



Shrewsbury Public Schools

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Superintendent

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To: School Committee

From: Joe Sawyer

Re: Draft of Survey on District Communications

In order to advance the School Committee's goal to continuously improve communications with its constituents, as well as my goal as superintendent to do the same, I am drafting a survey to send out to the school district's stakeholders in order to receive feedback regarding what communication tactics are considered most effective.

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) indicates that effective school district communication is important for the following reasons:

- High-performing teams and companies are characterized by open and frequent communication, collaboration and shared decision-making.
- Organizations that communicate frequently with their employees and treat them well outperform their peers....
- Good communication increases teamwork, productivity, employee morale, job satisfaction and retention.
- Good communication improves customer service.
- Good communication serves as the organizational glue as well as the oil that keeps the engine running smoothly.
- Transparent, open, and frequent communication and ongoing engagement build trust in organizations and their leaders.
- When people trust and are engaged in organizations, they are more likely to use their services, advocate on their behalf, defend them when attacked and pay their taxes or write checks to support them.

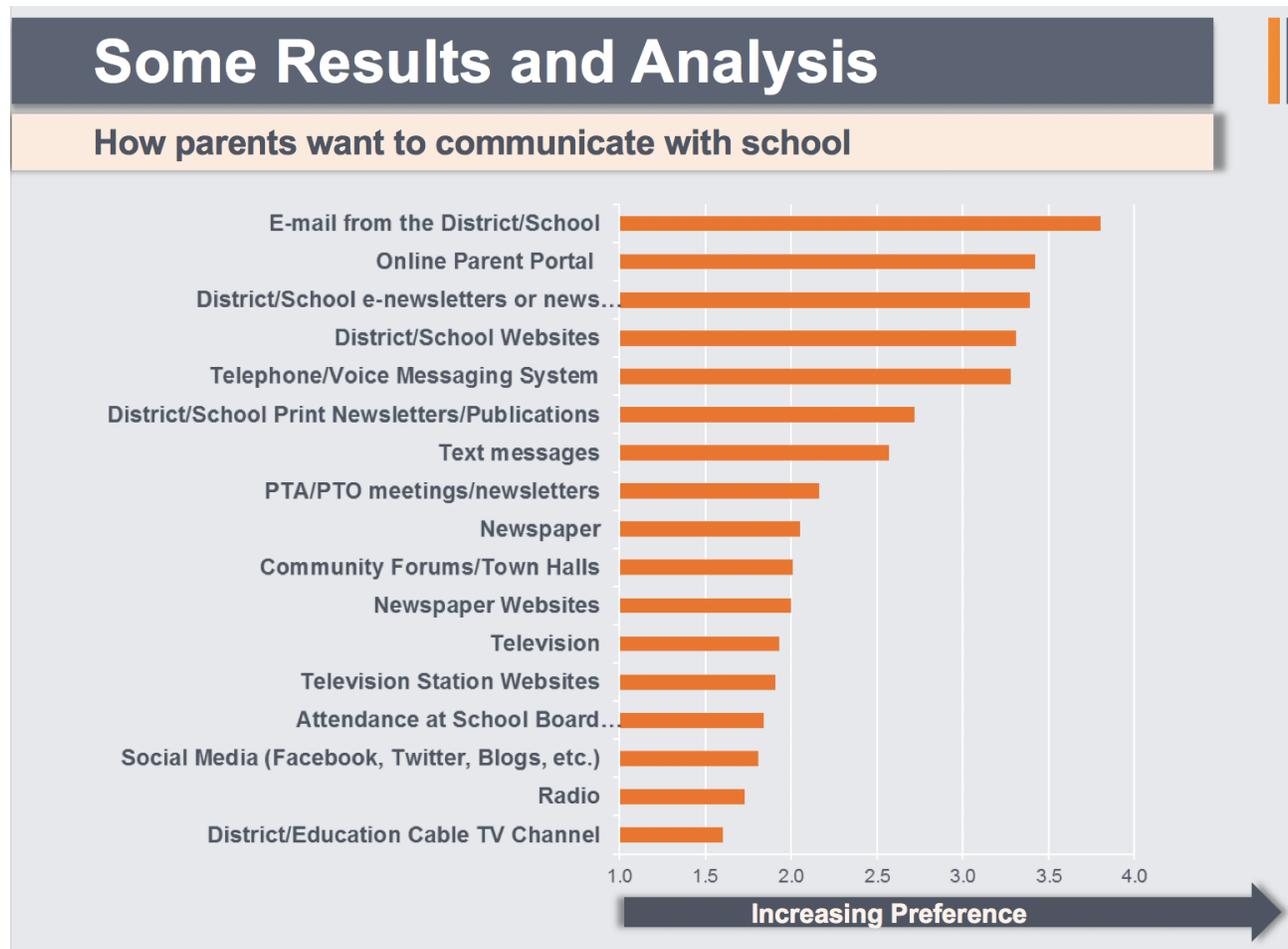
(National School Public Relations Association, 2013)

