



# **Review of the Communications Operation of the Anchorage School District By the Council of the Great City Schools**

**Fall 2008**

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Council of the Great City Schools' Strategic Support Team review of the communications operation of the Anchorage School District. The Council conducted the review on August 18-20, 2008. The review, including a look at both internal and external communications of the district, was conducted by a team of communication directors and public relations executives from major urban public school systems across the nation. (*Biographies of the Strategic Support Team are presented in Appendix A*). The team made a series of findings and developed specific recommendations as a result of that review.

## **The Review Process**

Before the review began, the team met with Anchorage School District Superintendent Carol Comeau. The purpose of this meeting was to orient the team to the Superintendent's goals and objectives for the review. The Superintendent requested a candid assessment of the performance of the communications operation and recommendations on how to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

The Superintendent indicated that the biggest issue the district faced in terms of communications was how to improve internal communications, particularly providing information to district employees with limited English and computer skills.

The Strategic Support Team reviewed documents and materials provided by the district's Communications Department staff before the team's visit on August 18. During its three-day visit, the team interviewed a number of district employees, school board members, as well as members of the media and others. (*A listing of individuals interviewed is presented in Appendix B*)

This report is organized around four broad themes—

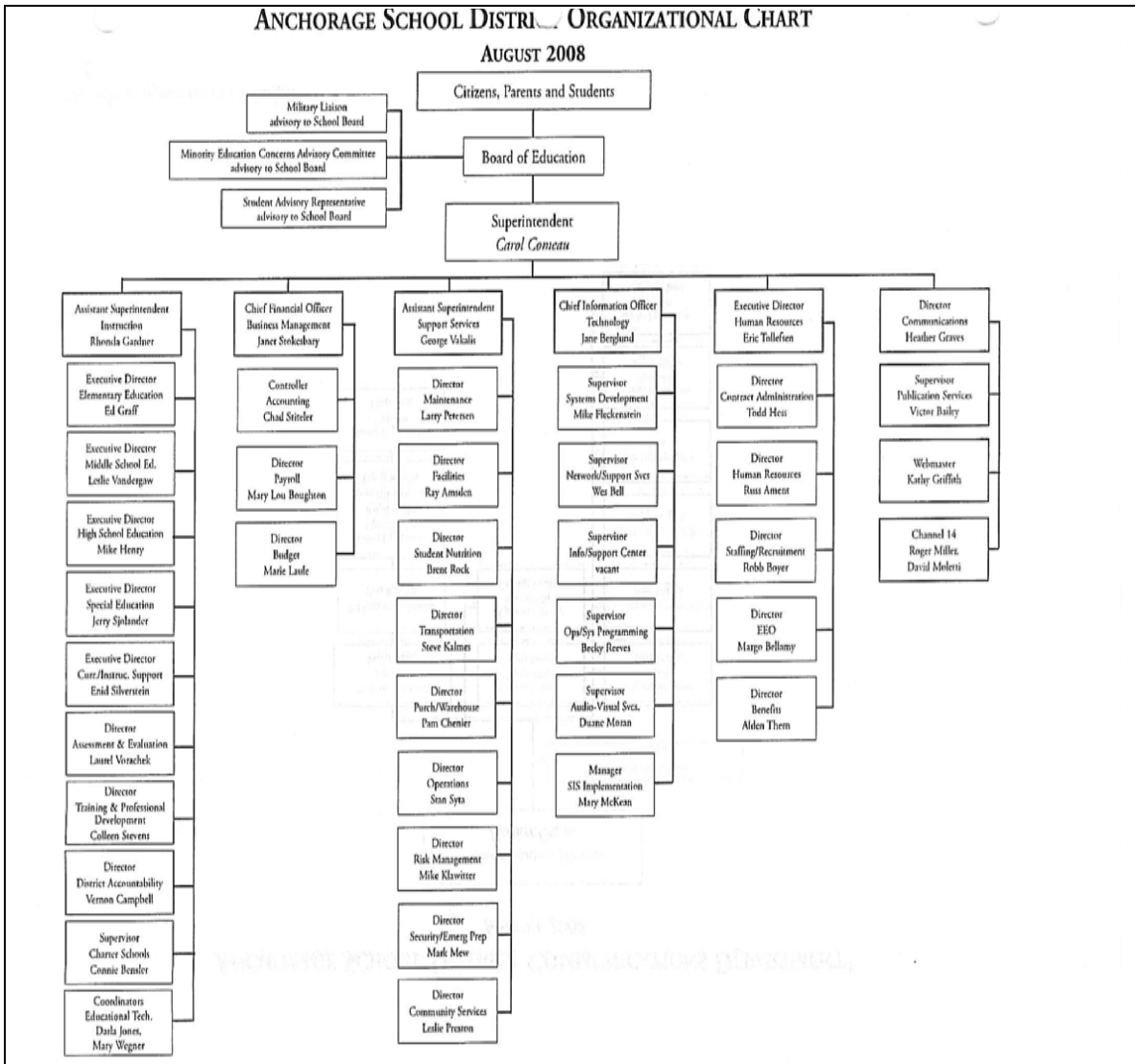
- Creating a master narrative for the district
- Reorganizing the structure of the Communications Department
- Improving the district's internal communications
- Increasing the visibility of senior staff and school board members

# Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

## Background

The Anchorage School District is the 88<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the nation, serving approximately 48,500 students. The system's enrollment is about 50 percent white, 13 percent multi-ethnic, 12 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 10 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Alaskan Native or American Indian, and 6 percent African American. This year, for the first time, minority students comprise 50 percent of the student population.

