



# STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

2017/18



# MISSION STATEMENT

The El Dorado Union High School District (EDUHSD) is committed to educating all students in a safe, supportive environment that will challenge students to pursue appropriate, rigorous paths for academic and career development and achievement that lead to lifelong learning and a productive adulthood.

NOTE: Crisis communications such as fire and flood are detailed in each school's Comprehensive Safety Plan. Contact your local school for more information.

## GOALS

Our goal is to increase the visibility of our District, by demonstrating our leadership, positioning our priorities and increasing our awareness as an institution in the community by being an exemplary employer and champion for local students.

By improving and integrating effective communication at all levels, both internally and externally, will support our efforts to:

1. Ensure understanding of our values, culture, qualities, and benefits to our community.
2. Establish and reinforce the fact that EDUHSD is a trusted, credible resource on issues related to educational policies, programs, operations, and the County of El Dorado.
3. Proactively and strategically manage internal hazards to minimize the impact on our reputation, credibility, and ability to lead.

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of all communications is to bring us closer to achieving our organizational mission and goals. Our objectives will require a variety of elements, including sustained and consistent information and coordination supported by internal and external communication at appropriate times.

1. **Clarify District flow of information:**
  - Charts will include individual areas of staff responsibility for communication.
2. **Provide ongoing training and support for administrators in effective communication with staff and the public:**
  - Provide continuing training sessions as part of principals' meetings on how to train teachers and staff to communicate their school's message.
  - Supply administrators with public relations fact sheets and other easy to-to-use communication tools as needed when issues arise.
  - Provide communication training sessions to site-level staff.
  - Schools will manage upcoming events through their online school calendar posted on their school's website.
3. **Provide regular information on District-wide issues through the development of clear, consistent messages delivered in one clear voice:**

- Distribute information from meetings on a need-to-know basis.
  - Distribute external publications and news releases to all employees via email, website, Newsletters, postings, and through school messenger.
  - Issue short, bulleted informational sheets to staff and parents on issues of immediate concern.
  - Formalize a policy for District communication with teachers and site staff.
- 4. Create a system to encourage the flow of information from parents/community to the District:**
- Encourage parents and community members to sign up for District-wide and school-wide internet listservs (automatic mailing lists from the internet, Open Houses, orientations, academic/athletic events, and email logs at each school campus.
  - Conduct electronic surveys (email) at District and site levels to provide feedback on the flow of information.
  - Offer informal meeting opportunities to receive input.
  - Establish an informational email account to receive feedback from the community.
  - Expand use of the Parent Portal to facilitate communication between parents and schools.
  - Expand and improve existing communication tools.
- 5. Publish and distribute informational pieces:**
- Develop collateral pieces such as District/school informational brochures, Newsletters to be communicated via e-mail, Press Releases as needed, and enhance materials to emphasize EDUHSD's core values and unique benefits.
- 6. Communicate with civic, community and religious groups:**
- Include groups in mailings and provide opportunities for them to sign up for our community listserv.
  - Attend community meetings as needed to provide information. Provide District communication materials to key leaders.
  - Develop partnerships with groups.
- 7. Be visible in the community:**
- Attend community organizational meetings.
  - Encourage participation in local service clubs.
  - Encourage school staff to talk positively about EDUHSD schools to friends, neighbors and community acquaintances.
  - Seek business partnerships through contacts in local groups.
  - Host EDUHSD "Town Hall" meetings or forums.
- 8. Promote the successes of EDUHSD personnel:**
- Produce a Monthly Newsletter or presentation focusing on our students, staff members, programs, schools, departments, etc. This is to be shown on our District website, newspaper, and/or at Board meetings.
  - Highlight staff with articles in District communications pieces, outside media, and through recognition at events.
  - Highlight teaching and learning across the District through the bulletin board in the District Board Room.

## KEY MESSAGES

The cornerstone of our communications strategy is to create and maintain consistency. We want target audiences to understand the same core message that we are communicating, also known as our brand. Our key messages explain what we want others to know and say about EDUHSD and make the connection between what we do and how it relates to targeted audiences.

Strong key messages make every communication process more effective, whether verbally through speeches, presentations and media interviews or visually through marketing materials, Newsletters, website, future social media campaigns, etc. More importantly, effective communication depends upon clarity, which requires developing key messages and using them consistently. Information can be targeted and nuanced in different ways to different audiences, but the overall main message must remain the same. It must be short, easy to understand, easy to explain and easy to remember.

### KEY MESSAGES:

1. EDUHSD offers world-class education.
2. EDUHSD believes in a safe learning environment for all.
3. EDUHSD believes every student has the potential for greatness.
4. EDUHSD operates with responsible use of tax-payer money.

## STRATEGIES

### 1. Keep Communications Simple:

- Use clear, concise and non-educational style for all general publications.
- Vary the types and level of communication to target diverse audiences.
- Translate communication pieces when appropriate for various language groups.

### 2. Create Informational Sheets:

- Create informational sheets on four or five topics such as District and state budgets, school safety, accountability, etc.; update them bi-annually or as needed.
- Have sheets available online for quick reference.
- Use a template for uniformity so that new topics can be addressed rapidly.

### 3. Communicate Early and Often:

- Prepare informational sheets when appropriate to send out to principals, office managers, and other staff as needed.
- Follow-up with memos or other forms of communication to all staff as necessary.
- Make telephone calls if in doubt.

