

Strategic Communications Plan for Richland School District Two

Disclaimer – This plan is continually evolving in order to be responsive to changing needs of our district and schools; to the volatile nature of traditional media and social media; and to the need for continuous improvement. Plan last updated on August 18, 2016.

I. INTRODUCTION

Richland School District Two is the fifth largest school district in South Carolina and is prominently located in the state capitol of Columbia and nearby communities. With a growing enrollment of 27,000+ students, the school district is recognized for the academic performance of its students and the wide range of choices offered to families through magnet and choice initiatives. Richland Two proudly ranks first in the state and twelfth in the nation for its number of National Board Certified teachers. The district also places emphasis on providing state of the art facilities for all students.

A. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Using research collected from the 2015 Communications Audit, the Richland Two Strategic Communications Plan outlines strategies the district can use to deliver key messages as effectively as possible; to prioritize key communication and partnership resources and activities; to address communication gaps; to improve overall communication practices; to assist Richland Two leaders in their efforts to communicate more consistently and effectively; to interpret public attitudes; to identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest; and to carry on involvement and informational activities that earn public understanding and support.

Key findings/observations from the Audit explained the need for a comprehensive communication plan:

- “Communications and Strategic Partnerships coordinates a lengthy list of projects, activities and crisis communications. Our observation is that the development of a comprehensive communication plan would bring a more strategic focus to the work being done and link it directly to the strategic plan Priority Areas.”
- “A common theme that emerged from the focus groups is that communication and messaging in Richland Two needs to be more consistent, both internally and externally.”

B. OFFICE INFORMATION

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Communications and Strategic Partnerships Office is to support the district’s mission of preparing all students for success by providing meaningful, challenging, and engaging learning experiences.

The plan supports the mission by building, maintaining and continually improving two-way communication channels and relationships with all of the district’s stakeholders.

The observations, recommendations, objectives and action items included in this plan promote effective communications in a school system that is committed to continuous improvement, maintaining quality and excellence, and serving the needs of all of its students and constituents to the best of its ability.

2. Staff

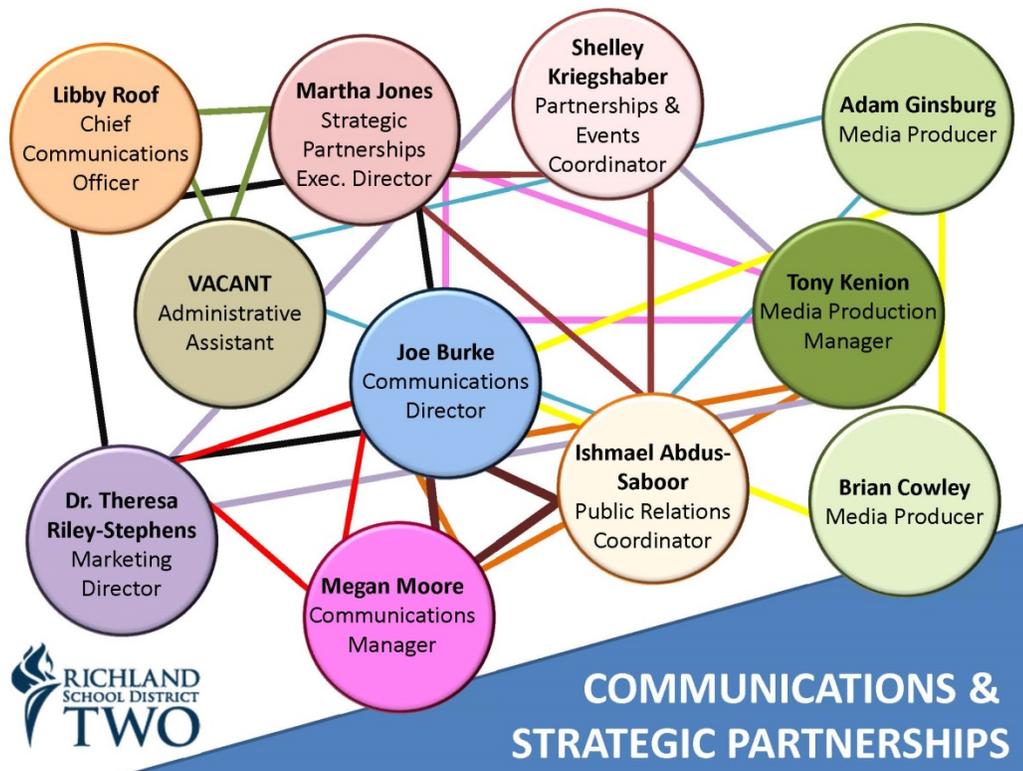
The Communications and Strategic Partnerships Office is organized around three key areas:

