

CLAYTON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

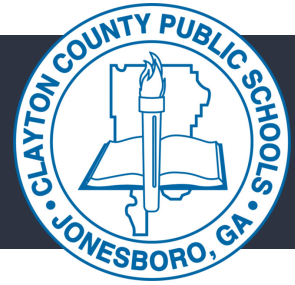
# CENTRAL OFFICE 2023 AUDIT REPORT

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## *"Building A Better Tomorrow, Today"*

### **Focus Area: Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing**

#### **Background**

Communication is at the heart of a school district's success among internal and external stakeholders in the school community. The primary goal should be to stimulate a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Communication, providing quality, accurate, and timely information on a regular basis, is essential to maintaining healthy relationships between students, parents, faculty, central office, and the community at large. Direct and positive communication helps everyone feel confident that they know what is happening and that the diverse needs of all stakeholders are being met. An effective school district's public relations plan provides value by giving people information they can use, not just information that needs to be conveyed.

The communications department should serve as a liaison between the school district and all areas of the community to promote a culture of care and connectedness by encouraging clear, open, transparent, and responsive communication between the district and its respective stakeholders. The department's responsibilities are broad. It should:

- Assist with the preparation and distribution of internal communications.
- Handle media inquiries.
- Respond to requests for publicity and advertising.
- Issue press releases and advisories.
- Connect members of the media with the appropriate district personnel.
- Oversee the district website and assist with school website maintenance.

- Create and publish printed materials such as brochures, flyers, the school activities calendars, and newsletters.

Each department within the system is clearly focused on increasing student achievement; an effective communications department utilizes a variety of platforms to create new lines of communication while building trust throughout the district and the entire community. Regular communication should be clear, concise, timely and responsive through a strategic approach that promotes systematic, two-way communication among both internal and external stakeholders. Utilizing an established communication plan promotes community support and involvement in the district and enhances the public relations of the school district among all stakeholders.

The audit began with a request for documents followed by interviews with the department head. Overall, three major areas of communication management were analyzed during this audit:

- Communication at Large
  - General Expectations for The Department, Other Departments, and Schools
  - Crisis Management Expectations and Standard Communications
  - Communications As an Integral Part of Change Management
- Public Relations
  - Content Development and Management
  - Media Coverage and Press Releases
  - Social Media Management
  - Participation in Community and Industry Events
- Marketing
  - Strategy Plan
  - Branding Efforts



The approach to the audit involved the analysis and triangulation of data from multiple sources, including district-provided data, interviews, surveys and focus group sessions with administrators and staff whose daily work interacts with the District’s Communications department operations and functions. Sessions were held with teachers, principals, and support staff members to gain insight and perspective from CCPS stakeholders. A review of records and associated documents was conducted to corroborate key processes, obtain evidence of documentation maintenance, and validate compliance with Clayton County Public Schools board policy. Documents and records requested for review included:

- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Department
- Organizational Chart
- Job Descriptions, Alignment of Roles and Responsibilities
- Current Goals and Objectives for the Department
- CCPS District Communication Plan
- Samples of General Internal and External Communication
- Crisis Response Communication to Internal and External Stakeholders
- Website Protocols, Guidelines
- Press Releases for The Current and Previous Schoolyear
- Sample Flyers, Brochures, and Other School System Branding Efforts
- Budget Revenues *and* Expenditures - Sys 2022-2023 And 2021-2022
- Applicable Board Policies

## SWOT Analysis and Findings

### Strengths

- The department provides support for diverse populations through translation of documents, voice overs, and more.
- Board meeting recognitions for outstanding staff and student accomplishments are held monthly.
- A complete and all-inclusive crisis response packet has been developed and provided to schools inclusive of step-by-step actions and strategies for various crisis situations, appropriate written responses to stakeholders, and more.
- The department is currently improving Printing Services operations by replacing antiquated equipment with digital equipment to offer better services to customers.
- A digital photo and video archival system has been established for future projects, advertisements, and branding.
- All schools have existing and active websites.

