



Communications Market Research Project:
Edina Public School District

May 6th, 2009



Research and Findings Conducted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To: Doug Johnson, Jolene Goldade and Pat Goodwin, Edina Public Schools

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Date: May 6, 2009

This report summarizes the extensive research completed by our team in conducting a communications audit for Edina Public Schools (EPS). Edina Public Schools District 273 wants to maximize the effectiveness of their current communication practices and requires a communication audit. Currently, the District is experiencing change in many aspects in which communication between the District and the staff/faculty, parents and community members is crucial. This research included secondary research, qualitative research and quantitative findings. The quantitative research included a survey completed by teachers, staff, parents and community members of Edina and EPS. By completing this audit, we strived to answer the following questions:

- How aware respondents are of EPS initiatives and core values.
- What tools each segment is using to learn about EPS initiatives and values.
- Whether the tools used by each segment impacts that segment's awareness and knowledge of EPS initiatives and core values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our survey results and in-depth statistical analysis of each of the nine segments we recommend the following:

For the EPS internal audience (segments 1, 2 and 3), district communications should focus on communicating core values and initiatives through individual school publications and staff bulletins. In the internal audience, these respondents used individual school web pages, email correspondence and staff meetings most frequently. While these communication vehicles were most frequently used, we found staff bulletins, individual school publications and "Learning" newsletter were the sources that most impacted individual knowledge and awareness.

For the External audience (Parents, segments 4, 5, 6 and 7), district communications can continue to use all of their current modes of communication. All existing methods of communication influenced respondent's knowledge and awareness of the districts core values and initiatives. Of all

communication tools, individual school web pages, the district website and public media were the most widely used.

Our other external audience (Non-parents, segments 8 and 9) preferred the use of public media, although only 26% used it monthly to gather information. The district should focus on continued use of the district website and written publications to reach these segments and communicate messages as these tools contributed most to understanding and awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

Upon completion of the online and print survey, we were able to separate the entire population into nine distinct segments. Each of the nine segments fits into one of three much broader categories: Internal Audience (Teachers and Staff), External Audience (Parents) and External Audience (Community Members, Non-Parents). Of the entire population, we were able to conclude the following:

- 55% of all respondents used the district website more than once per month to obtain information
- 54% of all respondents used an individual school webpage more than once per month
- 45% used email correspondence with an individual school on a monthly basis
- 44% of respondents gathered information from school publications at least one per month

All of the current district communication tools in the survey related to higher statistical scores in both communication effectiveness and a higher knowledge of EPS core values and initiatives. Each of the nine sub segments showed different percentages and preferences for communication tools when examined separately. These individual differences can be found in full detail in the quantitative findings section of the report.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our team began the communications audit by conducting secondary research that detailed not only the audit process but also outlined our findings on effective school district communications. We found that districts can use a variety of vehicles to communicate its messages, both internally and externally, when coupled with an effective strategic communications plan. Some examples include: a district web page, school newsletters, written publications and email.

Upon completion of the secondary research findings, we moved to the qualitative phase of the research. During this phase we chose to gather our data through one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted with members of the EPS school board, the superintendent, management team, teachers, staff, parents and community members. While opinions varied greatly among individuals and

groups, we found that these individuals both use and prefer a vast number of different communication tools to send and receive messages. Opinions also differed on what district initiatives, core values and messages needed to be communicated and how they should be communicated for maximum effectiveness. Given the broad range of responses we received during this phase, we focused the creation of our survey around the three main questions listed above.

Lastly, we conducted our quantitative analysis by conducting surveys. We sent on-line and mail surveys to teachers, staff, and member of the Edina community. We segmented the respondents into nine distinct groups so we could use statistical methods to test their awareness of the District's initiatives and core values, the communication sources that are being used by each segment, and which communication sources are really impacting the awareness levels of the respondents. There were many findings stemming from our analysis. For example, we found that internal respondents in segment 2 and external respondents in segment 5 have high awareness levels of the District's initiatives and core values. On the other hand, external respondents in segment 9 have statistically low levels of awareness of the District's initiatives and core values. We also found that respondents are mostly using the District's website, individual school web pages, and e-mail correspondence with individual schools to learn about the District's messages. Lastly, we found strong relationships between the effectiveness of communication and the attitudes of respondents toward Edina.

