



District Communication Update

Presented to the LVJUSD Board of Education

March 5, 2019

Background:

Fulfilling our district's mission - each student will graduate with the skills needed to contribute and thrive in a changing world - depends on students being successful in school. Family engagement is one of the single most important factors in ensuring student success in school. With the advent of the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), educators in California have been charged with engaging families in the education of their children. Family engagement begins with, and is sustained through, effective communication.

Our district's LCAP Goal #3 prioritizes the need for family engagement and communication: "Enhance parent and community engagement and communication." Specifically, within the 2018 LCAP Goal #3, our district committed to "Improve communication tools in use by district staff to reach all parents effectively, thereby increasing the percentage of parents engaged in their children's learning." With that goal, our Community Engagement Department facilitated a district-wide Communications Task Force, comprised of teachers, administrators, a Board trustee, office staff, students, and parents representing elementary, middle and high school levels, that recommended improving communication tools so that our district could reach and maintain the highest level of community engagement through communication. On April 17, 2018, our Board of Education approved the acquisition of website, mobile app, and mass communication tools that have the capacity for state-of-the-art communication between schools and families, schools and students, and schools and community. Implementation of the new products began in fall 2018 and is ongoing throughout 2018 - 2019.

In addition to external communication and outreach, our district is committed to efficient internal communication tools and practices that provide systematic means of conveying information, fostering collaboration, and supporting professionalism. Along with the new suite of tools currently being implemented, internal communications include email, newsletters, and sharing of information through G Suite and our District Intranet. Effective internal communication supports student achievement, which in turn enables our mission to be realized.

Status:

External Communications

With the activation of our new, robust suite of communication tools, school and district staff members are able to communicate directly with families, students, and community with ease

and efficiency. Our Community Engagement Department continues to provide guidance and support to all sites and departments in making the most of the tools. This work supports one of our measurable items for LCAP Goal #3: District and sites communicate with parents/guardians through mass notification, app, and newsletters on a regular basis. Our goal is that at least 75% of staff communicate regularly. We have 100% use of our new tools by site administrators, and are seeing a continual increase in use by teachers, along with their continuing use of more traditional means of communication such as weekly newsletters sent home with students and personal meetings during conferences.

Our new mass notification system launched in July 2018, enabling both teachers and administrators to communicate easily with parents/guardians, as well as with students and staff. All teachers can email and text parents directly, and administrators have the added ability to phone as well as post messages to the mobile app, to their websites, and to social media. All can use the tool to send newsletters and messages using a variety of customizable templates. This tool has been of particular benefit for district-wide and crisis communications. For example, in only moments, we were able to notify all parents, guardians, students, and staff that we needed to close school because of hazardous air quality. More frequently, we provide updates of school, district, and community events; share accomplishments of students and staff; and encourage attendance at school, district, and pertinent community events. We are now able to send our superintendent's monthly newsletter, "The Grapevine," directly to all parents, guardians, and staff members, in addition to posting it online for our community at-large.

Even as staff members are still learning the benefits of the tool, we are seeing increasingly frequent use of the mass notification system. In addition to the automated attendance messages that are sent through the system, we are seeing a growing range of use of the mass notification tool. During the first half of this year, teachers sent 718 emails and/or texts, resulting in 3,725 contacts with students, and more than 23,750 contacts with parents. Administrators have already sent 1,533 messages, resulting in 1,494,170 contacts with students, staff, and families. It may be worth noting that teachers did not have the ability to use our previous mass notification tools, so we are developing workflow processes that make use of this efficient means of outreach.