### Weaknesses

- The current Communication Plan is dated 2019-2023. Efforts to develop a new plan should have begun in year 2022 to ensure seamless transition.
- Standard Operating Procedures were not delivered, and there appeared to be no specific goals or direction for the department.
- A clear outline of internal processes needs to be developed and routinely followed.
- District-wide communication strategies and expectations need to be developed beyond those specific to crisis response.
- A clear marketing plan does not exist. Evidence of branding efforts is minimal.
- Antiquated equipment inhibits efficacy and progress in the department.





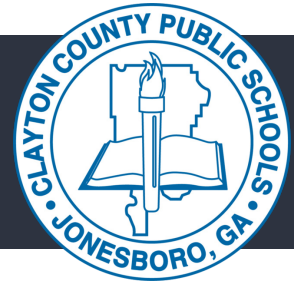
## Opportunities

- Strategic planning for the department should be underway. A Communication Plan for years 2024-2028 should be developed as a result.
- Revisit roles and responsibilities within the department. Ensure staff assignment is based on interests, strengths, and ability to deliver.
- Develop a communication campaign and plan centered on the Interim Superintendent's five priorities.
- The latest press release prior to the first audit interview had been issued one month prior. This release, like many of all others, was advisory in nature, evidencing missed opportunities to tout district advancements and successes.
- The aesthetics and functionality of school websites can be improved. Assess for needed improvements and possible enhancements. Establish and communicate expectations and implement ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance.
- Facilitate the redesign of school websites.
  - Develop a solid content strategy. Build out content to achieve district and school goals.
  - Direct schools on what needs to go on all sites. Include a checklist and provide orientation and training for website maintenance.
  - Facilitate deletion of outdated dated material and information.
  - Execute monitoring and oversight.
- Channel 24 has been inoperable for a protracted period of time. Although operation was recently reinstated, the current state of the channel is not conducive to maintaining long-term functioning operations with high quality content. There exists an inability to produce more meaningful productions and livestream presentations.
- Engage students in district communication efforts at the school level through morning news, school newspapers, podcasts, and other means. Provide work-ready opportunities

for high school students having interest in broadcasting, journalism, and TV production. Consider early release of students where possible.

- Expand relevant and tangible content. Provide an array of diverse content. Include internal and external stakeholders in the process.
- Highlight school specific programs and other newsworthy activities and events.
- Make attending department meetings a priority on a rotating basis. Feature and highlight information, programs activities, and events.
- Identify a communication contact person at each school to be responsible for featuring and highlighting school related information, programs, activities, and events. Offer a stipend for services rendered.
- Make communication and community engagement a shared custody and responsibility throughout the district. Engage internal and external stakeholders in the process to include the faith-based community, civic groups and organizations, fraternities and sororities, and more. Get the word out about all the good things going on in CCPS; communicate them to all residents, business occupants, and learning institutions across the county.
- Advise and keep the superintendent aware of all community events, activities, and newsworthy items.
- Introduce social media benefits and use to all schools. Establish expectations for district-wide social media utilization among all schools and departments.
- Plan and organize Listening Sessions, whether virtual or in-person, to inform the community of the ongoing work in the district, afford them an opportunity to pose questions and to give input and offer suggestions as to how the department can best serve and include the community at large.





- Hold a media luncheon and invite representatives from local media outlets. Brief attendees on the interim superintendent’s five priorities. Establish a database of contacts, open lines of communication. Strengthen and reconnect media relationships to garner more local news coverage.

## Threats

- At the time of the audit, there was no evidence of a Clayton County Public Schools Communication Plan. The one provided was dated **2019-2023**. “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail”.
- There appears to be no clear direction or identified goals for the department.
- The department lacks standard operating procedures (SOPs) beyond the response packet for schools.

## Recommendations

- Identify and begin implementation of best practices for rebranding the district
  - Open SY 2023-24 with an established brand that is readily recognized by all CCPS staff and community stakeholders.
  - Establish and communicate a written protocol outlining expectations and for branding throughout the district.
  - Indicate expectations specific to central level divisions and departments, schools, and other associated organizations.
- Revamp the aesthetics and functionality of the district website.
  - Make readily accessible the school system’s mission, vision, and beliefs.
  - Ensure all schools and their respective administrators are readily identifiable. Include applicable addresses and phone numbers.
- Tell your own story and change the narrative.

