



**Pascack Valley Regional High School District  
Communication Plan**

***Innovation. Inquiry. Individuality.***

**July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2021**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Research.....	5
Analysis.....	9
Communication Plan.....	13
Evaluation.....	17

## Acknowledgments

### Pascack Valley Regional High School District Board of Education

Ms. Tammy Molinelli - President	Woodcliff Lake, NJ
Ms. Janet Bissinger – Vice President	Montvale, NJ
Mr. Joseph Blundo	River Vale, NJ
Mr. Michael Fronte	Hillsdale, NJ
Mr. Brian Hallowell	Montvale, NJ
Ms. Kenneth Ralph	Hillsdale, NJ
Mr. Arnold Scher	Hillsdale, NJ
Mr. James Stankus	River Vale, NJ
Mr. David Steinberg	Woodcliff Lake, NJ

### District Administration

Dr. P. Erik Gundersen	Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Pamela Baxley	Business Administrator
Dr. Barry Bachenheimer	Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Mr. Glenn deMarrais	Principal, Pascack Hills High School
Mr. Thomas DeMaio	Principal, Pascack Valley High School

### Technology and Communication

Mr. Paul Zeller	Director of Technology and Communication
Mr. Washington Pico	Network Manager
Mrs. Mary Camporeale	District Data Services Manager
Mr. Armen Hagopian	Systems/Network Administrator

### District Supervisors of Instruction

Mr. Shawn Buchanan	Physical Education and Health (Pascack Valley)
Dr. Aarti Mallya	Science, Technology Education
Ms. Eva Merk	Special Education
Mr. Joseph Orlak	Social Studies and Business (District); Physical Education and Health (Pascack Hills)
Ms. Noemi Rodriguez	World Languages, FACS, Music
Dr. Mark Russo	Mathematics, Computer Science
Dr. Sean Struncis	Guidance and Counseling Services
Ms. Valerie Mattessich	English, Media Centers, Art

## Executive Summary

The Pascack Valley Regional High School District is recognized on the local, county, state, and national levels as a high performing public school district. Our students consistently achieve both in and out of the classroom. Our faculty demonstrates outstanding professionalism as educators, as recognized not only by our community, but their peers throughout the country. Our administration is relied upon as a resource for countless educators seeking to improve their school districts in the areas of leadership, financial responsibility, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and co-curricular activities. Our Board of Education is recognized as visionaries, seeking to encourage, support, and help improvement throughout all levels of district operation.

Whether the district is sharing student achievement, plans for improvement, or steps to address a current challenge, effective communication assures district stakeholders, as well as the general public, have a clear understanding on the district's direction. In recent years, the district has made improvements to broadcast information with its intended audience, and while generally successful, the ever changing platforms by which people receive information and the increased volume of information needing to be shared has the district realizing a comprehensive plan with dedicated oversight is needed to assure we meet the needs of the community we serve.

This Communication Plan has been developed using the R.A.C.E. model, which is endorsed by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The R.A.C.E. model follows the tenets of:

- **Research:** Solicit the input of all stakeholders in an effort to determine what is currently working, what is in need of improvement, and suggestions on how to improve.
- **Analysis:** Analyze all input and information collected during the research phase, and report the information so that decision makers and stakeholders attain a comprehensive understanding of each audiences position.
- **Communication Plan:** Based on the analysis, establish goals and objectives that best meet the needs of stakeholders.
- **Evaluation:** As the district works toward the goals and objectives, solicit feedback and evaluate progress being made.

The Technology and Communication Office (further referred to as the Communication Office) will oversee the district efforts as it relates to the Communication Plan, under the direction of the superintendent of schools.

## Research

To properly establish Communication goals, the Communication Office conducted a survey of students, parents/guardians, staff, administration and Board members with the intention of learning how each audience feels we can improve. The survey was sent to all 2,044 students (number of students at the time of the survey), their respective parents/guardians (2,879 messages in total, with the understanding one message went to parents who have multiple children in the district), all 296 staff members (including faculty, support staff, and administration), and all 9 Board members.

Below are the questions from the survey:

### How effective are these methods in providing you with school/district information?

	Outstanding	Effective	Needs Improvement	Ineffective
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local/Community Ne...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mobile App	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Superintendent's New...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"The Report" (District ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## How would you like to stay informed about the school/district?

