Tips for Communicating about the 2020-21 School Year

Tips to consider when preparing for the 2020 – 2021 academic year:

**Establish a communications strategy. Consider these methods:**

* Administer a survey to educators, parents, and/or students to gather their views around reopening and the role of summer learning as part of the equation.
* Appoint a family liaison in charge of overseeing all communications with families, if one is not present already.
* Ensure a dedicated COVID-19 email address or telephone number run by the district is functional, messages are monitored, and timely responses are provided.
* Host virtual town halls to communicate the results of the survey and work of the Task Force.
* Publish a press release articulating a detailed vision for the 2020-21 school year and how community input was/will be incorporated.
* Create and run public service announcements encouraging steps such as filling out the survey.
* Publish opinion pieces that articulate the district’s reasoning behind its reopening plans and describe health and safety precautions being taken.
* Conduct a media briefing to communicate the district’s reopening plans.

**Provide concrete, parent-friendly information.**

* Avoid ‘education jargon’ or difficult instructions that are not plain language and can confuse parents. Explain what the changes will mean and provide step by step instructions for what they can expect when an outbreak occurs. For example, if they will receive an alert message through the school’s messenger service.
* Translate updates into school community native languages as needed.
* Be empathetic and personalize the tone of updates as much as possible (parents care first and foremost on how changes will affect their child rather than the system). COVID 19 and school closures are stressful for parents, teachers, and students. Communication should acknowledge this difficult time and offer opportunities for the school community to support each other as much as possible.

**Engage partners and key stakeholders**

* Co-host meetings with educator organizations, community groups, parents and families, and other civic-minded bodies to hear concerns and provide clarity on the district’s vision.
* Record meetings and post to website.
* Discuss and review parent-friendly materials.
* Work with partners to identify additional stakeholders and opportunities for deeper engagement.

**Communicate new information frequently using multiple channels and platforms**

* Update your website (homepage) regularly with the concrete, easy to understand information and resources. In addition to the updates, consider posting items that are being worked on and let parents know when to check back. (Example: Fall School Plans: In Progress. Check back for updates soon).
* Include all links to district digital learning platforms in one place as well as additional mobile-friendly digital resources or families who may not have access to high speed internet.
* If possible, also include the latest information regarding COVID 19 assistance (i.e. how students can get free meals if they qualify, or technology or internet connectivity assistance if available.)
* Have materials reviewed by civil rights, advocacy groups, and organizations that represent vulnerable communities for tone, cultural competency, and to ensure key issues are addressed and that the communication resources are reaching underserved populations.
* Take steps to ensure that all materials are available in multiple languages and are accessible to parents and other stakeholders with disabilities.
* Communicate via local media (earned, donated, and paid) channels including print, TV, and radio.
* Track questions that are raised and post an FAQ online with clear, detailed answers to respond to common concerns and issues.
* Engage with stakeholders on various social media channels.
* Utilize social media, voice and text to reach parents with key information.
* In addition to the above channels, share information through community-based organizations such as PTAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and places of worship.

**Send Regular updates on a consistent schedule so parents know to expect them. (For example, every Monday night.)**

* Use multiple communication methods in a coordinated way to ensure you’re reaching all families, including those without email/internet access. For example, share updates by text, phone, and social media.
* If updates are too long for text/social media, link to the website page and/or one pager that can easily be opened from those platforms.
* Consider leveraging an existing auto phone call system or chain (or create one) to contact families and/or students that you haven’t been able to reach online. Phone calls should also be used for communicating sensitive or personal information.
* If possible, provide printed updates and instructions for home learning.

**Create Opportunities for Two-way Communication**

* Consider a way for parents to submit questions, ideas, and share resources.
* Provide a question/contact us box either on the website or Facebook page.
* Based on what parents are asking, post FAQ’s on the website.
* Use social media and/or PTA/parent group pages as an avenue for parents to share ideas and resources on both academic as well as social/emotional development.