The mobile app launched in November of 2018, just in time to spread the news of air quality conditions to all families as well as to community members who downloaded the app. Another commitment through LCAP Goal #3 is to establish a baseline in the use of communication outreach tools. We currently have over 4,350 downloads of our app, and we intend to double that by the end of this calendar year. Conversations with those who have downloaded the app show that our community members appreciate having all school news available in the palm of their hand. All community members are able to use the app to access calendar items and homepage news from any and all schools, if they choose, as well as to receive all general app notifications sent out by school sites and our District Office. They can follow social media accounts and peruse Peachjar flyers, all available through the app. The app provides an easy way to email staff members, and includes one-click access to Tip Line, which allows our community to send positive messages as well as to alert administrators of potentially unsafe

conditions. Additionally, parents and guardians who have logged in to the app are able to access their children's lunch account information (and add funds to the account), and to view their library and textbook records, through a link to our Destiny system. They can see student attendance, and modify their own notification preferences. Students who download the app can also log in and receive direct communications, in the notification section of the app, from teachers via their @lvjUSD.org email accounts. Several sites have begun using the app as a means for teachers to enhance communication with their students. As with our website, the app allows our community members to translate the content into their preferred language. With our current mass notification system and our mobile app, each parent, student, teacher, and administrator has an account. Our previous system sent messages to one parent contact; our current system allows each parent/guardian to have unique contact information, enabling direct communication to facilitate engagement.

Our new website launched in mid-September of 2018, offering a contemporary format for all sites throughout our district and providing accessible content to our entire community. The new content management system (website) includes built-in support for our editors to ensure that content on the website is compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA). One of our LCAP action items asserts that we will provide translation and interpretation services for parents and guardians. In addition to this need being met through translation services during meetings through Language Line or interpreters, the website allows users to access content in their preferred language. Our vision for the website is to make it a complete resource for all parents, guardians, and students, providing information that will support parents' and guardians' understanding of our educational system, while also providing vetted professional resources that can inform their support of their student's academic, behavioral, and social emotional growth and wellbeing.

Our district continues to provide an online gradebook for teachers in middle and high schools that includes an online portal for students and parents/guardians. A measurable item for LCAP Goal #3 states that 100% of our staff members will use the online gradebook, thereby enabling parents and guardians to monitor their students' progress. All of our middle and high school teachers meet this goal. Another item in our LCAP Goal #3 stresses the importance of reporting student progress to parents and guardians by updating the online gradebook at least every three weeks. Our middle and high school teachers continue to make a commitment to meet - and, in many cases, exceed - this goal.

It may be worth noting that the online gradebook requirement is for middle and high school teachers, only. In addition to the online gradebook already purchased and included in our student information system (PowerSchool), with the purchase and use of another online program (Illuminate) for benchmark assessments and elementary report cards, we are exploring making electronic gradebooks available to all teachers (not only teachers of grades 6-12). This spring, the Gradebook Committee will research options that may provide fewer logins for teachers, save money, and provide easier access for parents and guardians by being compatible with our new mobile app.

All sites make use of Peachjar to share electronic flyers with our families and community. Schools post site-specific information, and our Community Engagement Department facilitates the posting of district-wide information as well as the sharing of community opportunities for enrichment. We frequently make use of an online graphic design program (Canva) to facilitate creation of engaging and informative flyers, website posts, and social media posts. Our mobile app and all school websites offer a link to Peachjar flyers. Parents and guardians can opt for an email from Peachjar, or they can easily peruse flyers for their schools and all schools through one click in the app.

Having access to a variety of communication tools, often sharing very similar or even the same information, enables us to meet our families where they are. Some parents and guardians check the school marquee each morning, while others only visit the schools once or twice per year; they depend on the availability of news that comes to them in the way they most prefer in order for them to stay up-to-date with their child's school and education. Connecting parents and guardians to our schools is a critical step toward full and meaningful parent engagement.

Outreach

In addition to direct communication with parents, guardians, and community members, we have organized methods of outreach to our community that offer multiple ways for staying informed and for participating in our schools. Media outreach, public events, and parent education and involvement are strategic ways of reaching our community to showcase our students and schools and to encourage engagement.