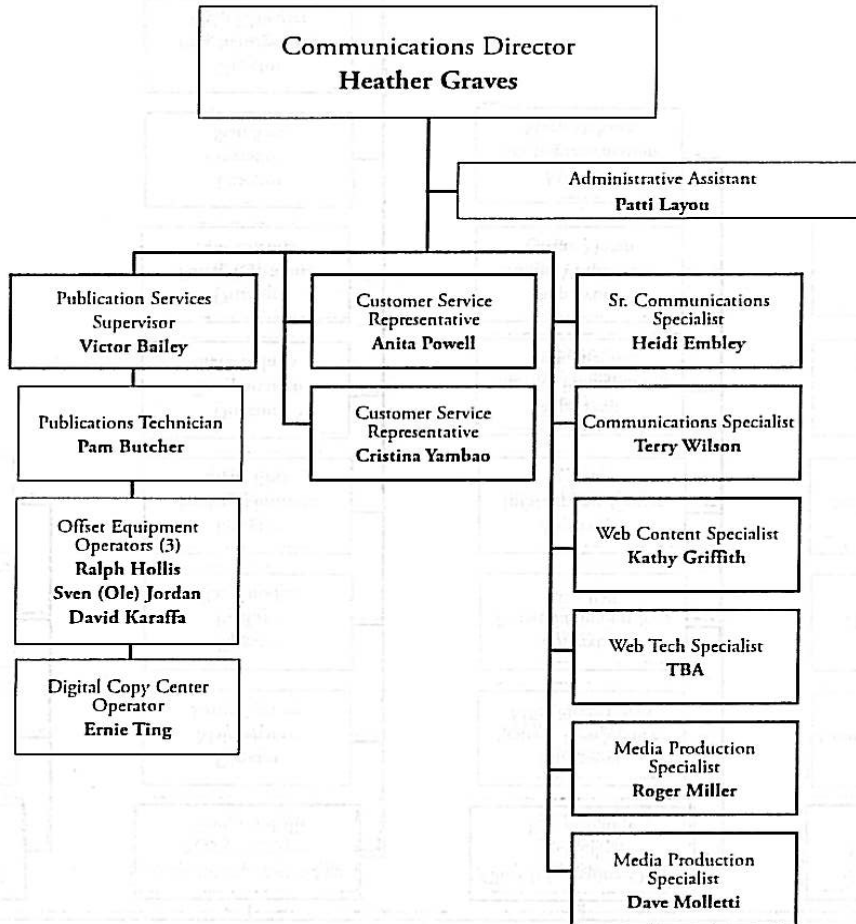
The Anchorage School District has a Communications Department led by the Director of Communications, who reports directly to the superintendent, as do five other senior administrators. (See organization chart below)



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The Department is composed of 15 individuals with responsibilities for publications, copying, customer service communications, website, and media production. (See organization chart below)

### ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT\* AUGUST 2008



- **Communications Director (now Heather Sawyer)** - Heads the department and supervises all internal and external functions
- **Administrative Assistant** - Provides administrative and clerical support
- **Publication Services Supervisor** - Manages the district's print shop, which is responsible for printing all of the district's publications
- **Publications Technician**- Typesets and formats texts of school district publications ranging from multi-color, multi-page items to forms design.
- **Offset Equipment Operators (3)** - Assists the publication services supervisor

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- **Digital Copy Center Operator** - Assists the publication services supervisor
- **Customer Service Representatives (2)** - Handles customer service for the district
- **Senior Communications Specialist** - Handles media relations and external communications
- **Communications Specialist** - Handles internal communications and produces in-house publications and the weekly e-mail newsletter
- **Web Content Specialist** - Develops and manages the district's web site
- **Web Tech Specialist** - This position, which has not been filled yet, will assist the web content specialist by regularly updating the web site and helping schools develop their own web sites
- **Media Production Specialist (2)** - Operates the district's cable television station

The Communications Department operates the district's cable TV—Channel 14—as a public service to the community 24 hours a day. Approximately 20 percent of the programming on the station is produced by Channel 14 staff. The Department also houses the Print Shop for the district as well as two employees who handle customer service requests for the district. The Department's adopted budget (including salaries) for the 2008-2009 school year is \$1,156,191.

The size and scope of the Communications Department is comparable to communications offices in urban public school districts of similar size. For example, the Office of Communications for the Atlanta Public Schools, with a student enrollment of 51,000, has approximately 20 employees and manages its own print shop and television station.

And while only a few communication offices of big-city school districts, such as Atlanta and Norfolk Public Schools, operate their own print shops, several communication departments handle customer service for their respective school districts, including Austin, Cleveland, Indianapolis and Memphis.<sup>1</sup> Some other big-city school districts also include translation services, family and community relations, volunteer coordination, and other services under their communications operations; Anchorage does not.

### **Strengths of the Communications Operation**

The communications operation has a competent staff and is highly regarded by district employees. The Communications Department and the school system should be commended for—

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<sup>1</sup> See Council of the Great City Schools (2007). *Public Relations Offices in the Great City Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

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- Maintaining general satisfaction with communications across stakeholder groups in the school district
- Generating high levels of satisfaction regarding emergency/incident response
- Building a productive relationship between the Communications Department and schools (especially with regard to schools sharing good news stories and with media contacts)
- Building an exceptional relationship with the news media
- Reaching out to the business community through the Anchorage School Business Partnerships program, which publishes a newsletter and has a placement in the Chamber of Commerce magazine
- Positioning a highly visible, dynamic, and well-loved superintendent
- Offering an extensive amount of information on the web concerning the school district
- Ensuring strong recognition of the school district's mission — to educate all students for success in life

### **Findings and Recommendations**

This section presents the team's findings and recommendations to assist the communications operation in improving its effectiveness and perform at an even higher level. In general, the team found the Communications Department of the Anchorage School District to be one of the strongest that the Council of the Great City Schools has seen. The proposals that follow were designed to help move the communications operations to the next level of excellence.

#### ***1. Creating a Master Narrative for ASD***

##### **Recommendations**

- Develop a master strategic narrative. Use storytelling to put a face on issues and more readily persuade with an emotional appeal.
- Adopt a strategic messaging approach identifying key messages to emphasize for the year. (*See sample in Appendix C.*)
- Increase direct communications to teachers and support staff using a systematic, predictable schedule of messages. This can take a variety of forms such as a formal speech, fireside chat, or taped focus group sessions that are broadcast to all employees.

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When asked to identify key messages or initiatives for the school system, stakeholders often provided a variety of answers — but no clearly defined, focused list emerged. This inconsistency suggests a problem, but also presents the district with an opportunity for significant improvement in communications. Employees and community members should be able to draw a straight line conceptually between what is being done in the school system on a daily basis and the district’s strategic plan.

This anchoring of key messages to a larger strategy would allow community members to better evaluate the return on investment for dollars spent on public education and would enhance change management efforts by allowing employees to see how their work directly impacts student achievement goals as identified in the ASD strategic plan.

To do this, the Communications Department of the district should not just report on what is happening in schools. Instead, it ought to provide examples of things happening in schools as evidence of how strategic initiatives are being implemented. Finding human interest stories to illustrate this would allow the school system to put a “face” on an issue and make it more meaningful to both internal and external audiences. The successful graduate going on to college should reinforce high school improvement efforts. The award-winning algebra teacher can underscore ASD’s investment in mathematics education. Data and gains in achievement or decreases in dropout rates, moreover, might be explained in the context of people rather than numbers.

For example, if ASD is reporting on an increase in math test scores, illustrate the trend by presenting a student who picked up the pace in learning because of the district’s academic reforms in the teaching of “number sense.” If the district is facing a budget cutback, illustrate the effect by showing a student who may have to walk to school rather than being able to take the bus.

Members of the news media told the team that these human connections were sometimes hard to make, however, when the school district made an announcement. Human relationships strike an emotional chord and motivate people more readily than statistics that many in the public simply don’t understand. Given the rich Alaska Native storytelling tradition, there is tremendous potential for this strategy to pay dividends for the school district.

