



**Canajoharie Central School District**  
**2017-18**  
**Communications Plan**

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## **Overview**

Rural school districts in New York state, such as the Canajoharie Central School District, continue to face challenges. However, Canajoharie successfully continues to prepare students for college, careers and the competitive global environment.

The district will continue to prepare students to be thinkers, learners, and good citizens in the 2017-18 school year.

The district will continue to be accountable to its community through a commitment to excellence and transparency. The district will communicate about its successes, challenges and choices it faces.

## **The District**

The Canajoharie Central School District covers 100 square miles and serves approximately 950 students in eight townships in Montgomery and Schoharie counties.

The district's facilities include East Hill Elementary School (Pre-K-5), Canajoharie Middle School (grades 6-8) and Canajoharie High School (grades 9-12).

### **The Communications Office**

The Canajoharie Central School District is served by the Capital Region BOCES Communications Service.

Ben Meyers became the district's new Communications Specialist in mid-June 2017. He brings with him years of public communications experience in many forms of media. He is supported by a team working in districts around the region and state, graphic artists, web specialists, print management specialists and communications program managers.

There is regular collaboration with those colleagues to accomplish regional and/or statewide communications initiatives. The shared-services provides districts with a depth and breadth of communications expertise that no single district or communications professional can replicate alone.

An effective school district communications program builds the district's credibility and helps develop and maintain strong, mutually beneficial relationships between the district and its stakeholders.

The following communications plan is intended to support these outcomes and will guide the work that is performed by the communications specialist assigned to the Canajoharie.

This communication plan is flexible; it can and will change — in consultation with the superintendent of schools — as needs and circumstances evolve throughout the academic year. Given the time constraints of the district's communications contract, it may not be possible to engage in all of the strategies and/or tactics outlined.

Accordingly, it is imperative that time and resources be continually prioritized and focused on the most critical and effective communication efforts.

### **Communications Goals**

Through its communications, the district will highlight innovative learning and student/staff achievement so that the community will understand that the district is preparing well-rounded students for a future in the world.

The district will also show it is practicing sound financial stewardship and build awareness and informed consent for the district's annual budget proposal.

Through social media and other digital platforms, the district will market itself to potential future residents moving into the Mohawk Valley.

## **Situational Analysis/Research**

According to a 2015 Capital Region BOCES Communications audit, district stakeholders rely on district communication vehicles, such as the website and social media channels, for news and information about the district.

"The district should continue to capitalize on the growing strength of its website and social media initiatives to develop the website as the public's first and best source of information for news about the district," the audit stated.

The audit also found that printed material mailed to district homes was rated very favorably.

### **Major District Events**

See included school calendar

### **Emergency Communications, School Closing Protocols (Inclement weather)**

See included district-specific "Project SAVE" school safety plan and emergency communications plan.

In the event of an emergency, the Superintendent will notify the needed parties via text message and then start a group text message with those parties so everyone can stay in close contact until meetings can be arranged.

### **Recent School History/Current Communication Challenges**

In January, 2017, a relative of an elementary student who is a Level 2 sex offender was handing out "I love you" notes written on napkins to students during breakfast at the school. Even though no laws were broken, nor any student safety compromised, the events concerned many parents of students in the East Hill elementary school.

Changes in safety procedures were made, personnel were changed, and meetings were held right away to assuage the fears of those parents. However it is still important to routinely show that the school is a safe place for students. (<http://www.twcnews.com/nys/capital-region/news/2017/01/30/canajoharie-school-leaders-meet-with-concerned-parents.html>)

As one parent said: "I think that once I actually see it happening and I see it stick and I see that it's working, I'll think I'll be a little bit more at ease."

Integrating the new safety protocols into social media and written messaging at the start of the school year is a good idea.

In the wider picture, much of the population of Canajoharie and the surrounding areas is made up of low-income families. This makes all news in concern to taxes and budgeting have to be carefully considered. The \$21,885,850 budget for the 2017-18 school year was approved by a vote of 278-172.

Starting with the 2017-18 school year all students in the Canajoharie school district will receive free breakfast and lunch regardless of family income. Getting this news to the public is a challenge along with making sure that accurate records are maintained in concert with both the guidance and food service offices.

In terms of administrative leadership, the district's superintendent and elementary school principal have multiple years of experience. The high school principal and head of special education are both entering their second year. The middle school principal is starting his first year this fall.

