



Community Relations & Communications Plan

Updated August 2024

Executive Summary

Marion County School District is located in a diverse community of just over 28,000 residents. Serving an average of 4,000 students in grades Pre K – 12, the district employs 670 staff members.

The Public Relations Office seeks to facilitate the district's direction and purpose by building and improving home-school-community relationships. The objective is to effectively and efficiently manage the flow of information between Marion County School District and the public while supporting the goals of the district's strategic plan.

Focus

The Public Relations Office will focus its resources on communications that will promote public awareness, understanding and support of the district and its initiatives while simultaneously creating new lines of communications forming pro-active partnerships that facilitate student achievement. It is our goal to build mutually beneficial relationships between Marion County School District and the public to facilitate the betterment of all students through a quality education.

This comprehensive plan will be used as a basis for the Public Relations Office's accountability and will provide a framework for the future use of resources including finances. This is a working document that will allow the Public Relations Office of Marion County School District to monitor and adjust actions and communications based on evolving needs to support the district's direction, purpose, and beliefs.

Marion County School District Direction

Marion County School District: Preparing all students to live and work effectively, responsibly and productively within our society.

Marion County School District Purpose

Marion County School District educates, prepares and inspires students to be productive citizens in a changing global society.

Marion County School District Beliefs

- ❖ All students can become productive members of society
- ❖ Education is a partnership among students, families, schools and community
- ❖ Our children are the center of all decision making
- ❖ Education should prepare students to succeed academically and socially so they can compete for quality jobs and become productive members of society
- ❖ Each person has intrinsic value and worth and is a unique individual with different needs and abilities.

Public Relations Purpose

To communicate and support the direction, purpose and beliefs of the Marion County School District.

Public Relations Beliefs

- ❖ We have the responsibility to communicate effectively with our constituents
- ❖ Meaningful public engagement supports the district's goals
- ❖ Effective communication is a two-way process involving both internal/external publics
- ❖ Comprehensive communication increases student achievement.
- ❖ Communication is the responsibility of every employee in this district.

Goals

This Communications Plan is designed to support the district's Strategic Plan. Goals for the Comprehensive Communication Plan are developed annually based on the Strategic Plan and evaluation of the previous year. We understand that meaningful public engagement encourages community involvement in education which benefits children and increases student achievement.

Marion County School District is a member of the South Carolina chapter of the National School Public Relations Association and is guided by the hallmark of professionalism established by the organization's Code of Ethics:

1. Be guided by the pursuit of the public interest through truth, accuracy, good taste and fairness; follow good judgment in releasing information; not intentionally disseminate misinformation or confidential data; avoid confidential data; avoid actions that lessen personal, professional or organizational reputation.

2. Give primary loyalty to the employing organization, insisting on the right to give advisory counsel in accordance with sound public relations ideas and practices; cooperate with other groups while avoiding conflicts with primary responsibilities; object to untenable policies or activities.
3. Be aware of personal influence, avoiding promises or granting of unprofessional advantages to others; refrain from accepting special consideration for influences on organizational decisions; avoid unauthorized use of organizational facilities, resources or professional services for personal gain or for promotion of the candidacy of aspirants to elected offices; forego derogatory acts or utterances against other professionals.
4. Recognize that effectiveness is dependent upon integrity and regard for ideals of the profession; not misrepresenting professional qualifications; give credit for ideas and words borrowed from others; cooperate with professional colleagues to uphold and enforce this Code.

Evaluation

The Community Relations & Communications Plan will be used as a basis for the Public Relations Office's accountability and will provide a framework for the future use of resources including finances. This is a working document that will allow the Public Relations Office of Marion County School District to monitor and adjust actions and communications based on evolving needs to support the district's direction, purpose, and beliefs.

Community Relations

Community relations encourages public support and understanding of the Marion County School District.

Objectives

1. Increase opportunities for public input and response (two-way communication)
2. Increase opportunities to share district information with community
3. Increase opportunities for community members to interact with the district
4. Expand use of technology and other forms of media

Strategies

1. Establish advisory councils and dialogue sessions
2. Promote School Board meetings
3. Provide District representation for community programs and organizations
4. Maintain an up-to-date and news-worthy web site (school and district level)
5. Maintain effective communications through traditional (print) and non-traditional

Media Relations

Media relations increases the number of positive stories in the media, showcases student achievement, and helps the district communicate with target audiences about increasing student learning, providing educational choice and managing finances in a responsible manner.