In addition, the school system could benefit from a master narrative. This narrative would tell a story of what the Anchorage School District stands for, where it has been, and where it is going. While there is clearly a key messenger in the Superintendent, the school system might do well to establish an overarching narrative and a limited number of key messages each year. Like the political “stump speech,” these identified priorities serve as a touchstone and keep everyone “on message.”

Situational needs and crisis incidents require off-script responses, of course, but an established story line for the system and prioritized messages allow staff members to re-focus quickly. Conventional public relations wisdom says a message must be shared multiple times in multiple venues to be effective. To maximize efficiency, content

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developed should appear in multiple venues/media. This consistent long-term messaging provides tremendous leverage in managing change and winning the hearts and minds of stakeholders.

Much content is filtered as it moves through the organizational structure. To ensure employees feel directly engaged and better ensure that they understand key messages, the Strategic Support Team recommends implementing some direct, whole-group communications opportunities for the Superintendent and members of her senior staff (*Appendix C is an example of Norfolk’s strategy that utilizes an Administrators Convocation, an All-Staff Address, a State of the Schools Address, and an End-of-the-Year message.*). These whole-group opportunities need not necessarily take the form of a formal speech, but might also include televised “fireside chats” or panel discussions that would serve to focus employees on key messages.

### ***2. Suggested Structure for the Communications Department***

#### **Recommendations**

- Reorganize the communications office staff to *decrease* the number of direct reports to the Communications Director while allowing for a more extensive focus on strategic messaging. (*See Appendix D.*)
- Use the resources and staff expertise of the district’s television station more effectively to get information and messages out to all employees. Capitalize on streaming video technology to enhance web-based communications.
- Streamline the district’s website and use of e-mail to schools in order to mitigate “information glut.” The district might do this by implementing a content management system for sending e-mails from the district office to individual schools, and re-design the web site to make it more easily navigable. Consider consolidation of e-mail traffic through the use of a hot sheet, and/or designated department/division staff member who manages flow/volume of e-mail.
- Close the loop on employee input and involvement in decision-making to ensure that staff knows what decisions were finally made and why. (A specific example of this challenge was presented by representatives of the teachers union who indicated that some of their members participated on committees to discuss stipends for certain types of employees, but never heard back as to what decision was made, what the pay level would be, and why recommendations from teachers were/weren’t used. Staff members indicated that they wanted “authentic” involvement opportunities.)
- Continue capacity development for all administrators in the area of communications. The current focus seems to be weighted toward media training (which is necessary, but not sufficient). Continue ongoing training regarding communicating with stakeholder groups, cross-cultural communications, etc.

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The Anchorage School District communications team maintains excellent relations with the news media and provides a wide array of information to various stakeholder groups.

It is the Strategic Support Team’s opinion, however, that the Director should focus on strategy and on facilitating discussions about content development and placement that tie directly and clearly to the school system’s strategic plan rather than supervising staff *per se*. We offer the attached sample organizational structure for consideration, recognizing that the Director should determine the placement and tasking of staff that best suits school system needs. *(A proposed organizational chart is presented in Appendix D)*

The suggested structure reduces the number of direct reports to the director in order to facilitate greater time for strategic planning, message development, and positioning. The suggested structure maintains print-based functions and aligns web and television services into a digital/new media function that would be used to move forward with implementing a web content management system and to capitalize on streaming video and podcasting opportunities. Making such an adjustment might require reprogramming the existing Web Content Specialist position into a supervisory role.

Establishing a digital/new media function would place the Anchorage School District Communications Department in the forefront of a combined organizational structure model of web and television. With the rapid growth of multimedia, urban school districts are facing the prospects of how to maximize the integration of new technology to communicate to a variety of audiences effectively and efficiently. The San Diego Unified School District may be one of the first to launch a web and video services unit within its communications department, but in recent years had to scale back its communications operation because of district budget woes. *(Sample chart of combined web/video services is presented in Appendix E)*

In addition, the team recommends the creation of one additional staff position (Senior Communications Specialist), if resources are available, to focus on content and message development for placement in print and digital media generated by the district and for pitching story ideas to the media. This new position and the Communications Specialist assigned to it would focus on developing a master narrative for the school system and finding individual stories that put a “face” on strategic initiatives. Having the customer-service representatives report to this position would allow for the identification of emerging issues and proactive responses to these concerns.

If resources are not available to create the new position at this time, then the team recommends that the current Senior Communications Specialist work closely with the Director and Communications Specialist in content and message development in addition to media relations responsibilities. *(A second proposed organizational chart is presented in Appendix F)*

While the Director of Communications should be focused on strategy, it should not be her purview alone. Each communications team member should be accountable for aligning the message, web site, video, press release, or memo with the district’s key



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strategic objectives. The Director could help facilitate this type of thinking by leading the communications team in development of a yearly editorial calendar and/or regular editorial meetings.

The team also suggests moving beyond the internal/external designation for members of the Communications Department staff. Just as the Director can not be the only person focused on delivering strategic messages, each staff member must see his or her responsibility as serving both internal and external audiences as the need dictates. *(Suggestions for determining appropriate venues/media for reaching internal audiences more effectively will be addressed in a later section.)*

Another possibility is the use of an “account executive” model or “beat” system where each communications staff member is assigned particular departments and/or schools and required to develop a strong, collaborative relationship with that group. This allows for expert communications assistance on each department's upcoming initiatives or challenges and provides an early-warning system for emerging issues.

It would also be helpful to consider an “instructional boot camp” for communications staff members to bring all team members up to speed on testing procedures/requirements, data analysis, and best practices. Staff members need to understand better the core business of the district in order to be able to communicate effectively with their target audiences.

No amount of restructuring will allow a small group of communicators to handle all the communications needs for the school system. In the final analysis, effective communications must be a priority for every employee. To that end, the Communications Department might facilitate or broker communications training for all administrators. Current capacity development efforts seem to focus on media training which, while important, is not enough.

The team is also suggesting that the district streamline its website and better manage its e-mail traffic to the schools. The district's website is very content-rich, but is sometimes hard to navigate. In addition, principals interviewed by the team indicated sometimes being overwhelmed by the number of e-mail messages that they received from the central office.

Finally, the district should continue its customer service training and improvement efforts, especially in interacting with minority stakeholders in schools.

### ***3. Reaching Internal Audiences***

#### **Recommendations**

- Evaluate or assess the use and usefulness of district publications/vehicles in a broader way than is currently the case. (Avoid sampling problems that arise by

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surveying about e-newsletter use, for instance, with an online survey that self-selects for people pre-disposed to like electronic communications)

- Survey district employees about where they get their information about school system development, and build the results into the school system's communications strategies. (Norfolk used auto-dial/telephone contact system surveying)
- Convene a standing internal communication advisory group composed of representatives from each major employee group

Superintendent Comeau and others have emphasized the need to strengthen internal communication in ASD so that all employees, educators and support staff alike are well informed at all times and recognize that they are valued members of the ASD team and critical to children's educational success. Clearly, employees are credible sources of information about schools (positive and negative), whose informal comments to neighbors in supermarkets and playgrounds can either strengthen or damage the district's reputation in the community. Therefore, it is essential that all staff have the information they need as well as a sense of "ownership" of the district's mission, vision, goals, and priorities to be effective ambassadors for ASD in and out of schools.