Our Community Engagement department invites our community to learn about our schools through regular press releases and daily social media updates through Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram. Each social media platform performs a slightly different purpose, together designed to inform and engage. (And all, together, stream to the mobile app for easy access.) Facebook is our community bulletin board, where we share news and events from school sites, our district, and within our community. Twitter is the place to find resources available to students, parents, and educators. We retweet parent resources from Choose Love, Common Sense Media, Challenge Success, and other vetted sources. We also retweet news and information from our partners such as the Livermore Valley Education Foundation, the Pedrozzi Foundation, the Livermore Cultural Arts Council, the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (LARPD), and the Livermore Library. Instagram is our platform to invite our community into our schools; we picture learning in action, we showcase teams and individuals contributing to our students' education, and we share images that celebrate our students' accomplishments and our district's progress. We also partner with the City of Livermore to share news on all platforms, and the City, in turn, uses its Nextdoor account to post District news and events, as well as safety reminders. Our website provides a home for informational outreach that works toward our mission, and shares District philosophy and core values. We share relevant resources and develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as needed to educate and inform our community and to support safe schools. We add the traditional power of the printed word to our outreach whenever we bring our District brochure, along with school site and department inserts, to community meetings and to any district-sponsored function.

We invite the community to a variety of events at our schools; press and social media coverage of those events heighten outreach to others not in attendance. Events such as Principal for a Day, Coffee with the Principal, Open Houses, and Expos offer parents, guardians, and community members a first-hand look at what our schools offer and how they are developing young global citizens. Frequently and throughout the year, schools host assemblies, theater productions, concerts, and athletic events that are open to the community. Special events such as groundbreaking and ribbon cutting underscore the connection between all Livermore residents and our schools' success. To encourage involvement, we announce and share agendas, via our website and app, for our Board of Education meetings, as well as our Citizens Bond Oversight Committee (CBOC), Measure G Parcel Tax Oversight, LCAP Advisory Committee, English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) and other meetings subject to the Brown Act. Intentional publicity and outreach by both the schools and our Community Engagement department ensure that these events benefit not only those already engaged in our schools, but also those who may need an invitation in order to be made aware of the possibilities that exist to become engaged. In addition to bringing the community to us, many staff members, particularly at the district level, join community events to serve as ambassadors for our district. The Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Tri-Valley, the Pedrozzi Foundation, Rotary Clubs, and more all have District representation that serves to develop and cultivate partnerships that engage our community directly in the success of our students.

Communication in the form of meetings and seminars is particularly effective in engaging parents and guardians in the education of their students. District staff, as well as the leadership of our parent organizations, provide myriad opportunities for parent education and involvement. We invite (and require, in some cases) parent/guardian participation in school and district committees and boards. We want our parents and guardians to have a voice in the decision-making processes in our schools, and to have ownership of the progress our students make. Each of our schools has a parent organization, and all participate in our Parent Club Information Council, a monthly forum attended by school representatives along with representatives from LARPD, LVEF, the Livermore Library, and from our Board of Education. At PCIC, participants share information and ideas, seek and receive guidance on projects, and provide input on District planning and policies. Between the school sites and district level planning, and often in partnership with community groups, our parents, guardians, and community members have the opportunity to learn about the educational system and how to support student growth and success (e.g., Preschool Parenting Classes, Parent Institute for Quality Education [PIQE], parent meetings at school sites). We offer workshops about topics that address health and wellness, and social emotional growth (e.g., screen time and teens, dangers of vaping, Choose Love). And we offer social events that provide opportunities for our adults to engage with one another and with staff, thereby strengthening relationships and developing a positive culture of support throughout our schools.

The results of our combined work as a district to engage parents and guardians are captured in an annual survey and reported through our LCAP Goal #3 each year. We have as a Goal #3 Action Item: Annually survey parents, primarily parents of English Learners and at-risk students,

to determine parent education/information topics, and, once education/information is provided (through workshops, training etc.), survey parents to make sure the information was relevant and their needs were met. In addition to the annual survey, our Community Engagement Department leads our district's work with providing timely follow-up surveys to capture feedback from participants in workshops and events so that we can continue to improve our collective outreach. Adding to the action items stated in LCAP Goal #3, this spring we are conducting a series of Parent Engagement Focus Groups that will inform the development of a Parent Engagement Plan. Our efforts will build on existing communication and existing parent/guardian education events to provide a systematic, robust means of supporting and engaging our families.