- **Marketing directed by Dr. Theresa Riley Stephens**
Goal: Create and implement a marketing campaign to increase public awareness on the local, state and national levels of the excellent educational opportunities in Richland Two and to position Richland Two as the district of choice for current and future residents of Richland County
Objectives:
 - Develop communications plans that include marketing strategies for schools, centers and magnet programs to improve awareness and enrollment; provide financial support for marketing efforts
 - Incorporate into the marketing plan the district's top selling points and perceptions
 - Make Richland Two employees an integral part of marketing the district

- **Communications directed by Joe Burke**
Goal: Create efficient and consistent processes to communicate key messages and information that empowers all of the district's stakeholders to be partners in carrying out our mission
Objectives:
 - Revamp district's website and intranet
 - Maximize the capabilities of our automated messaging system including the mobile app
 - Develop more opportunities for transparent two-way communication with all stakeholders

- **Strategic Partnerships directed by Martha Jones**
Goal: Create and foster partnerships for the district that are mutually beneficial for the students and/or employees of Richland School District Two and the business, organization or individual with whom we are partnering.
Objectives:
 - Grow partnerships by increasing diversity
 - Secure partnerships to meet matching fund requirements of grants
 - Increase work-experience opportunities for students as well as their awareness of workforce needs and opportunities through business partnerships

These key areas include district and school marketing; internal and external communications; crisis communications; public relations; special events that support marketing, communications and public relations; and media production.



C. RESEARCH

1. Stakeholders

- Current and future employees
- Current and future students
- Current and future parents/guardians
- Business leaders
- Community leaders (civic, faith-based and non-profit)
- Elected officials
- Retirees
- Residents

2. Key Findings and Observations from 2015 Communications Audit

The audit provides information about attitudes, perceptions, and effectiveness of current communication, engagement and marketing/branding efforts and offers recommendations to expand or enhance the overall communications program. The audit also provides a benchmark for continuing to measure progress in the future. The development of any effective communication strategy begins with opinion research.

- (a) Communications and Strategic Partnerships produces a number of quality communication and marketing publications and media projects such as the Back to School Handbook, Annual Report, and high school marketing brochures. They have also been proactive in establishing a strong social media program to ensure a multi-channel communication effort as stakeholders' use and needs evolve.

- (b) “The Four Squares: Learning, Character, Community and Joy are at the heart of our school goals, objectives and strategies” – is a strong belief statement that should be emphasized in marketing and communication efforts.
 - (c) The school district offers a variety of Magnet and advanced academic programs. This was a point of pride with many internal and external audiences. At the same time, there were numerous comments that the registration process is confusing, but families feel pressure to make the right decision since enrollment is limited. Because these are signature components of Richland Two’s program, more research and strategies are needed to address any real or perceived problems with the process.
 - (d) The quality of school facilities across the district was often cited by focus groups as a positive asset for Richland Two. Focus group participants (both internal and external) felt that community support for new facilities and renovating existing facilities was another positive for Richland Two.
 - (e) The 2014 School Board election highlighted questions regarding the equitable treatment of African-American students in Richland Two schools as it relates to school discipline. While the public discussion has subsided, the concern is real with African-American leaders. From a communications standpoint, Communications and Strategic Partnerships needs to help district administration continue to develop an open and transparent dialogue with the concerned groups.
 - (f) Diversity was cited as a strength and a selling point of the district by numerous focus group participants, and should be celebrated in marketing materials and as a component of Richland Two’s “brand.”
 - (g) Based on focus group comments and a review of the website, there is a need to improve the site design to make it more user-friendly and better support Richland Two’s marketing and branding.
 - (h) Richland Two staff members praised Communications and Strategic Partnerships for its communication efforts related to crisis response, Magnet Programs, new employees and School Board information. At the same time, they expressed a need for a regular employee newsletter in order to be better informed about changes and additions to programs and procedures that impact parents and students district-wide.
3. Recommendations from 2015 Communications Audit
- (a) Implement a comprehensive communication plan to guide the program.
 - (b) Improve internal communication systems.
 - (c) Build capacity in the Communications and Strategic Partnerships Department to focus on strategic communication needs.
 - (d) Expand and enhance the external communications effort.
 - (e) Continue engagement activities and integration of open feedback loops.
 - (f) Increase the focus on diversity and inclusive communications.
 - (g) Establish communication protocols and message consistency.
 - (h) Expand and revise communications and marketing for Magnet Programs.
 - (i) Rebrand the image of Richland School District Two.

