

Communication Audit Report

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Prepared for:

Salem Public School District

Salem, MA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year, Salem Public School (SPS) District's Communication Director, Kelley Rice, met with Dr. Cindy Vincent from Salem State University to begin a collaborative partnership to design and implement a community outreach campaign. The campaign would consist of four phases: research, planning, implementation and evaluation. The research phase would be executed in the fall 2017 semester with the help of nine Salem State University students enrolled in COM 500, Directed Study in Communications under Dr. Vincent's supervision. In the spring 2018 semester two more students were chosen to compile and edit the final report. This Communication Audit is the result of the first phase of this collaboration and provides a snapshot of the district's communication policies and needs, an analysis of the efficacy of the district's current communication strategies, and recommendations on how to improve communication efforts in the short- and long-term.

To create this report, Salem State students engaged in primary and secondary research. For the preliminary secondary research, students analyzed current communication policies in place at the district, current demographic information for the district, and previously collected community surveys and other forms of feedback about the district. For the primary data collection and analysis, students conducted a focus group of principals about their current communication strategies, an analysis of traditional PR materials, a local media analysis, a social media analysis, a focus group with key community stakeholders, and an interview with the superintendent and communication director. This report contains the analyses of these different types of

data and provides recommendations on how to better improve the district's external communication.

INTRODUCTION

Salem is a historic city located in the North Shore of Massachusetts comprised of approximately 43,132 people with an average annual household income of \$61,093. Salem's population consists of 74% Caucasian residents and 26% Residents of Color. The city is broken up into seven wards with 10 schools spread throughout. The Salem Public School District is an open district, where parents may enroll their child in any public school located within the city. School district leadership consists of the mayor, Kimberley Driscoll; superintendent, Margarita Ruiz; and six school committee members: Mary Manning, Amanda Campbell, Manny Cruz, James Fleming, Ana Nuncio and Kristine Wilson. Two years ago the Superintendent created the communications director position and hired current director, Kelly Rice.

Demographics

The school populations vary in their student race and ethnicity as well as their selected populations. Bates Elementary School offers grades K-5 with an enrollment of 327 students. The student body is 56.3% Caucasian and 43.7% students of color. Bates teaches 54.7% high-needs and 45.3% economically-disadvantaged students. Carlton Elementary School is another school serving K-5. It has a population of 239 students of which 61.9% are Caucasian and 38.1% students of color. Carlton has similar high needs and disadvantaged student population to Bates. Horace Mann Laboratory school has 287 students in grades K-5. Horace Mann's students are 45.6% Caucasian and 54.4% students of color. It has a higher percentage of high needs students (62.7%) than

Bates and Carlton, but has a similar percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Witchcraft Heights Elementary teaches 479 students grades K-5. Witchcraft has 39.5% students of color and 60.5% Caucasian students. It has a smaller population of economically disadvantaged students than other elementary schools in the district.

The Saltonstall School teaches grades K-8. This school is 56.7% Caucasian and 43.3% students of color. Of these students, 42.5% are high needs and 33.6% are economically disadvantaged. The Nathaniel Bowditch School has 444 students in grades K-8. The school has a higher percentage of students of color (80.2 %) than Caucasian (19.8%) students and high percentages of economically disadvantaged and high needs students. The School District announced that this school will be closing in Summer 2018. Collins Middle School has 545 students in grades 6-8. The school has 54.9% Caucasian and 45.1% students of color. Collins has a similar percentage of high needs and economically disadvantaged students as the elementary schools. Salem Prep High School has an enrollment of 13 students from grades 8-12. Of these students, 53.8% are Caucasian and 42.6% are students of color. Salem Prep High School has a high population of high needs students (92.3%). Salem High School has a student body of 933 students in grades 9-12. Of this population, 43% are Caucasian and 57% are students of color. Salem High has a population of 62.7% high needs and 45.4% economically disadvantaged students. New Liberty Innovation school serves 41 students in grades 9-12. The student body is 56.1% Caucasian and 43.9% students of color. This high school has 78% high needs students and 63.4% economically disadvantaged students.

Policies

According to the Salem Public School Policy Manual (2018), the school district has ten communication-related policies organized under two areas, 1000 Community Relations and 4000 Personnel. These policies cover the following topics: school-community relations goals, advertising, notice distribution, media relations, taping and video, public complaints, public complaints about school personnel, public complaints about curriculum and materials, public information program, and staff use of technology. There are no policies directly related to the communication director position or the roles and responsibilities of that position. It is recommended that the district leadership create a stand-alone area within the policy manual for communication policies and clearly explicate the communication director roles and responsibilities that is accessible to the public. It is also recommended the district create a new policy on acceptable social media usage by schools, personnel and administrators that includes appropriate usage of social media, protection of children's rights on social media, and delineation of the roles and responsibilities for keeping social media updated in a timely manner.

