Communications Audit – 2016-17

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# External Communications – District-to-Community

External Communications include all methods Woodland Public Schools utilizes to reach families, students, and community members.

These methods include a variety of media including traditional newsletters and news releases as well as newer technology including the district’s website and social networking accounts.

The following sections summarize each of the different methods and ongoing releases Woodland Public Schools uses. The sections also include trend and results analysis of the success of each type of communication method.

## Woodland Schools Weekly – What, Why, How Often

**What is it?**

Each week, the Communications Manager produces a feature story about something newsworthy happening in Woodland Public Schools. These stories are released to the Woodland Schools Weekly email list, posted to the district website, posted to Facebook and Twitter, released to the media, and sent to the Woodland Public Schools staff. The stories are also used for the Woodland quarterly newsletters and for other purposes.

All Woodland Schools Weekly stories are archived on the Woodland Public Schools website and are accessible to the public. The archive currently holds more than 80 stories.

**Why is it?**

In addition to teaching members of the community about the district, the Woodland Schools Weekly stories enhance transparency by providing the district with a vehicle to release information about construction, the budget, academic success, curriculum changes, and other important school news to the community and to the media.

**How often is it?**

Weekly, except for school holidays (Approximately 30-40 stories per school year).

**Why is media coverage important to a school district?**

The local news media, including newspapers, television news, and radio stations, have column inches and hours of airtime to fill. By sending them our news stories, we receive free coverage on their avenues of communication leading to:

* *More affordable.* School districts can’t afford to send printed media on a regular basis, however printed media is the best way to ensure the district reaches its entire constituency. By receiving free coverage in the media, the district is able to communicate with the community without paying printing costs.
* *More notoriety.* When a district applies for grants or government assistance, being notable and recognizable can be key in receiving the extra funding. Companies are more likely to support organizations where they know they will receive coverage of their generous work.
* *More credibility*.Even though the local media often runs our stories exactly as we write them, readers hold great credibility in something they read, hear, or see in the news media because the media performs independent research for their stories.

## Woodland School Weekly Stories – Trend Data

**Number of weekly Woodland School Weekly stories in 2016-17 School Year (July-June):** 39

**Number of Media Hits in 2016-2017 School Year (July-June):** 91

**Hits to Release Ratio:** Average of2.33 media hits per WSW

**Number of weekly Woodland School Weekly stories in 2015-16 School Year (August-June):** 36

**Number of Media Hits in 2015-2016 School Year (August-June):** 116

**Hits to Release Ratio:** Average of3.2 media hits per WSW

**Summary**

Regularly releasing weekly news stories caused the media to pay attention to Woodland Public Schools. Now, the local news media relies on the district’s Woodland Schools Weekly stories to fill column inches and airtime which extends the district’s reach to the Woodland community and offers more ways for community members to stay in-the-know. This extensive coverage also comes with no costs for printing or postage to reach the thousands of residents who want to learn more about Woodland schools.

**Trends**

Our Hits-to-Release Ratio decreased slightly in 2016-17, however this is to be expected as the media will pick up our stories at varying rates related to a number of variables. Attaining 91 media hits is significant, representing tens of thousands of dollars of free media coverage throughout Cowlitz County, Clark County, and beyond. In 2016-17, the district also received a significant amount of television media coverage in addition to newspaper and radio coverage, reaching an even wider audience in a variety of methods.

## Board Briefs – What, Why, How Often

**What is it?**

Following each school board of directors meeting, the Communications Manager works with other district personnel to summarize the events and decisions made during the board meeting. These summaries are called Board Briefs and are released to the community via an email newsletter, the district’s website, and the district’s social networking accounts. Archives of previous Board Briefs are also stored on the district’s website. Board Briefs are also sent to the entire staff of Woodland Public Schools to keep them up-to-date on board activities.

