

NSPRA Communications Audit

Additional Considerations Regarding the Public Information Office

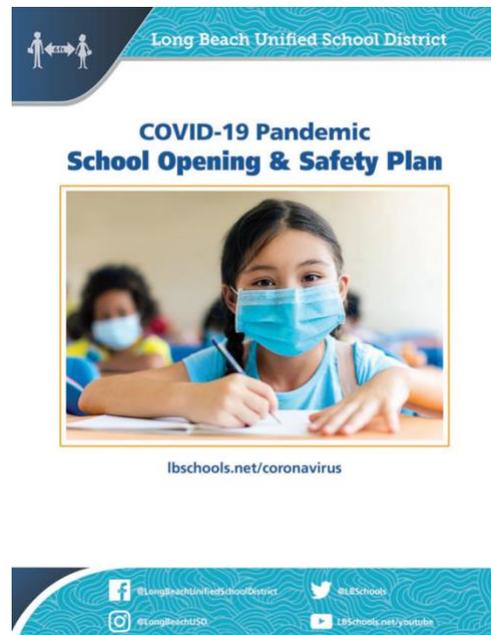
April 28, 2021

The National School Public Relations Association's Communication Audit Report for the Long Beach Unified School District provides multiple recommendations worthy of consideration, some of which relate to the Public Information function of the school district, and some of which are under way. Because the audit is by nature a snapshot in time, and the past year has brought unprecedented communications challenges for the entire school district due to the global coronavirus pandemic, some additional context may be useful.

From March to October of 2020, the Public Information Office consisted of two people: the Public Information director and the district webmaster. A third position had become vacant in March 2020 due the retirement of a long-time assistant. Public Information reworked that job description to recruit and hire a communications specialist, who began working for the district in October. Public Information also worked with Facilities Development and Planning to recruit and hire an assistant Public Information director, who began working in late February 2021 and is embedded at Facilities working on communications about LBUSD's campus improvements.

COVID Communications and the Vaccination Campaign

The audit gives the school district high marks on its COVID-related communications. The auditors' observations in this regard are reaffirming, because most of Public Information's focus during the past year has been on COVID-related communications. Public Information oversaw the creation of the Coronavirus Response web page, including the creation and distribution of 70 and counting notifications to school communities, in three languages, usually with accompanying video (again in three languages plus American Sign Language) from Marketing and Media Services. Public Information also oversaw the creation and distribution of the COVID-19 Pandemic School Opening & Safety Plan, in three languages, including a recently revised edition that reflects more current conditions. The report can be found at lbschools.net/coronavirus along with many other community resources and a complete archive of prior notifications to the community.



Public Information managed the targeted and sequenced distribution of emails to prioritized groups of employees, providing them links to COVID vaccination appointments made available through the school district’s partnership with Long Beach Health and Human Services.

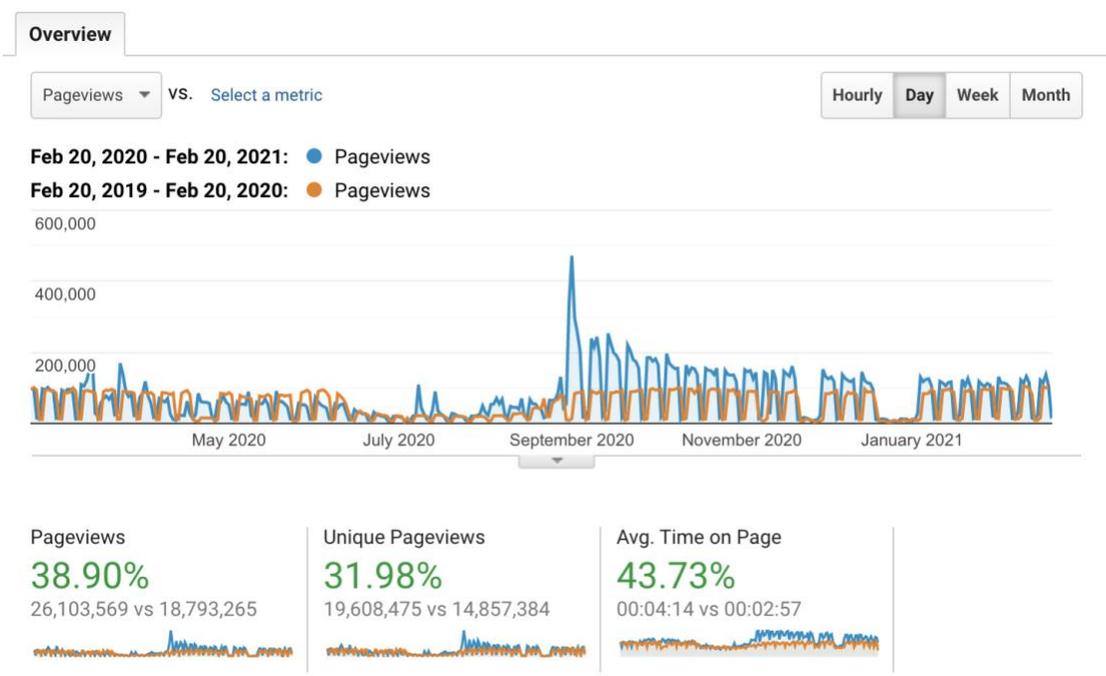
At the outset of the pandemic, and especially as schools closed to in-person learning and began offering free meals and technology to children, Public Information also coordinated frequent community messaging with communications staff at the city’s Joint Information Center.

