group*
- *Support the superintendent in participating in informal feedback sessions by having dinner hosted by community groups and families*
- *Create an incentives reward program for the community through unique experiences (hard hat tour of new school/dinner with Board before the SB meeting/free Thanksgiving lunch tickets)*
- *Free incentives for retirees to encourage their continued engagement with and support of ACPS*
- *Track community events that are already taking place and make sure we have a presence as a division*
- *Create an “Engage With Us” web page to track community events and where the Superintendent and senior staff will be*

**Strategy No. 6: Continue to realign the Office of Communications to better support the needs of the division and actively drive change**

- *Create an assistant director position to assist with strategic communication planning*
- *Coordinate with Tech Services to better align AV within ACPS needs*
- *Create a division webmaster in the Office of Communications*



- Conduct an external communications audit to assess strengths and weaknesses of current procedures and practices
- Conduct weekly data analysis session during team meetings
- Set up Communications Advisory Group made up of communications professionals to advise and support the Office of Communications

## Evaluation: What Does Good Communications Look Like?

### **Student: Amir C.**

*Amir C. returned his contact information form to the school during the first week of school. Thanks to the updated contact form, Amir C's parents now receive the ACPS emergency alerts via email and text that they did not receive the year before. They like the communication, but object to the frequent robo calls. They also now receive the T.C. email newsletter, which helps them feel more connected to their teenager and what is going on at his school. They like the fact that information sometimes comes in Arabic, which is their preferred language, although they only use it when the information is available easily without having to search for it. Amir C. is a big social media user. He follows T.C., the T.C. principal, the T.C. library as well as T.C. athletics and the International Academy as his friends are in those programs on Twitter. Amir C. is active in politics and wants to be able to get updates and contact his friends at lunchtime. He is aware of what happened in Parkland and wants to know that he uses his phone to get real-time information in case of an active shooter incident so he knows how to escape. Amir C. is a member of the Superintendent's Student leadership team but resents the fact that it's mainly girls and so he only goes occasionally when the Superintendent himself/herself is there. He gets the counseling newsletter via Canvas on his Chromebook and has signed up for the Scholarship Fund newsletter as he is hoping to get support for college.*

### **Parent with English as a second language: Theresa J.**

*Theresa J. receives a Welcome Packet addressed to her child in her preferred language (Spanish) at the open house three days before the start of school. She is relieved that the Code of Conduct, Family Handbook and calendar are in Spanish as she does not feel comfortable reading English. She uses a phone to communicate with her family using Facebook. She is happy to see that ACPS has a Spanish Facebook page with videos explaining programs and opportunities in Spanish. The Community outreach specialist showed her how to access the ACPS Spanish Facebook page at the open house, access Spanish translated pages on the ACPS website using her phone and made sure she knew the importance of giving ACPS her contact information. Theresa J. did not feel comfortable giving anyone any official contact information for her family given their recent personal circumstances and so she did not return the contact form for her child. The Parent Liaison contacted her personally three weeks later to remind her of the importance of this information in case of an emergency and assured her that ACPS does not share this information with anyone. Theresa J. attended the next FACE workshop that she had found out about via the ACPS Spanish Facebook page and gave her contact information to the FACE staff member at the event. This information was passed to the registrar via the Parent Liaison (who checked her off her list) and was added to PowerSchool the same day. The next day, the school had to close due to an HVAC system failure. Theresa J. got a text message in Spanish to her phone and knew not to walk out with her child to wait for the bus. She was updated in Spanish when the HVAC system was fixed and was informed that school was open as usual the next day. The following Monday, she received information in Spanish via ACPS Express informing her about contact information for her school's Parent Liaison. She was soon a regular attendee at the principal's coffee, where her questions were relayed through an interpreter and volunteered to help out with a*



PTA event. While helping out, she was invited to a PTA meeting, where there was a Spanish interpreter, and brought three of her friends from Casa Chirilagua with her and was pleasantly surprised when the Community Outreach Specialist showed up at their next Casa Chirilagua dinner night with the Superintendent.

