I Live the Mustang Way

Independence Community School District

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

November 2022

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Independence Community School District

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VISION

Creating a climate in which individuals of the Independence Community School District (ICSD) will strive to become effective communicators, problem solvers, responsible citizens and productive people.

MISSION

Educating people to be life-long learners and respectful, responsible citizens.

MOTTO

Start Here. Succeed Anywhere.

GOALS

- Increase achievement in reading
- Increase achievement in math
- Increase achievement in science
- Integrate technology into instruction
- Strengthen culture and climate

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Independence Community School District's Communications Plan is to present a clear and concise framework for communicating with our school community. The plan primarily addresses two types of school district audiences: internal (students, teachers, staff, administration, and school board) and external (parents, businesses, civic groups, faith-based organizations, and other members of the ICSD Community).

Note: Crisis Communications in regard to fire, tornado, bomb threat, evacuation, etc. are addressed in the school district's Crisis Response Manual. This is a detailed manual that is shared with our school staff. For more questions on this type of communication, please contact the Superintendent of Schools at 319-334-7400.

Staff support for and involvement in this plan is vital particularly for teachers and office staff who are highly influential sources of

information for the public. The ICSD staff carries the message of the school district to their families and friends who in turn form opinions about the school district. We must have as a top priority the goal of clearly communicating our unified message at all times.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Internal:
1. Students
2. Staff
3. School Board

External:
1. Parents
2. Prospective Employees
3. Parent Organizations
4. Business Community
5. Civic Groups
6. Elected Officials
7. Senior Citizen Groups
8. Faith-based Groups
9. Community Groups
10. Law Enforcement
11. Electronic Media – website, E-mail, Facebook, television
12. Print Media – newsletters, newspapers
13. Colleges and Universities
14. Private Schools and School Districts

BOARD COMMUNICATION GOAL

The goal of the ICSD School Board is to establish a strong public relations/marketing program for the district.

Steps/Strategies

1. Create and maintain new channels for improving district PR plan.
2. Educate staff on multiple channels available to promote their programs and students.
3. Utilize/expand relationship with cities, chamber and county.
4. Report quarterly to Board all electronic hits to the school's website.
5. Principals to communicate with staff, students and parents regarding the employee of the month.

Resources Needed

1. Utilize PR services for district.
2. Monthly promotion of staff/coaches/activity sponsors and programs at board meetings.
3. Provide time to educate staff on PR strategies available.
4. Time to build relationships with cities, chamber and county.
5. Receive staff, parent and student input for Employee of the Month per building.
6. Allocate necessary financial resources to implement an Employee of the Month program.

Outcome

1. Increased public awareness of all school programs and activities.
2. Staff morale will be improved through recognition of their students and programs.
3. Stronger relationship between cities, chamber, county and school that will promote the community as a whole.
4. Monthly Employee of the Month presented to board and publicly per building.
5. Positive promotion of district will increase overall enrollment.
6. Shrink the open enrollment gap.

ICSD COMMUNICATION GOAL

The Independence Community School District wants to improve internal and external communication systems with the specific goal of creating open, two-way communication between the Board of Education, administration, staff, parents, and the ICSD community members.

Strategies

1. Clarify district flow of information
- Review Board Policy on communicating with the public
- Remind administration and staff as to the decision-making process, reporting, and accountability structure

2. Provide ongoing training and support for administrators in effective communication with staff and the public

- Subscribe to the National School Public Relations Association and relay pertinent ideas and information to administrators
- Provide on-going training sessions as a part of principal meetings on how to communicate school's message
- Supply administrators with fact sheets and other easy-to-use communications tools as needed when issues arise

3. Publish and distribute informational pieces
- District or School Building Informational Brochures
- Internal Newsletter – Mustang Pride Newsletter
- Budget Documents, financial information
- Press Releases as needed
- Informational items posted on website
- PR video for school district
- Highlight faculty/staff/student accomplishments

4. Keep communications simple
- Use clear, concise, and non-educational style for all publication
- Vary the types and levels of communication to target diverse audiences
- Translate communication pieces when appropriate for various language groups

5. Provide timely information
- Provide information sheets on key ICSD topics of interest such as the district's budget, student achievement information, etc. and update as needed
- Have key information available on-line for quick reference
- Communicate early and often and provide information when appropriate

6. Develop relationships with our community
- Develop key communicators' groups and deliver messages to them as needed. They will take the message to the community more effectively than district personnel.
- Ask for input on areas of concern

7. Study the media
- Pay attention to the types of stories aired or published
- Note who is generally used as a source of information
- Develop relationships with editors and education reporters

8. Prepare our messages
- Study issues facing education and be prepared to respond with information sheets
- Develop responses that represent our school district's message

- Avoid technical jargon by keeping it simple and using quotable sound bites when appropriate. Don't use education lingo or acronyms when preparing messages

Methods

The Independence Community School District strives to make our community a true community with information, press releases, notices, and timely communication.