Metrics

Many of the observations in the audit are based upon individual interviews and focus groups. Public Information uses additional metrics such as Google Analytics and surveys to monitor audience reach and behavior. Public Information adds communications-related questions to other district surveys, such as the opinion research conducted by the FM3 Research group. Such metrics indicate that significant and growing proportions of the general public rely upon the school district’s lbschools.net website for news and information about local schools.

The lbschools.net site has attracted about 26 million pageviews in one year, a remarkable 39% increase compared to the prior year. Average time on the page increased by almost 44%. Also remarkable was the first day of school via distance learning last fall, represented in the chart below by the highest spike, a half million pageviews in one day – an all-time high. A silver lining of the pandemic is that audiences have come to rely more on digital information. LBUSD capitalized on that benefit to provide a reliable source of information during a critical time.

Lbschools.net Pageviews in One Year (Compared to Prior Year)



Such metrics also are used to drill down to individual communications, including in real time, such as employee newsletter distributions and web-posted news articles. Based upon Google Analytics, the employee newsletter can attract as many as 4,000 pageviews within a few hours, particularly when especially newsworthy pieces are included, for example, the availability of COVID vaccines. Employee newsletter content also is repurposed and distributed in a number of other electronic formats where metrics also are tracked. A community-wide message from the superintendent can attract 20,000 pageviews within the initial hours of distribution, and more than 30,000 pageviews within a few days.

Web Accessibility Compliance

The audit mentions that a strength of lbschools.net is that it is accessible for people who have disabilities, including people who use adaptive technology. Improving such accessibility has been a multi-year endeavor, overseen by Public Information, and the effort most recently included collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights to make certain that our site is accessible, for instance, to people who have impaired vision. The result is that lbschools.net is one of the most highly accessible sites among K-12 school systems. The same holds true for the district's 85 school websites, and Public Information has supported significant upgrades to those sites to ensure accessibility.

Other Public Information Functions and Accomplishments

Media Relations: A significant portion of Public Information's time continues to be devoted to fielding daily inquiries from news media, researching their questions, providing interviews and connecting news gatherers with appropriate sources within the school district.

School Bulletin, Web Content and Newsletter Creation, Distribution: Public Information has continued to produce the School Bulletin employee newsletter, a school district tradition for more than 100 years. Usually the newsletter is produced biweekly, but publication has become slightly more sporadic in recent months due to the multiple demands of COVID communications, and because with students and staff away from campuses for most of the year, less content was generated, including photos. The audit understandably noted that some photos



You Have a Right to Know
News About Your Schools

N.Y. Times Notes School Reopening
LBUSD was the largest district in the California to return to in-person learning after a year of virtual instruction.

Tincher Lauded as 'School to Watch'
For the fourth time, Tincher Preparatory School has earned the School to Watch honor recognizing academic excellence in the middle grades.

Students Honored In Global STEM Contest
A team of juniors from Jordan High School earns third place in a challenge hosted by Otis Worldwide Corporation.

Worldwide Audience For Podcasts

and content at lbschools.net needed updating. Now that we have students back in person, we are rebuilding our library of student photos, and we are refreshing web images and related content. Per the audit's recommendation, Public Information is exploring modernization of the School Bulletin format, including converting to a direct email-based (versus emailed PDF) newsletter similar to the district's You Have a Right to Know (registered voter audience) and Building on Success (school bond project updates) e-newsletters, which are also overseen by this office.

Bargaining Updates: Public Information works with Employee Relations to create and distribute these updates to employees. Fourteen of these updates have been distributed over the past year. The bargaining update web page attracted more 17,000 pageviews during the week of March 22 as employees sought the latest news on negotiations and compensation.

2020-22 Communications Plan: Public Information worked with the recently reorganized Marketing and Media Services to develop a combined 2020-22 Communications Plan, which also addresses collaboration across other key school district departments. This plan, cited in the audit and reviewed in a recent "New Board Member Briefing" session, can serve as point of reference as LBUSD further refines its communications planning. The plan includes key messaging, target audiences, priority tasks/projects and sample metrics.

Flyer Approvals (Recent Implementation of e-flyer system): Public Information annually reviews and approves hundreds of flyers, based upon Board of Education policy, from community-based organizations for distribution to LBUSD families. Just prior to the 2020 winter break, Public Information began implementing an electronic flyer distribution system called Peachjar, which has now replaced hard copy distribution. So far, the electronic system has saved an estimated 3.6 million sheets of paper, or 439 trees. The system also will save countless hours of office staff and teacher time spent batching and/or distributing hard-copy flyers through classrooms and students' backpacks.

View LBUSD's e-flyer board by selecting the peach icon next to the social media icons at lbschools.net.

Each school also now has its own e-flyer board, accessible via each school's home page.



Letters of Support: Public Information has helped to facilitate numerous of letters of support from the Superintendent's Office to partnering agencies seeking grants, or in support of priority legislation at the state level.

Guidelines for Parents and Students: This annually updated booklet, now about 50 pages long, is provided in three languages, summarizing required parent notifications and related education code.

Submitted by Chris Eftychiou, Public Information Director