**Why is it?**

The Woodland community expressed interest in receiving summaries of the district’s school board of directors meetings more rapidly than waiting for the approval of the board minutes at the next board meeting. The Board Briefs provides the district with a method to summarize board meetings and reach the community without needing to wait for the next meeting.

**How often is it?**

Board Briefs are typically released within 1-3 days of the most recent board meeting.

## Board Briefs – Trend Data

**Number of weekly Board Briefs in 2016-2017 School Year (July-June):** 13

**Average Open Rate for 2015-2016 School Year (August-June):** 36.84%

**Number of weekly Board Briefs in 2015-2016 School Year (August-June):** 17

**Average Open Rate for 2015-2016 School Year (August-June):** 45.26%

**Trends**

The Board Briefs continue to hold a higher-than-average open rate at 36.84% with the average open rate for email newsletters typically below 20%. The decrease year-over-year in the open rate can be the result of a number of factors such as board activities, community interest, etc.   
  
Continuing to offer Board Briefs is incredibly important as it lends transparency to district activities and offers community members yet another method to stay in-the-know about district activities.

**Summary**

With the Board Briefs sent to community members, the media, staff, and interested parties, the Woodland community is able to stay on top of the Woodland Public Schools Board of Directors activities and meetings.

## Facebook and Twitter – What, Why, How Often

**What is Facebook?**

The district’s Facebook page permits the district to post stories, photographs, links, and other bite-sized news events on a regular basis. The stories posted to Facebook aren’t long enough to qualify as Woodland Schools Weekly, but still offer exciting news to the community.

**Why is the district using Facebook?**

Some news events are too small for full releases, but Facebook enables those stories to be told to an increasing audience. Facebook’s ongoing popularity and relatively low cost (it’s free) help the district provide information to people both on-the-go through Facebook’s mobile versions and to those who use Facebook from a computer.

Facebook provides another avenue for the district to post school news, closures, and also engage in two-way communication with the community. Community members post questions and comments to the district’s Facebook posts which the Communications Manager responds to, offering another method for community members to reach out to the district.

**What is Twitter?**

Twitter feeds provide content limited to 140-characters per post (called a “tweet”). The district is seeing growing participation in Twitter, and since the large majority of posts made to Facebook are duplicated to Twitter, the low amount of time required to participate in tweeting justifies the district’ use of the network.

**Why is the district using Twitter?**

Given that Twitter requires little time investment and no cost, it provides another method for community members to receive news about the district.

**How Often?**

The district tries to release one Facebook post and Twitter tweet a day, but also tries to limit the number of posts to, at most, only 1-2 per day. Maintaining the balance between providing regular news without becoming too noisy is key to keeping Facebook fans and Twitter followers engaged but not overwhelmed.

*More than two posts per day may cause Facebook and Twitter fans to stop following the district’s social networking accounts by causing too much “noise” on users’ feeds.*

## Facebook – Trend Data

**Current Number of Facebook Fans:** 1,475(29.9% increase since June 2016’s 1,128 fans)

**Number of Posts in 2016-2017 (July-June):** 204 posts

**2016-17 Average Number of Likes per Post**: 17.43 Likes per post

**Number of Posts in 2015-2016 (August-June):** 180 posts

**2015-16 Average Number of Likes per Post**: 13.66 Likes per post

**Trends**

Facebook continues to increase in popularity as a way for Woodland Public Schools to reach its community. An average Likes-per-Post of 17.43 (up from 13.66 in 2015-16) is phenomenal comparative to other school districts of even significantly larger sizes than Woodland. Increasing our number of fans by nearly 30% on a year-over-year basis shows that the community is finding our Facebook page and relying on it to receive up-to-date news from the district. The consistent results from the Facebook audience in Woodland Public Schools content demonstrates that giving audiences regular news updates via social networking helps increase participation and attention.