We will continually identify the communication tools that are most widely used, accepted, and preferred by our community. Our current communications methods include but are not limited to:

- **Activities Calendar:** This is a comprehensive calendar for the entire district including athletics, arts, public meetings, plays and is located at: http://www.wamacconference.org/g5-bin/client.cgi?G5genie=150&school_id=8

- **Activity Websites:** Many of the athletics and activities have their own separate website to highlight the program. Use the District Website as a Launchpad to find and bookmark these pages.

- **Annual Yearly Progress Report:** This is published yearly and is available on our school's website under the District Information Tab. Information included is our student achievement data and our ACT Test Results.

- **Audio Broadcast of Mustang athletics**

- **AVTN (Audio Visual Technology Network):** This student group designs monthly news reports which are written, edited, and narrated by students. They also record athletic events, music programs, and do the sound for the ICSD Jr/Sr High School Gym events. These are located on our school's website under the Activities Tab.

- **Board of Education Video Broadcast:** These video broadcasts are only available through the ICSD FaceBook site. From the Independence Community School District site, select the dropdown next to "Photos", then select "Videos" to see the list of videos.

- **Bulletin Journal:** The school district submits articles and press releases in the local paper during many weeks throughout the year.

- **Building Parent Advisory Committees:** Each building has its own Parent Advisory Committee. These committees meet once a quarter and the meetings are facilitated by the Building Principals.

- **Building Walking Hours:** This information is communicated to our district patrons on our school's website, posted in each building, and posted on our school's Facebook page.

- **Calendar Committee:** The school district has a Calendar Committee made up of teachers, parents, administrators, district supervisors, and one school board member. This committee creates the school calendar with input from each building and other community stakeholders. Once the calendar has been designed, it is put on the school's website for people to see and give input. The school board also holds a public hearing to gather input from district stakeholders before they officially approve the calendar for the following school year.

- **Canvas:** Canvas is a learning management system that connects all the digital tools and resources teachers use into one simple place. This is used primarily at grades 7-12. The Canvas website is: https://sites.google.com/a/independence.k12.ia.us/canvas-by-instructure/

- **Classroom Messenger:** Teachers and coaches are able to send messages to groups of students through SchoolMessenger.

- **Class Reunions:** The school district hosts many tours of our buildings for class reunions. Please contact the Superintendent's Office to set up these tours.

- **District Website:** There is a wealth of information about our school district at: https://www.indeek12.org/

- **Daily Bulletin for Grades 7-12:** This bulletin is posted on our school's website and helps parents, students, and community members to keep up with information from the Jr/Sr High School. This is located at: https://www.indeek12.org/our-schools/independence-junior-senior-high/daily-bulletins/

- **Facebook:** Our school district does have a Facebook page. Please follow us by visiting: https://www.facebook.com/indeeschools/

- **Mobile App:** Our school district does have its own Mobile App. It is a quick reference and is available on the Apple App Store and Google Play. Look for Independence Schools and then choose our school district.

- **Mustang Pride Newsletter:** The Mustang Pride Newsletter is published three times per year. This newsletter has information from the district, the activities program, the technology department, and from each of the school buildings. This newsletter can be found on our school's website under the Marketing/Communications Tab.

- **Outdoor Sign at the Jr/Sr High School:** This sign is updated frequently and lists the evening events scrolling across the board.

- **Parades:** Our bands (both junior high and high school) take pride in promoting their music programs and participate yearly in the ICSD Homecoming Parade, the Independence Day Celebration Parade in Independence, the Rowley Days Parade in Rowley, and the Brandon Days Parade in Brandon.

- **PowerSchool Parent Portal:** Parents can keep up with their child's or children's attendance and grades using our PowerSchool Program. To set up an account, parents should contact the building secretary who can then help them with this process. Parents can log on to PowerSchool at: https://indee.powerschool.com

- **Press Releases:** All of the press releases from the ICSD are available to see at the following link: https://www.indeek12.org/press_releases/

- **School Lunch Information:** Parents can check their child's or children's lunch account balances and add money as needed to the account. This information along with the school lunch menus can be found on the school website under the District Information tab.

