



# Metro Schools' Communications Update

October 11, 2011

## **Communications Department Vision Statement:**

*To serve as a hub for accurate and clear information about Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, reaching our communities wherever they are and however they communicate.*

MNPS is committed to partnerships across the Nashville community and strives to maintain open, honest and effective communication with everyone we serve – students, parents, teachers, support staff, business professionals, community organizations, elected officials, community leaders and the news media.

*Effective communication* – internal and external – is crucial to the success of any business or organization, and Metro Nashville Public Schools is no exception. It enables us to:

- positively influence public perception of the district, producing more positive attitudes and behaviors;
- increase student safety and achievement;
- build a strong sense of community trust in our district;
- eliminate the potential for public misunderstandings;
- garner more support for the district and the students we serve;
- reduce dissatisfaction of employees;
- improve staff recruitment and retention; and
- achieve a higher level of overall customer satisfaction.

The payoff for effective internal and external communications is enormous. While effective communication takes a great deal of time and effort, it is well-worth the investment. It is much easier to form and maintain a positive opinion than to change a negative one. In addition to daily operations, the Metro Schools Communications Office also provides support, counsel and training to assist other departments and district staff with their communications efforts. This report will provide a summative overview of some of the activities and milestones achieved this year, categorized by activity.

## **Media**

The MNPS Communications Office should be the first point of contact for local and national news media. This allows our staff to minimize disruptions to schools and ensures the knowledge expert responds to media questions. During a given school year, Communications staff responds to more than 1,000 media calls. Some result in reports in local and national media outlets, while others provide information, background and assistance but may not result in a news report. In addition to news releases, media advisories and phone calls, many of our local media have now begun to follow our social media postings for news and story ideas. The department tracks media coverage of

Metro Schools’ events and programs, including the news agency, topic and a determination of the report’s tone - positive, negative or neutral. The results so far this school year:

	Jan. 1 – June 30, 2011	July 1, – Sept. 30, 2011	Total	Percent
Positive	176	89	265	53%
Negative	42	14	56	11%
Neutral	113	69	182	36%

### Social Media

Social media use in MNPS continues to grow, with followers able to receive quick information, updates, recognitions and job postings right on their home or mobile device. We have continued to be pleased with the effectiveness of our live-blogging of Board of Education meetings and other high-profile events and announcements. Through live readers and replays, we are able to expand our information to thousands who would not otherwise attend the event. Some key examples of growth this past year:

- Facebook Likes: 7,824 (1,300 in Oct. 2010)
- Twitter Followers: 2,425 (550 in Oct. 2010)

Live Event Views:

- Live Readers – 3,835
- Replay Readers – 119,552
- Total Readers – 123,387— more than if the board room were full to the fire marshal’s limit at every school board meeting for 25 years.

Website Clicks from Social Media: 25, 776 (for six month period of April 4-October 4, 2011), with Facebook, Twitter and local news media websites as top referrers. What are these visitors viewing?

In the past six months, these are the primary areas of information viewed:

- District Calendar
- School leadership changes
- Balanced calendar information
- Job postings

### Publications

While much information is available through social media and website content, many families still rely on written communications. The Communications Office prepares a number of district publications while also assisting many departments with materials that are distributed to the public. Some are electronic while others are printed. Some examples include:

- [Children First](#) – our weekly newsletter blog.
- *Monday Memo* – our weekly employee electronic newsletter
- FACTS Sheet – an informational piece including facts, statistics, financial information, etc.
- *Code of Conduct* – A publication of Student Services with Communications staff assisting with revisions, layout and facilitation of printing and translation. This year, the Communications

Office arranged to have this document translated into three additional languages to better serve our families.

- *Parents Guide to School* – a printed reference piece with information about each school, enrollment, graduation requirements, transportation, and more.
- *Family Manual* – an 8-page insert published each year by *Nashville Parent* magazine. Communication staff plans, prepares and provides camera-ready copy included as part of this special publication at no district cost.
- *Annual Report* – in 2010, this report was transitioned from a print publication to an online, interactive document complete with videos. The latest version should be complete within the next few weeks.
- *Communications Guide* – This resource book for employees is designed to offer guidance in creating printed materials for public distribution, use of logo and other required elements for MNPS printed materials, and provide simple media tips and contact information for staff in the Communications Office who can provide assistance. It is printed and shared with schools and departments, as well as placed online on the employee intranet.
- *Now I'm 5!* – our kindergarten readiness manual is a publication of the elementary office of Leadership & Learning, created with design and assistance by Communications staff.
- Brochures, logos, flyers and programs – printed as needed for various activities and events with district-wide significance.

