Foundations for Successful Internal Communication

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Like any other organization, school districts require effective internal communications to build community and achieve strategic goals. With different schools, too many contributors, and ineffective internal solutions, it can be exceptionally difficult for school districts to engage their staff. At Rally, we saw these challenges as an opportunity to create a unified communications platform that would revolutionize internal communications for school districts. Here are five principles we built into our system to make it as impactful as possible - and how you could use the same principles to improve your internal communications system.

The [Gallagher State of the Sector 2022/23 Report](#) surveyed over 2,000 organizations from around the globe. The results showed some common challenges throughout these different organizations, most notably:

- "Lack of time and capacity in my team (34%)
- Disengaged employees (30%)
- Internal technology and challenges not fit for purpose (22%)
- Lack of analytics or measurement (22%)" (p. 14).

Sound familiar? As the Gallagher Report shows, these issues are common throughout different industries, and we were left wondering why - and what we could do to continue to support our partners in education.

When we asked our partners about their internal communications, we got a little more insight: districts were overwhelmed with documents, too many different contributors and channels, and a lack of personalization, all of which resulted in a incongruent internal communication system with little cohesion. Different departments had their unique systems, and there was no way to know if internal messages were being received. Staff were overwhelmed, checking too many different places for information, shifting through different versions of the same documents, and

even filtering through communications irrelevant to their positions. Rather than having a single solution, school districts were using different smaller tools to try to achieve the same effect - which means that staff have more to keep track of. It's easy to see how such a disorganized system would be difficult for staff to engage with.

We were astounded to find such a gap in the market - and delighted. It was another chance for

us to build the perfect solution from the ground up. Afterall, since Covid-19 and the Great Resignation, staff expect more from their employers. As The Gallagher report states, "The need to shape culture and create a sense of belonging has become much more prevalent" (p. 6). So, we designed and developed StaffConnect, our unified intranet solution, to empower internal communications, just for school districts. Knowing the challenges our partners faced, we prioritized five core concepts for successful internal communications: personal, central, simple, secure, and measurable.

PERSONAL

One of the biggest challenges for school districts, and on the Gallagher report, was staff engagement. If communications and resources aren't relevant to a staff member's role, they're not going to engage with it. Too often, internal communications systems don't offer a personal experience to users. Sure, you can typically sort content based on department, but that might not stop IT reports from showing up in a search for computer curriculum resources. If there's too much information that's irrelevant to a staff member, they'll become frustrated. More than that, they might not feel seen by the organization and feel that their contributions are being overlooked.

Keep your internal communications personal. If your district uses a Google or Microsoft directory, you can use a tool to leverage the staff information within the directory. Staff are sorted into job categories, and a tool such as StaffConnect, can harness that information to ensure that staff only see information related to those established job categories. This segmentation is known as 'identity-based content delivery' and ensures that teaching staff have access to teaching resources while administrative professionals do not. Use identity-based

content delivery to ensure that staff only see the resources and pages relevant to their role. It'll simplify their experience and show that your organization understands and values their work. Can staff add their own content and resources? If staff can add their own bookmarks and personalize the system, and they'll be more likely to use it.

CENTRAL

There's nothing more frustrating than sorting through emails or trying to find a link or realizing you forgot to bookmark a page and trying to remember how to navigate through a difficult website. If resources and documents are scattered through different websites, emails, and folders, it's difficult for staff to find what they're looking for, let alone if they need to create a new account and remember yet another username and password. These issues are cumbersome and impact staff's user experience, meaning they won't use the system.

Create one place to share everything with staff: organizational news, documents, calendars, resources, external and internal links, and even entire pages of content. By placing content and resources in one place, it's easier for staff to find important information, creating a better user experience and a place where staff will want to return. They're not going to get overwhelmed trying to navigate through dozens of different folders or duplicate document versions. Organize resources within the central location and ensure it's easy to navigate and that there's a good search feature.

SIMPLE

One of the common themes we heard from school districts was that their systems were out of control: too many contributors, too much variety between departments, and too much content to sort through. Review what resources are in your system and see if they can be better organized or consolidated for better ease of use. A convoluted system puts the burden on the user to sort through information. And no one likes a user-unfriendly system. Creating a personal, centralized internal communications system will remove a lot of redundant information

and simplify the process for your staff, making it easier for them to engage with your internal communications effort.

But what about the maintenance and use of the system itself? It should be easy for administrators to add or update content and share it with the right people. If the system is too technical, it won't be updated or used regularly. How will you engage staff then? Consider how the infrastructure will facilitate ease of use, from adding calendar events, updating links, or replacing documents. Can you share information with everyone at once? Do you have to repost content to different user groups? Can it integrate with your public facing websites to share information to internal and external audiences at the same time?

SECURE

Who can access your internal system? Do staff resources sometimes wind up on your public facing website, just because it's the only central place to keep them? Staff content should be kept secure, ideally with multi-factor authentication. If you can tie your personalization to data groups within Microsoft or Google, even better. These extra layers ensure that sensitive information is kept with the right people. Not all staff content needs to be or should be accessible to all staff.

MEASURABLE

How do you know if you're actually reaching people? What metrics and analytics can you gather from your system? See if you can track page visits, link clicks, or downloads to see what resources staff are using. Metrics will help inform your internal communications strategy and improve engagement. Without any data, it's hard to know what's resonating with your internal audiences.

As the Gallagher report reminds us, "the scope of internal communication continues to expand into all areas of organization wellbeing, culture, and employee experience" (p. 3). Internal communication is vital for a school district to create organizational trust and achieve strategic

goals. And yet, the impersonal, clunky internal communications often used for internal communications make it difficult to engage staff.

If you're looking to improve your internal communications this school year, start by auditing your current system. See how easy it is to use, both for staff and administrators. Does it have the features and functionality needed to personally engage your staff? Is it easy to use and secure? Are there metrics you can use to improve your strategy? Consider what barriers exist for users within the system and how you can improve or change the infrastructure to further advance internal communications.