



Board Monitoring System: Indicator B

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere. In fulfilling this goal, HISD's Board Monitoring System requires the administration to report on each goal and core value on a routine basis. The indicator currently under review is PROGRAMS AND SERVICES WILL BE EVALUATED FOR EFFECTIVENESS. The objective of this indicator states: "All major programs and services throughout the district will be closely evaluated to determine their effectiveness on meeting the district goals and objectives. Evaluation results shall be utilized to make adjustments and/or to eliminate various programs and services" (Goal 3, Section B).

The Office of Communications and Publications as it exists today is a new division at the Houston Independent School District. Six existing departments were reconfigured into one office beginning in December of 2008. These departments—Media Relations (formerly the Press Office), Communication Services, Strategic Partnerships, Instructional Media Services, Administrative Services, and the Information Center—now comprise the office.

A separate report to the board chronicles the first seven months of the work of the office and it is configured today, providing examples of programs/projects completed in that time frame. It is meant to provide an overview of how the departments are working as a unit using sound public-relations principles.

The office has established the HISD Public Relations Advisory Committee as a sounding board for public-relations plans and programs. The committee is made up of veteran public-relations professionals within the Houston community. Each has extensive experience in public-relations and can offer the district insight into the community and advice on plans and projects. The committee has reviewed the separate report and offered its opinion as an independent third party.

Communications Metrics—Since the office is relatively new in its current configuration, many metrics are not in place as of this date. The adoption of the Performance Management model will outline many common and specific metrics will be developed which will measure the effectiveness of programs/efforts. At this time, the office is able to track some activities using tools currently at its disposal. The following are some of the indications of effectiveness of various programs and initiatives under way.

Program/Initiative	2008	2009	Projected 2010
Contacts in electronic data base	1,000	50,000	75,000
Electronic messaging (<i>"From the desk of..."</i> , <i>Informed Source</i> , <i>eNews</i>)	16	48	52
Guests columns/appearances in local media	NA	Establish baseline	10% increase
Virtual Media Page unique pageviews	NA	2,688	5,000
HISD <i>Connect</i> Web site unique pageviews	52.8 million	67.1 million	74 million
Volunteers in Public Schools	62,000	74,781	78,520
Strategic Partnerships overall funding (including the HISD Foundation)	\$4.5 million	\$4.8 million	\$5.1 million
<i>Connect-ED</i> calls	8.3 million	11.1 million	13.9 million
Administrative Services revenue	\$4.8 million	\$4.7 million	\$5.5 million
HISD cable TV local programming	56% (baseline)	2% increase	5% increase

The office has conducted some informal surveys regarding various communication vehicles and will continue to do these types of surveys throughout the year to measure the effectiveness of print and electronic messaging.

Overview

The Office of Communications and Publications is made up of six departments: Media Relations, Communication Services, Strategic Partnerships, the Information Center, Instructional Media Services, and Administrative Services. A description of each of these areas is below.

The **Media Relations Department**, previously referred to as the Press Office, provides assistance in communicating with the media. Its services include pitching stories to the news media, writing press releases and *Connect-ED* messages, and providing communications support during a crisis.

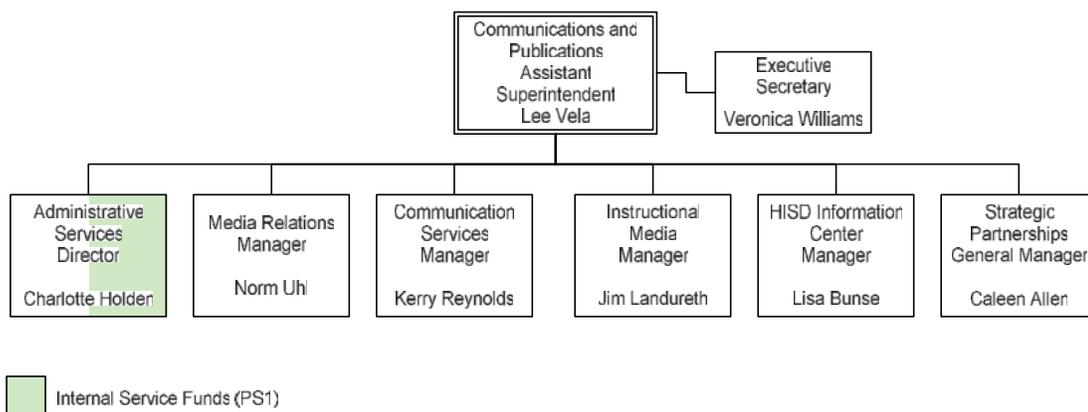
The **Communication Services Department** manages the HISD*Connect* Web portal for the district along with designs for districtwide publications such as the *Back to School* brochure, the *State of the Schools* annual report, *eNews* bulletins, and the *Informed Source* newsletter. The department provides communication support services by writing, editing, and translating documents.