- (j) Consider a redesign of the Richland Two website.
- (k) Integrate video into communication and marketing/branding efforts.

II. RECURRING FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

To be completed throughout the 2016-2017 school year.

A. CRISIS RESPONSE AND COMMUNICATIONS

B. BACK TO SCHOOL

STEP-UP TO SIXTH/FRESH START

Time	Task	Talent	Budget
New budget process	Confirm funding for transportation and lunch	Chief Communications Officer w/ Teaching and Learning and Operations	
May – to schools week before schools gets out	Write, print and distribute to schools letter from superintendent to go home with fifth- and eighth-graders	Communications Director	
May – to schools week before schools gets out	Script for student call asking parents to look for letter	Communications Director	
July	Email to principals that includes copy of news release	Teaching and Learning (sends out email) Communications provides news release	
August	Media coverage (traditional & social media)	Public Relations Coordinator	

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Time	Task	Talent	Budget
Nov.—March	Comprehensive review.	Communications Manager & Chief Communications Officer	
June	Review of required notices under FERPA, PPRA, TCPA	Communications Director	
June–July	Design, edit and translate	Communications Manager	
July	Handbook Acknowledgement Form w/ F&R reminder on back updated, translated and printed	Communications Director	
August	Distribute copies to	Communications	

	school	Director w/ Tony Coleman	
Second week of school	Automated message reminding parents of required notices	Chief Communications Officer	

NEW TO TWO
JULY INSERVICE
BUS DRIVER TRAINING
EMPLOYEE TRAINING VIDEOS AND HANDBOOK
WELCOME BACK MESSAGES
MARKETING NEW PROGRAMS, SCHOOLS, ETC.
DISTRICT INSERVICE
SUMMER INSTITUTE
COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN
BACK-TO-SCHOOL VISITS

C. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/PARTNERSHIPS

NERMA
BEA
FAC
PAC
UNITED WAY
WALK FOR LIFE
STATE OF THE DISTRICT
REALTORS BREAKFAST
RETIREES LUNCHEON
R2 EDUCATION FOUNDATION
DECKER BOULEVARD BUSINESS COALITION
CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE – COLUMBIA CHAMBER, BLYTHEWOOD CHAMBER, NE
CHAMBER BOARD
MIDLANDS TECH DINNER
PRINCIPAL FOR A DAY
LION’S PEACE POSTER CONTEST
SPARKLEBERRY FAIR
TEACHER FORUM’S CANDIDATES FORUM & PASTRIES AND POLICIES

D. CALENDAR DEVELOPMENT

E. EVENTS

BOARD MEETING SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
DISTRICT OFFICE HOLIDAY & END OF YEAR LUNCHEONS
END-OF-YEAR INSERVICE
SCHOOL BOARD APPRECIATION
SHADOW GROUNDHOG DAY

F. SPECIAL RECOGNITONS

BOARD MEETING SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS

Time	Task	Talent	Budget
Ongoing	Identify potential awards for recognition	All staff	

	at board meeting		
Ongoing	Enter eligible awards in database	Administrative Assistant	
Two weeks before board meeting	Letter from superintendent mailed to student or employee School/office notified Certificates printed RSVPs collected	Administrative Assistant	
One week before board meeting	Script written and presentation created	Partnerships & Events Coordinator	

TEACHER OF THE YEAR
AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK
TURNAROUND AWARDS
RETIREES
DISTRICT ARTS CELEBRATION
DISTRICT WELLNESS CELEBRATION
GRADUATIONS

G. MEDIA PRODUCTION (R2TV)

EVENT COVERAGE

Graduation, Quiz Wiz, Retirees Luncheon, State of the District, Board Meetings, School events, Back to School, Live streaming, etc.

VIDEO PRODUCTION

Schools, Magnets, Programs, Departments

H. WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

We use the website to communicate key information to our stakeholders including parents, employees, business partners and community members. It is also a vehicle to advertise the district to potential: families, employees and business partners.