The Superintendent has expressed a strong commitment to more extensive outreach to staff who are not as easily reached by the current means of communication's methods and vehicles, most notably employees who do not have computer access during their workday and therefore are not receiving electronic communication such as *Inside ASD* and other e-mail correspondence, as well as support staff whose primary language is not English.

It is important to note that the district already has a variety of strategies in place to communicate effectively with employees. Some of these efforts are targeted solely to district staff. The internal communications outlets include—

- *Inside ASD*, a weekly electronic newsletter sent *via* email with links to news and critical information on the ASD website.
- The *School Zone*, a printed newsletter mailed periodically to the homes of all employees.
- *District Connection*, ASD's Intranet portal for employees, which includes space for announcements, news, and other updates.
- Principals and other leaders also periodically receive "Spread the Word" binders with talking points and communications tools about particular topics and initiatives.
- The Superintendent and members of her leadership team also meet regularly with various employee groups. Some of these meetings are attended by all members of

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a particular employee group (e.g., monthly meetings of all principals, Superintendent visits to all maintenance staff twice per year), while others include representatives from particular groups of staff (e.g., a teacher advisory group, regular meetings with leaders of collective bargaining units).

Other communications tools are designed to reach broader audiences, including employees who are residents of the greater Anchorage community. These tools include—

- ASD Online, the district's website;
- ASD Direct, e-mail notification services available through the website;
- Television broadcasts and notices on ASD-TV 14, the district's cable television channel;
- Press releases and media stories;
- The district's monthly full-page newspaper advertisements in the *Anchorage Daily News*;
- Other publications, such as *Expect the Best* and AYP results;
- School Messenger pre-recorded telephone voice messages (these can be sent to all families and staff, or tailored to reach particular groups).

This array of tools and strategies represents an impressive effort to communicate with staff, but ASD leaders are wise to be asking what more can be done, or in some cases, might be done differently. Given the appointment of a new Communications Director, now is an appropriate time to evaluate the effectiveness of existing vehicles. This baseline data and subsequent evaluations will allow for more data-driven decision-making regarding these tools.

With respect to internal communication, it is important to consider not only the *means* of communications, but perhaps more importantly, the *content* of the communication. The Communications Department may be well positioned to take a more strategic, intentional approach to internal communication that strikes an effective balance among various types of messages. For instance—

- There is a great deal of information that employees must know in order to perform their jobs effectively, as well as logistical information about their own employment (payroll, benefits, etc.), emergency preparedness, and other matters that may require them to follow particular policies or procedures.
- Other messages involve breaking news in the district, most notably major announcements like test results or a recent assault. It is important for employees to be “armed” with timely, accurate, digestible information about these matters, particularly

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more controversial topics, so that they can serve as effective spokespeople in their communities and not contribute to misinformation.

- Current employee outreach efforts highlight many positive human interest stories about the achievements of individual students and staff. These smaller “feel good” news items help “put a face” on ASD, boost morale, and reinforce the message that every adult and child is critical to the success of the district as a whole.
- What seems to be lacking in the current approach to internal communication in ASD is an emphasis on “the big picture”— hence the need for a master narrative and identified key messages (as discussed in a previous section). While most staff we interviewed seemed able to state the tagline “Educating All Students for Success in Life,” the Strategic Support Team did not hear consistent responses to questions about the district’s vision, key priorities, theory of action, goals, or strategic plan. (The responses were not necessarily contradictory, but simply lacked a common thread.)

This does not mean employees should be expected to recite a list of goals and priorities, but rather that there should be more consistency among all staff when speaking about where the district is now, what ASD is striving to achieve, and most of all, the district’s approach to getting there. One School Board member cited three overall priority areas adopted by the Board (academic achievement, supportive and effective learning environment, and public accountability), but no other interviewees referred to these areas in the same way. Similarly, there were very few mentions of the more detailed measurable objectives associated with these goals, also adopted by the Board. There seems a need for a sharper, more coherent statement about the core work necessary to take ASD schools and students to the next level of excellence.

### Strategies / Recommendations

Anchorage utilizes a robust external survey program to gauge community attitudes and discover how external stakeholders get their information. The district also should employ periodic internal sampling to discover how school system employees currently receive information, whether they are satisfied with those vehicles/distribution methods, and how they would prefer to receive their information. There are a variety of ways to collect this information (for example using a survey module within an auto-dialer/phone messaging system, surveys distributed at employee orientation, etc.) in order to avoid surveying staff electronically on the use of the electronic newsletter.

The Communications Department might also convene a standing **internal communication advisory group** composed of representatives from each major employee group (including principal, teacher, secretary, bus driver, custodian, *et al*), to (1) provide general guidance about the most effective means of communicating with employees, and (2) offer specific guidance about messages and tactics for communicating about particular issues and topics. The members of this committee should be selected based on

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their proven ability to think strategically about how to share information among their colleagues.

The Anchorage School District, moreover, might consider the cost-savings (and small revenue generation) of contracting with **1<sup>st</sup> Hour** or another vendor to print and mail *The Zone* or another printed newsletter for families and staff. 1<sup>st</sup> Hour ([www.1sthour.com](http://www.1sthour.com)) will print a four-page, full-color newsletter five times per year and mail it to households along with a series of commercial advertising inserts (used in Boston, Memphis, Jacksonville, and other districts). The vendor also returns a portion of the proceeds to the school district. [Note: While 1<sup>st</sup> Hour will produce and mail only one version of the newsletter, some districts produce translated versions of the publication and make them available online and/or print translations in-house.]

Superintendent Comeau also identified **several key personnel issues** primarily affecting staff that require a thoughtful and thorough internal communication strategy, including a new 403b investment plan; changes in State regulations regarding employee certification/licensure; requirements to revalidate employee marital and dependent status for health insurance; and recent changes in the State ethics ordinance. The Communications Department and the Human Resources office, among other departments, might be charged with devising and executing a communications plan to inform employees (and get feedback, answer questions, etc.) about these timely issues, and others that arise in the future.

Rather than having separate communications strategies for each of these matters, the district would be well served to craft a targeted effort focused on all four of these issues (though the materials might not be disseminated simultaneously), developing a range of tools to reach different employee groups in different but perhaps overlapping ways. These efforts should include the translation of key documents for non-English-speaking employees, as well as tactics that do not rely on the written word, such as video messages and podcasts. The leaders of the collective bargaining units with whom we spoke seemed willing and able to help communicate this information to their members.

