

Communication &  
Engagement  
At  
Avoca

# Committee Members

Karen Azar- Parent

Gil Gibori- Parent

Karen Quezada- Parent

Julie Barello- Preschool Teacher

Rebecca Goldman- Parent

Joel Raynes- Board of  
Education Member

Pete Brennan- P.E. Teacher

Mandy Hale- Speech/Language

Jim Rohner- Parent

Louise Dechovitz- Board of  
Education Member

Suzie Harris- Ast to the Supt

Robyn Schiffman- Parent

Niki Dizon- Parent

Jessica Hutchison- Principal

Nancy Stewart- Learning  
Behavior Specialist

Barbara Ferencz- Community  
Member

Kevin Jauch- Superintendent

Anne Nagle- Community  
Member

Sheryl Swibel- Board of  
Education Member

Dan Garbis- Parent

Darren Persino- Science  
Teacher

Jun Yoshitani- Parent

# C & E Ad Hoc Committees

Community Businesses

Community Members- Non-parent

Community Members- Parent

Avoca Staff Members

Other Municipalities

# The Process:

## Research Methods:

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- IASB and INSPRA Presentations

Each focus group provided a representative for another ad hoc group that then organized the data.

# Community Non-parent Findings

- Are best informed by direct postal mailings
- Attend to articles in both traditional media sources and online news
- Currently are not apt to follow Avoca on social media sites

# Community Non-parent Findings

- Interested in:
  - Financial information
  - Academics
  - Celebrations
  - Adult education
  - Volunteering
  - Attending school events:
    - Performances: play, orchestra, choral, etcetera
    - Veterans Day breakfast
    - PTC's Intercultural Night
  - BOE, COTW and Town Hall Meetings

# Community Parent Findings

- More substantive information at all levels
- More effective feedback loop
- Inconsistent communication structure
  - Who delivers what and according to what schedule
  - Not “more” communication; efficient communication
- Email as the preferred method for sharing news
- Website needs attention

# Staff Findings

- Website needs attention
- Would appreciate defined expectations for communication to parents
- Email as the preferred method for communicating
- Appreciate being “in the loop” regarding district issues

# Other Municipality Best Practices

- Keep it brief
- Repeat the message via multiple modalities
- Effective website is critical
- Social media is trending.

Communication is an issue for ALL municipalities!

# Big Ideas (What did we learn?):

1. Key Messages
2. Substantive
3. Multiple Modalities
4. To the point
5. Transparency & Responsiveness

# Key Messages

Branding- what do we want to be known for?

- Whole child
- Academic Excellence
- Diversity
- Public school with a private school feel.

Consistency of message & repetition

***In the absence of information from the District and schools, others will fill the void with their own thoughts, accurate or not.***

# Substantive

1. Direction/strategic plan (goals, progress, updates, news)
2. Academics (curriculum, instruction, achievement, growth, news)
3. Financial (budget, reserves, financial standing, news)
4. Accomplishments (academic, artistic, athletic, awards, news)
5. Human interest (classroom, school, community, news)

# Multiple Modalities:

- Email (most preferred method of communication)
- Website
- US mail (for important full community communications)
- Press releases
- Social media (as an additional source of news)

# Transparency & Responsiveness.

- Surveys- If survey data is requested, then share what is learned.
- Committees- When committees are established, share committee news.
- Inquiries- If multiple inquiries about same topic, share answer broadly.

***In the absence of information from the District and schools, others will fill the void with their own thoughts, accurate or not.***

# Recommendations

1. Defined Expectations for Communication
2. Website
3. Social Media
4. Communications Calendar

# Standardized District Expectations

## Critical Information:

- Strategic Plan: Goals & Progress
- Financials:
  - Revenues & Expenditures
  - Reserves
  - Levy & Budget
- Academic Performance
- Other Performance Indicators
- Board Briefs
- Celebrations
- Legislation that impacts Avoca

# Standardized District Expectations

- Vision:
  - Annual Review- Fall
  - Progress to Date- Winter
- Board Briefs
  - Included in the Visions
  - Stand Alone:
    - November Mailing: September and October Highlights
    - May Mailing (potentially 4 pages): February, March, April Highlights & Summer Projects

Visions and Board Briefs to be run in Wilmette E-news.