Objectives

1. Increase the number of positive stories provided to the media.
2. Expand professional relationships with members of the local media.
3. Increase use of social media networks to augment media efforts.
4. Serve as Marion County School District' primary liaison with the news media, including spokesperson at the direction of the Superintendent.

Strategies

1. Press releases, briefings, photo-ops, and conferences.
2. Establish positive and consistent relationships with media representatives.

Marketing

Marketing creates pride in the school district and builds an understanding that public education is a benefit to the community.

Objectives

1. Increase the distribution of positive information about the school district.
2. Expand relationships with members of the community and other partners.

Strategies

1. Attend special events that involve the community; school and district-based personnel
2. Marketing materials to support community events (give aways)
3. Publications such as the monthly newsletter The Pulse
4. Promote recognition programs

Public (Family) and Employee Engagement

Public and employee engagement empowers employees and families to take ownership in their schools and the district, and fosters collaborative relationships.

Objectives

1. Increase opportunities for staff and community members to become involved in meaningful public engagement with schools, the District and school board.
2. Increase students, parents and employees' awareness of their role as customers and ambassadors of the Marion County School District.

Strategies

1. Advisory Councils and dialogue sessions
2. Presentations/Special Event appearances
3. Recognition programs
4. Civic/service organization memberships and attendance
5. Strategic partnerships

Student/Staff Relations

Student/staff relations increases ownership in the district, builds trust, creates goodwill ambassadors, and fosters a positive environment for teaching and learning.

Objectives

1. Expand opportunities for students and staff to have input in decisions that affect them.
2. Recognition of students/employees internally and externally for their accomplishments.
3. Assess employee morale and trust in the district.
4. Increase employees' awareness of their role as ambassadors for the district.

Strategies

1. Maintain internal Newsletters at each school site for all employees to receive timely information
2. Maintain a leadership Newsletter to better inform and educate leadership (Briefs & Updates)
3. Staff/student forums and dialogue sessions with Superintendent
4. Assist schools and departments with internal communications plans and actions
5. Staff orientation and professional development

Community Relations and Communications Goals

Updated August 2024

Goal #1

Establish an effective community relations program to build collaborative relationships and strengthen support for and confidence in Marion County School District.

Strategy #1:

Create an external relationships to engage public opinion leaders in understanding District's purpose, communicating key messages, and providing feedback on critical issues impacting Marion County School District.

Strategy #2:

Determine public attitudes toward the district and increase awareness and support for Marion County School District, through the use of formal and informal research (e.g. surveys, focus groups, etc.).

Goal #2

Establish an effective employee communications program that improves knowledge about, and support for, Marion County School District.

Strategy #1:

Develop and maintain key communication tools for employees, including an internal newsletter for all employees.

Goal #3

Improve the public's access to online district information and provide online tools that empower the public to interact with Marion County School District.

Strategy #1:

Improve District's Web site tailored to public stakeholders – parents, students, potential employees, businesses and the general public – that best facilitates the flow of information and provides an efficient and clear delivery of district services.

Strategy #2:

Create a Web governance structure and organizational policies that define responsibilities, relationships, and rules involved in managing the district's Web site.

Strategy #3:

Gather data and analyze the needs of our stakeholders/Web users in order to develop an appropriate Web structure and content. Consider an online survey from the district's existing home page to identify who are the district's Web users and for what information they are searching.

Strategy #4:

Determine an appropriate software platform or system for delivering Web content to users.

Strategy #5

Maintain and update online tools in a timely manner. Websites should be updated weekly, FaceBook and Twitter accounts should be updated twice a week.

Goal #4

Establish a long-term, ongoing plan for community engagement.

Strategy #1:

Continue to research and develop a strategy for effective community engagement in order to advance district initiatives.

Goal #5

Establish a strong, positive connection between individual schools and their communities.

Strategy #1:

Develop tools and resources to help principals become more effective in their roles as communicators for the District.

Strategy #2:

Develop targeted communications for prospective families and parents of Marion County School District's pre-school/early childhood families

Strategy #3

Every school will have a designated school based public relations person that will work with the district Public Relations office. This person will be responsible for:

- a. Updating the school website on a monthly basis (See Appendix A).
- b. Submitting stories with photos to the district PR office.
- c. Providing the local newspaper with articles on the positive things going on in their school (All articles must be read and approved by the district PR office before submitting).

Appendix A

Websites should include the following:

- Calendar of events
- Listing of staff located at the site
- Student and parent handbooks
- Message from the educational leader (principal/superintendent)
- Newsletters
- Links to other appropriate websites of interest
- Listing of school organizations/clubs
- Athletic schedule if appropriate
- Pictures of activities