For major initiatives/announcements, the district might consider preparing communication toolkits for managers/supervisors that include: talking points or a script to share at staff meetings; sample e-mails, newsletters and voice-mail messages; PowerPoint presentations, DVDs, etc.

In-house video interviews with the Superintendent on important matters, from major announcements to crisis situations, might also be employed. These edited videos would be produced for the district cable TV channel, as well as streamed from the district web site.

Managers of groups of employees without e-mail access, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers and custodians, could print electronic periodicals and distribute them to employee mailboxes or post in employee gathering areas.

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Finally, for staff members who are not effectively reached through existing means, the district should be thoughtful about communicating with these employees through the vehicles on which they already rely in their **homes and communities**. For example, if there are significant numbers of Spanish-speaking employees in service roles, identify the ways that these Spanish speakers receive information about other programs and services in their communities – for example, ethnic radio and newspapers, churches, as well as more informal channels like community-based organizations. This requires a differentiated (and labor-intensive) approach, given the uniqueness of each linguistic and cultural minority. This approach and effort would also help in targeting messages to the external ethnic and poor communities at large.

### ***4. Increasing the visibility of senior staff and school board members***

#### **Recommendations**

- Include senior staff in communications opportunities with media and key stakeholder groups.
- Develop an appropriate public profile for School Board members. Leverage their connections in the community and among staff to get key messages out and to hear concerns and receive feedback that can be directed to the Superintendent and/or senior staff.

Without question, the most valuable communications asset in the Anchorage School District is the undeniably popular, credible, and respected Superintendent Carol Comeau. She is the face and voice of ASD, a dynamic leader, educator, spokesperson, and cheerleader – heralded as the most trusted public figure in the State of Alaska. The Superintendent engages parents, students, staff and citizens all day, every day – through nearly every means imaginable, from media appearances to countless community events and school activities. Superintendent Comeau has all of the characteristics of a top-notch communicator: She is passionate, articulate, honest, accessible, charismatic, optimistic, skilled, and tireless.

The Superintendent also has assembled an impressive group of key leaders – in schools and central offices – who earn the praise and trust of employees and community members alike. However, perhaps because the Superintendent is so visible throughout the city, there seems to be less expectation for other district officials to serve as public ambassadors for ASD. The Superintendent should (and undoubtedly will) continue to be a community relations juggernaut, but the district would also be well served by elevating the visibility of her direct reports and other senior staff as well.

There is immeasurable value in the Superintendent being synonymous with the ASD “brand,” but there is also value in emphasizing the capable team she has assembled. There are countless opportunities (media appearances, community events, school visits, etc.) to reinforce the view that the strength and expertise of ASD rest not in the Superintendent alone but rather in every function of the organization. For district leaders

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who are not as comfortable becoming more visible in the community, there is no one better positioned than Superintendent Comeau to coach and mentor them to grow in that regard.

Similarly, the School Board – both as individuals and as a collective body – seems to be underutilized as credible spokespeople for the “big picture.” The current practice of the School Board commenting on the record to media primarily on policy issues is appropriate and should continue. But the community should have as much confidence in the School Board (again, less as individuals than as a cohesive, effective body) as they clearly do in the Superintendent herself. The apparent unity and professionalism of the Anchorage School Board are critical to the continued success of the district, and these assets might be highlighted in schools and the community as yet another point of pride.

### **Conclusion**

The Communications Department of the Anchorage School District operates an effective communications operation and should be commended for maintaining excellent media relations; providing the district with an informative and highly used web site; cultivating strong relationships with various stakeholders and responding to crisis situations in a timely manner. This report is an effort to assist the district in getting to the next level, particularly in terms of building a top-notch internal communications operation. The Anchorage School District is becoming increasingly diverse, in terms of not only students but employees, so it is vital that the Communications Department strengthen its internal communications so all district staff feel they play a critical and valued role in the organization.

**APPENDIX A. STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM**

**Keith Bromery**

**Keith Bromery** is the Director of Communications for the Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the sixth largest public school system in the nation. As the director, he provides communications advice and counsel to the Superintendent and School Board; serves as chief media spokesperson; produces television programs; serves as editor of electronic and published employee newsletters; speech writing and speakers bureau management. He also develops and manages the organization’s web site. Bromery has also served as the Chief Communications Officer for the Chicago Public Schools, the nation’s third largest school district.

**Henry Duvall**

**Henry Duvall** has been Director of Communications for the Council of the Great City Schools since 1992, coordinating press relations and public information for the Council. He is the editor of the award-winning *Urban Educator* newsletter, and develops various forms of communications through advertising, electronic productions and special events as well as publications. Prior to joining the Council, Duvall served as media relations associate at the national office of the American Red Cross after spending 13 years at Howard University in media relations and editorial capacities. Earlier, he was an editor at the *Albuquerque Journal*, New Mexico’s largest newspaper. Duvall is a graduate of the University of Maryland College of Journalism and is a Navy combat veteran of the Vietnam crisis.

**Tonya Harris**

**Tonya Harris** has been a communications specialist and manager at the Council of the Great City Schools since 1999, serving as associate editor of the award-winning monthly newsletter the *Urban Educator*, maintaining the Council’s web site and carrying out other journalistic, writing, media relations and desktop publishing tasks. Prior to joining the Council, Harris was a public relations assistant at Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. headquarters in Washington, D.C. for two years. Earlier, she was editorial assistant from 1993 to 1996 with two Congressional Quarterly Inc. publications--*CQ Weekly* and *CQ Researcher*. Harris is a journalism graduate from the University of Maryland at College Park and holds a master’s degree in online journalism from American University.

**Christopher Horan**

**Christopher Horan** has served as the Boston Public Schools’ first Chief Communications Officer since 2005. He previously served as Chief of Staff for former Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant and as Executive Secretary for the Boston School Committee. Horan began his career with the City of Boston in 1995 as a speechwriter for Mayor Thomas M. Menino. He is a graduate of Princeton University and earned a Master



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of Fine Arts degree from Emerson College in Boston. He recently co-authored with Dr. Payzant a chapter in the book *A Decade of Urban School Reform: Persistence and Progress in the Boston Public Schools*, published by Harvard Education Press.

### **Vincent Rhodes**

**Vincent Rhodes** serves as Communications Manager and Clerk of the Board for Norfolk Public Schools, the largest urban school system in the Commonwealth of Virginia and one of the top 150 largest school systems in the country. In that capacity, Rhodes directs crisis and strategic communication efforts with the goal of increasing community support for a school system that won the prestigious 2005 Broad Prize for Urban Education and has begun to attract national media attention for its efforts to improve academic achievement for all students. He also serves on the Superintendent's Cabinet working with senior-level administrators to develop strategic plans for achieving School Board goals and ensuring efficient day-to-day operations. Rhodes has been a freelance graphic designer and feature writer since 1992 and his work has been recognized with a variety of awards from the National School Public Relations Association and the Florida Magazine Association. He earned a Bachelors degree in Communication and Biology from James Madison University, a Masters degree in Professional Writing and Rhetoric from Old Dominion University, and is currently working on a Doctorate in New Media and Professional Writing.