- Prepare and issue periodic press releases touting district and schools' accomplishments and successes in the school system.
- Identify a communications contact person at each school to be responsible for highlighting and sharing school activities, events and other good news from schools. Have them issue monthly press releases to the communications department. Offer stipend to each contact person.
- Invite central level department heads to share newsworthy information specific to their departments to be shared with internal and external stakeholders,

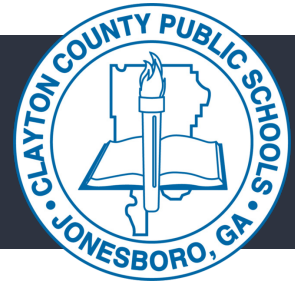
## **Future Implications:**

Being able to communicate effectively is vital to being a viable educational organization.

Communication is the best tactic an educational institution can use in today's world. This is true for almost every desired outcome: expanding institutional reputation, expanding student enrollment, or simply expanding the district's reputation in the local community.

Communication is an integral part of change management; it not only conveys information, but it encourages effort, modifies attitudes, and stimulates thinking. Without it, stereotypes develop, messages become distorted, and organizational learning is stifled. With the increased competition amongst education institutions, investing in a strong communications department will provide a competitive edge for the school district.

It will be in the district's best interest going forward to identify someone responsible for serving as a community relations manager. The Community Relations Manager would be the staff member charged with planning, developing, implementing, and analyzing community relations campaigns, marketing efforts, and related events. The person would also establish and maintain relationships with internal/external stakeholders to support Clayton County Public Schools and Superintendent, along with the Communications, Public Relations & Marketing Division through



the implementation of community outreach programs, organizing events, coordinating volunteers, etc. He or she would write content for public and media promotions to enhance the district's brand awareness and the district's mission, vision, core beliefs. The Community Relations Manager would also communicate strategic goals across the community and beyond. Additionally, the individual holding the position would do the following:

- Remain up to date on current trends, events, and situations in order to identify/create strategies to increase community engagement.
- Facilitate good, ongoing communication.
- Administer periodic surveys as a great way to keep in touch with what the community is thinking.
- Establish a Parent and Community advisory Council (PACs) to promote open lines of communication and support. Members can include parents, teachers/staff, business leaders, senior citizens, clergy, alumni, youth organizations, sports leagues, preschool/day care centers, civic associations, local business leaders and service providers, and local government. Make certain this group has timely and correct information about important or controversial district issues.
- Every district needs a spokesperson. In general, the superintendent is the spokesperson for matters relating to district operations. For issues related specifically to the Board of Education, such as board policy, the board president typically acts as spokesperson. Some districts appoint a district communications officer to deal with the media as well as public inquiries. Whatever the case, a spokesperson should always be available and responsive to take calls, even after regular working hours as events require.

## Other important considerations for the department would be to:

- **Develop an e-mail blast list.** A district could have several lists: one for families who need to know details of school events and news like weather-related school closing, and another that encompasses the community in general and gives overall district news and information. Ways to create this broader list include having signup sheets at local organizations such as senior citizen groups and making a general signup list available through the district website.
- **Diversify communication.** Remember that one communication technique is rarely a silver bullet for reaching most parents. Some will prefer email, others social media, while others prefer the backpack method, or even delivery through churches or community and social centers.
- **Make two-way communication a priority.** A community relations program isn't just about putting information out there; it's about receiving it as well.
- **Arm board members with positive talking points.** Board members tend to hear complaints or concerns about the district from the public – that's just part of the territory, and listening is an important aspect of a board member's role. However, try to make it a practice to give them good news to impart as well.
- **Inspect what you expect.** The audit revealed the need for heightened accountability across the district, and communications is no exception. Clear guidelines and protocols relative to schools' websites and other systemwide mechanisms must be established and routinely followed. Leaders within the department must maintain oversight and monitoring of how responsible parties adhere to established guidelines and protocols. Non-compliance should be reported up the chain of command as necessary.