

School District of Altoona

Marketing & Communications Plan



October 2019 ☺ By: Joyce Orth, Communications Coordinator

The School District of Altoona offers large school opportunities with a small school approach. We do this by Engaging, Equipping & Empowering our Stakeholders.

We believe that school public relations is every employee's job. Every employee is an important communicator making or breaking our collective image. All employees must be well-informed through consistent messaging at all levels (talking points/key words) and empowered to serve as ambassadors building bridges, or a go-to person for answers. In the absence of communication, we humans fill in the gaps.

Purpose.

This plan is intended to serve as a roadmap, providing intentional direction and focus as we do our work aligning leadership and improving communication across the board.

It will identify stakeholder groups and outline ways that we engage, equip, and empower them, along with ways we can improve communication with them and build a culture of engagement. It will establish realistic priorities that need the most urgent attention and/or will have the greatest impact. "A culture of engagement must be built. It's not an event, rather a process that requires intentional and sustained effort."¹ The ultimate desired end result is increased student success.

Stakeholders.

Snapshot – Our Demographics for Zip Code 54720²:

- 33.7% of the total population are age 50 or older; 25.1% are under age 20. Those two age groups make up 58.8% of the population. The median age is 36.6.
- 37.9% of "household types" are identified as nonfamily households, with 32.3% living alone, and 15.2% are age 65 or older.
- 91.8% are white, followed by Hispanic 3.7% and Asian 2.6%.
- The median household income was \$53,270 in 2017; 8.2% of residents live in poverty.

We have social responsibility to diverse stakeholders, even beyond our stakeholders, what we do matters well beyond our school boundaries. While we'd love to retain the good citizens that graduate from Altoona High School year after year, we know that the great majority will go on to work and lead elsewhere - in-state, out-of-state, and across the globe.

¹ Gallup. School Engagement is More Than Just Talk by Tim Hodges, October 25, 2018

² Cubit Planning, Wisconsin Demographics, Demographics Starter Report for 54720

Internal Stakeholders:	External Stakeholders:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Students➤ Parents<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Resident➤ Nonresident➤ Staff➤ School Board Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Alumni➤ Community Members<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Nonpublic School families➤ Home School families➤ Empty Nesters➤ Young adults w/o children➤ Employers/Businesses➤ City/Townships➤ Media

Marketing.

Good marketing will make the School District of Altoona visible as we establish our presence in and around the school district, the Chippewa Valley region, and beyond, further setting our place at the table as a school of choice, give us expanded opportunities to build relationships, and grow partnerships.

Communications.

Consistent communications is the heartbeat of school PR and marketing in any setting. Good communication will increase our base of support as we tell our success-stories and share our challenges using both one-way and two-way communication approaches that provide opportunities for feedback and engagement.

Studies indicate that when schools listen to their stakeholders, engage them in school activities, and respond to their needs, they become successful, high-performing organizations. When stakeholders become partners with their local schools, educators are motivated, and most importantly, students succeed.

It is estimated that 58.8% of our population (that reside within the City of Altoona) do not have children in school, and it has been said that only 4% of American citizens get news about their local public schools directly from their schools. We are responsible for telling our story.

"We human beings are hard-wired for narrative. In the absence of a story, we will make one up. Tell your story first." Kate Nugent

Channels.

	Website	Email	Mass Notification System	Email Points of Pride	Social Media	Press Releases	RAILS Review News-letter	Physical Presence
Staff	x	x		x	x		x	x
Students	x				x		x	x
School Board	x	x		x	x		x	x
Parents	x		x		x		x	
Alumni	x				x			
Community At-Large	x				x		x	
Media	x	x			x	x		

Each stakeholder group has different expectations, needs, and preferred vehicles of communication. On top of that we have **barriers** and **communication holes**. As noted in Hacking Leadership 101, “Flattening the walls of your school entails eliminating the communication barriers so everyone feels like they are part of the school community.”

Priorities.

Our goal is to improve communication and build a culture of engagement (flatten the walls); we will do so by establishing realistic priorities that need the most urgent attention (barriers that need to be eliminated) and/or will have the greatest impact.

Yellow highlighted text on the Channels Chart above represent priority areas that will be addressed starting this school year. We believe the actions and timelines to address these areas are realistic and sustainable.

1. **Stakeholder Alumni.** While our alumni can be a powerful engagement and fundraising source, our connection with alumni is almost non-existent (**communication void**). We’re missing out on what could be our most loyal support network, not to mention, great role models for our current and future student body. A typical public K-12 communication emphasis (approximately 90%) is on students, parents, and staff which make up an estimated 15% of the community. The other 85% is typically alumni parents, alumni, and other community members.³ If our district is typical, only 10% of our communication emphasis is focused on this large percentage (85%) of the community. While our website and social media outlets are available 24/7 from anywhere, these are not channels that our alumni are apt to seek out.

³ Alumni Nations™ https://www.alumninations.com/creating_your_nation

Action. We are in the early stages of working with Alumni Nations™ to build our alumni (and other community members) base. We will capitalize on the number of alumni who are also staff members by asking them to actively work with us in some capacity during this process. This initiative has the potential to have **great impact** on future fundraising and, as we build alumni relationships, on student success well into the future.

Timeline. October, 2019, begin seeking fundraising options to cover program start-up costs. After start-up costs are accounted for, this process will be ongoing.

2. **Stakeholder Students.** While social media is readily available at any time, research shows that YouTube (85% say they use), Instagram (72% say they use) and Snapchat (69% say they use) are the most popular online platforms among teens.⁴

Action. Add Instagram to our current social media (Facebook, Twitter at the District level) mix. This simple action will fill a **communication void**, and better engage our student population.

Timeline. Implementation by mid-November 2019.

3. **Stakeholder Parents.** Our current Mass Notification System is outdated; the most pressing issue being our inability to communicate with our non-English or limited-English speaking parents. (Think snow day or an emergency with a robocall in English.) The mass notification system is also used for triggered attendance alerts, and low lunch balances. This is another high priority area. Another desired feature of a new system is the ability for anyone from anywhere to be able to opt in and receive custom email updates from within the notification system that would highlight a week or month, depending on what frequency is manageable. This opt-in feature would provide an avenue of communication that reaches well-beyond our parent group.

Action. Research notification systems, with input from IT department (for technical aspects) and present a recommendation to the Superintendent for implementation as soon as practical. A new system will **eliminate barriers, fill communication holes and have great impact.**

Timeline. Present a recommendation to the Superintendent by March 2020.

4. **Stakeholder ALL.** Our physical presence in and around the community will further set our place at the table as a school of choice, give us expanded opportunities to build relationships with all stakeholder groups and grow partnerships. When stakeholders become partners, educators are motivated, and most importantly, students succeed.

Action. Establish a School District of Altoona Ambassador program. This action will **fill communication holes and have great impact.**

Timeline. By December 2019, establish an Ambassador job description and protocols. By March 2020, invite staff, parents and community members to apply to the program. By May 2020, meet with the ambassador team to strategize and identify next steps including potential opportunities to be visible and establish our presence, and ways to consistently solidify our brand.

⁴ Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018 "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018" Pew Research Center <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>