



# **VESTAVIA HILLS CITY SCHOOLS COMMUNICATION PLAN**

*Developed by*  
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VESTAVIA HILLS CITY SCHOOLS  
1204 Montgomery Highway  
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216

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## VESTAVIA HILLS CITY SCHOOLS MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Vestavia Hills City Schools is to ensure each student learns without limits by pursuing knowledge and igniting curiosity about the world through a system distinguished by:

- A safe and nurturing environment
- The courage to be creative
- Unparalleled community support
- Appreciation of diversity
- Multiple paths to a bold future

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## COMMUNICATION PLAN PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Vestavia Hills City Schools' Communication Plan exists for the purpose of facilitating two-way, symmetrical communication between the school district and its stakeholders. Our objective is full community awareness of Vestavia Hills City Schools and the work of its students through a system of:

- Unified avenues of communication
- Timely and accurate dissemination of information
- Building of cohesive relationships among those invested in the school system
- Continuous development of an identity of excellence

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## INTRODUCTION

The Vestavia Hills City Schools Communication Plan was first drafted and presented to the Board of Education during a work session on September 24, 2014. This revision takes into account the district's 2015 Strategic Plan as well as new communication efforts undertaken over the past year. This plan serves to guide the district as it communicates key messages effectively to all stakeholders.



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## **ONGOING COMMUNICATION EFFORTS**

### **MEDIA RELATIONS**

We work to publicize news, events, activities, and awards for the District and its schools, teachers, and students. As the district's spokesperson, we serve as a point-of-contact liaison between schools and the media by communicating key news and information points whenever they are needed. We strive to cultivate a cordial relationship with local and regional media sources. We facilitate controlled media access to schools and information while simultaneously working to protect the safety and integrity of our learning environments.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT**

Recognizing that all VHCS employees are *de facto* school system representatives, we provide public relations and communication support on issues that impact schools, departments, and the district. We provide support for teachers, administrators, and our schools through targeted public relations including articles, newsletters, photography and videography services, key message development, and website content creation.

### **URGENT COMMUNICATIONS**

In concert with the district's Crisis Plan, we coordinate communication responses including student and parent alerts, social media, website bulletins, and media requests. In the event of an incident, we serve as the Public Information Officer for all schools and will work in direct contact with the Director of Safety and Security, school resource officers, emergency responders, and school administrators to manage the flow of information to stakeholders and the public.

### **COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

This area of focus is designed to build a positive working relationship with the City of Vestavia Hills and its community organizations. We work with the Parent Teacher Organization, Vestavia Hills City Schools Foundation, Partners in Education, Chamber of Commerce, City Council, and state representatives to inform, promote community involvement, and develop unified communication messages.

### **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

To promote an informed and cohesive working environment, we provide information specific to Vestavia Hills City Schools employees through the use of email, e-newsletters, and the district's intranet. We provide support for internal publications, presentations, and communication initiatives.

**DIGITAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE MANAGEMENT**

Recognizing that multiple, varied avenues are necessary for effective communication, we curate continuously-updated streams of information on the web. As the district's webmaster, we create and edit information on school websites and social media feeds. These channels are used as a tool to relay news, event information, accomplishments, and urgent communications.

**IDENTITY MANAGEMENT**

We act as a conservator of the Vestavia Hills City Schools brand through the establishment of uniform guidelines for communication, standardized key messages, and development of consistency and appearance for information generated by schools and the district. Through continuous monitoring of media and digital sources, we work to ensure accurate representation of the VHCS brand.

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**TARGET AUDIENCES**

Vestavia Hills Board of Education  
Vestavia Hills City Schools employees  
Students and parents  
Vestavia Hills residents  
Parent Teacher Organization

VHCS Foundation  
Partners in Education  
Local and regional media  
City and state representatives  
State Dept. of Education



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## ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION

Note: New initiatives occurring after publication of the 2014 Communication Plan are highlighted in **bold**.

### FOCUS 1: MEDIA RELATIONS

1. Write and distribute press releases to local and regional media outlets whenever news and accomplishments should warrant publicity.
2. Act as primary point of contact for all reporters, media visits and inquiries. Work with media to provide controlled access to schools when it is feasible.
3. Provide media with supplementary information for news and accomplishments, such as photographs, videos, interviews, and story guidance.
4. **Stage and coordinate press conferences and interviews for significant announcements and news events.**

### FOCUS 2: PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT

1. Write and share news stories directly with the public through communication avenues maintained by the district.
2. Record and produce videos of all Board of Education meetings and work sessions, and post videos to website in a timely manner for public review.
3. Cover news stories and conduct interviews for publicity of district and school programs, initiatives, activities, professional development sessions, and accomplishments.
4. **Provide marketing support for school events, fundraisers, athletics events, and community awareness campaigns.**
5. **Set up audio/visual systems at Board of Education meetings.**