**Teacher: Joanna P.**

*Joanna P. is able to add her contact information to a staff database through Canvas, select the method by which she would like to be contacted by ACPS during emergencies and weather emergencies and keep her own information up-to-date. She uses a blog post in Canvas to give ACPS staff feedback to resolve who to contact to update information on the school calendar on the website regarding the change of date for the pyramid concert she is organizing. She also wants to know how she should go about getting media to the concert and what the policy is about contacting them herself. She gets an immediate response from the Office of Communications to both her initial question and follow-up question. When Katy Perry decides she is coming to the pyramid concert, she reaches out once again for help to write a speech and works with a member of the Communications team face-to-face and to craft an initial draft and then through Google Drive to finalize it. Communications provides AV set up (microphones/lighting) for the concert and sends a videographer and photographer to cover the concert while working with the media to ensure local and national media coverage. Music copyright is checked with the publisher to ensure the correct live screening rights and post-publication rights have been obtained. Joanna P. had already obtained the copyright as she had attended a training session about it hosted by the Office of Communications in the summer. The visit/concert is promoted through the school newsletter and invitations are sent to the Board, Mayor and City Council. It is shown live through ACPS-TV, Facebook Live and Twitter, and covered post-event with a news release, ACPS Express post, ACPS-TV, the website home page, Facebook and Twitter. Joanna P. is impressed by the level of service and the boost to her credibility, and is inclined to stay at ACPS another year rather than take the job she had been offered in a neighboring school division that pays slightly more.*

**Central Office staff member: Tucker M.**

*Tucker M. needs to get a building permit approved by City Council within the next eight months. One of the requirements will be community engagement around the project. He requests a meeting with the Office of Communications. Communications assigns a communications strategist to the task who draws up a strategic communications plan to ensure the project checks all the boxes. The plan includes a series of community meetings to solicit feedback and then changes as a result of that feedback back to the community; a web page for the project linked to the homepage, an online form for feedback, a survey, support with writing presentations, an email out with regular updates around the project to those who are particularly interested, a series of meetings with opponents to make sure their voices are heard, a meeting with a group who would like to fund part of the project, regular joint facilities meetings with the City planning and zoning staff, media coverage, political soundings of Planning Commission and City Council members to assess how they are likely to vote and 20 speakers to speak in support of the project at the two Saturday hearings. The webmaster solicits each PowerPoint presentation, makes it accessibility compliant and posts it on the website along with a Closed Captioned video recording of the community meeting the morning after it has been presented. Communications records the School Board meeting updates and posts clips of them on the website, ACPS-TV and on ACPS Express so that the public can watch the discussion. When the issue hits the front pages of the newspaper, the Communications strategist is already fully briefed on the politics of the project and can respond to the question designed to trip up anyone less experienced so that the issue becomes a non-issue and disappears from the media within a week. Tucker M. feels he is not alone in handling the community engagement piece of the project, which is not his area of expertise and gets credit for handling the project well from City Council and the City Manager. Communications then assists with soliciting a diverse group of community members to sit on an*



*advisory committee to select and promote a name, creating a news release with a video around the final selection in four languages to explain the selection to the wider community and enhance engagement in the new school. Communications then develops and stages a VIP ground breaking and ribbon cutting ceremonies and positive media coverage of both.*

**Community member: Mel J.**

*Mel J. does not have children in the school division, but she is a resident of Alexandria and used to volunteer as a reading mentor several years ago. She is not sure her tax dollars are well spent by anyone in the City, let alone the school division, but she follows the local media and hears that the schools are improving academically – especially Jefferson-Houston. She believes this will help the local economy and see the value of her house increase. She once went to a Symphony Orchestra Concert at NOVA where students from a music program at John Adams were playing and thought it rather good. When they were renaming the school near her house she put her name forward for the advisory committee. She thought it sounded interesting. She was surprised she was selected as they always seem to choose the same people and she hadn't been selected before. When she showed up to the first meeting, she was surprised at how diverse it was. Recently, someone came and spoke at the civic association meeting and she has caught the updated TV clips, which occasionally catch her eye. She has started to volunteer again as a mentor and loved it when she received an invitation to the Partners and Volunteer Celebration BBQ and the Teacher of the Year reception through her school. Her involvement with ACPS has given her new friendships and a new purpose.*