Check all that apply

- Email
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Local/Community Newspaper (Community Life, Pascack Press, Record, etc...)
- Mobile App
- SMS / Text message
- Superintendent News Brief
- "the Report" (received via postal mail)
- Twitter
- Website
- YouTube
- Other...

**Do you have any suggestions on how we can better provide you with information?**

Long answer text

---

**"The school/district wants to hear what I have to say."**

How do you feel about the above statement?

- Yes, they want my opinion.
- Sometimes.
- No, they do not want my opinion.

**When I share my thoughts on the school/district, I use the following method(s):**

Check all that apply

- Email / Written Letter
- Face-to-face meeting
- Phone
- Twitter

## I would prefer to share my thoughts using:

Check all that apply

Email / Written letter

Facebook

Face-to-face meeting

Instagram

Phone

Twitter

Other...

## Do you have any suggestions on how we can better listen to you?

Long answer text

---

## Is there anything you want to share regarding the school/district?

This survey is anonymous, but, if you would like us to respond, please include a preferred method of communication and contact information.

Long answer text

---

## Analysis

The Communication Office performed an exhaustive analysis of the data collected. After the analysis, including reading each individual comment for each response, a presentation was made to administration, and a full report by building was provided to the superintendent and the school principals. Only one person indicated a request for follow-up, and that request was fulfilled.

Below is a summary and analysis of the survey information collected:

- 5,228 people were sent the survey
- 1,205 people completed the survey (23%)

### Question: Effectiveness of Current Methods

When answering this question, stakeholders ranked each option as “Outstanding,” “Effective,” “Needs Improvement,” or “Ineffective.” As can be seen in the chart below, all stakeholders unanimously felt email is the most effective (ranked either “Outstanding” or “Effective”) means of communication. Other current effective methods are the News Brief, The Report, Twitter, and the website, with effectiveness varying by stakeholder group. Our stakeholders feel the least effective methods are the mobile app, newspaper, and YouTube.

	Students	Parents	Staff
Email	96%	96%	99%
Newspaper	30%	40%	51%
Mobile App	26%	54%	50%
News Brief	53%	89%	89%
The Report	42%	75%	65%
Twitter	56%	52%	66%
Website	63%	70%	80%
YouTube	31%	34%	45%

**Question: Preference on how people would like to stay informed**

When answering this question, stakeholders had the option of selecting all methods they desired on how to stay informed. Including adding the options of text messages and current popular social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, email was still the most preferred method across the board. Current research indicates social media platforms are desired by public school K-12 audiences; however, our current stakeholders did not indicate this as a preferred method. According to the data, parents show a desire to receive text messages.

The chart below shows all of the data:

	Students	Parents	Staff
Email	95%	96%	93%
Facebook	3%	16%	6%
Instagram	24%	7%	6%
Newspaper	9%	10%	14%
Mobile App	19%	30%	17%
Text	38%	62%	44%
News Brief	18%	36%	41%
The Report	9%	20%	12%
Twitter	31%	11%	23%
Website	32%	38%	35%
YouTube	13%	1%	5%

**Question: Suggestions on how the school/district can provide better information**

This was an open ended question. Each response was read and categorized based on the type of feedback provided. Across all stakeholders, the number one suggestion was “less, but more informative emails.” Digging deeper into those responses, the most prevalent suggestion was messages that were more direct and less verbose. Other popular suggestions included: improve the website and more use of text message. A specific suggestion of louder PA announcement at Pascack Hills was also prevalent and at the time of writing this plan, is being investigated so the proper adjustment can be made.

**Question: How do you feel about the statement “the school/district wants to hear what I have to say”**

Combining the data across all audiences, 13% of the people who responded felt the school/district does not want to hear what they have to say. When reading the comments of these responses, most were from students who did not agree with closing the online gradebook during the day. The remaining responses either did not provide a reason, or, had a very specific issue that was not addressed to their satisfaction.

The district does want the input of all stakeholders. Even if the district does not follow the suggestion of an individual or group, the input is always evaluated, discussed, and considered when making a decision. The district will look to better communicate to all stakeholders that their input is desired and valued.