### FOCUS 3: URGENT COMMUNICATIONS

1. Act as Public Information Officer for all schools in the event of a crisis. Provide public, parents, media, and employees with emergency information as needed.
2. Work directly with Superintendent, Director of Safety and Security, school resource officers, and school administrators to obtain information for distribution during a crisis and develop response strategy.
3. Improve communication of school closings, delays, and lockdowns by disseminating announcements through SchoolCast, social media, and the district website.
4. **Develop a Crisis Communication Plan with details of protected communication assets, prioritized responsibilities, sample messages, and post-crisis evaluation questions.**

**FOCUS 4: COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

1. Meet regularly with city leaders, PTO representatives, and VHCS Foundation leadership to gain feedback from and galvanize support for district initiatives.
2. Participate actively in civic and community organizations as communication liaison between the district and city leaders.
3. Add translation tool to website to facilitate accessibility of school information in other languages.
4. Participate in community-led school groups, including the Strategic Planning Team, Strategic Action Team #3, and Drug Awareness Team.
5. Publicize community-wide district initiatives such as adult education programs, community forums, and community surveys through media and community partners.
6. Create an annual report and other publications, distributed via print and online, to showcase district data and school accomplishments.
7. **Create an online form for community to communicate directly with the Superintendent.**
8. **Begin development of a VHCS “welcome packet” for new Vestavia Hills families to include designed brochures for each school, PTO, VHCS Foundation, and Partners in Education.**
9. **Collaborate with PTO on the redesigned VHCS website and school-specific public relations issues as needed.**

**FOCUS 5: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

1. Develop a Communication Plan for the district to outline ongoing communication efforts, target audiences, and communication alignment with the Strategic Plan.
2. Participate in administrative meetings and maintain close working relationships with all school administrators to ensure that communication needs of schools are met.
3. **Consolidate school calendars and make them available in a digitized format on school websites.**
4. Manage editing and distribution of internal publications to keep all district personnel informed throughout the year.
5. Work directly with Superintendent and district-level administrators to inform employees of news and announcements when they occur.
6. Investigate opportunities to utilize students in writing and production of communication pieces as a résumé-building opportunity for students interested in communication and public relations.
7. **Collaborate with Information Technology Specialists at all schools to facilitate improved website content and communication avenues.**
8. **Make regular visits to all schools to meet face-to-face with administrators and teachers and discuss their current communication needs.**

**FOCUS 6: DIGITAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE MANAGEMENT**

1. Create a website News Feed to share newsworthy content generated by schools and the district.
2. Publish all press releases to the News Feed and social media pages.
3. Acquire a social media dashboard application to manage all social media pages and generate analytics reports.
4. Create an official, active Facebook presence for Vestavia Hills High School.
5. Create social media campaigns and “hashtags” for various school and district events (back to school, homecoming, etc.) as common threads for the community to share content.
6. Create an Instagram account for the district.
7. Collaborate with Information Technology Specialists to design new website features.
8. Create an online means of two-way communication between the Superintendent and the public, including an online feedback form and a Superintendent Twitter account.
9. **Lead content migration to a new website provider; develop template design and website content standards for all schools.**
10. **Collaborate with teachers on publicity of the annual vXchange learning conference; create a vXchange Twitter account to share classroom technology ideas.**
11. **Leverage the website and social media to publicize work we are doing to meet AdvancED accreditation standards and Strategic Plan strategies.**

**FOCUS 7: IDENTITY MANAGEMENT**

1. Set up web alerts to find new mentions of “Vestavia” and key school officials on the Internet.
2. Work with Facebook to delete imposter pages of various schools.
3. Create new template for daily Vestavia Hills High School parent announcement email to ensure uniformity and ease of reading.
4. Research development of a communication standards guide for the district to include guidelines on logo usage, approved colors and typefaces, telephone greetings, and customer service best practices.
5. **Work with Director of Safety and Security to identify potential and current threats to students and schools online and on social media.**
6. **Disseminate new district logo and Annual Report to community organizations and media to ensure proper representation of the district.**
7. **Begin researching opportunities for school grants and national recognitions.**
8. **Develop a social media program for each school to increase publicity of good news and student achievement.**

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## EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

The following resources will be utilized to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of this Communication Plan:

Principal/leadership feedback  
AdvancED Spring Survey  
Social media analytics  
Community partner feedback

Media feedback  
Faculty feedback  
Vimeo analytics  
Website usage analytics



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## CONCLUSION

This Communication Plan is an outline for Vestavia Hills City Schools communication efforts continuing in the 2015-16 school year. This plan will be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect progress and new goals. Updates and revisions will be presented to the Superintendent and shared with the Board of Education and public.