- **SchoolMessenger:** This is a mass communication tool for phone, email, and text messages that the school uses to let parents know of school closings, and other district and building events, etc. Parents are to use the PowerSchool Parent Portal to control which phone numbers will receive which kind of phone message.

- **School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC):** This committee consists of parents, teachers, administrators,

students, and community members. SIAC meets 4-5 times a year. This committee helps determine student achievement goals, bullying/harassment prevention goals, and other areas of school improvement for the district. These SIAC Agendas and Meeting Minutes are posted on our school's website under the District Information Tab.

- **Staff Email to/from Parents:** Parents may use the Staff Directory to email teachers with questions or information. If parents are unclear which staff member to reach out to, please send an email to info@indeek12.org and it will be directed to the appropriate person.

- **Staff Phone Calls to/from Parents:** Teacher phone calls are set to go to voice mail during the day. The teacher will respond back to parent's inquiry as soon as possible. Parents may also leave a message for teachers with the office staff.

- **Staff Websites:** Each teacher has his/her own website as an introduction to themselves. Teachers work each year to keep their websites updated.

- **Twitter:** The district uses Twitter for timely communication and updates it regularly.

- **TV Monitors at the Jr/Sr High School:** The monitors often display the ATVN broadcasts. They also have the ability to display the daily announcements and display live events in both the gym and auditorium.

PUBLIC RELATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA

General Statement of Policy

Independence Community Schools is committed to partnering with its many publics –community, families, students and employees. The school district will coordinate and share regular and ongoing communications through a variety of means, including print, electronic, voice and visual. The district will identify spokespersons to facilitate communications and share information with the media at the district, site and program levels.

Information Sharing

Regular Communications

- The district, school sites and district programs will provide regular communications to their publics by sharing information about their activities, happenings, curriculum, assessments and goals.

- The primary source of regular communications will be electronic with the recognition that the district, school site, or education program levels will be responsible to ensure that families, community members and employees who do not have access to electronic sources will receive the shared communications.

- The primary source of district communications will be the district's website and Facebook page.

Media Communications

- The superintendent is responsible for coordinating the information sharing with the media. The superintendent will work with each school site or program's designated administrator when it is necessary to share information with the media.

- District employees, will receive approval from the superintendent prior to sharing school district information with the media.

- The approval may be given to an employee to maintain direct media connections when appropriate (e.g., sports season, ongoing activity).

  Code No. 902.1 – News Media Relations
  - The board recognizes the value of and supports open, fair and honest communication with the news media. The board will maintain a cooperative relationship with the news media. As part of this cooperative relationship, the board and the media will develop a means for sharing information while respecting each party's limitations. Members of the news media are encouraged and welcome to attend open board meetings. The board president shall be the spokesperson for the board, and the superintendent shall be the spokesperson for the school district. It shall be the responsibility of the board president and superintendent to respond to

inquiries from the news media about the school district. Members of the news media seeking information about the school district shall direct their inquiries to the superintendent. The superintendent shall accurately and objectively provide the facts and board positions in response to inquiries from the news media about the school district.

Code No. 902.2 – News Conferences and Interviews
- The superintendent, on behalf of the board and the school district, may hold a news conference or respond to a request for an interview with the news media. The superintendent shall respond accurately, openly, honestly, and objectively to inquiries from the news media about the school district. News conferences and interviews planned or pre-arranged for school district activities shall include the board and the superintendent. News conferences for issues requiring an immediate response may be held by the superintendent. It shall be within the discretion of the superintendent to determine whether a news conference or interview shall be held to provide an immediate response to an issue. It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent to keep the board apprised of news conferences and interviews

Code No. 902.5 – Employees and the News Media
- Employees shall refer interview requests and information requests from the news media to the superintendent's office. Employees may be interviewed or provide information about school district matters after receiving permission from the superintendent. It shall be within the discretion of the superintendent to allow the news media to interview and to receive information from employees. It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent to develop guidelines for assisting employees in complying with this policy.

Media Communications with Students

The media may not contact or interview students on any of the school campuses or at school-related events without verbal permission of the district, school site, or program's spokesperson. Parent/guardian permission may be required and determined by the spokesperson.

Crisis or Emergency Situation

The superintendent or school board president or designee will address all media when a crisis or an emergency situation occurs within the district. The district will identify specific times and locations of news conferences when necessary.

Social Media Communication Standards

The superintendent, in collaboration with the administration, will establish communication standards for employees, recognizing the primary means of communications will be via social media. (Appendix A)

ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

Because different measurements work best in different situations, a tracking system will be developed to measure communication effectiveness.