## Twitter – Trend Data

**Current Number of Twitter Followers:** 823(45.4% increase since June 2016’s 566 followers)

**Number of Tweets in 2016-2017 (July-June):** 182 tweets

**Number of Tweets in 2015-2016 (August-June):** 146 tweets

**Trends**

Woodland Public Schools continues to see substantial increases in its Twitter audience this year growing from 566 followers at the start of the school year to 823 at the end, an audience increase of 45.4%.

**Summary**

Calculating Return-on-Investment (ROI) continues to be difficult on Twitter as many followers view their feeds without engaging the posts with by “liking” the post, a feature just introduced in the past few months. The low time investment with no fiscal cost using Twitter makes it continue to be an effective communication method to release district news and updates via another avenue for community members and other interested parties.

## Our Town Buzz

**Our Town Buzz – Video Messages throughout Woodland**Terry Richard, a local community member, started a service in 2016 posting changing video messages on screens throughout Woodland. Twice a month, Terry changes the messages and includes messages created by Woodland Public Schools free-of-charge. This service allows the district to release news and announcements of upcoming events reaching even more members of the community who may not have access to the Internet or actively read mailings.

## Publications

**Our Community Matters Newsletter**The Our Community Matters Newsletter focuses on in-depth academic and district news stories from all around Woodland Public Schools. In each issue (released as determined to be necessary throughout the year), the district strives to give each school a dedicated story along with at least one story affecting the district as a whole. The Our Community Matters Newsletter is printed and sent to every resident of Woodland. In addition, the current electronic versions and archives are available on the district website in both English and Spanish.

## District Website

URL: [www.woodlandschools.org](http://www.woodlandschools.org)

The district website remains a top priority for district communications as it can effectively, efficiently and quickly provide information for the community at little to no cost for publication outside of the contract with the website provider.

**Changes for 2016-17:**

* **Redesigned Community Resources Section**In conjunction with Leslie Mohlman’s implementation of the “Our Kids, Our Business” Task Force, the Community Resources section of the website was fully revamped with a wealth of community resources, Frequently Asked Questions, and much more to keep the community aware of services offered by the district as well as ways for the community to donate time and resources to the program.
* **Added 50-for-20 Scholarship Program Section**With the introduction of the 50-for-20 Scholarship Program, an entire section of the website was created to explain the program, recognize donors, and offer ways for community members to donate online. With the assistance of Steve Rippl, IT Director, the website also features a personalized url: [www.woodlandschools.org/50-for-20](http://www.woodlandschools.org/50-for-20)

**Key website features:**

* All printed publications are offered electronically on the website prior to their mailing.
* The Woodland Schools Weekly and other news messages are updated in each of the rotating image banners on the various homepages.
* Required district communications such as meal programs, RFP/RFQs and employment requests can be posted via the website.
* Shortcuts to athletics, employee benefits, Skyward Family Access, maps, and much more are immediately accessible from the homepage.

## Special Projects

**Levy 2017**

* Press release announcement of levy request approval
* Website Creation, Revisions, and Updates
* District Mailer Research, Design, and Printing
* Community email inquiry management
* Chamber of Commerce Presentation Layout and Design
* Levy Article Composition and Revisions for Media and Chamber of Commerce
* Staff Materials
  + Handout Layout and Design
  + Talking Points Creation
  + Dos and Don’ts for Elections

**Website Reorganization and Redesign**

* Web pages were redesigned and recreated for:
  + Volunteer Information
  + Business Services
  + Human Resources

**50-for-20 Scholarship Program**

* Press Release Creation and Distribution
* Social Networking Blast Preparation and Distribution
* Program Logo Design
* Program Website Design
* Program Handout Design

**Crisis Communications**

* Clown Threat – October 2016
* Lockout – Suspects at Large – November 2016
* Inclement Weather Advisories – Winter 2017
* Lockout/Lockdown – Bomb Threat – January 2017
* Student on Bus – April 2017
* Casino Traffic Issues – April 2017
* 13 Reasons Why Netflix Program – April 2017
* Possible Employee Incident – June 2017

