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Communications Departmental Audit

The Audit Team

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Scope & Process

- **Audit began in summer 2019**
- **Scope**
 - ***Strategy Assessment***
 - ***Tools Assessment***
 - ***Effectiveness Assessment***
 - ***Compliance Assessment***
 - ***Impact Assessment***

Scope & Process

- **Primary research**
 - *Materials, media, plans, data review*
 - *Interviews: 39*
 - *Focus Groups: 15*
 - *Surveys: 73*
- **Secondary research**
 - *Risk Assessment & School Board committee and workgroup reports*
 - *Surveys (2016, 2017, 2018)*

Benchmarking ACPS

- **National School Public Relations Association Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures (©2018)**
 - ***Comprehensive Planned Communications***
 - ***Internal Communications***
 - ***Parent/Family Communications***
 - ***Marketing/Branding Communications***
 - ***Crisis Communications***

Results

- **Research and assessment resulted in:**
 - ***5 Observations***
 - ***10 Kudos***
 - ***25 Recommendations***
 - **Staffing & Organization**
 - **Emergency Communications**
 - **Collaboration & Opportunity**
 - **Process & Tools**
 - **Best Foot Forward**

Observations

- 1. The Office of Communications is staffed by professionals who want ACPS to succeed.**
- 2. The Office of Communications has a perception problem.**
- 3. Barriers to collaboration – both within the department and between other departments – have caused duplication of effort, miscommunication, errors and lost opportunities.**
- 4. The Superintendent is a skilled communicator with characteristics well suited to move ACPS's communications in a positive direction.**
- 5. The School Board is invested in improving communications throughout the division and with each stakeholder group.**

Kudos

- 1. The many national communications accolades earned by ACPS are indicative of the quality product that can be produced by the department.**
- 2. The communications surrounding the new Superintendent announcement, First 100 Days and the Superintendent's Listening Tour were strategic and effective.**
- 3. The “Measuring What Matters” initiative and resulting materials are effective in telling the story of ACPS beyond standardized testing.**

Kudos

- 4. Emergency communications, by almost all accounts, has improved within the division.**
- 5. ACPS branding is graphically sound and consistent throughout division materials.**
- 6. The stories being told about students and staff are compelling and in alignment with the strategic goals of the division.**
- 7. The ACPS Office of Communications Strategic Communications Plan is complete and follows industry standards.**

Kudos

- 8. Primary communications materials, both print and digital, are consistently translated, specifically for Spanish, Amharic and Arab-speaking families.**
- 9. Data are routinely collected for the communications program's primary tools.**
- 10. Office of Communications staff take advantage of professional development opportunities and act as leaders in regional and national school public relations associations.**

Recommendations: Staffing & Organization

- 1. Conduct a time study of members of the Office of Communications team, including the Director of Communications.**
- 2. Develop a job description for an assistant director/senior communications coordinator who can act as a deputy for the Director of Communications.**
- 3. Increase the .5 communications writing specialist position to full time.**

Recommendations: Staffing & Organization

- 4. Move receptionist duties from the Office of Communications administrative assistant. Develop a structured phone tree and integrate calls into a customer response system.**
- 5. Combine the Office of Communications and the Office of School, Business and Community Partnerships into an Office of Communications and Engagement, maintaining two director positions and reporting to one senior division leader.**

Recommendations: Emergency Communications

- 1. Ensure the participation of Office of Communications staff in all major emergency initiative launches or changes.**
- 2. Continue to strengthen existing relationships with emergency responders and develop an emergency management communications plan with Alexandria City Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities.**
- 3. Develop and consistently follow a debrief protocol after each major emergency. Expand debrief protocol to learn from major school-based emergencies in other localities/states.**

Recommendations: Emergency Communications

- 4. Cross-train all Office of Communications staff on all elements of the division's emergency communications protocols and develop an on-call calendar to identify one staff member each weekend who will assist as needed with communications emergencies.**
- 5. Develop and implement a protocol to ensure that the School Board and all division leaders are aware of emergency events and have the information they need to inform relevant stakeholders.**

Recommendations: Collaboration & Opportunity

- 1. Develop processes to strengthen collaboration and ensure the Office of Communications' role in launching and implementing all major division initiatives.**
- 2. Design and implement a communications skill development plan for School Board members, division leaders, and school and Central Office staff.**
- 3. Develop and launch a customer service portal and integrate a complaints process into the portal.**

Recommendations: Collaboration & Opportunity

- 4. Strengthen existing connection efforts and develop programs to reach untapped constituencies.**
- 5. Assign Office of Communications staff to schools of responsibility ('beats') within the division.**

Recommendations: Process & Tools

- 1. Identify and implement a project management tool to improve processes and track requests for Office of Communications support.**
- 2. Redesign and relaunch the division website.**
- 3. Identify funding to expand availability of closed captioning services.**
- 4. Expand existing staff communications initiatives and develop new internal channels.**
- 5. Move T.C. Williams Audio/Visual (A/V) responsibilities to T.C. Williams administration and all other A/V support responsibilities to another department, specifically one with technical staff that can immediately meet division and school support requirements.**

Recommendations: Best Foot Forward

- 1. Develop and disseminate communications that are grammatically correct and free of content errors.**
- 2. Focus efforts and cease low-impact and ineffective communications initiatives.**
- 3. Embrace the ‘Bite, Snack, Meal’ concept when constructing division communications.**
- 4. Proactively nurture relationships with media outlets and take advantage of opportunities.**
- 5. Ensure events are planned well in advance and meet division standards.**

Priority Recommendations

1. Time study.
2. Project management system.
3. Customer response system.
4. Website relaunch.
5. Professional learning.

Conclusion

- **Communications is everyone's responsibility.**
- **Effective communication is only accomplished if all parties are engaged and are mutually focused on a shared outcome.**

Questions?



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