**When I share my thoughts, I use the following method:**

The purpose of this question was to discern how people currently prefer to communicate with the school/district, whether it is a question, comment, or concern. This was an optional question, and many did not respond. Respondents had the ability to select more than one answer.

The most preferred method to share thoughts was email/written letter with 957 responses. The second most preferred was face-to-face with 542, and third was by phone with 251 responses. Twitter only received 38 responses.

**I would prefer to share my thoughts using:**

The purpose of this question was to learn which methods of communication people prefer when providing input, asking questions, or expressing concerns. This question provided Facebook and Instagram as options to determine interest in these currently popular social media platforms. This question was optional, with more responding to their preferred method than to their current method. Respondents could choose multiple options.

Inline with the previous question, the most preferred methods were email/written letter (1016), face-to-face (639), and phone (337). Only 16 open responses were provided, with the only one specified by multiple people being anonymous survey with 6 responses - all students. The social media platforms had minimal responses which again is surprising based on current research.

**Do you have suggestions on how we can better listen to you:**

This was an open-ended question, with answers varying depending on the audience. The most frequent response from students was to ask the student body at large, not just pocket groups such as the Student Government Association. Students suggested more anonymous surveys as the primary method for soliciting feedback. Parents primary suggestion was to be more responsive, and like the students, to have more surveys seeking their input. With regards to being more responsive, administration was sent all feedback to review and consider ways as it pertains to their purview. Staff suggested designating times for dialogue, having administration explain how suggestions are considered even if not used so that they know their voice is heard, and like the other two groups, requested more anonymous surveys.

**Is there anything you want to share regarding the school/district:**

The intent of this question was to give all stakeholders an opportunity to anonymously share their thoughts on anything, not just communication. The issues raised in this question varied widely and most not involved with communication, so they are omitted from this Communication Plan. A full report of responses was given to the superintendent and the respective building principals. One person provided their email address seeking a direct response to their concern, and they were responded to within 48 hours of their inquiry.

# Communication Plan

## Goals and Objectives

Based on the analysis of feedback from the survey, board and district goals, and suggestions made by alumni and recently retired staff, the goals and objectives of this Communication Plan are as follows:

1. Develop and implement a process that streamlines and focuses communication based on the needs of the stakeholders.
  - 1.1. Establish a process for stakeholders to submit information that is simple and consistent.
  - 1.2. Assure at least two people proofread all information prior to distribution.
  - 1.3. Communication Office to assure information is distributed based on type of information and desired delivery method of target audience.
  - 1.4. Continuously assess methods of communication, those being utilized by the district and others that are available, to assure we are communicating with stakeholders the best ways possible.
  
2. Improve email communications that are sent to large groups of stakeholders.
  - 2.1. Consolidate information into fewer email messages.
  - 2.2. Assure descriptive subjects and text accompany email messages that have an attachment as the primary source of information (flyers, sign-up, forms to be printed, etc.).
  
3. Redesign website to assure most needed and relevant information is easy to find, requiring minimal navigation, and is responsive to modern devices.
  - 3.1. With input from all stakeholders, select a new template that minimizes scrolling to access key information.
  - 3.2. Determine and assure most accessed information is at the top level of the website.

4. Improve on how the district solicits feedback from stakeholders.
  - 4.1. Solicit more feedback through anonymous surveys.
  - 4.2. Offer opportunities for stakeholders to discuss concerns with administration.
  - 4.3. Demonstrate how stakeholder input is considered when making large decisions.
  
5. With the understanding that alumni and retirees can offer tremendous insight in how the district progresses against its goals, establish better lines of communication with these audiences.
  - 5.1. Through surveys, local municipalities, and established social media groups, solicit current contact information from alumni and retirees.
  - 5.2. Establish lists allowing for the distribution of information to alumni and retirees.
  - 5.3. As appropriate, solicit input from alumni and retirees as it relates to district goals and initiatives.
  
6. Work with the School Safety Specialist to incorporate a communication plan into the district Emergency Response Plan.
  - 6.1. Clearly define protocol for communicating important information between agencies involved in the response
  - 6.2. Clearly define protocol of whom is to communicate information to the media and to the public.
  - 6.3. Review and revise prepared statements that provide base language to help quickly craft specific responses to an emergency.