**Job Fair Collateral Design for 2017**

* Job Fair Display Boards – Redesign and Layout
* Job Fair Business Cards – Redesign and Layout
* Job Fair Brochure – Redesign and Layout
* Bus Driver Poster – Design, Layout, and Print Prep

**Woodland Public Schools School Year Kickoff All-Staff Breakfast**

* Start-of-School Staff Presentation – Layout and Design

**Woodland Public Schools Employee Appreciation Awards Ceremony**

* Online Nomination Form – Creation and Design
* Staff Party Announcement/Invitation – Layout and Design
* Staff Party Awards and Photos Presentations – Layout and Design

**Non-Woodland-Schools-Weekly Press Releases**

* Woodland Public Schools approves levy request *October 26, 2016*
* Woodland Ceramic Clubs Empty Bowls event raises $3,000 to combat hunger*December 7, 2016*
* Woodland High School Career and Guidance Specialist is ESD 112’s 2017 Regional Classified Employee of the Year  
  *March 23, 2017*
* Woodland High School Horticulture Science 29th Annual Plant Sale  
  *April 18, 2017*
* Woodland High School prepares first musical in years  
  *May 9, 2017*
* Woodland Public Schools selects James Johnston as new middle school principal

*May 15, 2017*

# Internal Communications – District-to-Staff

Woodland Public Schools reaches out to the staff utilizing internal newsletters in an effort to improve morale and increase awareness of district decisions affecting the staff. Future plans include additional methodologies to improve two-way communication between the staff and district leadership.

## WSD in the News

Total for 2016-17 School Year: 32 email newsletters

**What is it?**

The staff of Woodland Public Schools receives an internal email newsletter letting them know what coverage the district received in the news media as well as upcoming events, district needs, and more on a nearly weekly basis. Special thanks and acknowledgments are given to those staff members who helped put together story either by suggesting it or helping arrange for interviews, etc.

**Why?**

“WSD in the News” email newsletters help increase staff morale by demonstrating the success of coworkers and giving credit for those who help tell the exciting stories happening around the school district as well as keeping the employees in touch with what’s going on around the district outside of the Woodland School Weekly feature stories and Board Briefs summaries.

**How Often?**

Typically weekly to bi-weekly depending on the number of media hits received and district news needing dissemination to the staff.

# Possible Future Projects

## Video Production – YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook

* Beginning at the end of the 2016-2017 school year, the district experimented by posting a few videos on YouTube including the Woodland High School Commencement Ceremony and the winners of the Staff Video Competition at the End-of-Year Staff Recognition Luncheon. Community response was overwhelmingly positive to both videos, with the Staff Video Award Winner video receiving more than 1,000 views over a single weekend. Investigating more opportunities for video production could be beneficial for community outreach and engagement.

## Two-Way Community Communication – Online/Paper Surveys

* Utilizing Google Forms, Woodland Public Schools can conduct low-cost online surveys to engage the community and received feedback about curriculum, academics, athletics, facilities, and much, much more. Paper surveys can also be utilized through the district to engage community members with no Internet access.

## Good News Postcards/Mailings

* Sent on a bimonthly basis, postcards containing important district news and upcoming events could be sent to the community, increasing community awareness and reaching all members including those without Internet access. Using a postcard design layout reduces postage and printing costs over a larger newsletter. The district would continue to send three newsletters each school year.

## Two-Way Staff Engagement – Surveys and Feedback Forms

* To improve staff engagement with administration and the board of directors, surveys using Google Forms could be implemented and analyzed on a regular basis throughout the school year. In order to increase staff participation, surveys should be conducted on a quarterly basis as more frequent surveys may result in less participation.
* In addition to surveys, the district may offer an anonymous feedback/suggestion form on the district’s website accessible to the staff where they could submit suggestions and feedback regarding district decisions and future plans.