**Communications Plan 2017-18**

Chattahoochee Hills Charter School

A comprehensive communications plan to serve as a working document for all internal and external communications at CHCS.

**Purpose**

* Support the mission, vision, values and objectives of CHCS.
* Enhance the school’s image.
* Publicize the school’s progress.
* Engage all the right people and provide them with all the right information.
* Show accountability through evaluation criteria.

**Objectives**

* Ensure that all communications reflect the CHCS mission.
* Increase opportunities to share good news about staff, students and school issues with the entire CHCS community.
* Better gauge and be more responsive to the communications needs and expectations of CHCS stakeholders.
* Engage internal and external stakeholders to take positive action on behalf of CHCS and its students.

**Communication Hubs**

1. **Internal Communications**
2. **Parent Engagement**
3. **Community Relations**
4. **Media Relations**

**Target Audiences**

Internal Audiences

* Students
* Teachers
* Non-teaching staff

External Audiences

* Parents
* PTO leaders/members
* CHCS Foundation members
* News media
* Community leaders in Chatt Hills/Fulton County
* Local and state elected officials
* Local businesses, including realtors
* Business partners/vendors
* Community groups, civic organizations, churches, and senior citizens

*This Plan should be dynamic and viewed as a work in progress. It will be revised and adapted as objectives are accomplished and new communication challenges and opportunities arise.*

**Strategies**

* Continue to develop a culture of communication and make internal and external communications a *priority*.
* Produce a steady stream of targeted school information and news to foster ‘dialogue’ with parents.
* Use social media to ensure timely, efficient and effective communication.
* Maintain and build upon current working relationships with the news media.
* Develop specific plans for communicating significant issues facing the school.
* Develop a process for engaging stakeholders in decision-making.
* Build relationships with elected officials.
* Include research and evaluation as essential components of communication.

*When sharing content, tailor our strategies to the specific audiences we’re targeting.*

**Communications Action Plan for 2017-18**

**Summary**

1. **CHCS Communications Advisory members**: Includes designated governing board members (Kiki Lawrence and Dominque Love for 2017-18 school year). Engage select parents, staff and students to help implement the plan).
2. **Social media program**: Include student social media ambassadors to help expand the school’s social media presence.
3. **Email program**: Incorporate additional ways to effectively communicate with stakeholders.
4. **CHCS website:** Continue to add options, features and updates to improve functionality and effectiveness of the new website design.
5. **Blog from CHCS Executive Director:** Engage parents and the broader community.
6. **CHCS newsletter:** Expand to regularly feature students, teachers and non-teacher staff members; post newsletter on website.
7. **Parent surveys:** Distribute at least once a year to measure the school’s communications.
8. **PR/media relations**: Engage a professional to develop and post a steady stream of CHCS success stories.
9. **Community presence:** Ensure school presence at community meetings.
10. **Board communication to parents:** Implement regular communications from board chair to parents.
11. **Crisis communications plan:** Implement a broader plan to address school emergencies, cancellations, postponements, etc.

12. **Evaluation of results**: Ensure that evaluation is an ongoing part of the plan.

**1. Communications Committee**

* **Communications Advisory Team** to meet monthly to discuss planning and promoting of CHCS communications plan.

**2. Social Media Program**

* Create a **social media mission statement** that reflects the essence of the CHCS vision for engaging the entire school community (e.g., “Share content and create meaningful dialogue with parents, students, staff and the community to improve communications and support the educational goals of CHCS.”), and post the statement on the CHCS website.
* Build a **social media structure** by designating a CHCS staff member to be *in charge* of the social media program.
* Form a **social media advisory team** that includes a teacher, a student and a parent, and that meets at least monthly to discuss planning and promoting social media content.
* Craft a **social media policy** to address privacy and acceptable use guidelines. (This can be easily accomplished and adapted to CHCS by researching other schools that have a social media policy already in place).
* Establish a **social media process** that:
  + Creates content.
  + Consistently chedules content.
  + Promotes social media at every opportunity.
  + Plans for interactivity (to address user comments, both good and not good).
  + Builds a strong CHCS following.
  + Explores social media management tools.

**3. Email Program**

* Use email regularly for one-on-one personal communication with parents and the broader school community (e.g., reminders, policies, registration, newsletters, announcements).
* Ensure that most of the content sent via email exists on the CHCS website and can be linked to easily.
* Use a third-party email blasting system such as MailChimp or Constant Contact, which will provide greater email security than one that the school handles itself and will also enable important metrics to help improve communication going forward.

**4. Website**

* Gain a better understanding of the needs of all website users through surveys (consider using online survey services such as Survey Monkey or Constant Contact) and other forums (e.g., informal focus group meetings of school leaders, parents, teachers, non-teacher staff).
* Thoroughly review the current website to determine what it’s doing well and what needs to be improved/added.
* Collect valuable data on how the current website is being used through Google Analytics (free to schools and relatively easy to set up on the website), and prepare a report when the website audit is completed.
* Commit key school personnel to be responsible for keeping content updated.