The **Information Center** and security front desk serve as the frontline customer-service component to HISD. The department disseminates information following customer inquiries, connects the public with the correct HISD representatives, and coordinates district tours for educators visiting the district from around the nation and the world.

Strategic Partnerships identifies, develops, engages, and integrates external resources to support schools, students, and their families to increase student achievement. Strategic Partnerships is made up of four departments that work together to accomplish the mission: Community Engagement, Fund Development, Parent Engagement, and Special Events.

The **Instructional Media Services Department** produces television programs, including a daily cable newscast featuring activities in schools, departments, and the community, and tapes major HISD meetings and events. The HISD cable-television channel is operated through this department.

The **Administrative Services Department** is made up of six different areas that provide document-management services such as designing, printing, copying, fleet copier management, records management, and mailing services. PS1 is the name given to the printing-services area, which is a fee-for-service operation.



The Program

Beginning in 2009, the communications functions for the district were restructured in one Office of Communications and Publications.

While its six departments had worked together in the past, they had not been a communications team. The office was reorganized in January and procedures were implemented so that the departments would begin working as a team with the goal of functioning as an in-house public-relations agency.

Vision and mission statements were developed and essential elements were identified. Strategic objectives were developed and plans were made for tactics and timelines to streamline efforts to begin to show results. The four essential elements identified were consistent messaging, visibility, community engagement, and marketing. Timelines were developed and assignments were made with the

deliberate combining of talents so as to foster a team effort to solve communications problems and implement communications programs.

Objectives were identified to help reach the various district goals using tactics with a meaningful impact on programs.

This report describes the essential elements outlined by the Office of Communications and Publications, what the office has done to implement those programs/tactics, and any measurable outcomes that are known at this time.

Since the office is relatively new (only seven months old), many metrics are not be available at this time. However, as the Office of Communications and Publications continue to implement Performance Management within the district and in the office, metrics will continue to be developed not only as a measure of effectiveness, but also to confirm direction so that the office continues to use tactics that are both strategic in nature and effective.

The Vision—HISD will be known for its cohesive communications efforts that create a two-way communications culture that is proactive, accurate, transparent, honest, strategic, and effective.

The Mission—To strengthen support and confidence both internally and externally by providing high-quality resources and services that advocate the district’s educational goals.

Strategic Public Relations Essential Elements

Consistent Messaging	Visibility and Transparency	Meaningful Community Engagement	Marketing
Institutionalize strategic messaging internally and externally. <i>HISD Goals: Improve public support and confidence in schools, Create a positive district culture</i>	Create a transparent culture in conducting the district’s business. Increase the visibility of the district and the board locally and nationally. <i>HISD Goals: Improve public support and confidence in schools, Create a positive district culture</i>	Reach out for meaningful community engagement and create a two-way communications culture that is responsive and proactive. <i>HISD Goals: Improve public support and confidence in schools, Create a positive district culture, Increase student achievement, Increase management efficiency</i>	Strengthen brand awareness for the district and its purpose using marketing skills. <i>HISD Goals: Increase student achievement, Improve public support and confidence in schools, Create a positive district culture</i>