Internal Communications

Efficient and meaningful communication within our district, among staff members at all levels, is essential to the success of our work as educators. Our district embraces G Suite technology to facilitate communication and collaboration. Additional support by our Community Engagement department provides site administrators and others with tools to communicate effectively with staff and families.

Students log in to Google for email, class assignments, and collaboration. Staff members, as well, benefit from the collaborative platform that enables sharing of information. "Leadership Weekly" is compiled through online collaboration by Cabinet members and their departments and shared each Thursday with site principals to pass on relevant information to their staff, students, and/or their parent/guardian communities. Each principal sends a regular news email to staff members, and most principals have a regularly scheduled newsletter that is distributed electronically to families using our mass notification and mobile app delivery methods. With the new website url of livermoreschools.org, and since all students and staff are provided with Google mail accounts, our district is moving toward the use of a single email system to streamline internal communications. In addition to the use of the mobile app to connect with students, middle and high school teachers are seeking a two-way method of communication with and among students, so we are anticipating activating Google Hangouts (already part of our G Suite). Our goal is to provide the tools needed for staff and students to communicate in the most direct way possible.

A significant means of staff support is our Intranet, another part of G Suite, and a thorough resource for information and professional development. The Intranet is searchable and contains internal district forms, commonly used links, useful guides and how-to documents. Just as the public website is envisioned as a resource for families and community, the Intranet is a resource for staff.

Additionally, the Communications Toolkit for Administrators is a living resource that provides communication templates for messaging and outreach (e.g., letters to parents/guardians, crisis notifications) as well as procedural best practices for conducting school events (e.g., first day of school, Back to School Night, State testing). Professional development to ensure consistent communication that reflects our district's high standards is ongoing. Our Community

Engagement staff members learn from colleagues through the Alameda County Office of Education Public Information Officer (PIO) Network, through monthly collaboration with lead communicators in agencies throughout the City of Livermore, and through membership in the California School Public Relations Association (CaSPRA) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). We continue to support staff throughout our district as we attain our goal of an engaged community.

Communication is natural for educators; ensuring that communication is efficient and follows best practices is furthered by the involvement of our Community Engagement Department. Each month, principals have a brief presentation at their district-wide meeting that further develops their mastery of communication tools. Our Community Engagement Department is in the process of providing training to all teachers in the use of website and mass notification tools. During our first months of implementation, more than 55 hours of website trainings have been hosted at our District Office or at school sites, including three different "Website workshop" days, during which training was provided on a drop-in basis for the entire day. Over 23 hours of mass communication trainings have been offered to serve staff, mostly at school sites. Over the next few months, schools are scheduling on-site training so that all teachers who want to be able to build their webpage are trained, and all teachers will be adept at using mass notifications to communicate with their students and parents.

Next Steps:

Just as we intend to graduate students who are lifelong learners, our staff, as well, is committed to ongoing learning in the area of communication. Our Community Engagement Department has, as part of its mission, to facilitate district-wide training and provide district-wide resources that enable effective communication. Within the next year, we are committed to furthering the realization of our vision for robust communication and significant parent/guardian engagement through the following:

- Continuing to train staff members to maximize their use of District communication tools
- Training staff to create documents that are ADA compliant
- Enhancing website content to ensure it is a well-developed resource for parents, guardians, and community
- Examining the implementation of Google Hangouts for two-way communication between teachers and students
- Articulating and ensuring a consistent standard of excellence for all external and internal communications by developing guidelines and protocols
- Increasing the efficiency of the Communications Toolkit for Administrators by creating templates that are uploaded into our mass notification system
- Integrating additional information and programs into the app
- Conducting Parent Engagement Focus Groups and developing a systematic Parent Engagement Plan
- Producing a district-wide electronic handbook as a resource to our parents and guardians

- Developing regular monitoring and evaluation systems that measure the success of our communication tools and methods

Our Community Engagement Department, in conjunction with District staff, all look forward to improving our work to better serve our students, families, staff, and community. Communication is the basis of relationships, and so we pledge to communicate with our families so that they are fully engaged in our schools and in their children's learning.