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### APPENDIX B. INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

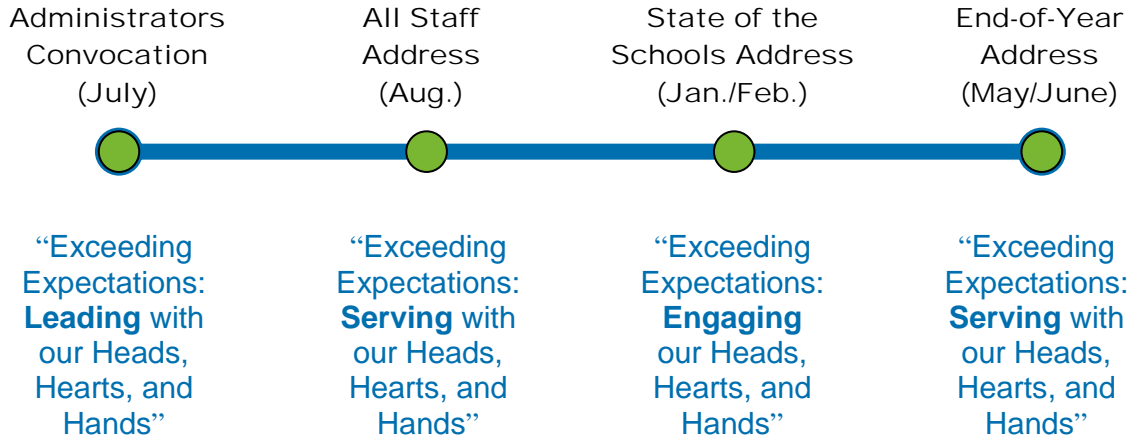
- Carol Comeau, Superintendent
- Michelle Egan, Former Director of Communications
- Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
- George Vakalis, Assistant Superintendent for Support Services
- Heather Graves, Director of Communications
- Heidi Embley, Senior Communications Specialist
- Terry Wilson, Communications Specialist
- Kathy Griffin, Web Content Specialist
- Roger Miller, Media Production Specialist
- Dave Molletti, Production Specialist
- Jeff Friedman, School Board President
- Macon Roberts, School Board Vice President
- Crystal Kennedy, School Board Member
- Tim Steele, School Board Member
- Chris Tuck, School Board Member
- John Steiner, School Board Member
- Pat Higgins, School Board Member
- Mike Abbott, Anchorage City Manager
- Mike Graham, Principal of East High School
- Andrea Gusty, Reporter for CBS affiliate news station
- Steve MacDonald, News Director for NBC affiliate news station
- Len Anderson, Reporter for NPR
- Rosemary Shinohara, Editorial Writer for the Anchorage Daily News
- Fran Ulmer, Chancellor of the University of Alaska-Anchorage
- Cessilye Williams, Principal of Clark Middle School
- Atisa Logo, Member of the Minority Education Concerns Advisory Committee
- Tim Thompson, Director of External Relations for the Alaska Railroad
- Jim Lepley, President of the Anchorage Education Association
- Debbie Omstead, Alaska National Education Association
- Rob Pfisterer, Alaska National Education Association
- Kim Handy, English Teacher at East High School
- Pam Massey, Anchorage Parent
- Eric Tollefsen, Executive Director of Human Resources
- Todd Hess, Contract Administrator
- Russ Ament, Director of Human Resources
- Robb Boyer, Director, Staffing/Recruitment
- Alden Thern- Director, Benefits
- Margo Bellamy, Director of Equal Employment Opportunity
- Tim Morgan, Representative from General Teamsters Local 959, Bus Drivers and Attendants Unit

## **Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation**

- Dale Miller, Representative from General Teamsters 959, Warehouse & Maintenance Employees as well as Food Service Workers
- Billy Meers, Representative from the Alaska Public Employees Association Local 71, AFL-CIO representing Custodians and Building Plant Operators
- Sharon Baker, Representative from TOTEM Association of Educational Support Personnel

**APPENDIX C. NORFOLK’S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

## Major Speeches

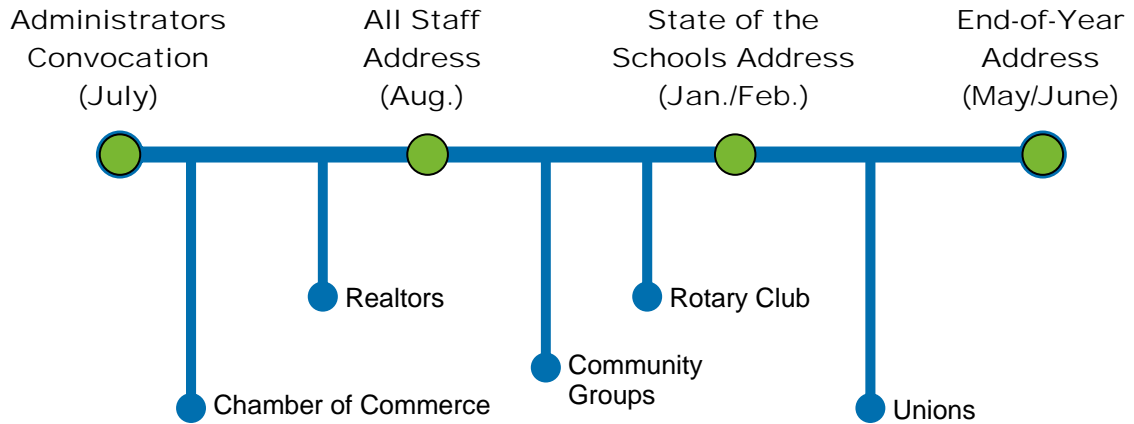


### Aligned Approach

One of the first phases of improving Norfolk’s executive communications program involved unifying the overall theme for the year. Like a political stump speech, key elements and themes are repeated to ensure that they are received and understood. Other parts are customized for or applied to specific arguments.

For non-politicians, this approach seems repetitive, but the repetition is often necessary because the audiences differ.

