



Linn-Mar Community School District

Strategic Communications Plan

Final Draft - 11/04/21



Purpose

The purpose of the Linn-Mar Community School District (LMCSD) Strategic Communications Plan is to establish a proactive system of communication that reaches district internal and external audiences to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence in the district.

Mission Statement

Committed to providing timely and effective district communication to strengthen internal and external awareness, support, and confidence in the district.

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Desired Outcomes

The Strategic Communications Plan will serve as a guide for the LMCS D Public Relations (PR) Department's strategies and goals for the 2021-2026 school years.

This plan will outline the PR department's role in providing ongoing media relations, internal and external communications, crisis communication, and building/department level communication support throughout the district.

Outcomes:

1. Establish and implement an effective External Communication Plan to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence in LMCS D.
2. Establish and implement an effective Internal Communication Plan to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence within the district.
3. Improve public access to online district information to better provide timely and effective district communication.
4. Transition department from a Communications/Marketing Department to a Public Relations Department to improve media relations, crisis communication support, and internal and external communications throughout the LM community.

The success of the LMCS D Strategic Communication Plan depends heavily on the support and involvement of all district staff members, as effective communication is a part of each and every job throughout the Linn-Mar Community School District.



Outcome #1

Establish and implement an effective External Communication Plan to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence in LMCS D.

Goal 1: Increase external awareness of the district's goals, programs and school buildings by generating relevant ongoing content in a clear and timely manner.

- **Tactic 1:** Develop and maintain a district content calendar to effectively share timely ongoing district news, interests, and special events.
- **Tactic 2:** Build relationships with LM Volunteers, LM Social Media Group, and LM PTO members to help distribute district news.
- **Tactic 3:** Increase the number of Linn-Mar generated positive story pitches for additional media coverage.
- **Tactic 4:** Increase coverage of the Superintendent's presence and involvement in the community.
- **Tactic 5:** Increase coverage of student and staff community involvement (ie: stories about staff/students donating or volunteering, local business partnerships...etc)

Goal 2: Strengthen external support by expanding existing communication methods and channels for current LM parents and community members.

- **Tactic 1:** Implement and distribute an opt-in district email newsletter to reach a broader audience to provide additional communication methods and channels for sharing district news, goals, objectives and programs.
- **Tactic 2:** Provide communication support for the Superintendent, Cabinet, and Board of Education to improve timely district communication.

Goal 3: Build external confidence in the LMCS D by focusing communication efforts on aligning with the district's goals and priorities.

- **Tactic 1:** Assist the Human Resource department with the creation of a marketing plan for staff recruitment efforts.
- **Tactic 2:** Assist with the creation of a marketing campaign geared towards incoming parents of Pre-K and Kindergarteners to increase student enrollment
- **Tactic 3:** Conduct a survey to gauge current levels of parent and community member confidence in the district.
- **Tactic 4:** Review survey results and identify key trends. (ie: confidence in student safety, crisis communication, standards based learning, etc)
- **Tactic 5:** Create goals and implement a communication plan based on key findings.



Outcome #2

Establish and implement an effective Internal Communication Plan to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence within the district.

Goal 1: Improve internal awareness and support by communicating school building, department, and district information in a clear and timely manner.

- **Tactic 1:** Develop and maintain an internal content calendar to better effectively share timely department information, staff successes, and special events.
- **Tactic 2:** Design and distribute an internal newsletter to improve staff's district awareness and support, while decreasing the quantity of all-staff emails.

Goal 2: Build internal confidence in the LMCS D by increasing district retention.

- **Tactic 1:** Conduct a staff survey on current levels of awareness, support and confidence.
- **Tactic 2:** Review staff survey results and identify key trends and share with key stakeholders to implement improvements.

Outcome #3

Improve public access to online district information to better provide timely and effective district communication.

Goal 1: Update existing district website layout and design to align content towards prospective and current families.

- **Tactic 1:** Work with website host to redesign website layout to modernize website to increase focus towards prospective families, job candidates and current families.
- **Tactic 2:** Review Google Analytics results to declutter website dropdowns and streamline access to relevant, searchable content.
- **Tactic 3:** Generate ongoing and timely website content to increase awareness, strengthen support and build confidence in LMCS D.
- **Tactic 4:** Remove intranet, staff directory and staff related resources from public facing website.

Goal 2: Expand existing School Building webpages to stand-alone websites to better provide current students, staff, and families with relevant building-related information.



- **Tactic 1:** Work with website host to redesign and redirect current school pages to stand-alone LM branded school websites.
- **Tactic 2:** Identify, train and develop staff at each school building to maintain new branded school building websites.
- **Tactic 3:** Provide ongoing support for new school building websites to ensure important and time-sensitive information is more accessible for current students, staff and families.

Goal 3: Increase awareness of the existing district’s social media accounts and new email newsletter.

- **Tactic 1:** Develop a Social Media Group, consisting of representatives from each school building, to help share school building successes throughout the district.
- **Tactic 2:** Conduct a Social Media audit of all LM district accounts and delete old accounts (inactive accounts). Set-up active social media accounts at all schools to increase awareness with external audiences, including, parents, students, volunteers, media.
- **Tactic 3:** Update existing or create a new policy which explains guidelines around creation of LM branded social media accounts (including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube). LM branded accounts must include a staff member as an admin, and must be approved by the PR department in advance to help limit the amount of future inactive accounts.
- **Tactic 4:** Promote sign-up of email newsletter on website to reach broader community audiences (ie: Voter base, assisted living residents, former and incoming Linn-Mar parents).

Outcome #4

Transition department from a Communications/Marketing Department to a Public Relations Department to improve media relations, crisis communication support, and internal and external communications throughout the LM community.