# Standardized District Expectations continued...

- Special Event Postcards or Other Paper Mailing (as necessary)
- Superintendent Blog
- Avoca Weekly
- Legal Notices: Budget Hearing, Tax Levy Hearing, Request for Proposals

# Standardized Principal Expectations (Substantive)

Weekly or biweekly newsletter (email or blog update with email notification):

- School Goals for the Year and Reason
- Progress towards School Goals
- Curriculum Adoptions Updates and Reason
- New Instructional Strategies and Reason
- Education Related Articles/Authors
- Parent Resources for School Initiative
- Educational Video and Reason
- Staff Professional Development

# Standardized Principal Expectations (Ongoing)

Weekly or biweekly newsletter (email or blog update with email notification):

- News
- Celebrations
- Calendar

# Standardized Team/Grade Level Expectations (website)

- Curriculum at a Glance:
  - The topics/units being covered and approximately when
  - Why the topics/units are being covered (standards addressed)
  - The objectives/outcomes anticipated
  - Resources for Parents

# Standardized Team/Grade Level Expectations (website) continued...

- Homework Policy/Expectations
- Grading Policy/Practices/Procedures
- Template for Grade Level Report Card (AW)
- Powerschool Report Card Link (MM)

# Standardized Teacher Expectations (Ongoing)

Substantive Information (for example):

- When a new unit is about to be introduced:
  - What? (Unit/Topic):
    - **2nd Grade Math: Measuring Lengths in Standard Units**
  - Why? (Learning Standards & Outcomes):
    - **Students have developed the understanding that lengths or distances represent quantity. In this unit students build on that understanding to recognize why standard units are necessary to precise communication.**
  - Assessment/Rubric/Culminating Activity:
    - **Students will measure length using rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, and tape measures. They will eventually have to record their measurements in a line plot (see example) and also solve word problems about length using number line diagrams.**
  - Supporting Resources for Parents

# Standardized Teacher Expectations (Ongoing)

Other Information (for example):

- Preview of upcoming weeks
- Instructional Strategies that are being introduced
- Reinforcement of District and School Initiatives as appropriate

# Standardized Teacher Expectations (Ongoing)

- Student Specific
  - District will endeavor to identify a reasonable method to update parents regarding their students':
    - Academic Achievement
    - Academic Progress
    - Social Emotional Well-being
    - Behavior
  - Just a “touch base”

# Revamp the District Website

- Dynamic
- Intuitive
- Substantive
- Appealing

# Revamp the District Website

- Action Plan
  - Form a small, representative website redesign committee (spring)
  - Issue a Request for Proposal for web designer (spring)
  - Approve Bid (summer)
  - Start Work (fall)
  - Tentative Launch (winter)

# Social Media:

Continue current social media efforts, but use as an additional method for sharing news, as opposed to a primary one.

- Well received by those who use social media

But...

- Parent community: 62% neutral or disagreed with the use of social media as a communication tool
- Non-parent community members: not interested at this time
- A social media presence is necessary.

# Community Business Strategies

- Theme was for the District to “give,” not just ask
- Indifferent to school district news
- Attracted to the idea of a “Avoca Market”
- Appreciate the benefit of being associated with the school district
- Investigate potential relationships between Avoca business community, PTC and District

# Two-Way Engagement

## Current Practices:

- Email
- Telephone calls
- Coffees
- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- School Events
- BOE/COTW Meetings
- Town hall meetings

## Future Opportunities:

- Volunteers
  - Intergenerational
  - Parents
  - Students
- Social Media
- Business partnerships
- Satisfaction Survey

We believe that by improving our outreach, we will benefit from greater community engagement.

# Next Steps:

- Standardized Expectations for Communication & Communications Calendar:
  - Formalize expectations in writing
  - Create an implementation action plan
  - Present written expectations and action plan for BOE approval
  - Distribute expectations and action plan to those responsible for implementation
  - Post expectations and action plan to website
  - Communicate expectations and action plan to constituents
  - Evaluate our efforts

Questions?