In [a national survey conducted in 2011 by NSPRA](#), the findings indicated the following regarding district-level communications:

When it comes to content issues from school district leaders, both parents and non-parents listed the rationale/reasons for decisions made by the school district, curriculum/educational options, information on how well the school district is performing compared to other school districts, and budget and finance elections and updates in the top tier of content requests.

This same survey gauged preferences for how constituents wished to receive communications from schools and school districts. NSPRA summarized these as follows:

Preferred delivery methods include direct communication from teachers, principals and school district leaders in electronic/Internet based formats. In a surprise finding, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. were in the bottom tier of preferred communication vehicles. Assumptions by NSPRA leaders are that social media may be seen as “too social,” lacking in credibility for official school information or it is just too soon to make an impact for today’s parents. Traditional media such as newspapers and television also were not as preferred as direct electronic communication from teachers, principals and other school leaders.



(National School Public Relations Association, 2011)

Where Respondents Prefer to Get Information

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	Parent	Non-Parent
E-mail from the district/school	3.8	3.5
District/School e-newsletters or news updates via email	3.4	3.0
District/School websites	3.3	3.4
Online parent portal (Online access to grades, attendance, assignments, etc.)	3.4	2.7
Telephone messaging system/voice-messaging system/emergency parent notification system	3.3	2.7
District/School print newsletters/publications	2.7	2.7
Text messages	2.6	2.1
Newspaper	2.1	2.7
PTA/PTO meetings/newsletters	2.2	2.1
Newspaper websites	2.0	2.5
Community forums/town halls	2.0	2.3
Television	1.9	2.6
Television station websites	1.9	2.3
Attendance at school board meetings/board minutes	1.8	2.1
Radio	1.7	2.2
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, etc.)	1.8	1.8
District/Education cable TV channel	1.6	2.1
Other	1.3	1.6

Respondents rated common media on a 4-point scale (1=Least preferred to 4=Most preferred) for where they prefer to get information about schools. Average scores for each group are displayed.

Electronic/Internet-based sources like email, e-newsletters, district websites, and parent portals tended to be the most preferred information sources.

(National School Public Relations Association, 2011)

I would interpret the above NSPRA findings regarding social media with caution, given that 2011 is a long time ago where it comes to the use of social media. However, [a more recent national survey](#) conducted in 2016 and reported in 2018 by Project Tomorrow (a non-profit research organization) and Blackboard (a school technology company that includes an automated communications product), had similar findings, indicating similar preferences to what NSPRA found.

Increasingly, principals are turning to social media tools to communicate with the parents of their students, but parents' choices for communications tools are often at odds with the administrators' choices.

However, this report suggested that the use of social media may expand as parents, especially younger ones, utilize it more in general:

Today's younger parents are on the forefront of using social media for communications across all aspects of their lives. It is therefore important for districts to understand and appreciate how these new digital parents are leveraging these tools as they may represent the future of home-to-school communications.

It will be important to determine SPS constituents' levels of satisfaction and communication preferences, which the recommended survey items will address.

The draft of a communications survey for our school district should follow the advice provided in [this post by Campus Suite](#), who is our district's website provider, which is to keep the survey "short and sweet" and to use simple rating scale questions and short answer responses.

With this in mind, the suggested content of the survey is as follows:

- 1) Demographics items to define constituent who is responding (e.g., parent, non-parent community member, staff member)
- 2) Survey items that ask what modes of communication do constituents utilize, and what they find effective regarding School Committee information
- 3) Survey items that ask what modes of communication do constituents utilize, and what they find effective regarding information from the Superintendent
- 4) Items that ask for their overall opinion on the effectiveness of communication from the School Committee and the Superintendent (these should be at the end, as asking overall opinions at the start of a survey result in respondents scoring subsequent questions in ways that justify their initial answer, rather than vice versa)
- 5) Ending with an opportunity to add comments

I look forward to discussing this topic and getting your feedback at your meeting on October 2.