### **Customer Service/Call Center**

The MNPS Customer Service Center celebrated an important milestone this past spring – service to its 1 millionth customer. The CSC serves approximately 600 customers per day and 150,000 customers annually either by phone or in person and is open from 6:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. during the school year so families can get the information or assistance they need before or after their work hours. The peak times of service are between 8-9 a.m. and 3-4 p.m. Some other facts:

- July to September 22, 2010-- 29,963 calls answered. July to Sept. 22, 2011--38, 403 calls answered
- Transportation calls were 18% fewer than last year for the month of September
- September 2010 calls 7,553 at 67%--this year 6,772 at 78% answered promptly
- Top Call Drivers
  - Bus Stop Request/Bus Arrival
  - Directory Information
  - Student Record Requests
  - School Zones/Optional Schools/No Child Left Behind
  - Approximately 50 other miscellaneous topics

### **Events**

The best way to convey the energy and excitement within our schools and district is a personal visit to our schools. The Communications staff assists with planning and logistics for a number of events/visits annually. Event planning/support this past year:

- Principal for a Day (Nov. 2010, with this year's set Oct. 26)
- Winter Graduation
- Retirement Celebration
- Brick Church Middle TCAP University (Parent University assisted event)
- Teacher of the Year
- Summer Graduation

- Parent University (two spring events, one summer event)
- Mayor's First Day Festival
- Realtors visit to Hillsboro High (April 2011), with additional scheduled this fall and spring
- VIP Tours in High Schools
- College Night (with a record-setting 6,000+ attendees)
- Career Fair
- School dedications (Nov. 3 is upcoming dedication for Glengarry)

### **Training/Professional Development**

*Customer Care Training* continues in the district, with 1,979 employees trained since March 2010.

- Nine volunteer facilitators conducting training
- 20% of district staff trained
- 4-6 training sessions scheduled monthly
- Verda Gibbs and Mark Chamberlain will present MNPS Customer Care program to Council of the Great City Schools conference in Boston later this month

*New Employee Orientation* now includes an introduction to the district conducted by Communications Office staff along with a packet of information about MNPS. Information covered:

- Welcome to district
- Vision
- District facts
- Customer Care needs
- Teacher development programs (Vanderbilt Master's, Teacher Leadership, etc.)
- Where to get information (*Monday Memo* and *Children First*, intranet, etc.)

*Principals' Communications Training* began in 2010 and will continue and expand this year.

### **New Program Support**

With so much going on in MNPS, Communications staff is busy providing various requested support. Whether it is working with media, assisting with logo and branding, updating a website, assisting with print materials, developing communications plans or creating informational video, staff is always available to provide counsel, technical assistance, training and support.

### **Videos**

Because many people prefer to receive information visually, the Communications Office has increased its use of videos to share the great stories in our schools and to communicate the many changes underway throughout the district. Whether short videos showing a school event, award or interview; or a full informational video, all are designed to inform, celebrate and/or present the work and learning underway in Metro Schools. Videos are often included in the weekly newsletter, *Children First*, as well as posted on the website. Some are provided to the local Educational Access Channel where they can be viewed at home. To view many of the video projects, visit our [MNPS Video Library](#). Topics of current and videos in progress include **MNPS Achieves: First to the Top**, Teacher Leadership Institute, press events, school events, services provided by Central Office to schools, middle school reform, and the list goes on.

## Web

The district's two web content managers are employees of the Communications Office. The district webmaster, formerly a Communications staff position, moved to IT at the beginning of this fiscal year to better align job skills within the two departments and to allow for integration with long-range IT planning. Web content specialists oversee the MNPS social media outreach, live-blog events, hold live chats, design and post content to the main district website access pages (home pages and section pages), and review and assist each of the 140 schools with training and updates to their school sites. Other activities this year:

- Leading a task force to create minimum content standards for all district sites, with specific information requirements clearly identified. This will result in guides for schools and will also include an implementation plan to bring all school sites current in their content.
- Implementation of a formal website training program, including strategic uses of websites along with technical training.
- Web support for key reform strategies, i.e. site content and design for teacher recruitment initiatives, Academies of Nashville, new Magnet schools, etc.
- Redesign of employee intranet (ongoing)

## Connect-Ed

The Communications Office administers the Connect-Ed automated call system, which includes account set-up and maintenance, working with IT, schools and HR staffs to address any data issues, training new users and providing technical assistance. During the past year:

- MNPS expanded native language capability for the system to include five languages: English, Spanish, Arabic, Kurdish and Somali, with speakers identified and trained to record and schedule district calls in these languages. Schools also have this opportunity available.
- In addition, we also added the technical capability to send calls to seven additional languages (Burmese, Karenni, May May, Persian, Urdu, Vietnamese and Swahili). Schools and EL staff are using these additional options to contact families.
- This past year, MNPS and schools combined sent 20,832 unique messages (Nov. 1, 2010 – Oct. 3, 2011). Of those:
  - 81% Outreach
  - 13% Attendance
  - 3% Single Survey
  - 3% Emergency
- Total phones called = 4.2 million (Nov. 1, 2010 – Oct. 3, 2011)

## Looking Ahead

In the coming months, Communications staff anticipates opportunities to share information about a new gifted services plan for MNPS, the expansion of the MNPS Virtual School, success of Academies of Nashville programs, strengths of the district's Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, student achievement, middle school initiatives, and results from the many other, varied activities tied to **MNPS Achieves: First to the Top**. We anticipate our new employee intranet will be ready for launch this fall with features that will enhance our internal communication throughout the district, as well as the adoption of content guides for our school websites to help ensure visitors will find accurate information they need. We will increase opportunities for community members to visit our schools and encourage current Metro Schools' families to visit more schools when considering their families' choices.