### 4. Communicate Face-to-Face:

- The more difficult the situation, the more important it is to communicate face-to-face.
- Encourage staff to relay messages through personal interaction when appropriate.
- When possible, use a natural voice to record messages in ParentSquare.

### 5. Keep Communications Brief and to the Point:

- In order to keep a person's attention, be brief and to the point.

- Use bullet points when appropriate.
- Highlight your message in the title.
- Proofread all documents for errors.

**6. Emphasize Customer Service:**

- Parents, students and community members must leave with an answer to their concern or question.
- Never be dismissive.
- Actively listen to understand the message beyond the words.

**7. Train Staff:**

- Train staff to understand that what they say to friends, neighbors, and people in the community has a direct impact on how EDUHSD schools are perceived.
- Engage frontline staff in the conversation, and make sure they have access to information immediately. They are the best link to parents and the community.

**8. Develop Relationships with our Community:**

- Develop relationships with merchants by keeping them informed.
- Ask for input on areas of concern through surveys, by contacting the schools via email, and through the Notifyme section on the District website.
- Develop key communicators groups and deliver messages to them as needed. They will take the message to the community more effectively than District personnel. This includes the Chamber of Commerce and other key community groups.
- Maintain a high level of visibility for the District through the participation of key staff members in various professional and community activities.

**9. Work with the Media:**

- Pay attention to the type of stories aired or published.
- Note who is generally used as a source of information.
- Develop relationships with editors and education reporters.

**10. Prepare our Messages:**

- Study issues facing education and be prepared to respond with informational sheets.
- Develop responses that represent our schools or District message.
- Avoid technical jargon by keeping it simple and using quotable, sound bites, when appropriate.
- Prepare stories in formats that match those used by the local media.
- Don't use education lingo when preparing messages.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

We must strengthen our relationships with target audiences to enhance our image and build awareness of the good work being done at the District and school level. These groups may change depending on the goals and messages sent.

**Influencers** – This group provides legitimacy and validation to our District. They are leaders in their own right and are viewed as trustworthy when echoing our key messages. Additionally, they have their own influential networks that may carry our messages forward.

- County Board of Education
- Local elected and County officials
- California Department of Education
- Media

**Champions** – This group is inherently supportive of EDUHSD, our leadership and purpose, and they are our greatest allies to amplify our messages.

- District School Board
- Superintendent and principals

**Recipients** – This is the audience we are trying to influence. These stakeholders may have a positive, negative or neutral outlook of EDUHSD, but may need to be convinced to be swayed one way or another.

- EDUHSD employees
- Teachers
- Parents
- Students
- El Dorado County community members

**Stakeholders** – This group may not directly interact with EDUHSD, but they have a great amount of influence among our recipient audience. They may be recruited as champions, but can also pose a threat if not inoculated.

- Other County agencies (Board of Supervisors, etc.)
- Business community (local business leaders, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- Community and faith-based organizations
- Unions

## BRANDING

We will establish consistency and promote our key messages by creating a uniform communication style and branded logo, so when our targeted audiences see our logo or communication layout, they will immediately associate it with EDUHSD and our goals. This brand should be carried throughout all of our communication methods, including our website, social media, Press Releases, Newsletters, and company email signatures.

## TOOLS

Tools and activities communicate key messages to target audiences, and those messages must be repeated, often. Our goal is to create an echo chamber, so our messages are heard over and over (social media can be especially useful for amplification). It is also important that different sources communicate our messages, so they do not come from a single source.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

A strong internal communications program will assist in informing and influencing staff who can disseminate messages to our external audiences. We must communicate with our internal audiences with as much care as we communicate with our external audiences. This professional level of communication will motivate staff and support our over-arching messages and goals. We must be consistent in our internal communications and promote

our key messages through platforms including, but not limited to, internal Newsletters, bulletins, emails, voicemails, videos, employee meetings, etc. One of the easiest and most efficient ways to achieve consistency and timeliness is by sending out an electronic newsletter.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

EDUHSD's external communications should provide our targeted audiences with timely, accurate and complete information about our policies, programs, services and initiatives. By creating an echo chamber of repeated key messages, our brand will begin to resonate with our targeted audiences, thereby reinforcing our contributions to our students, families and community. Spokespeople should promote the same consistency, whether key messages are delivered through the website (including recent stories), Press Releases, op-eds, letters to the editor, Newsletters (electronic and/or print), social media, email blasts, letters to parents, etc.

## TACTICS AND TIMELINE

This will be determined after key messages and communication priorities are established.

Electronic newsletter (EDUHSD E-News) using ParentSquare:

- District-wide
- Every 2-3 weeks
- Open Rate Goal: 20%

Electronic "wellness blast" using ParentSquare:

- Directed to parents
- Monthly

Build Facebook to 1,000 followers by the end of the 2016-17 school year; Build Twitter to 200 followers by the end of the 2016-17 school year; Establish District YouTube channel:

- Facebook (parent focused), Twitter (student focused), YouTube (future)
- District sites PLUS individual school sites
- Linked to website
- Additional information to be found in Social Media Policy / Guidelines (in the works)

Video campaign

- An EDUHSD District video was completed by EDCOE and was released in the 2016-17 school year
- Videos for each school will be produced during the 2016-17 school year
- Videos will be linked to websites, social media, YouTube channels, etc.