Long-term Goals

Based on years of community surveys and feedback, the superintendent recognizes that one of the biggest issues in the district is family communication. Before the hiring of Kelly Rice, much of the communication responsibilities fell to the superintendent and principals of each school. Rice is now the point person for the school district and is responsible for highlighting the successes of each school and reaching out to the community and school administration to maintain communicative cohesion throughout

the district. Since the creation of this position, community complaints about miscommunication had generally decreased across the district, until the announcement of the Bowditch closure in January 2018.

It is the hope of both Ruiz and Rice that the image of Salem Public Schools continues to improve over time by increasing families' access to school district information. One strategy to accomplish this is to create a functional and up-to-date website, which is currently in progress. Until recently, there was a team of individuals across the district responsible for updating the website; however, due to a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities and a lack of accountability and oversight, the website was difficult to navigate and struggled to maintain current information. In the 2017-2018 academic year, Rice worked with schools to update this job description and responsibility and to put a system of accountability in place. In addition to an updated user-friendly website, Rice also hopes to implement a more up-to-date email system for the school district to help solidify district branding and communication channels.

Previous Community Feedback

Please see Appendix A for a list of all previous data sources reviewed for this report.

Data analysis resulted in five themes: parent engagement, publicity, access to information, language and inclusivity/openness. Within the parent engagement theme most comments revolved around improving communication and outreach with families and community members, increasing teacher outreach and accessibility, improving the communication between parent groups in schools, improving the Parent Information

Center communication/outreach, improving opportunities for parent involvement with more direct outreach to parents, and opening communication channels for parents to be able to provide feedback directly to SPS. Within the publicity theme most comments focused on improving and increasing positive publicity around existing programming and diversity in schools; leveraging the strengths of the district and schools; improving the media relations about what is going well in the district and leveraging the “bright spots”; further analyzing the factors affecting school/district choice, particularly around the district’s reputation; and increasing the likelihood that a family will choose SPS by publicizing the great things going on across the district and improving the quality and perception of middle school options. The access to information theme focused on an interest in “pull” information, not just “push”¹; accessibility to teachers and classroom information; and an improved website and website content. The language theme primarily focused on improving communication to non-English speaking families. The inclusivity/openness theme suggested providing more opportunities to invite community businesses and partners to collaborate in classroom. Within this secondary analysis some gaps and limitations were identified. The gaps primarily centered on determining how parents prefer to be communicated with and which social media platforms they prefer using to engage with the district. Limitations and issues identified in this data set include a low response rate in comparison to the total district population and low Latino response rates. These limitations were not addressed in this communication audit and it is recommended the district pursue collecting this missing data further.

¹ “Pull” information refers to information that constituents can readily access themselves versus “push” information, which is the information the district sends out to their constituents.

METHODOLOGY

To create this report, Salem State students engaged in primary and secondary research. For the preliminary secondary research, students analyzed current communication policies in place at the district, current demographic information for the district, and previously collected community surveys and other forms of feedback about the district. For the primary data collection and analysis, students conducted a focus group of principals about their current communication strategies, an analysis of traditional PR materials, a local media analysis, a social media analysis, a focus group with key community stakeholders, and an interview with the superintendent and communication director.

CURRENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

This section explains the current communication strategies of the district and each school and their effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Information in this section was collected from a focus group with nine school principals, an interview with one school principal, an interview with the superintendent and communication director, and a traditional public relations analysis. Identifying the efficacy of current communication strategies will help to ascertain which communication strategies to continue to support and promote and which to bolster or discard.

Overall District & School Strategies

The district meets with the school committee twice a month to discuss current issues and updates through presentations that are televised to the public. The communication director's current responsibilities include conducting speeches, op-eds, press releases, and other written communication pieces as needed. When requested, this position provides parents with district and school information. The district has seen a reduction in Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests because of the access and transparency the parents are receiving. The communication director is also the media relations manager for the district and works with local media outlets to publish and highlight programs within the schools. This position is charged with working with the media during school and district crises. The communication director is also a consultant and resource to all of the school principals through regularly scheduled meetings to advise them on ways to leverage their communication platforms to send messages to the community efficiently and effectively.