Consistent Messaging

- Development of **key messages** to inform board members and key personnel on various issues thereby ensuring one voice when discussing issues with the media and the community at large.
- **Electronic messaging** has been revamped and stepped up to send key messages to a database that has grown from under 1,000 names to 50,000. Increased the number electronic message disseminated to key communicators.
- **Collateral materials** continue to be analyzed, recommendations for improvements continue to be made, changes are being implemented, and each department continues to audit materials for effectiveness.
- A **Public Relations Advisory Committee** has been formed to oversee public-relations activities and provide the office with independent, third-party advice. This committee consists of veteran public-relations professionals.
- The departments that make up the Communications and Publications Office interact on a daily basis to review products and plans of other departments for consistency and accuracy.
- The departments share media products and programs that may be useful to other departments. For example, **video programs** produced by Instructional Media are used by Strategic Partnerships to share with partners, and Accelerating Student Progress Increasing Results and Expectations (ASPIRE) videos are shared districtwide to assist in training, community outreach, and advancing student achievement.
- Other examples include televising (nearly in its entirety) the July 31 accountability news conference on the HISD cable channel so that every Recognized and Exemplary school was on the air that day, providing Professional Development Services with video updates on first-year teachers for the ABRAZO new-teacher event, and providing video for Transportation Services to use at employee inservice programs.

Transparency

- In the previous seven months, much was done not only to improve transparency by the Office of Communications and Publications, but also to make the district's many different programs and services more visible.
- Special emphasis has been placed on stepping up the district's media relations activities. The Press Office was renamed the **Media Relations Department**. One-on-one meetings were scheduled with targeted media outlets to emphasize these changes, and change was welcomed.

- Procedures are in place for **quick notification to board members** of issues that demand attention from the community and from the media.
- **A new direction** was implemented to show the many “faces” of HISD. Whenever possible, principals, teachers, and various experts are used in media interviews to present a more credible voice to the community.
- **Targeted news pitches** were developed using a strategic approach to issuing press releases.
- Establishment of a Twitter account to quickly relay important information to the media.
- **Regular Guest Columns in the Media**—regular guest columns for board members and television and radio appearances.
- **Virtual Media Page**—Available for download are press releases, video provided by Instructional Media that has been edited into short, broadcast-ready news segments and high resolution still photos. The page also includes links to frequently asked questions, district data, and reports, thereby reducing the volume of calls to the department and leaving more time to pitch stories to media outlets.
- The HISD cable-television channel began **airing Board of Education meetings** live (rebroadcasting throughout the month) and producing and airing shows on board workshops. The office began airing the meetings in April 2009.
- **Positively Parents**, a program designed to keep parents informed with timely and accurate information about district programs and initiatives. **HISD News Today** program provides parents and community members the opportunity to learn about issues that are important to them.
- **Redesign of HISDConnect**: The Web portal was redesigned to provide easier navigation for the public and for employees.
- **Promoting School Choice**—HISDConnect has developed special web pages for the many unique options in education available in HISD including Montessori schools, early college high schools, virtual-schooling options, after school program options, prekindergarten/early childhood education, Magnet/Vanguard schools, alternative/charter schools, and Career and Technical Education programs.
- **Increased Electronic Messaging**—The database used for electronic messaging has been expanded from under 1,000 names to more than 50,000. Messaging in the form of “*From the desk of...*” *Informed Source* (the newsletter about Board of Education actions) and *eNews* has been increased.
- **Special web pages developed** -- Sites were developed and maintained for the **federal stimulus package** and the **superintendent search** to communicate information and solicit input from the public.

- The HISD Information Center has assisted in hosting hosted meet-and-greet sessions complete with an information booth prior to regular monthly board meetings.
- Crisis Communications – Plans and protocols are in place for natural disasters and the H1N1 flu virus.