# Strategic Messages



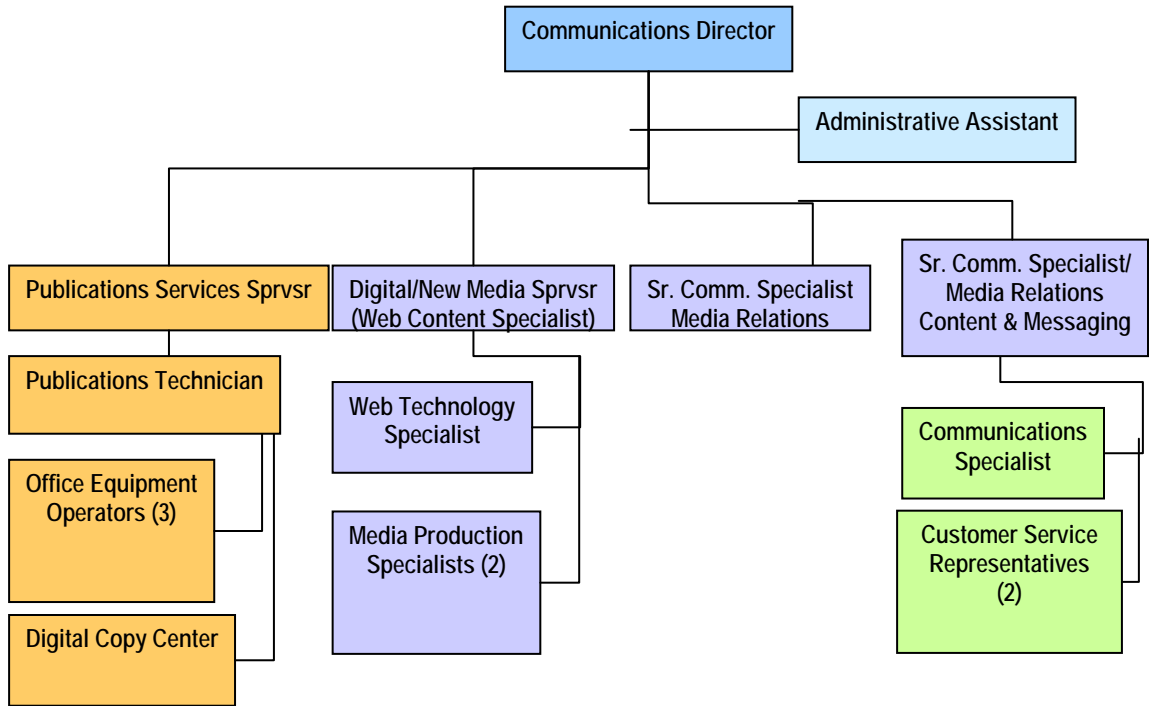
## Connecting the Stump Speech & Key Themes to Other Talks

## Suggested Readings

- *Stephen Denning, The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative, 2005*
- *Stephen Denning, "Telling Tales," Harvard Business Review, May 2004*

**APPENDIX D. PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

Proposed ASD Communications Department



**NOTE:** This organizational structure is merely a suggestion. The goal would be to decrease the number of direct reports to the Director of Communications to allow for more focus on overall strategy and facilitating strategic planning for the communications staff. This suggested structure reprograms the Web Content Specialist position to a supervisory role and creates a new Sr. Communications Specialist position to better align print, new media and content development functions.

# Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

## APPENDIX E. SAN DIEGO COMMUNICATIONS SAMPLE CHART

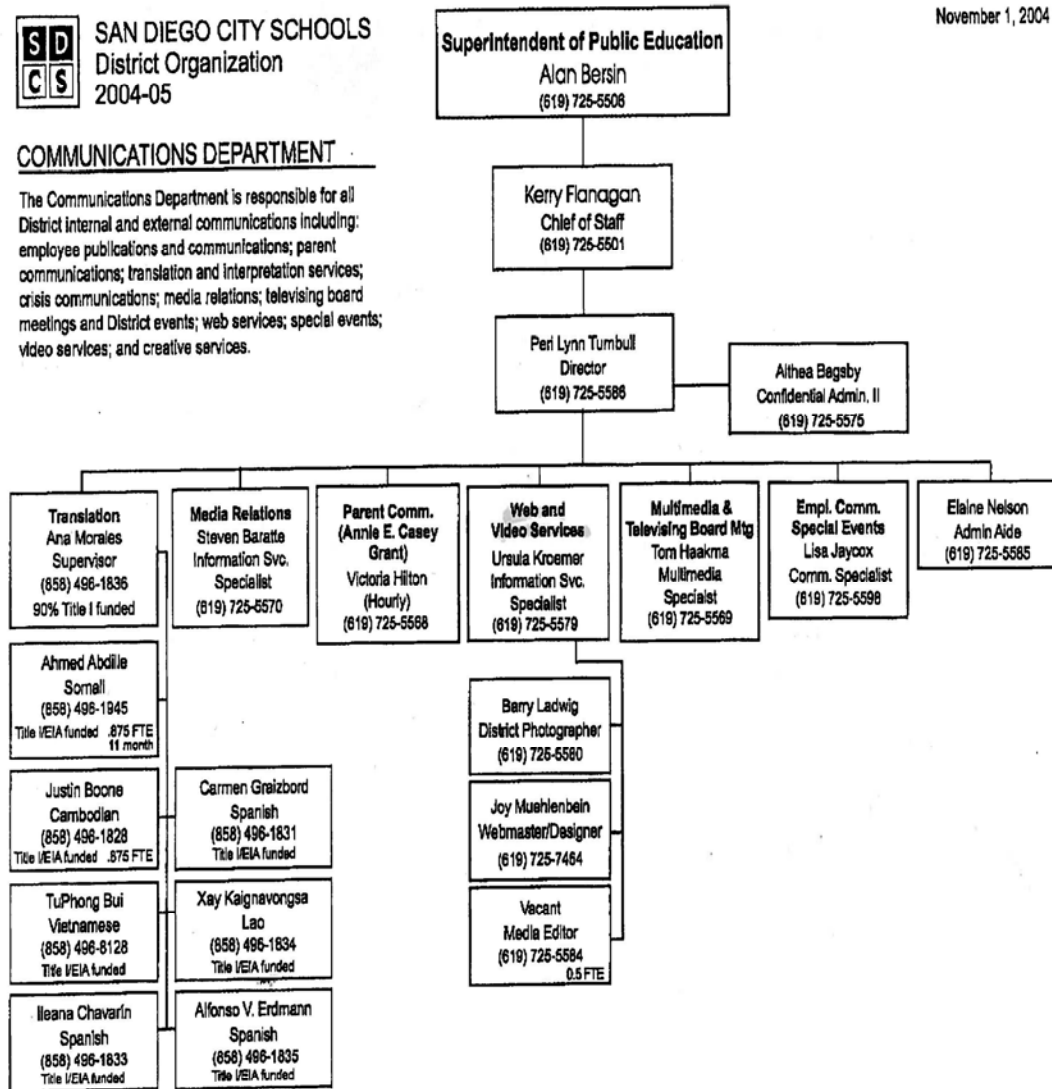


**SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS**  
District Organization  
2004-05

November 1, 2004

### COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

The Communications Department is responsible for all District internal and external communications including: employee publications and communications; parent communications; translation and interpretation services; crisis communications; media relations; televising board meetings and District events; web services; special events; video services; and creative services.