The principal focus group showed that every school is currently using the district-required Blackboard application, but not every school uses it to its full ability. According to their website (2018), “Blackboard partners with the K-12 community to enable the school-to-home communications and personalized education that students need to be successful.” Blackboard requires principal approval to send out messages, which can be tedious and time consuming when trying to answer parents almost immediately. Some schools prefer individual teacher communication like emails and meetings instead of a school-wide app like Blackboard. Apps like Class Dojo and Remind use more direct parent-to- teacher communication through direct messaging. According to their website (2018), “Remind is an app that allows teachers to directly communicate with parents and students by sending out quick messages to any device for free.” Remind is so successful at Collins that they are interested in implementing a school-wide app and are currently working on increasing teacher buy-in. Saltonstall is also a big advocate of Remind and found that the app is easy to navigate and has the most accurate translation in comparison to other translation services. Saltonstall also found that classrooms that use the app are now 100% successful in navigating the app. Another common platform used is Class Dojo, which is used in 90% of K-8 schools in the U.S and is free for teachers.

In addition to emerging communication apps, every school uses at least one social media platform to communicate with their constituents. Most schools have either a Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or all three. This report examines social media content and usage in more detail in the next sections.

Five of the schools still rely on printed communication channels like newsletters and green sheets. Hard-copy newsletters are used in Bates, Bentley, Bowditch, Witchcraft Heights and New Liberty as well as digital letters for those who prefer online platforms. Most of the schools send out weekly and daily emails.

Communication Strategy Efficacy

After discussing the current communication strategies of each school, some strategies were found to be effective and ineffective. Based on the data from the principal focus group, the schools should think about the platforms that are the most helpful and effective. Based on the analysis, it seemed like the learning systems like Class Dojo and Remind were the most effective for parent-teacher communication. Class Dojo is an app that can be accessed through tablet or smartphone. It is a point system that tracks the student's behavior and progress each day. Parents can directly communicate with the teachers throughout the day with messaging. Class Dojo is great for daily parental interaction. It is catered to elementary and middle school classrooms. According to Forbes, (2017) ClassDojo has been translated into 35 languages and made inroads in 180 countries.

The Remind app is a great tool for parent and student reminders. It contains file attachments, office hours, group conversations, and scheduled announcements. According to Forbes, (2016) the parent-teacher app Remind accumulated to more than 20 million monthly active users among teachers, parents and students across the U.S.

In 2017 Business Insider announced that Remind has partnered with PBS, Quizlet and other leading education companies.

Blackboard is still effective for a district-wide app. Class Dojo is the most universal app used among the schools, but it is not required to have like Blackboard. Some schools have outdated emailing lists that do not include the current families in the school system. For translation accuracy, Remind seems to be the most useful and helpful. Digital information like online newsletters seems to be another effective communication strategy that works. Emailing can be effective once the accurate identity information is added to the system like new phone numbers, addresses and new families. The websites are currently in the process of renovation and will soon be one of the strongest communication strategies. Family engagement coordinators are helpful and effective but not all schools have them. The focus group stated that some teachers are not willing to use their own devices for apps like Class Dojo and Remind. The most effective way to accommodate to teacher's needs is to stick to the traditional communication strategies like emails, digital newsletters, phone calls, and accurate website information.

The following sections discuss communication strategies currently being used at each school across the district.

Bates Elementary School

Bates uses Blackboard to send out information electronically to students and parents. The school also sends out hard copies of their newsletter in the student's "Thursday folder" which are basically their weekly information to bring home to their families to update them on personal and school events. Bates is beginning to use Class Dojo so that teachers can communicate with parents and families. The challenge is that not every teacher is on board with using Class Dojo and this puts a strain on how information is sent out. The principal did not state that there are specific expectations for teachers to use Class Dojo but he did say that it is the most effective way that the school communicates with parents. Tom would love for all the teachers to be trained to use Class Dojo so that there is a consistent usage of the program throughout each of the 19 homerooms. There also needs to be a shift from using the "Thursday folder" system because a lot of information is not reaching home in many cases and the family communication facilitator is left to figure out where the disconnect is happening. He wants a better system in place to move so that hard copies are not the main form of communication between students and families. Bates also utilizes Twitter, Facebook and Instagram all on a schoolwide level. Another crucial problem that Bates faces is the uneven divide between non-English speaking students and English-speaking students. The school needs to provide more of the same level of communication with non-English speaking students so that everyone can be on the same page.

Bentley Academy Charter School

Bentley has a website with a blog feature. They participate on social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter, but they do not get updated too much. The principal

mentioned that she tries to update the website weekly but sometimes fails. They have a weekly newsletter that they send home on paper. They also email it to parents who prefer digital letters using MailChimp. They do all calls through Blackboard and use another platform such as School Connect, which is a closed social network that some of the families use. Her staff also receives a weekly email and a daily email.

Carlton Innovation School

Carlton uses the program Remind as well as Blackboard as their main communication and translation tool. Some teachers use Remind but not everyone is onboard with the system. Their professional development meetings are scheduled around talking about family and home communication, but that does not happen due to other things that they have to allot time for. There was not much information provided by Cathy Anne from the focus group. Carlton has a lot of information in the form of newsletters provided in both English and Spanish. The newsletters are put out every Thursday and provide information about upcoming school and district events.