Goal 1: Establish the Public Relations (PR) department as the central office for all media relations to ensure all correspondence is handled consistently throughout the district.

- **Tactic 1:** Build and strengthen relationships with internal staff, including, school building principals, athletic department, student activities/clubs, and coaches to strengthen the PR department as the liaison between staff and media.
- **Tactic 2:** Ensure all press releases, media inquiries, story pitches, interviews, and email/phone coordination goes through the PR department.
- **Tactic 3:** Build and strengthen relationships with external audiences including reporters and anchors to help establish the PR department as the intermediary for all district media requests and stories.



- **Tactic 4:** Develop materials regarding internal staff protocols for media correspondence.
- **Tactic 5:** Provide training and media coaching as needed throughout the district.

Goal 2: Provide ongoing communication support for School Buildings, Internal Departments and Programs to align communication with district goals.

- **Tactic 1:** Create procedures for project requests to help prioritize as well as determine which projects will be worked on, turnaround time, type of project etc.
- **Tactic 2:** Support the Student Services department with promotion of current crisis communication tools.
- **Tactic 3:** Create a PR campaign surrounding LM's 75th anniversary (2024).

Goal 3: Provide ongoing training to support PR department staff in transitioning from a Communication to PR department.

- **Tactic 1:** Identify current responsibilities and prioritize to help determine if and when certain project requests will be supported to better align with the new PR department goals and strategic communication plan.
- **Tactic 2:** Identify future PR department responsibilities and goals which will further advance the department and strategic communication plan.
- **Tactic 3:** Develop a 1-5 year PR department budget for upcoming expenses and needs. (IE: website, new camera, software fees, personal development, award submission fees, conference fees, etc...)
- **Tactic 4:** Send submissions annually or as needed for Iowa School Public Relations Association (ISPRA) and/or National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) awards.

Conclusion

The Strategic Communication Plan is an outline for communication efforts for the 2021-2026 school years. Should the district's needs change significantly during this time period, this plan will also be revised. The Strategic Communication Plan will be reviewed annually for effectiveness and will be updated to reflect progress and new goals.

Evaluation and Measurement

The following resources will be utilized to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the strategic communication plan.

- Awareness, Support and Confidence Survey (pre and post)
 - Staff
 - Parent and Community
- Quality and Quantity of Media Coverage
- Social Media analytics (followers, impressions, engagement, post link clicks etc...)
- Website analytics
- Email newsletter analytics

District Audiences

Internal

- Students
- Teachers
- Support Staff
- Substitute Teachers
- Administrators
- Board of Education
- School Volunteers

External

- Parents
- Community Members
- Retirees/Alumni
- Media
- Elected Officials
- Businesses/Partners
- Prospective Parents and Students
- Prospective Employees
- Realtors
- New Residents of the District
- Taxpayers of the District



Public Relations Department Responsibilities

The Linn-Mar Public Relations Department is responsible for the districts' media relations, internal and external communications, crisis communication, and building/department level communication support throughout the district.

- **Media Relations**
 - The Public Relations Department (PR) serves as the district spokesperson and acts as the liaison between staff, schools, district and the media.
 - The PR department provides media training for administration and interview preparation for staff and administration.
 - The PR department secures interviews with media and coordinates building media access and classroom visits.
 - The PR department pitches positive story ideas and writes press releases for additional media coverage.
- **Internal and External Communications:**
 - The PR department develops, maintains, and implements the district's strategic communication plan.
 - The PR department manages and maintains the district's communication channels including, but not limited to, the district's website, marketing publications, e-newsletters, and social media.
 - The PR department supports the Superintendent, Cabinet, and Board of Education to communicate timely and effective internal and external communication.
- **Crisis Communication Support:**
 - The PR department is responsible for the distribution of district-wide alerts/notifications related, but not limited to, weather-related cancelations, emergency alerts, and important district-wide news.
 - The PR department assists the Student Services Department with testing and implementing the district's crisis communication tools and plan.
- **Building and Department Communication Support**
 - The PR department provides ongoing communication support for school buildings and administration, including but not limited to: presentations, photo/video production, and social media/website guidance when the below criteria is met:
 - Project will help **recruit staff and students**
 - Project will **positively impact the district's brand**
 - Project will help **improve district internal and external communications efforts.**
 - The PR department creates the following annual marketing publications:
 - **Annual Report** - The annual report showcases the district's facts and financials, instructional and building accomplishments, and student and staff achievements and recognitions.
 - **District Handbook** - The district handbook is a comprehensive guide and directory. It is a detailed resource guide for each school building and administrative department and list of services the



district provides. The district handbook also includes student forms, and a list of board policies.

- **District Fast FAQs** - District Fast FAQs is a summary flyer which includes high level district facts.
- **Branded Special Project Publications** - Special projects publications include, but not limited to: Capital projects flyer, district folders, letterhead, pens, etc.

Marketing vs Public Relations Definitions:

- **Marketing** refers to activities a company undertakes to promote the buying or selling of a product or service. **Marketing** includes advertising, selling, and delivering products to consumers or other businesses. Some **marketing** is done by affiliates on behalf of a company.
- **Public Relations** professionals shape an organization's image. They build the brand, spread the organization's message and minimize the effect of negative publicity. At a small company, the PR person may have to handle all the **roles** – cheerleader, media contact person, the deflector of criticism – themselves.

Transitioning the Communication/Marketing department to a Public Relations department will help the district increase its focus to improve awareness, strengthen support, and build confidence in LMCSD. Currently, many of the day-to-day department tasks and project requests consist of marketing support for buildings and/or departments, (IE: video/photo requests and assisting with building/department website and social media content). This transition will assist with improving awareness of the Linn-Mar brand, strengthen the overall support and build confidence in the district throughout the larger community.