Some assessment measures could incorporate the following:

- **Benchmarking:** This will be used to ascertain what communication strategies are being implemented and are effective in other school districts.

- **School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC):** The district will seek input from SIAC on what is working and what could be improved in terms of our communication procedures.

- **Survey:** The district will use electronic surveys to ascertain our district patrons' opinions and to collect quantitative information as to our communication procedures.

- **Monitoring:** The district will continue to monitor the hits to our website, our Facebook page, and Twitter account.

- **Interpersonal Contact:** Informal word-of-mouth surveys will be conducted to gauge the level of effectiveness of this Communications Plan.

The Communication Plan will be reviewed and updated as deemed necessary by the Superintendent and the Board of Education.

APPENDIX A

Social Media Communication Standards

All "official" Independence Community School District social networking site pages must be approved by the superintendent and should adhere to the following standards:

- The title or name of the ICSD affiliated page must begin with: Independence Mustang _____. (i.e.: Independence Mustang Football, Independence Mustang Baseball). This is for consistency and helps others find the page on Facebook.

- Administrators of the page should be the department head or head coach or someone appointed by them. Any posts made by designated administrators shall be approved by the department head or head coach. All posts are deemed to be the responsibility of the head coach.

- Logos and graphics used on the site must be consistent with the branding standards and usage guidelines of the School.

- Page administrators are to review images and photographs prior to posting on the site page. Images and photographs will show students complying with the Student Conduct policy and staff complying with school district Employee Conduct policy. Where the flag of the United States is shown, only images complying with the United States Flag Code will be shared.

- Sites that accept comments or postings by anyone other than the site administrator must be diligently monitored to ensure that information displayed is appropriate to the subject matter of the page.

- Students should not be expected to utilize the site as the only source of important information.

- Unauthorized pages that have not been approved by the superintendent will be treated as personal pages and you may be asked to delete the page.

- Any page administrator information (i.e.: usernames, passwords and other administrators) must be passed along to the superintendent or another administrator in the event that the current administrator no longer holds the position.

- Any clubs not directly organized under the ICSD are also expected to follow the standards above. (i.e.: Booster Club, Post Prom, Mat Club etc.)

School District Employee Social Media Expectations

Expectations for the use of personal social media

District staff should:
- Refrain from accepting current school district students as "friends" on personal social networking sites.

- Be aware that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share your information with others.

- Remember that once something is posted to a social networking site, it may remain available online even if you think it is removed, and it may be far-reaching.

- Set and maintain social networking privacy settings at the most restrictive level.

- Not use a social networking site to discuss students, employees or the school in a negative way.

- Check with the office when posting photos of students to be sure they are approved to appear in school related photographs.

Expectations for the use of educational networking sites

District staff must:
- Notify your supervisor about the use of any educational network and discuss with your supervisor the need for notification to parents and other staff.

- Use district supported networking tools when available.

- Be aware that all online communications are stored and can be monitored.

- Have a clear statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.

- Establish a code of conduct for all network participants.

- Not post images that include a student who does not have permission from a parent to have his/her image displayed.

- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved participants access to the site.

Expectations for all networking sites

District employees should:

- Not submit or post confidential or protected information about the district, its students, alumni or employees. You should assume that most information about a student is protected from disclosure by both federal law (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and state law (Iowa Code Section 22.7(1)). Disclosures of confidential or protected information may result in liability for invasion of privacy or defamation.

- Report, as required by law, any information found on a social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines.

- Not use commentary or post pictures or video deemed to be defamatory, obscene, profane, or which promotes, fosters or perpetuates illegal discrimination of any kind.

- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterizations.

- Not use school or district logos unless you have been approved to do so by the superintendent.

- This includes using school logos, mascots, photographs or other such graphic representations or images associated with the district.

- Not create an alias, false or anonymous identity on any social media.

- Consider whether a particular posting puts your professional reputation and effectiveness as a district employee at risk.

- Be cautious of security risks when using applications that work with the social networking site. (Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games).

- Run updated malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your personal devices (a computer or other device not issued by the school district).

- Be alert to the possibility of phishing scams that arrive by email or on your social networking site.

Anyone who wishes to establish a social media account for specific school district offices, initiatives, schools or programs must first contact the superintendent. Social media may be used for school related purposes only with the approval of the superintendent. If you have questions, would like to start a social media initiative on behalf of a district entity, or have content you would like posted to the district's Facebook page, please contact the superintendent or the district media contact: Fusion Forward, LLC. 319.334.9300.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the following policy, please contact the Superintendent of the School District.