Horace Mann Laboratory School

Horace Mann Laboratory School uses Blackboard which is mostly for phone calls and text messages. The principal talked about using the platform more for emailing. The only problem with this platform is it needs to be updated with the current information of the parents' information. That seems to be the biggest issue for him and others: keeping up accurate information in the system. An effective way that this school gives out their newsletters are sending them home in a folder. This seems to be the most effective for

Chad. The website is the platform that the district gave them, but it is “cumbersome” and “not user friendly.” They do not send out a weekly newsletter, but they do send out a weekly parent message; however, only about half of the families get them due to inactive or outdated emails. Blackboard also will send text messages to landlines and none of the information goes anywhere due to human error putting their home phone numbers where the cell phone number goes. Class Dojo is another platform that is used by teachers but is not required. That is more of the parent-teacher relationship.

Nathaniel Bowditch Elementary School (now closed)

Bowditch uses Blackboard to communicate with their students and families. Newsletters are sent out a weekly to the staff. The monthly newsletter for the school is posted on the school’s Facebook page, website, and sent out as a hard copy. Bowditch also has an Instagram and YouTube account, but both of those are not used to send out information. Bowditch has a monthly newsletter in both English and Spanish. Bowditch also has a factsheet (in English and Spanish) providing parents with information about the total enrollment within the school along with resources and academic information.

Saltonstall K-8 School

Saltonstall uses Remind that sends out quick messages to any device for free. They are very happy with Remind and almost committed to a school-wide use of the app. They did not have enough teacher buy- in but they are still trying to grow it. They found that the app was easy to navigate and the translation was most accurate. Saltonstall is trying to be as digital as possible and use what works best for the parents. The teachers use

Remind because it is singular whereas Blackboard is not. In order to use Blackboard, teachers have to go through the principal. Remind is an app they can use in and out of the classroom with one-on-one connections between the teachers and parents. They found that classrooms that do use Remind now have a 100% success-rate. He would like everyone to try and commit to using the app weekly.

Saltonstall's website is similar to Salem Prep's; it is very outdated and has the same setup with quick links and documents. However, Saltonstall's has friendlier and more engaging content. It looks like this school is more community-based and this event has been successful for a long time. There was a quick link entitled "Helping your child after the death of a friend" and was linked to the Salem Public School system page. It was also linked to a resource page for parents, but the link did not work. The site is bilingual and has an email subscription. The only newsletters on the site were from 2013.

Witchcraft Heights Elementary School

Witchcraft Heights uses Blackboard, emails, Class Dojo, and traditional hard copy newsletters as forms of communication. The school tries to communicate by phone and in person as much as possible. Class Dojo is very popular amongst teachers and parents and both teachers and parents enjoy using it. Leann brought up that the most successful form of communication through the school is from individual teacher communication. Witchcraft also does not have a family engagement coordinator like Bates, so a lot of responsibility fell on Leann to make those connections. Witchcraft Heights has a monthly newsletter provided only in English on their website. There are

other newsletters provided on the website, but mostly with regard to district events, not primarily focused on Witchcraft Heights.

Collins Middle School

Collins also uses the platform Blackboard. This allows the principals to send out emails, text messages, and automated phone calls. Phone calls and text messages seem to be the most common for them. This school also uses their web page to update their calendar as much as possible with events and potential permission slips. The biggest issue that they seem to have is updating the parent information. As children transition in and out of the school, the information is not entered correctly leaving them with an unorganized and inaccurate system. Most of the teachers use Class Dojo but like other schools, it is not required of the teachers. Some teachers feel uncomfortable using their own devices, which result in not using the platform.

The majority of the information is on the front page of the website. The page contains tweets from the middle school's Twitter account, which are current and active. There is an open house letter explaining when, where and how an event is happening. There is another informational letter about 'Spirit Wear' in two languages. They have a calendar with all upcoming events in English only. The tabs at the top of the page are family resources, whom to contact, and upcoming events. The "upcoming events" tab brings you a bigger version of the calendar as seen on the front page. The page also contains newsletters, forms, and files for parents. For example, beginning of the year announcements, letters from the nurses about what food to bring for snack, outdated

summer program forms, and a form about how important it is to exercise (Spanish only). A hard copy newsletter was sent out providing information about the goals and hopes of the kids who are going to attend the school. The newsletter also shows how well the school is improving in the testing area and the extracurricular activities they offer like STEM, along with other activities.

New Liberty Innovation School

New Liberty uses Blackboard to send out emails to the parents and students of the school. New Liberty consists of older students, so Blackboard isn't always useful. Communication between the staff and students are most effective. They send home a monthly newsletter to the students in Spanish and English. The school also has social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. These platforms are not updated frequently. They have a website through the school district, but it is not updated frequently either. The school participates in professional development twice a year with the teachers and staff to know how to effectively communicate with the students.