## Current Progress

The district has already made progress against the Goals and Objectives noted above in an effort to improve communications. Below is a synopsis of the progress made as of the time this plan was written:

1. An initial process to streamline and focus communication that needs to be distributed has been established through the use of an online form. All employees of the district have access to the form to submit information. Once submitted, the form goes through several approvals to assure all pertinent information is captured and that proper proofreading takes place. Once approved, the Communication Office performs a final review and publishes the information as deemed appropriate based on content and intended audience.

The initial process is a significant improvement in assuring information is published in a timely and accurate manner; however, it continues to be evaluated and adjusted in an effort to best meet the communication needs of the district.

2. The Communication Survey noted email to be the most preferred method of receiving information by all stakeholders. The analysis further showed a desire to assure email messages are sent in a more effective way. The Central Office has adjusted its practice, sending less but more informative messages. To accomplish this, the Central Office messages often include headers to break apart different topics, use of bullet point style lists to share information, and links to websites with further detail for those interested. In addition, the Central Office is working with School Offices to use similar practices.

There is a great deal more work to be done in achieving this goal, as it requires all members of the team to follow similar styles and methods of communicating.

3. After receiving input through the Communication Survey, from the Technology Committee (comprised of students, parents, faculty, administration and Board members), we have selected a new template that achieves this goal. All quick links, headings, and key information will be accessible without scrolling, regardless of device, while maintaining an aesthetically pleasing site.

At the time this plan is being drafted, the Communication Office is actively working with the website provider to implement and modify the new template. We intend to have the new site implemented for the 2019-2020 school year.

4. The Communication Survey was a first step in an effort to improve on how the district solicits feedback from stakeholders. Based on the analysis of that data, we understand stakeholders have a desire to be surveyed anonymously even more so. To this end, a district wide School Climate Survey is being issued in March/April of 2019 to all stakeholders. Another Communication Survey is planned for the fall of 2019 as a follow-up on how the Communication Office is improving.

With regard to discussing concerns with administration, we have made small steps, hosting small group conversations with student and faculty during the 2018-2019 school year on the topics of diversity and inclusion. This initial step

has been valuable in helping the district better understand stakeholder perspective and we look forward to more such conversations in the future.

The district has a history of considering stakeholder input when making large decisions, but as indicated in the data analysis, the district has not always communicated these efforts. The topics of diversity and inclusion have prompted a great deal of discussion, as noted above, and now as the district launches programs to affect change for fostering a more inclusive environment, the district is sure to acknowledge how stakeholders contribute to the process. While the district has taken good first steps with respect to this goal, administration will continue to make a conscious effort in soliciting and sharing the feedback of all stakeholders.

5. In the winter of 2018, the Communication Office launched an effort to contact alumni and retirees. This effort started with an initial email campaign to the parents/guardians of alumni of the past eight years (those we have contact information from our Student Information System) with a form requesting alumni provide basic contact information. The Communication Office launched a similar email campaign to retirees, both directly, and through invitation of current employees who have relationships with our retirees.

This effort has yielded initial lists of contact information over 800 alumni and over 40 retirees, and with the form still available online through the website, we continue to get responses. Some initial communications have been made using the lists; however, we look to form a more formal process to assure we are regularly communicating with these valued members of the community.

6. Our newly appointed School Security Specialist has undergone a formal review of our Emergency Response Plan. The review has yielded a heavily revised version of the plan, which does include a revised section for Crisis Communication. The Communication Office is responsible for providing detailed protocols and base statements to be used in a crisis, and this was completed in the spring of 2019.

## Evaluation

As the district works toward the goals and objectives set forth in this plan, the Communication Office will solicit feedback from all stakeholders. Information will be gathered via anonymous survey and through feedback provided in focus group discussions. Throughout the process, this data will be used to make adjustments as necessary to assure the district is making its best effort to achieve the goals for the stakeholders.

Toward the end of the 2020-2021 school year, a final survey will be sent to all stakeholders that will include a copy of this plan, and ask for feedback on the overall progress against these goals and objectives. The Communication Office, under the direction and supervision of the superintendent of schools, will analyze that feedback to determine success and next steps for future school years.