I. CHOICE/MAGNET MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

J. GRANT MARKETING

K. QUIZ WHIZ

L. MEDIA COVERAGE, PUBLICITY

News releases for awards, testing results, personnel announcements, budget process
Track and analyze media coverage

M. PUBLICATIONS

Annual Report
School Board Newsletter
You and Two

III. PRIORITIES

Key Messages:

- *The Four Squares: Learning, Character Community and Joy are at the heart of all we do to fulfill our mission.*
- *Richland Two offers a variety of strong academic and magnet programs.*
- *Your zoned school is a choice.*
- *Richland Two provides quality facilities across the district and appreciates support from the community to provide resources for building new facilities and renovating existing facilities.*
- *Diversity of Richland Two is a strength and selling point of the district.*

Key Happenings:

Opening of R2i2

Construction of Elementary 20

Rezoning for Elementary 20

Develop plans for all annual activities

10-year facilities study

AdvancED

Strategic Planning

Comet Partnership Launch

Superintendent transition

A. COMMUNICATIONS

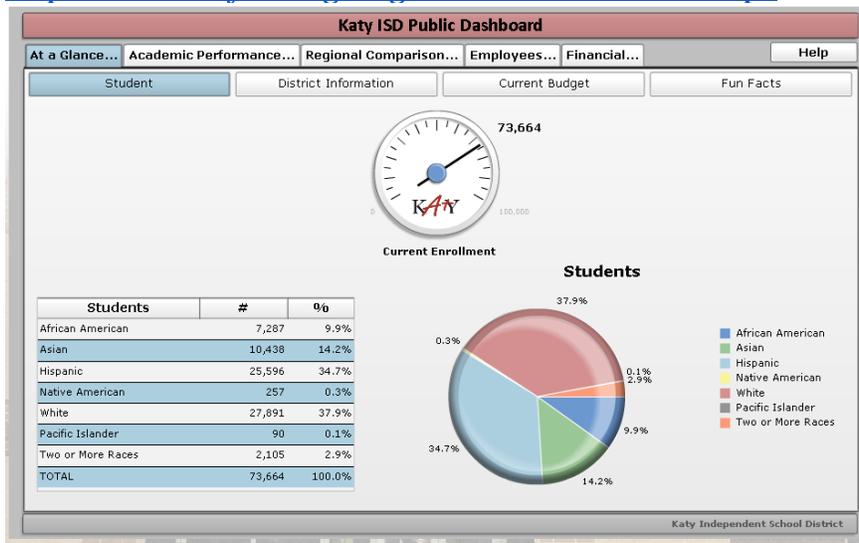
- (1) Equip employees with accurate and timely information in a manner that is easy to access and readily available in an on demand format.
 - Evaluate and overhaul Inside Two to better fit the internal communication needs of our employees
 - Update training videos
- (2) Develop plans, duty trees and templates for crisis communications
Example – After school activities canceled
 - 12 p.m.: Superintendent informs the Chief Communications Officer (CCO) that all after school activities will be canceled due to weather.
 - a. CCO informs the communications staff of the change. The team begins creating their pre assigned duties listed below.
 - b. CCO: Begins writing email to principals detailing the changes
 - c. Director of Communications (DOC): Begins writing call and email to parents and staff
 - d. Communications Manager (CM): Begins writing talking points for DO/School front desk staff
 - e. Admin Assistant (AA): begins the blackboard scheduling process and provides codes to DOC
 - 12:15pm: CCO sends email to principals detailing the changes
 - 12:20pm: CM sends talking points to the front desk personnel

- 12:30pm: DOC sends out the call and email to parents and staff

(3) Promote transparency and open dialogue

- Create The Real Deal – Webpage for housing information to dispel rumors, misinformation and misperceptions
 - Post links to page prominently on Inside Two and external website
 - Use posts as articles for You and Two newsletters, especially for employees to ensure the information reaches our employees first and to encourage them to “help set the record straight.”
 - Use district meetings (executive staff, key leaders, department & school staff meetings, advisory councils, etc.) to identify issues to address on page and to share information posted on the page
- Add “You Ask...We Answer” section to You and Two newsletters.
 - Include link for submitting questions
 - Answer questions submitted
 - Add questions and answers to The Real Deal webpage
- Create a dashboard for posting financial, demographic, academic performance, discipline data, accolades, etc. information