The website is a very basic layout providing little information, just the district calendar and quick links. There is nothing attached under school news. Some of the quick links are geared to help the students, for example, homeless student support and transportation. They have links for questions about the competency test in both English and Spanish. There is a resource book that looks like a handbook of rules and regulations for the students. Within the resource book there is a personalized calendar for the school. All the information that is available is in English. The principal sends out

a newsletter every month that contains activities and upcoming events the school is hosting.

Salem High School

Salem High uses Blackboard for phone calls, emails and texts to parents. They also have social media such as Facebook and Twitter. They post to their website as well. The reliable way that they get information to their students is having a weekly video with the SHS's students regarding events and weekly information. The video is posted their website where parents can have access to it. The front page of Salem High's website is very clean with basic information. There is an upcoming event schedule and quick links. These quick links are both in English and Spanish. School event information is provided as well. There doesn't seem to be any newsletters or press releases here. The students have a weekly newscast that is posted on the website as a video. The students speak about current events regarding the school and information that everyone needs to know.

Salem Prep High School

Salem Prep has a pretty dated website. Their quick links just state school lunch menu, student health services, calendar, homeless student info (in Spanish as well), parent engagement guidelines (in Spanish too) and the NCLB report card 2014. They are all linked to old Word documents. They have a subscription to their emails by entering an email for news and announcements. Their calendar does not list much, just holidays and professional development days. The only news they have on their site is the link to the school's entry plan and temporary location information. Almost everything is linked

to a PDF and there is not much communication and engagement on the site. No newsletters were found on the website.

Social Media Analysis

Using a series of themes and subcategories, the social media data were calculated to find the most and least amounts of success/engagement on each platform. The social media data gathered yielded 384 posts, with 3,014 reactions in total. The data that were gathered were divided by themes and subcategories. The general themes decided upon were 'Announcements', 'Notification', 'Events', 'Academics', and 'Sports'. Overall, the 'Events' theme created the most content, at 144 posts, and 'Announcements' gathered the most reactions, with 1369 likes, shares and comments.

Announcements

The theme 'Announcement' was divided into three subcategories: 'Recognition', in which the school would post about students or staff, bringing attention to their successes; 'Reminder', such as reminders for students, parents, or staff members; and 'Update,' such as updates to the schools' Facebook page or websites. Of the 384 posts recorded, 141 of them were categorized under the theme 'Announcement', which is just over one-third, or 36% of all the posts. This makes it the second most posted about theme.

Within the subcategories, 'Recognition' and 'Update' shared the same amount of posts, with 56 each, or 39.7% of the posts each for the theme, and 14.5% of the total posts. The subcategory 'Reminder' had 29 posts, or 20% of the theme's posts, and 7% of the total posts from every theme.

In relation to reactions, this theme had the most, with 1,369 reactions. Of the three subcategories, 'Recognition' had the most reactions, with 676, or 49% of the total reactions for the theme, and 22% of the total reactions for all of the data, making it the most successful subcategory based on engagements. The theme 'Update' had the next highest count for reactions with 574, or 42% of the reactions for the theme, and 'Reminder' had 119 reactions, or just over 8% of the theme's reactions.

Notifications

The theme 'Notification' was divided into two subcategories: 'Annual/Holiday', which described any events of holidays that were recognized once a year, and 'PTO Meetings' which represented any time the parents of the students gathered together to discuss school events.

Of the 384 posts recorded, 'Notifications' comprised 29 of the posts, or less than 8% of all the total posts. This was the least successful theme, both in amount of posts, and amount of reactions garnered. Within the two subcategories, there were 10 posts categorized as 'Annual/Holiday', or 34% of the theme's posts and 19 posts, or 66% of the theme's posts, categorized as 'PTO Meetings'.

In relation to reactions and user engagements, 'Notification' has the least amount of reactions with 127, or less than 5% of the total reactions. Of the 127 reactions 64 were placed into the 'Annual/Holiday' subcategory, leaving 63 reactions in the 'PTO Meeting' subcategory, about 50% per category.

Events

The theme titled 'Events' was separated into four subcategories. The first subcategory, 'Annual events', represented events that happened regularly in the public-school system, such as "Haunted Happenings". The subcategory 'Updates' was used to regard any information about events happening within schools, such as Open Houses. The subcategory 'Reminders' created information regarding back to school dates, or last-day-of-school dates. Last, the subcategory 'Fundraisers' represented any occasion involving either raising money for the school or for a cause or raising awareness for a cause. The theme gained a total of 144 posts and 942 reactions. As subcategories, 'Annual event' contained 37 posts with 313 reactions, 'Update' contained 32 posts and 231 reactions, 'Reminder' contained 31 posts and 149 reactions, and 'Fundraiser' contained 38 posts with 231 reactions.