**5. School Blog**

* “Executive Director’s Blog” should:
  + Deliver messaging priorities that can boost public confidence in CHCS.
  + Share thoughts, photos, anecdotes, and others’ content to help personalize our school leader.
  + Provide a forum to reinforce the CHCS mission.
  + Articulate, support and clarify CHCS policies.
  + Spark dialogue.
  + Help form ties with the media.
* Promote the blog on CHCS website homepage.
* Share the blog on our Facebook page and other social media, as well as CHCS non-digital school communications.

**6. School Newsletter**

* Expand the monthly school newsletter to include three distinct sections:

1. **Leadership**: Use this section to motivate, inspire and lead. It can include snippets of the journey CHCS has taken/is taking to achieve its mission and goals, and can also reinforce expectations regarding behavior, uniform, academic success, resilience, etc.
2. **Operations and Logistics**: This is the part that helps the school operate smoothly, and can serve as a reference point to marshal students and parents when things are happening at school. Logistics need to be easy to find, easy to read and understand, accurate, and include the name and contact details of a staff member when appropriate.
3. **Achievement:** This is an important section, since it’s how parents measure the school’s success (e.g., student awards, teacher professional development and awards, school competitions and exhibitions, volunteer programs, community engagement programs, etc.)

* Ensure the newsletter is well written, clear, concise, easy to read, and targeted to the people who actually want to read it.
* Email the newsletter to parents, and post on the website to reach a broader audience.

**7. Parent Engagement**

* Create and disseminate a survey to parents to help further engage parents and improve involvement.
* Implement a steady stream of targeted CHCS information and news to create dialogue with parents.
* Appoint designated people at the school (administrators, teachers, other staff) who want to serve as champions for school communications
* Create a designated email address to solicit requests and ideas.
* Create a specific submission form on the CHCS website.
* Routinely ask for news and story ideas through the school’s social media channels.
* Broad examples of information to share are:
  + Promotions of school happenings and news.
  + Time-critical school information (e.g., emergencies, closings, policies)
  + Ongoing procedural communications and information exchange.
  + PTO events and other important parent-related issues.
  + Leadership and education improvement ideas (e.g., parent resources).
  + School funding and community outreach.
  + Stories and images of CHCS successes and impact on the community (cool human interest content, photos, videos).

**8. Media Relations**

* Engage a PR/media relations professional to:
  + Develop and place a steady stream of CHCS success stories externally (e.g., positive stats from GA Milestones Comparative Data).
  + Help develop strong ties with the media.
* Identify and train a CHCS staff member to engage the media and broader public, and to serve as spokespeople at public events and on various news/talk radio/televised broadcasts that feature education.
* Prepare talking points for our media representatives, and update them at least quarterly.
* Distribute fact sheets to the media of current CHCS goals and initiatives.
* Maintain professional media information and collateral (that is useful, up-to-date, accurate and credible).

**9. Community Engagement**

* Create a schedule for ensuring board presence at community meetings:
  + FCS monthly community meetings; see link for meeting schedules: [http://www.fultonschools.org/en/calendars/Pages/Community\_Meetings.aspx](http://www.fultonschools.org/en/calendars/Pages/Community_Meetings.aspx" \t "_blank)
  + Chattahoochee Hills City Council meetings
* Create/maintain a list of community stakeholders to which we share select information via email and social media.

**10. Board Communications**

* Add a “how this will be communicated” section to Board agendas.
* Send monthly communications from the governing board chair to parents.
* Establish a Board Communications Code of Conduct:
  + Immediately forward all communications sent to the Board from parents, teachers, and other staff members to Asher.
  + ED responds directly to these communications within 24 hours.
  + If ED does not respond within the designated time frame, he informs the Board of the reason for delay.

**11. Crisis Management**

* Prepare a step-by-step **Crisis Communications Plan** that includes:
  + List the appropriate people to handle the situation. An administrator (the executive director or an assistant/designee) should take charge of the situation, implementing the crisis plan.
  + Understand the circumstances; define the problems.
  + Consider the options; act decisively to ensure the health and safety of students and staff and protection of property.
  + Communicate with staff; keep the news media informed.
  + Update students periodically in their classrooms. Avoid having large group meetings.
  + Inform parents via email and by letter (sent home with students at the end of the day) explaining what occurred and how it has been handled.
  + Keep the community informed. To allay fears and demonstrate competence in handling the situation, get accurate information out via social media and through the news media.
* For **notifications and alerts** (time-critical messages that are not crises), communicate with parents through a notification system that provides text, voice and email.
  + Parents typically have the ability to customize their preference and receive the preferred method of communication.
  + Ensure that notifications are not over-used (which can become annoying to parents, and possibly illegal).

**12. Evaluation**

* Use Google Analytics (free to schools) to collect data on how people are accessing the website.
* Measure email activity through a third-party email service to:
  + Track how many people open school emails.
  + Monitor ‘bounce’ trends.
  + See what users clicked (to help increase engagement).