Engagement

- **Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS)**—This initiative increased the number of cleared and registered volunteers from 62,000 to 74,781, an increase of 12,681 volunteers supporting HISD students and educators.
- **Community and Parent Survey**—Strategic Partnerships handled the request-for-proposals development, vendor selection, and other logistics for the successful implementation and completion of the 2009 Community and Parent Survey.
- **Board Donation Process**—In an effort to streamline donation acceptance and to enhance tracking, a new board donation-acceptance process was launched, with Strategic Partnerships taking the lead.
- **Learning Labs**—During the last seven months, community outreach continued with a series of Learning Labs covering subjects including communications, HISD's 2009 legislative agenda, and the ASPIRE program. The labs were held at the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center and at off-site locations such as the Greater Houston Partnership. Learning Labs were taped and aired on the HISD Cable channel.
- **Partnerships**—Strategic Partnerships has created, developed, and implemented seven new districtwide partnerships while expanding 12 existing districtwide partnerships (e.g., the Luby's ACT Program, the Elves & More Wheels Deal Program, the Chevron New Science Energy Program, the KBR Science Teacher Awards Program, the Tracey McGrady Foundation Library, Asian Career Day activities, and the Capital One Principal for a Day program). Additionally, **HISD Partnership Forums**, a setting for dialogue with partners, have been created.
- **Parent Prep Academy**—the Parent Prep Academy expanded its course offerings and completed the first stage of technology development.
- **Regional Relationship Managers**—The department redesigned its regional relationship managers model to work more closely with the leadership in each region to determine needs and to develop necessary resources to support student achievement and progress.
- **Special Events Department**—Special Events managed a variety of major district events, including the State of the Schools Luncheon, Teacher of the Year Banquet, Partnership Breakfast, March for Babies Campaign, Scholars Banquet, Principal for a Day, Reach Out to Dropouts Walk, National Academic

Achievement Awards, 36 Exemplary School Ice-Cream Socials, Exemplary Schools Dinner, Yates Pep Rally/Press Conference, and the Council of the Great City Schools annual national conference. Events were videotaped and shown on the HISD Cable Channel.

- Overall, Strategic Partnerships developed funding, goods, and services valued at \$4.8 million during fiscal year 2008–2009.
- The **HISD Information Center** provides customer service for a 24-hour response turnaround to public e-mail queries.
- **Interpretation Services Increased** —To provide citizens attending meetings of the Board of Education with simultaneous, “real-time” Spanish interpretations of the board’s deliberations using a wireless audio system with headsets. Translation Services also provides interpretation services at board meetings for speakers of Spanish or Vietnamese who wish to comment on a matter to be voted on by the trustees or to address the board during the Hearing of Citizens portion of a meeting. Translation Services staff members also use the audio equipment at conferences and community and town-hall meetings.

Marketing

- **Advertising**—Efforts were made to use outdoor advertising to brand the district through advertising for the various regions. A branded design was developed that could be “localized” for each region. A total of 16 billboards were utilized, for a reduced cost of \$12,100. The commercial value of this advertising is \$70,250, saving more than \$58,000 in advertising costs. The district’s message on these billboards is reaching a total of 584,573 people per day, every day they are displayed.
- **Pre-K Marketing Initiative**—The office created a communications campaign to better promote all of the district’s prekindergarten options. Creating marketing products (in English and Spanish) that included new branding; a Web site; strategically placed billboards, brochures, posters, postcards, video programs and PSAs for the HISD cable channel; print advertisements; and a PowerPoint presentation for use by schools in community outreach. Advertising was also placed in targeted publications, including *Family Magazine*, the *Kid’s Directory*, and *El Semana*. Together, these ads reached a combined circulation of more than 432,000 people within the targeted markets.
- A new **back-to-school public-relations effort** is designed to emphasize the many school-choice options available in HISD. The Information Center will coordinate a back-to-school telephone “hotline”; HISD television programming, including feature stories on *HISD News Today* and public-service announcements, will promote school choice; and the online back-to-school page was enhanced.