Overall, the theme 'Events' was posted about the most frequently out of all of the posts, with 144 posts. The posts were divided fairly evenly between the four subcategories. The number of reactions garnered a larger disparity between the subcategories. 'Annual event' garnered the most reactions, with 313, while 'Reminder' garnered the least, with 149. Two of the subcategories had the same number in reactions: 'Update' and 'Fundraiser' with 231 reactions.

Since the subcategories appeared in a similar quantity within this theme, the percentages were close, as well. 'Annual event' came to 26% of the theme's total

postings, 'Update' came to 22%, reminder came to 23% and fundraiser came to 28%. Based off of the quantity of posts, 'Fundraiser' was posted about the most frequently. As for the percentage of reactions this theme made up 31% of the data's total number of reactions, making it the second most successful theme, in relation to user engagements. Two of the subcategories equaled the same percentage of the theme's total user engagements at 24.5%: 'Fundraiser' and 'Update'. The percentage of reactions for 'Annual event' came to about 33%, and 'Reminder' yielded about 16%. This shows that based on percentage, the subcategory 'Annual event' received the highest number of reactions and was the most successful in regard to user engagements, while 'Reminder' received the least amount of reactions and was therefore the least successful.

Academics

The theme 'Academics' was divided into two subcategories: 'Curriculum' where the school would involve parents in what their students were learning and how they were being taught through "classroom corner" workshops, and 'Parent: Teacher' where opportunities to create connections between the student's teachers and their parents were made available such as the date/time for social meet and greets, parent-teacher conferences and open houses. These 'Academic' posts were released primarily through Facebook.

Of the 384 posts recorded, 38 of them were categorized under the theme 'Academics', which is just 10% of all the posts recorded. This makes this theme the second least posted about theme.

Within the subcategories, 'Curriculum' garnered 13 posts, or 34%, of the theme's total posts. The subcategory 'Parent: Teacher' garnered 25 posts, or 66% of the theme's total posts.

In relation to reactions, this theme was one of the least interactive with only 188 reactions. Of the two subcategories, 'Curriculum' had 86 reactions, which was 45% of the total reactions of this theme and 2% of the total reactions for all of the data. 'Parent: Teacher' had 102 reactions which was 54% of the total reactions of this theme and 3.3% of the total reactions for all of the data.

The theme 'Academics' had only 188 reactions, which is less than 7% of all the posts' reactions.

Sports

The theme 'Sports' was divided into seven subcategories: 'Cross Country', 'Softball', 'Baseball', 'Golf', 'Football', 'Volleyball' and 'Soccer'. Each post was either congratulating a team on winning or announcing a game's time/location. Most of these posts were found on twitter.

Of the 384 posts recorded, 'Sports' comprised 32 of the posts, or less than 1% of all the total posts. This was the second least successful theme both in amount of posts. There were 388 reactions in total amount of reactions garnered.

Within the seven subcategories, there were seven posts categorized as 'Cross Country', or about 22% of the theme's posts, three posts about 'Softball' or 9% of the theme's posts, three about 'Baseball', or 9%, six posts about 'Golf', or 18%, two posts about 'Football' or 5% of the total theme's reactions, two posts about 'Volleyball' or 5% and nine posts, or 28% of the theme's posts, categorized as 'Soccer'.

In relation to reactions and user engagements, 'Sports' has the second least amount of reactions with 388, or only 12% of the total reactions. Of the 388 reactions 'Football' and 'Volleyball' had the least amount of reactions with 5% of the reactions for posts relating to the 'Sports' theme, and 'Cross Country' had the most with 22% of the total reactions for sports.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

For the local media assessment, 35 articles printed over the course of one year were analyzed from *The Salem News*, *Salem Gazette*, *Salem Patch*, *The Lynn Daily Item*, and WBUR. News coverage was focused on the Salem Public School District and each school within the district. When looking at the Salem Public School District as a whole, 71% of the articles portrayed the district in a positive manner. The district was framed in an overall positive light to showcase the growth and ongoing improvements made to the Salem Public School District, especially in regard to the school system moving from a Level 4 to a Level 3. The levels of SPS strategic plan were also heavily discussed as well as a need for an increased budget in order to aid student success. The other articles either painted a negative picture of the district (14%) or had a credible source from the district missing (15%). The superintendent and the mayor were frequently quoted in articles focused on the district-level.

