

21st Century Communications Rubric

Researchers have shown time and again that highly effective principals are highly effective communicators, engaging their communities in ongoing conversations about teaching and learning. The challenge for today's principal is that while the nature of our messages haven't changed—parents still need to understand a school's vision, community leaders still need to know how to best support our schools, and students still need to find connections between what they're learning in school today and what they'll need to be successful tomorrow—yesterday's communication tools are ineffective. Consider using this rubric to evaluate the currency of your school's communication plan.

Scoring Your School's Communication Plans

LEVEL 3

Messages can be delivered and received anytime and from any place using an Internet-connected device. Messages regularly include interactive content—like video clips from school performances, photos from athletic events, podcast recordings of important messages, and links to external sites for continued exploration—captured and shared in real time. While customized for individual stakeholder groups and often shared in traditional ways, messages can also be accessible to broader audiences and posted in several different social media forums in an effort to reach out to digitally connected parents, students, and stakeholders. Messages are crafted and delivered instantly at the school level. The principal has complete control and flexibility over message frequency and content. Messaging patterns provide ongoing opportunities for two-way interaction between stakeholders and school staff members. The principal transparently demonstrates a willingness to listen and to respond to the community.

Overall, this communication plan shows extensive evidence that the school is listening to—and interacting with—the communities it serves. School leaders have clearly worked to establish footprints in popular social media services and are regularly initiating conversations with all important audiences. What's more, they are crafting engaging messages likely to catch the attention of today's parents, students, and stakeholders. Finally, this communication plan is defined by its versatility, allowing audiences to interact with school messages in a variety of different forums and with a variety of different devices.

LEVEL 2

Messages are shared in several different formats. Static websites, newsletters, phone messages, community newspapers, press releases, and electronic mailing lists are all used in an attempt to reach wider audiences. The school's website shows clear efforts to craft engaging messages and to capture the attention of today's audiences. Video messages are embedded, audio content is posted, and collections of links are updated and maintained. While there is no evidence of real-time communication or complete flexibility on the part of the principal to reach out to important audiences, messages are current, reflecting a genuine commitment to sharing school happenings. The principal regularly responds to interested stakeholders, but those interactions happen in one-to-one situations that the school rarely initiates.

Overall, this communication plan shows willingness on the part of the school to share interesting and timely messages with the communities it serves. Content created is engaging and likely to stand out to today's parents, students, and stakeholders. There is little evidence, however, that the school is willing to listen to or interact with audiences. Communication patterns are largely one-dimensional—staff members deliver while constituents passively receive. Little has been done to establish footprints in popular social media services.

LEVEL 1

Messages are generally delivered in limited formats—a weekly newsletter sent home with students, a Monday's Message from the principal, or an occasional article in the community newspaper. The school relies heavily on a static, text-heavy website to reach online audiences. Sharing messages is a time-consuming, multistep process that depends on the action of several different employees. Messages shared are often out of date, lending a sense of apathy to the school's communication efforts. There are no opportunities for message recipients to respond to or interact with one another. There are no opportunities for message recipients to respond to or interact with school employees.

Overall, this communication plan shows little evidence that the school is listening to—and interacting with—the communities it serves. There seem to be no efforts to reach out to constituents by using popular social media services. What's more, there seem to be no efforts to provide opportunities for constituents to interact with messages that the school shares. Finally, there seem to be no efforts to craft the kinds of interactive, engaging messages that today's parents, students, and stakeholders have grown to expect.