



ACPS Communications Plan

The Board of Education of Allegany County affirms the need and obligation to keep the citizens of Allegany County apprised of accurate information regarding the Allegany County Public School System. **The release of any information concerning the school system is coordinated by the Superintendent and the Office of Public Information and is communicated with the public through a variety of methods including, but not limited to, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, ACETV, ACPS Video On Demand, social media sites, and the ACPS website.**

Goal: The goal of this plan is to raise public confidence in the Allegany County Public School System by educating key audiences that we have a strategic plan with measurable outcomes that will improve the system and ensure open communication.

All communication within the Allegany County Public School System and throughout the community will be:

- Understandable
- Courteous
- Proactive
- Encouraging
- Dependable
- Accurate

Objectives:

- Build credibility for the Allegany County Public School System among target audiences
- Become established as the primary source of information regarding the Allegany County Public School System
- Recruit support from the business community for partnerships in our schools
- Establish a proper chain of dissemination and protocols for information related to calendars, press releases, newsletters, other publications, website and social media site maintenance, ACETV bulletins, VOD uploads, etc.
- Recruit and retain highly qualified teachers

- Promote individual school identities and cultures in a positive way consistent with school improvement plans
- Feedback, both compliments and constructive criticism, is welcomed and utilized

Audiences:

- ACPS employees (internal)
- Parents
- Students
- Community members
- Business partners
- Media
- General public

Positioning Strategies:

- The Allegany County Public School System is successfully working to improve the quality of education in Allegany County and is a responsible guardian for the children in its care
- The Board of Education of Allegany County is a responsible body working hard to improve the education system in Allegany County
- The Allegany County Public School System is listening and responding to the community and to key stakeholders
- The Allegany County Public School System is a faithful steward of tax dollars
- The Allegany County Public School System’s leadership is knowledgeable about the key issues facing education today
- The Allegany County Public School System is a fair employer, and the school board members are compassionate regarding the fair treatment of system employees

Implementation Tactics:

1. Establish an effective community relations program to build collaborative relationships and strengthen support for and confidence in Allegany County Public Schools; determine public attitudes toward the school district and increase awareness and support for the school district; leverage external communications through existing community and civic publications (i.e. chamber newsletter, email listservs, etc.); maintain and improve the Superintendent’s outreach programs
 - Ensure that a key communicator list includes realtors, child care facilities, faith-based organizations, senior centers, large businesses and/or corporations, foundations, non-profit agencies, colleges and universities, and establish and maintain routine communications with these groups

- Establish an annual assessment system of the quality, quantity, and effectiveness of all existing forms of communication with various stakeholders
 - Maintain communications with established parent organizations (PTA, PTO, PAC) and teacher organizations (Teacher Roundtable, ACTA)
 - Maintain communications with student leadership organizations (ACASC)
 - Assess and identify meetings that board members and/or administrators may want to consider attending
 - Maintain a distribution list for district publications (i.e. board meeting newsletters, meeting minutes and agendas, school system reports, calendars, etc.)
 - Assess and recommend speaking engagements for the Superintendent at community and civic organizations
 - Maintain a user-friendly website and social media site that will provide up-to-date information for parents, students, staff, and the community
 - Develop a mechanism for the public to send questions electronically to be answered on the school system's website or social media sites by the Superintendent or designee
2. Provide for an effective media relations program that enhances the school district's image in the community; develop a strategic media communications program that is proactive and reactive
- Conduct routine editorial visits with key media outlets to develop and maintain relationships with editorial staff
 - Provide the media with proactive stories about Allegany County Public Schools
 - Meet regularly with reporters who cover education stories for newspapers, television, radio, etc.
 - Develop a district-wide experts list who can provide interviews and background information to the media about important education-related topics
3. Provide for an effective employee communications program that improves knowledge about and support for the school district; strengthen the content and design of key communication tools for employees
- Maintain the distribution of the Boardroom Chatter newsletter
 - Develop an employee newsletter
 - Publish featured ACPS headlines and photo on social media sites
 - Utilize the ACPS Employee portal to post information about the school system

4. Establish and maintain a strong, positive connection between individual schools and their communities; develop tools and resources to help principals become more effective in their roles as communicators for the school district
 - Support principals in understanding how to work with the media and develop skills to communicate appropriate messages for their schools
 - Distribute school newsletters
 - Review schools' current communications methods and tools
 - Review school websites and make suggestions for improvements
 - Consider a common district section on each school website
 - Encourage community and civic clubs to hold meetings at schools
 - Invite key stakeholders to school Open Houses
 - Coordinate efforts to inform, recruit, and promote parental, business and community involvement
 - **Each school will designate a staff member or administrator to act as the information liaison to the PIO to coordinate the release of any information regarding the happenings at their respective schools**

5. Improve the public's access to online district information and provide online tools that empower the public to interact with Allegany County Public Schools; maintain the school system's website and social media site and ensure that they facilitate the flow of information and provide efficient and clear information about the school district
 - Continually monitor the needs of website and social media site users in order to improve structure and content
 - Conduct online surveys from the website and social media site to identify who the school district's users are and for what information they are searching
 - Maintain a uniform look and feel for the website so that each page can be clearly identified as belonging to the school district and ensure that each page has the required navigational and other design elements to facilitate ease of use

School Board Communications: *(Per Policy BH-R)*

It is the belief of the Board that open communication is essential for the effective operation of the school system. Through established procedures, the Board will ensure that its members have knowledge of the communications directed to it from the public and from the staff.