Of the articles that focused on the individual schools, 62% of the articles framed the district positively, 14% portrayed the school negatively, and 6% remained neutral. The analysis also showed that 17% were missing a credible school or district source attributed to comments made. Articles focused on changes in curriculum, specifically STEM, science after-school and in-school programs, grants focused on new supplies and equipment, or changes in leadership and/or staff roles. The articles focused more on the success and growth of students and how the schools will better prepare students for the future.

The analysis of the news coverage revealed that there is still room for improvement at the district level. The negative articles showed a need for stronger leadership within the district and the need for follow-through in regard to the district's strategic plan. Local journalists are not consistently incorporating credible district sources in their media coverage. The articles analyzed showed both the district and schools in a positive light overall, highlighting the improvements and gains over the years, but there still needs to be an increase in direct quotes from both school and district officials in order to increase media credibility.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

A focus group was held November 29, 2017 at Collins Middle School to discuss the public perception and communication preferences of the school district. Attending were representatives from community stakeholders such as local non-profits, parents, teachers, local business owners, students, technological support for the school district, and the city mayor. A majority of the participants discussed the difference between the perception and reality of the Salem Public Schools. Many of the parents and faculty present expressed the positive ongoing improvements that have been made, especially when referring to the schools moving from a Level 4 to Level 3. A theme that emerged during the focus group was the lack of knowledge community members have on the resources and services offered by the school district. Participants discussed a solution to the communication issue is to have a more user-friendly website so individuals could find out information about services and resources at each school (one participant suggested an organizational structure for the website similar to the YMCAs).

Community judgment of the Salem Public School system often stems from test score rankings and level placement given by the state. If community members search online for Salem Public Schools, they will see low standardized test scores, but steady improvement throughout the years. Test scores are often the only benchmark community members use to base educational decisions; however, the school district has many other positive programs that should be highlighted in the community. These programs include accelerated courses, a variety of extracurricular activities, a “no one goes hungry” policy with free breakfast and lunch, and an extremely expansive art

program. According to the group, these incentives need to be better represented in order to help change the perception of the Salem Public School District.

One topic of interest was the need to better reach parents and young families who are interested in moving into the area. A suggestion was made that it would be best to reach this audience as they are in the decision-making process. There was a discussion surrounding the need to reach parents who have children ages 2 to 3. The best way to reach this group would be targeting locations they frequent the most, for example, the Salem YMCA. Participants stated that it is also important to remember and be aware of where people are getting their information, which includes local realtors in the area who are key influencers in deciding if a family moves to Salem or not. Another major factor that can positively impact prospective families is inviting parents and children into the schools for tours a year or two before they begin elementary or middle school. This would give prospective families an idea of how their child would be educated and allow them to see the environment at a time when private schools are actively recruiting.

The students present in the focus group stressed the need for teachers to be more involved in their learning experience, specifically letting them know of certain programs offered after school and within the community. The students expressed that the education is well-rounded in Salem, especially at the high school level and for those students who are self-motivated and want to succeed. For the students who are not as motivated or have a low support system at home, there needs to be better communication between teachers and students to highlight the opportunities available

to them. Another big takeaway from this focus group was the interest in off-site meetings between parents and teachers, like home or neighborhood visits. This has proven to be highly successful in one other school and seemed to have a positive effect on the community. Parents and teachers could have the opportunity to discuss the education and other aspects of the child's life outside of the school setting.

As a whole, those present at the focus group came to the conclusion that there is not a one-size-fits-all model for communication between schools, districts and families — and that is okay. The information for the time being can be provided in multiple ways in order to reach Salem Public School's diverse audience.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the focus groups held with the principals, superintendent, and communication director, the following recommendations are provided to help improve school and district communication efforts.

To be implemented immediately:

- Survey the parents and identify their preferred communication channels. Ask parents what communication channels they feel comfortable using and what platforms they like.
- Place more communication responsibility and direction in the communication director's role with appropriate support and accountability structures. This will allow her to assume the duties of communications director more effectively and lead to better communication between schools, parents, and administrators.
- Hold regular meetings at the district level between school principals to discuss communication strategies and new developments within the district. These meetings could be held once every term. This suggestion comes from the teachers who think better communication between schools and workshops would be beneficial.

As time and money permit:

- Educate all faculty on the uses of Blackboard in order to better communicate between parents, teachers, and students.
 - Create a training class for principals so that they better understand the practical uses of the application.

- Explore local university collaborations to provide a consistent pipeline of internships to assist the communication director.

Social Media Recommendations

To be implemented immediately:

- Ensure that there are social media accounts for all schools within the district for parents and students to follow and like. Encourage all schools to use same platform and cross-post content as applicable.
- Have the social media coordinator for each school create a professional relationship with the PTO president for each school to strategize effective ways to create and share content from both accounts (if applicable) or to strategize effective ways to create content for the school account.
- Leverage each school's social media coordinator to post more information about school academic achievements, parent involvement, and athletic events (if applicable).
- Reduce redundancy across platforms. Remember that each platform is a unique communication channel and leverage its difference.
- Analyze each platform and determine if its needed. If the messages are redundant from other platforms and engagement is not high, consider deleting the account.

