

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES OCTOBER 3, 2014

Attendance: Laura Schulkind, Deirdre Burns, Deirdre d'Albertis, Joe Phelan, Stephen Jensen.

Website Redesign: Members of the committee met with Ed Schindler, a consultant who has been retained to help update and streamline the District's website. Ed walked us through the various functions of the site currently under construction. The new site will be "cleaner," less crowded with text, even as the navigation section should become more intuitive and easy to use. "Ask the District" and Twitter feed icons can be prominently featured on the home page. He will look into enabling Google Translate for each page on the site, increasing ease of use for all families. Teacher portal accounts will also be improved. The Board of Education page may be reorganized to feature in one place all relevant documents, minutes, agendas for public access. Calendaring can be improved either with Google Calendar or Office 365, allowing for color-coding and coordination of all district events in one easy to use, easy to update place.

Ed has moved from the relatively limited suite of options offered by WordPress to customize the site so as more effectively to meet the needs of teachers, administrators, students, and families. He highlighted the enhanced editing capacity for those who will manage the site.

Joe observed that it will be crucial over the coming weeks for Steve and Ed to share the various options for website improvement with administrators, teachers, and staff to consider how the many users of the District site actually work with this communication tool. How, for instance, might the Guidance Office like to see its page updated and improved? What distinctive qualities would each principal like to see highlighted on the page for each building/school? We can't move forward without this valuable input.

Laura has prepared a detailed list of questions and suggestions for Steve/Ed following from her own careful review of the beta site.

Wireless Project Delays: Steve updated the committee on unforeseen difficulties both with Carousel, the vendor, and other entities (BOCES, CSI) involved in installing wireless throughout the district. RCSD's highly customized system evolved over the last 15 years. The unique configuration of the existing system has caused unexpected challenges in terms of configuring anew each port separately. The library in RHS/BMS has been particularly hard hit during this time of transition. Members of the committee agreed that it is important to communicate clear expectations for a timeline on completion both internally and with those who are currently working to overcome the various problems bedeviling the new system.

RCSD and Twitter: Superintendent Joe Phelan is now "tweeting" on behalf of the District. "Follow" him and stay tuned!

PTSO and BOE: The committee affirmed its desire to work collaboratively with PTSO in sharing news within the District. Alerting community members to the new Twitter feed will be helpful. Directing interested folks to our board minutes (for instance, the monthly report of the principals and “Good News” section of the meeting) could also be fruitful. Joe Phelan reiterated his willingness always to respond to community queries and concerns, either in person or over the phone/via e-mail.

Open Houses and Parent-Teacher Communication: The BOE has identified communication between parents and teachers as one of its four goals for 2014-15. Trustees spoke to this at Open Houses in each of the school buildings. Joe will contact representatives of the RTA to see if they would like to reconvene the informal “communication” group that met successfully with representatives of the BOE for the first time this spring. Deirdre Burns noted a suggestion which came out of that group meeting in June that each building articulate its own take on “best practices” for communicating between school and home (this could even be reflected in the website with the individualized pages for CLS, BMS, and RHS).

Save the Date: Our first Coffee with the Board event will take place on Thursday, October 23.

Agenda for our next meeting:

--Look at Johns Hopkins National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) as a possible partner for communications survey of parents and teachers.

--Relative to our communication goal for the year, this group will begin talking concretely about how to celebrate outstanding accomplishments within the district. Laura directed us to the “success summaries” of the Pittsford District website. Making time at our meetings—and finding a congenial format-- to acknowledge progress and achievement will be our aim.

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d’Albertis