

November 4, 2010

Melrose Public Schools Communications Plan, 2010-2011

The Melrose Public Schools are committed to fostering effective communication with all segments of the Melrose community, including families, students, civic and community organizations, and the general public. This document summarizes steps the district and School Committee will work together to advance, starting this school year, to augment communication with our community and enhance community knowledge about important issues facing the Melrose Public Schools.

The items in this plan are divided into short-term, medium-term, and ongoing actions.

- Short-term actions include actions that have been identified as high-priority by the School Committee and Superintendent, as well as those that can be implemented relatively quickly. It is expected that items in this category will be pursued and/or completed by the end of the 2010-11 school year.
- Medium-term actions include those that will require additional discussion and planning. Work on these items can begin during the 2010-11 school year, but may not be completed by the end of the current school year.
- Ongoing actions include items that can be advanced immediately, but will become an ongoing part of the district's regular communications efforts.

1. Improve the Melrose Public Schools website, as well as individual school websites.

Responsible parties: School Committee, Superintendent and Principals

Short-Term Actions:

- Establish a website working group comprised of district administrators, School Committee members, teachers, parents, and community members to solicit input about improvements to the district's website and individual school websites.
- Establish a routine process for updating content and archiving old material on the district's website and individual school websites.
- Establish a routine process for keeping the online calendar of events for the district and individual schools updated and accurate.
- Create a search function for the district and individual school websites.
- Organize website content so information – especially important and time-sensitive information – can be found more easily.
- Create and maintain website content that responds to families' and community members' frequently-asked questions, such as:
 - A "Frequently Asked Questions" section on the district website.
 - Standard information regarding the special education process.
 - District and school performance data (MCAS, AYP, SAT/AP results, college acceptances).
 - District and school improvement plans.
 - Links to information regarding the college application process (US DOE's College Navigator website, MEFA, etc.)

Medium-Term Actions:

- Explore a process for evaluating website usage to help ensure that the district and school websites are effective resources.
- Explore the creation of a monitored blog housed within the district’s website.
- Explore the creation of a comment function on the district’s website.
- Identify a Webmaster for the district.
- Create a training process for volunteers who participate in website-related activities.

Ongoing Actions:

- Ensure the regular participation of the City’s IT director in website maintenance/enhancement efforts.

2. Encourage interactions between the School Committee, parents, and community members on a regular basis, and create additional opportunities for such interactions.

Responsible parties: Superintendent, Principals and School Committee

Short-Term Actions:

- Hold a future School Committee meeting at a school to test the idea on a trial basis.
- Organize periodic opportunities for parents to interact with School Committee members (on a voluntary basis) at their local schools.

Medium-Term Actions:

- Organize “Superintendent Chats” with parents/community members on a quarterly basis.
- Create a calendar of citywide events that are not school oriented, and encourage School Committee presence at such events in order to enhance interactions with non-school-based community members.
- Allow School Committee members who do not have children in particular schools to become familiar with those schools by following a mock student schedule.

Ongoing Actions:

- Encourage School Committee presence at all major district/school events.

3. Improve external media coverage (*Free Press, Weekly News, Melrose Patch, Boston.com*) of the Melrose Public Schools.

Responsible parties: Superintendent and School Committee

Short-Term Actions:

- Establish a routine process, at both the district and school levels, for notifying external media outlets of school district news, school and student accomplishments, and school-related meetings.
- Establish a regular schedule for producing press releases on important school-related issues (e.g., school registration, start of school, release of student achievement results, MCAS/PSAT/SAT administration, graduation, etc.)

- Establish routine procedures for responding to public inquiries/comments so everyone knows their role and responsibility in the process.

Ongoing Actions:

- Prepare op-eds highlighting important issues and district/school accomplishments for submission to local media outlets on a regular basis.

4. Create new events for families that focus on important student transitions.

Responsible parties: Superintendent and Principals

Medium-Term Actions:

- Evaluate current events that focus on supporting effective student transitions in critical grades (pre-Kindergarten, Grade 5, Grade 8) and explore additional events, if necessary.

5. Increase communication between district- and school-based groups to improve alignment of mutual priorities in support of students.

Responsible parties: Superintendent and School Committee

Medium-Term Actions:

- Explore periodic meetings between the School Committee and the Citywide PTO, individual PTOs, and School Councils to discuss their projects, activities, and areas of mutual interest.

6. Use existing district media outlets more effectively and establish new communication efforts.

Responsible parties: Superintendent and School Committee

Short-Term Actions:

- Establish a periodic School Committee e-Newsletter.

Medium-Term Actions:

- Explore ideas for enhancing programming on METV, such as the creation of a regularly-scheduled show about the Melrose Public Schools.

7. Increase external advocacy efforts.

Responsible parties: Superintendent and School Committee

Short-Term Actions:

- Schedule biannual meetings between School Committee members and local/state elected officials in order to share information.
- Hold annual meetings with school committees in neighboring districts.

Medium-Term Actions:

- Create an online or physical School Committee library with publications that will inform members on topics of interest.
- Explore additional resources that may be available to assist School Committee members in being informed about relevant external issues (e.g., state and federal policy developments, budget debates, etc.)

Ongoing Actions:

- Encourage School Committee/Superintendent participation in advocacy efforts organized by MASC and other membership organizations (e.g., MASC Day on the Hill, etc.)

###