

Date: February 23, 2018
For ACTION _____
For INFORMATION X____
Board Agenda: Yes ___
No X___

FROM: Helen Lloyd, Director of Communications

THROUGH: Lois F. Berlin, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Ramee A. Gentry, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Re-launch of ACPS-TV on March 1, 2018

SUMMARY:

On March 1, the Office of Communications will re-launch ACPS-TV to align it with other communication tools.

In September 2015, the Office of Communications began work to create an aligned package of communication tools to reach its target audience of parents, students, staff and the wider community. These communication tools included ACPS Express, ACPS Insider, refocusing the ACPS Facebook and Twitter accounts, redesigning the website, launching an app, designing and creating electronic school newsletters, and expanding and aligning school social media usage. The final tool left in this communication toolkit is ACPS-TV.

The relaunched model aims to:

- Better engage, inform and serve consumers in the digital age (with content that is timely and relevant)
- Serve as a combination of TV, bulletin board and marketing channel
- Align ACPS-TV with the other ACPS communication tools, repurposing content from other channels
- Upgrade consumer experience with a high-definition format, while minimizing the cost to the tax-payer

The new-look ACPS-TV will function primarily as a bulletin board, featuring videos that promote a positive image for the school division and promote opportunities for students, menu items for the day, the weather, upcoming events, news updates in English and Spanish, concert clips and student-produced content.

EveryDay Titan and Mac-TV will stream shows daily. Mac-TV equipment will be upgraded to bring it into line with the HD format required for the new-look ACPS-TV. The Office of Communications has also reached out to Theogony and the TV production classes at T.C. Williams to collaborate on short video content for the bulletin board and longer-format video for evening programming.

The TV will transition to a full-screen format from 7 p.m. each evening to stream school board meetings and community meetings, and show Smithsonian science programming content, obtained free from the Smithsonian Institute. ACPS-TV will retain the permanent new logo throughout all evening programming.

BACKGROUND:

ACPS-TV was launched as the access channel for the school division on January 15, 1999. Since that date, Comcast has had a franchise agreement with the City that requires the cable company to provide public, educational and government access channels. The City has allocated one of their assigned Educational Channels to ACPS (Channel 71).

For the last 19 years, ACPS-TV has been operating on a stand-alone model and its content and messaging has not been incorporated or aligned with any of the other communication tools. Due to limited staffing to maintain the quality and quantity of output, content is sometimes repeated many times and many years later. As such, the TV station has failed to maintain the same quality and brand recognition as other communication tools and has lost credibility. In a digital age where viewers are able to access content on demand, the current model is becoming more and more misaligned with modern trends. A combination of Comcast and national survey data shows that the number of viewers of government/educational channels is decreasing annually.

According to the most recent survey by Comcast, approximately 5 percent of the community have ever watched a School Board meeting or viewed ACPS-TV content. This does not distinguish between those viewing on Channel 71 and those viewing online via the website. ACPS 2020 survey results for 2016 showed 88.4 percent of current parents said they found ACPS-TV not useful or only somewhat useful (the survey did not distinguish between the TV and YouTube channel). Only eight percent of current parents (2017) said they ever obtained information from ACPS-TV. This fell to 5.3 percent for the wider community.

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 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 viewing other Comcast channels.

The City, which derives a small amount of revenue per month for maintaining this educational channel, would lose these funds if the ACPS-TV channel were not maintained.

ACPS 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.

IMPACT:

The new-look TV will be maintained as part of the everyday work of the Office of Communication at no additional ongoing cost. The re-launch involved a one-time purchase of a Bulletin Board platform at a cost of less than \$4,000.

Although Comcast is unable to provide formal data around ACPS-TV viewership, the Office of Communications will be collecting informal data to measure the impact of the change.

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