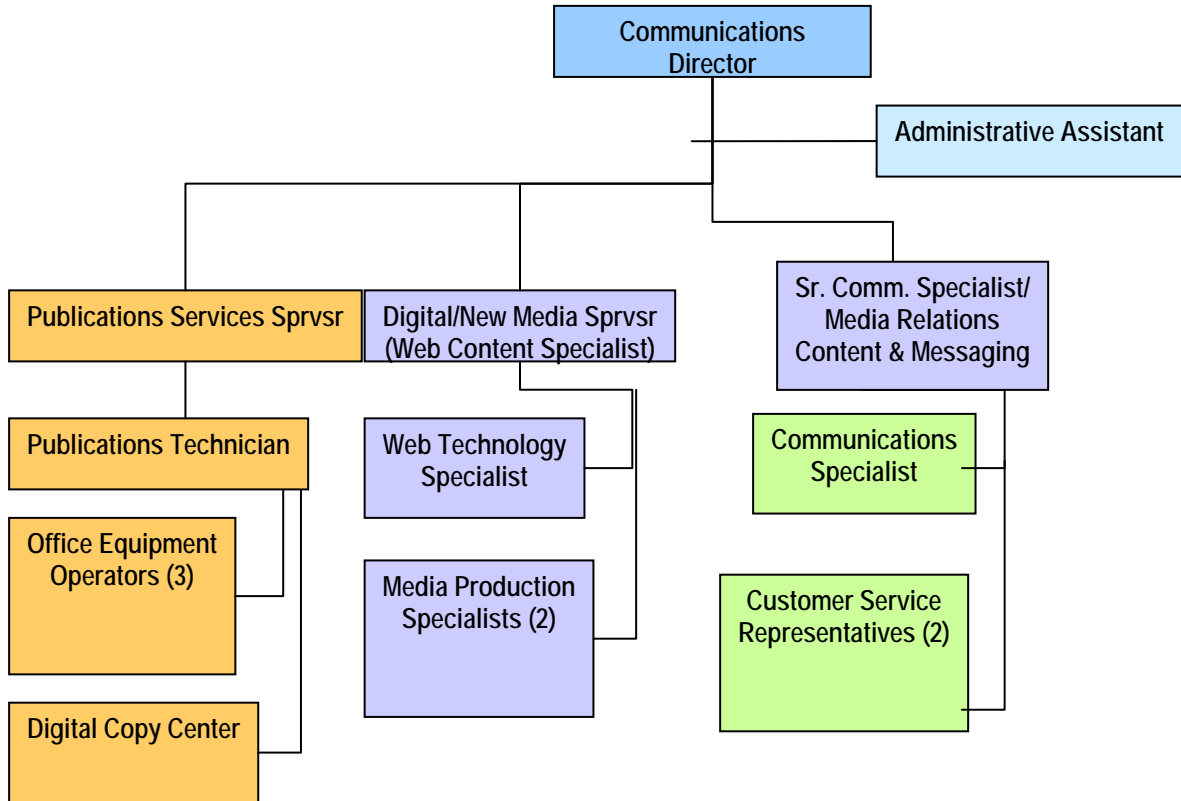


The mission of San Diego City Schools is to improve student achievement by supporting teaching and learning in the classroom.



**APPENDIX F. PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

Second Proposed ASD Communications Department



**NOTE:** This organization structure is merely a suggestion. The goal would be to decrease the number of direct reports to the Director of Communications to allow for more focus on overall strategy and facilitating strategic planning for the communications staff. This suggested structure reprograms the Web Content Specialist position to a supervisory role and adds content/messaging responsibilities to the Sr. Communications Specialist position to better align print, new media and content development functions.

**APPENDIX G. ABOUT THE COUNCIL**

**Council of the Great City Schools**

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 66 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent of Schools and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501 (c) (3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in areas such as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, and technology. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

### History of Strategic Support Teams Conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools

City	Area	Year
Albuquerque		
	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2005
	Legal Services	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
Anchorage		
	Finance	2004
	Communications	2008
Birmingham		
	Organizational Structure	2007
	Operations	2008
Broward County (FL)		
	Information Technology	2000
Buffalo		
	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum and Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
	Finance II	2003
Caddo Parish (LA)		
	Facilities	2004
Charleston		
	Special Education	2005
Charlotte-Mecklenburg		
	Human Resources	2007
Cincinnati		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
Christina (DE)		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000
	Facilities Financing	2000

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

	Facilities Operations	2000
	Transportation	2004
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Safety and Security	2007
	Safety and Security	2008
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance and Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Information Technology	2007
	Food Services	2007
Dallas		
	Procurement	2007
Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Budget	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Bilingual Education	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
Des Moines		
	Budget and Finance	2003
Detroit		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum and Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Food Services	2007
	Curriculum and Instruction	2008
	Facilities	2008
	Finance and Budget	2008

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

	Information Technology	2008
	Procurement	2008
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
	Facilities	2004
	Human Resources	2007
Hillsborough County (FLA)		
	Transportation	2005
	Procurement	2005
Indianapolis		
	Transportation	2007
Jackson (MS)		
	Bond Referendum	2006
Jacksonville		
	Organization and Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
	Finance	2006
Kansas City		
	Human Resources	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Finance	2005
	Operations	2005
	Purchasing	2006
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Program Implementation	2007
Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
	Organizational Structure	2005
	Finance	2005
	Information Technology	2005
	Human Resources	2005
	Business Services	2005
Louisville		
	Management Information	2005
Memphis		
	Information Technology	2007
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

Milwaukee		
	Research and Testing	1999
	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
	Alternative Education	2007
Minneapolis		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Finance	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
Newark		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007
	Food Service	2008
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Hurricane Damage Assessment	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2006
New York City		
	Special Education	2008
Norfolk		
	Testing and Assessment	2003
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
	Human Resources	2004
	Finance	2008
Pittsburgh		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
	Technology	2006
	Finance	2006
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001
	Personnel	2001
	Human Resources	2007
Richmond		
	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
	Transportation	2004
	Food Services	2004
	Special Education	2008
San Diego		
	Finance	2006
	Food Service	2006
	Transportation	2007
	Procurement	2007
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003
	Curriculum and Instruction	2004
	Federal Programs	2004
	Textbook Procurement	2004
	Human Resources	2005
Seattle		
	Human Resources	2008
	Budget and Finance	2008
	Information Technology	2008
	Bilingual Education	2008
	Transportation	2008
	Capital Projects	2008
	Maintenance and Operations	2008
	Procurement	2008
	Food Service	2008
Toledo		
	Curriculum and Instruction	2005
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003
	Budget and Finance	2005

## Review of the Anchorage School District's Communications Operation

	Transportation	2005
	Curriculum and Instruction	2007