- **The Information Center**—The Center has served approximately 8,000 more district callers this year than it did last year and over 5,000 more district visitors to the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center. The Center also coordinates the district’s online bulletin-board messages that promote the district, its campuses, and area programs and events.
- **Administrative Services—Marketing:** The Administrative Services Department is made up of different production areas that provide **design, printing, copying, fleet copier management, mailing, and records management** services to HISD. A fee-for-service operation, this department’s financial goal is to fully support itself while maintaining low prices. The department had more than \$4.7 million in revenue in 2009. Moreover, the department made a small profit of over \$60,000 this year, based on the unaudited financial statement. Outside sales totaled over \$1.3 million and made up over 26-percent of revenue, a slight increase over last year.
- A full **marketing campaign** for the district is being developed. It will implement a consistent communications program that’s both top-down and schools-out. It will seek to align communications efforts across divisions, including philanthropic and board communications, annual reports, and facilities updates (reports on bond spending), as well as long-term programs and community-building. The plan will also have a “co-op” marketing aspect so that schools/feeder patterns can opt in to an umbrella campaign as the district offers matching funds for their “localized” marketing efforts.
- Other programs under way include marketing initiatives for: dropout prevention, Montessori schools, virtual schooling, human talent, and the Parent-Student Connect Web site (which uses GradeSpeed to post students’ grades). Other programs include employee media training, the installation of ceiling-mounted cameras and microphones for the board conference room for easier, less-disruptive coverage of board workshops, and to provide streaming of the HISD cable-television channel and “video on demand” of key programs. Additionally, a total revamping of published materials is in progress, including expansion of printed newsletters, the development of an HISD Speakers Bureau and a School Marketing Tool Kit will help schools to promote their services.
- **Administrative Services** is in the process of developing HISD holiday cards to be sold as a way to raise funds for HISD educational programs. The cards will be based on the 24 selected holiday-card designs submitted by HISD children. People may order the cards and have them personalized with a special message. In addition, the department is building a Web-based storefront where specialty HISD items such as pens, hats, cups, and binders may be purchased. This will give people the ability to order items with the HISD logo at special prices through bulk ordering.

- **Revenue-Generating Programs**—Requests for proposals for two potential sources of revenue are under construction. The district will issue a request for proposal for advertising on HISD’s school buses and other vehicles. Additionally, a request for proposals is being developed for the creation of an HISD Internet radio station. Administrative Services (printing) will continue to solicit copy-center contracts with other educational and governmental entities.

Surveys and Awards

- The annual internal survey of principals gave high marks to the various departments within the Office of Communications and Publications. For the second consecutive year, the Media Relations Department (formerly the Press Office) scored high on the list, as did the telephone call-out service, *Connect-ED*.
- **Parent/Public Opinion Poll**—In the spring of 2009, Strategic Partnerships completed a survey of the general public about its perceptions of HISD on a variety of different factors. The general population gave significantly fewer top ratings to almost all factors than parents did. The general population gave significantly more “don’t know” responses. Basically, parents are more educated about the system and are pleased with it, while the general population is somewhat pleased—a large percentage is not aware enough to give any rating, be it positive or negative. From 2007 to 2009, the majority of ratings increased. While this is seen more often in the parents’ ratings, the general population’s increased, as well. Only one factor in the survey showed a statistically significant decrease, the rating given to the superintendent of schools; all others stayed statistically the same.
- The National Association of Printing Leaders, a leading printing-business consultation firm, surveyed the printing department’s customers to determine their satisfaction in such key printing-business areas as price, quality, turnaround time, and customer service. The department’s printing services were rated above average compared to the competition in all printing-business areas.
- **Awards**--Administrative Services won five awards in various categories for excellence in the printing industry from the Printing Industry Gulf Coast, a subsidiary of Printing Industries of America (PIA), as the top printers in the region. PIA is the premier printing association in America. Instructional Media received awards for five television programs it produced from TSPRA (Texas School Public Relations Association).

Summary

This is an executive summary of a much more detailed report that chronicles the activities of the first seven months of operation of the Office of Communications and Publications as it is configured today. The full report is on-file in Board Services. The report uses measurements currently available; however, future plans call for

more detailed metrics as Performance Management is fully implemented. The results for the short period of time analyzed show marked improvements in communications efforts for the district with plans for future improvements in place.