

## Communications Committee

### Recommendations

#### 1. Communications Committee

- a. **Create a permanently staffed committee dedicated to communications.**

We will establish a District Committee to review communications avenues that will meet on a regular basis. This Committee will address the District websites to ensure that all are current, as well as ways to assess the best methods to inform parents and residents.

- b. **Create a Board of Education vision and mission statement for communication.**

The Board of Education already has an adopted goal “to increase awareness and gain community recognition of the contributions, successes and challenges facing the Tolland Public Schools through an array of continuous and varied media”.

- c. **Develop a communication plan.**

During the 2009/10 school year, the Communications Committee will develop a plan to distribute information relative to District operations, pertinent school operations, and budgetary data.

#### 2. Update Website

- a. **Dedicated webmaster**

Excellent idea, which should be combined with a trained production person for *Inside Tolland Schools*. However, given our many other needs, the cost may be far too great for implementation in this district. Volunteer help is possible but likely to be unsatisfactory due to issues of accountability and availability.

- b. **Ease of access, simplicity of design**

The current website is designed and maintained by students. To a large extent, ease of access and “simplicity” of design are contradictory to our mission which is to put “all the information about everything” on our site. Professional design work, including a detailed analysis of our business information output, is required for a substantial overhaul of the existing site; an expense that the district cannot afford.

**c. Updated regularly**

BOE main site is updated regularly. "Last updated" dates are included on every page. Departmental and building level sites are updated as arranged and dictated by curriculum, department, and building administrators. Teacher pages are updated according to the policies and procedures of each building's administration.

**d. Cost effective**

We have provided the website as cheaply as is possible. We are connected to the web through the Connecticut Education Network at no cost to the district. We use the free .12.ct.us web domain. The web server software comes at no cost with our regular licenses for the other servers in the district. Backups of web content are handled as part of our general system backups at THS. The web server device is five years old; there is no on-going cost for service contracts, on site staff handle all repair and maintenance issues with the web server and its connection to CEN. The district supplies open source tools to edit and upload pages, again, at no cost. Ongoing page updates are handled either by staff, volunteers, or by students employed at minimum wage.

**e. Website for teachers**

The district provides space for teacher pages on the district server. Administration policies and procedures in the different buildings determined how and when those pages are used. It should be noted that at the beginning of 2010, the district intends to implement the parent portal feature of PowerSchool, the new student information management system. With this system, student attendance, grade, assignment, discipline, and school information will be available to parents and students online.

**3. Streamline Information**

**a. Maintain student handbooks, notices, calendar, budget**

The Districtwide Communications Committee can assist with suggestions on ways to streamline information being provided to parents and residents.

Please note that all student handbooks are reviewed annually and updated based on changes to federal and state statutes, policies and school procedures.

**b. District wide calendar for BOE, schools and events**

We are looking at electronic options and hope to use the parent portal portion of PowerSchool to meet this need.

**c. Reduce the amount of paper**

Tolland Middle School developed and implemented a “digital backpack” this school year. It is an e-mail list which informs parents of events and information pertaining to the Middle School. It is aimed at replacing paper handouts on Fridays. If successful, we will expand to other schools.

**d. Show parents where information is available.**

Web pages attempt to be both highly informative and easy to navigate. It is usually possible, with a small time investment, to find what is needed by browsing the sites. People who visit frequently find things more easily than those who do not. Google search is available on the district office site and will shortly be available on building sites as well.

The Fall 2007 and Spring 2009 editions of Inside Tolland Schools featured information about the District’s website and the types of information contained on the web pages.

**4. Encourage an Exchange of Information**

**a. Utilize the PTO organization newsletters, other civic organization newsletters where appropriate**

**Tolland High School**

The High School includes school communications with the Booster Club Newsletter and the Counseling Department Newsletter that are distributed periodically throughout the school year. In addition, the School communicates with parents through e-mail, web pages, and the AlertNow message system.

**Tolland Middle School**

The Middle School currently has a TMS/PTO newsletter called the Falcon News. It is a joint endeavor between the PTO and TMS, and is mostly financed by contributions made by community businesses and organizations who, in exchange for a business care sized ad, help pay for the publication. It comes out about five times during the year.

The School also contacts newspapers like the Journal Inquirer and the Reminder, to share news and invite them to report on happenings at TMS, will soon begin using the Hartford Courant I-Towns, to provide information as well.

#### **Tolland Intermediate School**

In the past the school principals from Birch Grove and Tolland Intermediate wrote a monthly letter for the PTO newsletter. In an effort by the PTO to conserve paper these letters were eliminated.

Currently at Tolland Intermediate School we send home a quarterly newsletter. We are currently attempting to utilize our web site more and more to post upcoming events.

#### **Birch Grove Primary School**

Currently at Birch Grove School we send home a monthly calendar and newsletter from the principal. The monthly calendar and newsletter are posted on the Birch Grove web site.

### **b. Survey the residents**

In 2006, a Community Survey was conducted using "Inside Tolland Schools". Many of the questions centered around the quality of Tolland schools, particular budgetary questions, and communication with the Board of Education.

Perhaps the Districtwide Communications Committee can review the possibility of another survey constructed to assess the specific issue of increasing communication to parents and residents.

### **c. Share and expand on successes**

#### **Tolland High School**

The High School will strive to develop more communications about the achievements and success at THS.

#### **Tolland Middle School**

As a case in point, the Middle School has invited the Journal Inquirer and Reminder to report on the fundraising activities at TMS for the American Cancer Society (a staff member agreed to have his head shaved if enough money was raised). The School attempts to involve the news organizations in events that occur at TMS and will do more of this in the future.

**Tolland Intermediate School**

This is accomplished through our newsletter, the principal's report at the PTO meetings, the State of the Schools Meeting in March, and in our annual report.

**Birch Grove Primary School**

We do this through our monthly newsletter, the principal's report at the PTO meeting, at the State of the Schools Meeting in March, and in the District's Annual Report.

**d. Streamline current paper communications**

Please see response on page 3 under 3c – Reduce the amount of paper.

**e. Continue to make the BOE accessible through meetings, e-mail, website, phone and mail**

By Connecticut Statute, regular Board meetings are scheduled and published through the Town Clerk's office prior to the beginning of the calendar year. By Board Policy, regular Board meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month, unless otherwise changed due to a conflict.

The District website ([www.tolland.k12.ct.us](http://www.tolland.k12.ct.us)) contains information relative to Board agendas and meeting minutes. The website also contains phone and e-mail addresses of all Board members.

For the past two years, both the Board and the Town Council have been sponsoring a "Community Hour" held once per month in the Town library. The purpose of the "Community Hour" is for residents to meet with and ask questions relative to the schools and/or Town operations.

**f. Replace broken avenues**

The Districtwide Communications Committee to be established at the start of the 2009/10 school year through its work will hopefully discover the "broken communication avenues" and suggest ways to repair or replace them in a cost effective way.