<http://www.katyisd.org/Pages/Public-Dashboard.aspx>



(4) Launch re-designed website

- Organize based on the information several groups, including future families, community members, potential employees and future business partners, tell us they are most often seeking. This approach coupled with the relocation of employee-only information to Inside Two will significantly improve the ease with which visitors search the website.
- Add new features including a newsroom, two-hot topic areas and upcoming events with a link to a full calendar on the homepage. The homepage will also prominently feature information about The Four Squares. The hot topic area will allow us to highlight important initiatives like the Choice Program and 4K and 5K Registration.
- Work with departments and schools to revamp their sites/pages

- (5) Complete conversion of Blackboard CS5i mass notification system including the rollout of the mobile app
- (6) Conduct research to determine real and perceived issues with the choice process. Based on research, implement strategies to address problems and misperceptions.
- (7) Develop a comprehensive social media strategy
 - Raise awareness of district presence on social media
 - Build capacity to post in at least Spanish
 - Invest in social media listening software to provide more efficient ways to engage with our followers, promote positive posts and respond quickly to negative posts
- (8) Develop guidelines for news releases and publications to improve consistency and inclusion
 - Create guidelines for writing releases, i.e., what qualifies for a release, what can simply be a social media post, etc.
 - Collaborate with Hispanic Family Liaisons to ensure that key information is translated into Spanish in a timely manner
 - Identify families with limited access to technology and provide alternatives to electronic communication when possible
 - Publications, and to a certain extent news releases, should be developed through the lens of The Four Squares.
 - Develop standard process for generating publications for departments
- (9) Rebrand R2TV to Richland Two Media Production to more accurately reflect the full scope of the work produced by the media production manager and the media producers
 - Continue work with social media to promote videos
 - Create a web-based portal for video library
 - Expand programming for web-based portal and R2TV to include new magazine format shows such as Magnetic Moments (features on magnet programs) and R2 Today (day to day stories)

B. MARKETING

- (1) Create marketing campaign focused on the four squares: Learning, Character, Community and Joy
 - Collaborate with professional advertising agency to create comprehensive marketing campaign that includes a new tagline for district
- (2) Create marketing materials/packet for realtors, newcomers, future partners, etc.
- (3) Create calendar of annual advertising opportunities
 - Billboard – identify one standard billboard for year-round use
 - Billboards- identify billboards for Choice/Magnet enrollment, kindergarten and pre-school enrollment, graduation and scholarship totals, District Teacher of the Year, Teacher Fair
 - Radio – Use to promote district and school events

- Television – Use during enrollment and for crisis communication
- Magazines – Palmetto Parent, Discover Columbia, Free Times Northeast Guide
- Newspaper – Multiple Paths to Graduation, Education Guide, Living Here
- Social media
- Yard signs
- Utility vehicles

- (4) Update existing school marketing/communications plans
- (5) Review and update style manual for school newsletter editors, news coordinators, TLCs and administrative assistants
- (6) Establish communications guidelines and customer service expectations for employees
- (7) Develop surveys for families entering and exiting the district
- (8) Develop school tours guidelines that include providing information about district

C. PARTNERSHIPS

- (1) Create a partnership newsletter to communicate effectively with district business partners all things Richland School District Two. Highlight partnership opportunities
- (2) Transform the partner’s database to a more accessible, usable format
- (3) Facilitate the creation of an Education Foundation page on the R2 website
- (4) Simplify Gold Card pass and do more to promote it
- (5) Better communicate the discount opportunities to employees (intranet) E newsletter that announces and reminds employees of partnerships. Teach employees how to access discount information on Inside Two
- (6) Better communicate educational opportunities to employees via Inside Two or newsletter
- (7) Work with R2TV to continually create partnership videos that showcase value of business and organizations to Richland School District Two. This includes CATE, R2i2, Grants, Academics, Back Pack.....etc.
- (8) Work with Chief Diversity and Multicultural Inclusion Officer to diversify partnerships

LAUNCH COMET PARTNERSHIP

Time	Task	Talent
August	Collect parent permission via signed form or Acorn	Comet Staff Executive Director of

	Table at High School Registrations/Orientations Distribute codes/cards	Strategic Partnerships Marketing Director Finance
September	Travel Training for Students	Comet Executive Director of Strategic Partnerships Schools
October	Travel Training & Comet Day during R2i2 Opening Week Employee launch Media coverage	Comet Executive Director of Strategic Partnerships Marketing Director Partnerships and Events Coordinator Chief Communications Officer R2i2 students & staff
Ongoing	Identify programs/groups at schools who can benefit from free pass	Martha