

Lake Washington School District: School/Home Communications Task Force Meeting #3 Summary



Lake Washington School District: School/Home Communications Task Force Meeting #2

Thursday, February 18, 2016

4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

L.E. Scarr Resource Center, Redmond, WA

Task Force Members in Attendance

Kremiere Boone, High School Parent
Dale Cote, Director of School Support, Juanita L.C.
Lucy Davies, Elementary Principal
Monica Garcia, Elementary Principal
Arianna Haindfield, High School Teacher
J-Marie Johnson-Kola, Elementary Parent
Melody Kieffer, High School Office Staff
JD Klein, Middle School Parent

Jennifer O'Neal, Elementary Teacher
Stephanie Parry, Elementary Parent
Kelly Pease, Director of Intervention Programs
Janitzia Pizarro, Middle School Office Staff
Victor Scarpelli, Middle School Principal
Julie Tribolet, LWPTSA Council Representative
Carmen Urrutia, LWSD Data Services Manager

Members absent

- **Ramu Iyer**, Middle School Parent
- **Barbara Martin**, High School Parent
- **Gale Paul**, Middle School Teacher
- **Lorraine VanKomen**, Elementary Office Staff

Meeting Purpose and Overview

The Lake Washington School District School/Home Communications Task Force held their second meeting at the L.E. Scarr Resource Center in Redmond on Thursday, December 10. Topics on the meeting agenda included:

- Introductions
- Review of December meeting discussions
- Review and discussion of NSPRA Audit materials
- Review and discussion of Hanover Research
- School survey data

Meeting Summary

Introductions

Kathryn Reith, the LWSD director of communications and the chair of the School/Home Communications Task Force led the group through introductions. She then outlined the agenda: review of January meeting discussions; and review and analysis of current school newsletters. She planned the bulk of time to be spent reviewing the newsletters.

Review of January meeting discussions

Kathryn started the agenda by reviewing the January meeting notes. She reminded the task force of their purpose and the ground rules for their discussions. She asked each member of the task force to review the meeting notes and ensure their accuracy. These notes will be added to the School/Home Communications Task Force section of the district website. There is also an option on that website for community members to follow the work of the group. Individuals can sign up for email updates each time that the website is updated.

Review and analysis of current school newsletters

Kathryn asked for each school principal to provide the School/Home Communications Task Force with copies of their school or PTSA newsletters for the Task Force to review. These newsletter samples were compiled and sent out to the Task Force for review prior to the meeting.

During the meeting, Kathryn divided the group into five smaller sub-groups to review sections of the newsletters. Based on the number of newsletters received, there were three elementary newsletter groups, one middle school newsletter group and one high school newsletter group. Each group was asked to look through their assigned set of newsletters and to find ideas, patterns or best practices. Kathryn made it clear that it was not about critiquing the newsletters, but about finding what works. She gave each group two forms.

Form 1 asked the group to check the newsletters and determine the following:

- 1) School
- 2) PTSA/School info
- 3) Frequency
- 4) Does it contain:
 - a. Information to help students learn
 - b. Important information (phone numbers, etc.)
 - c. Upcoming school events (report cards, testing, etc.)
 - d. Calendar
 - e. Personalization/human touch
 - f. District information
 - g. Other

Form 2 asked the group to check the PTSA newsletters for the following:

- 1) School name
- 2) Does it contain the following information:
 - a. Upcoming events
 - b. After school activities
 - c. Fundraising
 - d. PTSA Governance
 - e. Advocacy
 - f. Other

The groups spent time reviewing their assigned newsletters and then the group came back to share what they saw.

Here is a summary of the comments:

- One group added a column, called “procedural data.” This covered items like parking lot access, attendance policies, etc.
- The group needs to make recommendations about how to visually display the information and how the information is categorized.
 - Newsletters that had boxes of information made it seem more accessible.
- Short blurbs of information are better than long articles for readability.
- Liked having “Quick Links” or table of contents at the start of the newsletter.
 - Helps you navigate through the newsletter
- If there are specific pieces of important information (like the school’s phone number), they should be referenced on each page.
- From a web/marketing standpoint, we need to make sure that there are multiple ways to get to and access this information – not just in a printed newsletter.
- PTSA newsletters seem to be highly PTSA-focused.
 - No school information/stories
 - Phone numbers not in PTSA newsletters
- Phone numbers were missing from a lot of newsletters.
- Would be good to include community resource information:
 - Immunizations – where to get them free or low cost
 - ELL – parent support groups for families from other countries
 - Hopelink, other service organizations.
 - Limited space available for community information.
- Assist in accessibility of newsletter:
 - No internet access – how to get the newsletter?
 - Ability to translate
- Need to look at mobile-friendly formats.
 - Often families have a smart phone but no computer/internet access at home.
- One newsletter was “community-based” – photos and stories only, not information from the school.
- At high school level – so much information to get out.
 - Hard to see categories of information.
- We need to think about what works best for each community?
- We need more information at the high school level. Only a few schools sent in newsletters for review.
- Need more information on the effectiveness of current practices.
 - Is the current newsletter being read?
 - Open rates or other data?
- Information that is specific to each grade level.
 - Yearly cycles for the different grades.
 - Organizing in a way to get the data across to parents.

Kathryn and Shannon will review all of the feedback and come back with recommendations at the next meeting.

Discussion about Task Force Recommendation: Should we recommend separate newsletters for schools and PTAs or combined school/PTA newsletters?

Kathryn posted this question to the Task Force: Should we recommend separate newsletters for schools and PTAs or combined school/PTA newsletters? She made it clear before the discussion began that the Task Force was not ready to vote on this decision, but that she wanted to open it for discussion as a group. Here is the feedback we heard:

Arguments for separate school/PTA newsletters:

- Parents say that they don't get enough school information, schools should provide more.
- Very little school information on the PTA newsletter.
- If it were a joint newsletter, then schools would need to have tricky conversations with PTA about how to make sure the newsletter meets district expectations.
- Having separate newsletters makes it a lot easier for the schools.
- Clear navigation: Where to get the information.
- Having two newsletters will likely make them shorter, providing "just enough" information for families, with links to other resources for more information.
- These newsletters need to be for the benefit of the families.

Should it be a school-level determination?

- May be more necessary at the elementary level to have separate newsletters.

If the recommendation is that they are separate – there needs to be a rationale given to principals.

- Need to provide:
 - Why is it important to have separate newsletters?
 - How do we separate out the newsletters?
 - Clear definitions of what types of information go into each newsletter.
 - Tools to make it easier – templates from the communications department.
 - Basic articles from communications department around items that happen at the same time each year (i.e., snow day procedures).

We also need to provide opportunities for principals to explore/learn how to engage their communities.

- Best practices regarding text messaging. How to get messages out to families quickly.
- Read rates for newsletters – provide tools that will give analytics to the schools.
- Recommend mid-year surveying – is the content working/not working.
- Frequency – how often should schools/PTAs send newsletters?
 - Is this a level decision (i.e., elementary more frequent than high schools?)
- Length – how long should the newsletters be?
- Read rates – If they are low, what triggers change?
- Consistency is important – why the group likes the template idea.

Group is leaning towards separate newsletters, but we're not ready to vote. More information is needed around:

- Best practices data around why separate newsletters?
- What we like about newsletters – content types
- If you don't use the templates, should we have a list of items that principals need to consider for their newsletters?
- Each newsletter does not need to have all of the sections (i.e., if there is no fundraiser happening, you don't have to include that section).

Kathryn and Shannon will review this feedback as well and will have some recommendations for the next meeting on March 10, 2016.