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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D. *Lillian M. Lowery*  
**DATE:** April 22, 2014  
**SUBJECT:** Superintendent's Update – MSDE Communications Plan

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**PURPOSE:**

At the last State Board meeting in March, Board members had questions and comments regarding the need for better communication with all stakeholders. I informed the Board that my chief of staff has created a communications plan that is aligned with MSDE's strategic plan to enhance its implementation and create mutually beneficial two-way dialog with our constituents.

**BACKGROUND:**

The MSDE Communications Plan was developed by the chief of staff in collaboration with MSDE's communications director and refined with input from the Leadership Team, Executive Staff and members of the Communications Office. Internal and external surveying will be used to further refine and improve the effectiveness of this plan.

To frame our thinking, I would offer the following information:

- Something timeless, "The Strategic Communication Imperative," from the MIT Sloan Management Review, 2005; and
- The Maryland Social Media Plan, <http://blogs.maryland.gov/socialmedia/index.php/handbook/>

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

By improving communication with employees and the public, we can better serve all Marylanders. By focusing on three key areas – internal communications, the MSDE brand and external communications – we can increase transparency and understanding of changes and new initiatives, while increasing opportunities to improve teaching and learning.

**ACTION:**

No action required, for discussion only.

LML/jlw  
Attachments



# MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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**April 22, 2014**

*Office of the Superintendent  
Communications, Partnerships and Grants*

# Strategic Communications

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Support MSDE Mission Statement & Brand:  
**“Preparing World-Class Students”**

Support MSDE Goals:

**Excellence**

**Equity**

**Efficiency**

# Why is Change Needed?

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## **Rationale Statement:**

Employees and the general public often lack information, understanding and opportunities to provide feedback that is needed for MSDE to fully accomplish its goals

# Communications Plan

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## Goals for the Next Two Years (2014 and 2015)

1. **Improve Internal Communications** – Internal communications become timely and accurate, informing decision-making and reinforcing external messaging
2. **Establish Brand** – “Preparing World-Class Students” will become synonymous with MSDE in the public consciousness
3. **Educate External Audiences to Strengthen Support**  
The general public and legislators will understand, value and invest in MSDE’s key initiatives

# Communications Plan

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## Objectives – Internal Communications

- 1.1 **Learn** – Ask employees how they want to receive information to establish most efficient channels
- 1.2 **Regular Communication** – Establish information-sharing routines and common language to equip employees with information needed to contribute to organizational goals
- 1.3 **Feedback** – Each office identifies a lead person to work with communications to develop a culture of “no surprises” and monthly updates

# Communications Plan

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## Objectives -- Branding

- 2.1 **Awareness** – “Preparing World-Class Students” will be the focal point of all communications
- 2.2 **Connection** – Connect brand with stakeholders on academic and emotional levels
- 2.3 **Value** – Strengthen brand by communicating and illustrating its return on investment

# Communications Plan

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## Objectives – External Communications

- 3.1 **Media** – Use earned, owned and social media to educate and establish common language with news media and public
- 3.2 **Events** – Develop activities that attract attention for key initiatives, demonstrate value and increase support
- 3.3 **Outreach** – Increase direct contacts with existing and new audiences



# SWOT Analysis

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## Strengths

- ❑ Institutional memory
- ❑ Strong brand
- ❑ History of results (No. 1)
- ❑ Effective spokespersons
- ❑ Motivated, experience leadership team
- ❑ Support of key local, state and federal leaders
- ❑ Credible partners (Maryland PTA, higher education, STEM, Environmental, after-school, etc.)

# SWOT Analysis

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## Weaknesses

- ❑ Limited staff capacity
- ❑ Flexibility/adaptation
- ❑ Customer service & Internal communications
- ❑ Very traditional communication vehicles
- ❑ Communication with Spanish speakers (media, stakeholders, etc.)
- ❑ Limited technology, including website
- ❑ Lack of social media expertise
- ❑ Data analytics, Info graphics, other tools
- ❑ Financial resources (fundors)

# SWOT Analysis

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## Opportunities

- ❑ Reform agenda -- Higher standards, better assessments, TPE, strong partners.
- ❑ Validators (Teachers of Year, State BOE members, business partners, higher ed partners, etc.)
- ❑ Employees
- ❑ Spanish-speaking media and stakeholders
- ❑ Video
- ❑ Social media
- ❑ RTTT funding & RTTT-supported staff members

# SWOT Analysis

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## Threats

- We have to tell the truth (good news & bad news)
- Some organizations overshadow our messages in traditional media. (Anti-Common Core, anti-testing, etc.)
- Some organizations more aggressively target influential legislators to block or derail initiatives
- Anti-reform media (columnists, bloggers, etc.)
- We are often blind to trends with limited expertise to engage on social media

# Key Actions

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## YEAR ONE: Present – June 2014

### **Internal**

- Partner with HR to survey employees to inform and receive feedback
- Analyze survey findings, develop and implement internal communications plan
- Establish internal communications calendar, including quarterly staff briefings
- Leverage new Google tools

# Key Actions

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YEAR ONE: Present – June 2014

## **Branding**

- Develop plan to increase brand recognition aligned with mission of “Preparing World-Class Students”
- Consistently connect programs, initiatives and mission of “Preparing World Class Students”
- Reinforce messaging with employees, partners and legislators
- Utilize tools and tactics already available

# Key Actions

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## YEAR ONE: Present – June 2014

### **External**

- Track and differentiate high impact/low impact media contacts, and proactive/reactive responses
- Create MSDE-wide communications calendar to shift from reactive to proactively position on key messages
- Provide media training for key staff
- Increase direct, unfiltered communication channels with stakeholders
- Expand communication with Spanish-speakers

# Measures of Success

Metrics	Mar-June 2014 (baseline)	July-Dec 2014	Jan-June 2015	July-Dec 2015
<b>Internal</b>				
Employee survey	0	1	0	1
Staff briefings	2	2	2	2
Monthly updates To Communications	6	6	6	6
Monthly Talking Points to All-MSDE	6	6	6	6
<b>Branding</b>				
Connections	6	6	6	6
<b>External</b>				
Media contacts	Establish baseline	---	---	---
Proactive/ Reactive	Establish baseline			
Letters & Op-eds	3	3	3	3
Social Media & Video Projects	6	6	6	6
Spanish-speaking media contacts	Establish baseline	---	---	---