Board Communication with the Public

- All communication received by the school system addressed to the Board will be copied and distributed to all Board members either as a weekly update (Week in Review) or as agenda materials for a subsequent meeting.
- The President of the Board will acknowledge correspondence other than letters of acknowledgement, circular letters, advertisements, or letters terminating a correspondence.
- The receipt of anonymous communications received by any Board member concerning personnel or other school-related matters, shall be immediately discarded or referred to the superintendent. All such telephone calls shall be promptly terminated. The only exception will be in cases involving the reporting of alleged child abuse or neglect.

Board Communication with Staff

- Effective communication between the Board and staff is essential for providing the best possible educational opportunities for students, the proper disposition of personnel matters within the system, and for maintaining continued confidence by the entire community.
- All official communication, policies, and directives of interest and concern to the staff will be communicated to staff members through the superintendent. The superintendent will employ such media as are appropriate to keep staff informed of the Board's issues, concerns, and actions.

Staff Communication with the Board

- All official communications or reports to the Board or to any subcommittees from principals, directors, supervisors, teachers or other staff members will be submitted to the Board through the superintendent. This is not to be construed as denying the right of any staff member to appeal any action or decision of the superintendent to the Board.
- When Board members and staff are working on policy issues, communication and feedback is encouraged.
- Communication with Board members is encouraged; however, when dealing with operational or personnel issues, the Board member should not be the first person contacted.

Visits to Schools

- Individual Board members interested in visiting schools, classrooms, or offices will make arrangements for visitations through the principals of the various schools or through the appropriate individual. Such visits will be regarded as informal expressions of interest in school affairs and not as "inspections" or visits

for supervisory or administrative purposes. Official visits will be conducted with the knowledge of staff, including the superintendent, principals, or other supervisors, as appropriate.

Social Interaction

- Staff and Board members share a keen interest in schools and in education generally. It is expected that when Board members and staff meet at social events and other functions, they will informally discuss educational issues of mutual interest. However, staff members are reminded that individual Board members have no special authority excepting when they are at a legally convened meeting of the Board or vested in special authority by Board action. Therefore, discussions by either party of personalities or personnel matters will be considered as evidence of unethical conduct.

Crisis Communications:

The most likely emergency the Allegany County Public School System will face will be one that occurs at a school, or is school-related. Our role in these emergencies will be focused on support of the affected school, oversight, and recovery. The school system's Incident Command System structure developed for a Central Office emergency will be utilized for a school emergency as well. All duties and responsibilities remain the same. All schools/buildings are equipped with an Alertus warning device to be utilized during an emergency to give an audible and visual warning along with directions during an emergency. All schools/buildings are also equipped with a base station radio capable of communication with the 911 center, police, and the Central Office, and each school principal is assigned a hand-held radio capable of the same communication. The school system utilizes School Messenger, a rapid notification system, to aid in notifying parents and the community about school delays and closings, emergency information and updates, as well as school-based information such as meeting reminders and school events. The ACPS website and social media sites will also be utilized to disseminate information during an emergency.

- 1. Key Operational Guidelines** – Each principal/director is responsible for the safety and well being of students, staff, and employees. Each school and building shall have a standalone emergency plan, updated annually, and the central office shall keep a copy of each of these plans on file. The central office's main role in an emergency is to provide the support needed by the school/building Incident Commander to effectively and efficiently respond to an emergency. **The Superintendent, the Public Information Officer, or other designee retains the authority for school closures, bus transportation, public announcements/media releases.**

2. **Emergency Notification** – ICS members will be instructed to “activate ICS” via phone if they are required to report to the command post (superintendent’s conference room).
3. **The Student Assistance Team** – The SAT will be dispatched as required by the Incident Commander to the hospital to aid students and facilitate parent/student reunification.
4. **School Counselors** – School counselors will be dispatched to the affected school/building and hospital as required to aid staff and students in coping and recovering from the emotional impact of the emergency.
5. **External Communication Requirements** – The Incident Commander shall make calls to the 911 center and the superintendent in the event of an incident.
6. **School Bus Accident Procedure** –
 - Receive initial information of accident
 - Is anyone hurt? If yes, then dial 911, notify superintendent, notify the school involved, notify the security officer, and dispatch spare bus. If no, then see below.
 - Has any student been thrown from their seat during the accident? If yes, see above. If no, see below.
 - Do any of the vehicles need towed? If yes, see above. If no, see below.
 - Is there any property damage? If yes, notify appropriate law enforcement agency. If no, see below.
 - Do you need a spare bus and are any of the safety and warning systems not working? If yes, dispatch spare bus. If no, see below.
 - Continue to transport and notify transportation supervisor when run is complete
7. **Command Post Information** –
 - Equipment includes overhead screen, projector, two wireless capable laptops, telephone with four lines, battery chargers for portable radios, police/fire scanner
 - Communication tools include two-way portable radio with transportation and Allegany County Department of Homeland Security and Public Safety, pager, telephone (landline), cell phone, instant messenger

Evaluation: The Allegany County Public School System will inventory and audit all communication vehicles currently being used to communicate with target audiences. The goal will be to eliminate redundancy and to begin to drive message and brand cohesion through all levels of the school system. The following resources will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Allegany County Public Schools communications plan:

(All surveys will be conducted via email or via School Messenger)

- Principal survey
- Employee survey
- Community feedback
- Website usage/hits
- School-based survey
- Media survey
- Student survey