As time and money permit:

- Publish a “recognition” post at least 3-4 times a week. These could be about stand out teachers or faculty. Even posts that recognize student achievements or special programs.
- Take advantage of schools that have “Student of the Month” and share this information, if possible, with parent permission.
- Acknowledge the unique contributions and accomplishments of staff and teachers at each school.
- Ensure that social media coordinators are responding to all social media queries as soon as possible.
- Consider creating event pages for upcoming events, especially community fundraisers. Use these event pages to send reminders as it gets closer to event date.
- Highlight fundraisers more. There were very little posts in this subcategory. When/if a school is planning a fundraiser, a posting should bring it more attention.

For the future:

- Invite the parents of incoming students to like/follow the social media pages on Facebook. Raise awareness of social media presence via kindergarten information night and information packets.

Local Media Recommendations

To be implemented immediately:

- Create an interactive digital media kit with a point of contact sheet for common topics at each school. This kit should include bios about each the superintendent and each school principal, recent press releases, fact sheets about each school, a backgrounder about the district, b-roll clips, and professional photos. This should be housed on new website with a dedicated page that is updated frequently.

As time and money permit:

- Invite local media to events that highlight improvements within the district. The media can witness firsthand these strengths, not just timely events held by the schools.
- Create a long-form journalism pitch that includes a feature story about the district as a whole as well as op-ed pieces about relevant issues affecting public school districts today.

Public Perception Recommendations

To be implemented immediately:

- Create and launch new website.
- Email a weekly newsletter from the teachers at each school to parents.
- Provide a few paper copies in the main office for families who may not have internet access.

- Design newsletters for the target audiences. For the elementary school this will be the parents of the young kids. However, throughout middle school and high school the newsletters should begin to focus more on the information for students.

As time and money permit:

- Design communication messages to be digital first and print second, if needed.
- Based on feedback from the community focus group, several constituents recommended holding parent-teacher community meetings offsite to reach families that may have scheduling or transportation issues.

For the future:

- Set up iPads in school lobbies for parents to use who do not have internet access at home to be able to access platforms and digital communications from schools and district.

APPENDIX A
COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Community Focus Group Questions

1. What is your perception of the school district's current trajectory?
2. What is your impression of the new superintendent?
3. What are key issues you see with the communication strategies currently being used by the district and specific schools? What areas need the most improvement?
4. What are the specific channels of communication and platforms you would like to see Salem Public Schools follow?
5. What is your perception of the Salem Public School district's relationship with the community? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
6. What types of messages would you like to receive from the Salem Public School district and/or individual schools?

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Principal Focus Group Questions

1. What ways do you communicate with your school community at large?
2. How frequently do you communicate with the school community? What topics are these usually about?
3. Are you active on social media? If you have a message to send out do you have multiple ways of communicating?
4. When trying to communicate with parents, how do you contact them successfully? Which communication methods have you found to be most successful?
5. Have you talked about new ways of communication and if so what are they?
6. How do schools share successes and best practices among and between each other and the district?
7. Could you describe an incident that happened on campus where you needed to contact the parents? In what ways did you handle it and communicate to the parents?

APPENDIX C

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Superintendent/Communications Director Interview

1. When and why was the communications director position created?
2. What was the communication infrastructure prior to the creation of this position? In other words, who was responsible for public outreach and communication at the district and school levels?
3. How did the public respond to the creation of this position?
 - a. How have schools and school communities responded to the creation of this position?
 - b. Has there been any internal pushback on new communication efforts or initiatives? If so, what?
4. What are the primary responsibilities for this position?
5. What is the relationship between the superintendent and communications director?
6. What current communication strategies do you think are working effectively?
 - a. What strategies could be improved upon?
7. What new strategies would you like to implement?
8. What are your plans for improving community relations and public perceptions of the district?

APPENDIX D
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Platforms Analyzed for Social Media Analysis

Facebook

- Bates Elementary School
- Bates Elementary School—PTO
- Carlton Innovation School
- Nathaniel Bowditch Elementary School
- Nathaniel Bowditch Elementary School—PTO
- New Liberty Innovation School
- Salem High School
- Salem Public School District
- Saltonstall K-8 School
- The Chalkboard (defunct)
- Witchcraft Heights Elementary School—PTO

Twitter

- Bates Elementary School
- Carlton Innovation School
- Collins Middle School
- New Liberty Innovation School
- Salem High School
- Saltonstall K-8 School
- Witchcraft Heights Elementary School