The district launched a new mobile app in January 2017 which has the capability to send out push notifications to its users. A new, mobile-friendly website is still needed and should be a top priority for the 2017-18 school year.

## **Demographics of Student/Local Population**

During the last two decades, student enrollment in Canajoharie has declined in by approximately 20 percent. (1999: 1,200, 2016: 975 students). A majority of community residents have no children, which presents a communications challenge for the district.

Beyond the district there are significant factors that affect the families, students, faculty, and staff of the Canajoharie school district.

Census data about Canajoharie (from censusreporter.org):

- 91% white
- median age 41.4
- 19% 30-49 (many parents younger, residents are grandparents, or residents do not have children in the district)
- \$21,747 per capita income
- \$45,455 median household income
- 20.9% people below poverty line (about 30% of children)
- 23.6 minute travel time to work
- 85.2% high school graduates
- 17.6% bachelor's degree or higher

Census data about Montgomery County (from censusreporter.org):

- 41 median age - pretty even age splits (NYS avg. 38.1, US avg. 37.6)
- 84% white
- 12% hispanic
- \$23,554 per capita income (NYS avg. \$33,236, US avg. \$28,930)
- \$43,764 median household income (NYS avg. \$59,269, US avg. \$53,889)
- 20.6% Poverty - about 32% of children (NYS avg. 15.7%, US avg. 15.5%)
- 24 minute travel time to work
- 56% of households with married couple
- \$101,600 median value of owner-occupied housing (NYS avg. \$283,400, US avg. \$178,600)
- 84.4% high school graduates (NYS avg. 85.6%, US avg. 86.7%)
- 16.2% bachelor's degree or higher (NYS avg. 34.2%, US avg. 29.8%)
- 8.9% Veterans (NYS avg. 5.4%, US avg. 8.3%)

Census data about Schoharie County (from censusreporter.org):

- 43.3 median age (NYS avg. 38.1, US avg. 37.6)
- 10% aged 30-39 (either younger or older parents)
- 94% white

- \$25,498 per capita income
- \$51,195 median household income
- 12.9% Poverty - 18% of children
- 29.7 minute drive to work
- 61 of households with married couples
- \$147,000 median value of owner-occupied housing
- 88.2% high school graduates
- 19.6% bachelor's degree or higher
- 10.7% Veterans

### **Local News/Economic Development**

In an effort to save finances, many Montgomery County services are being combined including police. (<https://www.leaderherald.com/news/local-news/2017/07/county-releases-more-shared-services-details/>)

In December 2016, the Mohawk Valley was awarded \$80 million through the state's Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) initiative. Through the first six rounds of the initiative, the Mohawk Valley council has used \$444.1 million for 462 projects in the area. (from [http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2017/04/800\\_million\\_in\\_economic\\_development\\_aid\\_up\\_for\\_grabs\\_in\\_new\\_york.html](http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2017/04/800_million_in_economic_development_aid_up_for_grabs_in_new_york.html))

Delays and scandal have held up the new multi-billion dollar economic development project in suburban Utica called, "Nano Utica." The primary tenant of the property AMS AG pulled out of the project in December. State officials are still pursuing new companies to use the site for hi-tech manufacturing. (<http://www.uticaod.com/news/20161216/ams-backs-out-of-nano-project-what-now>)

State and local officials are also working on the 26-acre Exit 29 site (the former Beech-Nut Nutrition Corp.) for redevelopment. Demolition on the site began in January 2017 while issues surrounding asbestos clean up and taxes still remain unresolved. (<http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-sample/article/Feds-put-Beech-Nut-on-the-hook-for-Canajoharie-11085215.php>)

Montgomery County officials recently voted to foreclose on the site. The site is in the heart of Canajoharie and can be redeveloped if the process continues to move forward. (<http://wnyt.com/news/beechnut-plant-foreclosure-canajoharie-montgomery-county/4539449/>)

## Current Communications Streams

### Hard Copy

The district currently sends out four printed products during the academic year: the district calendar and the budget newsletter.

The district calendar is sent at the beginning of every academic year and highlights static events set before the school year begins. The calendar also includes important annual information for parents (attendance, school closing, immunizations, how to report absences, etc.) along with a list of all Canajoharie academic staff. Many families in the Canajoharie community use the calendar as an organizational tool at home.

The district sends one hard copy newsletter in fall (October) and one newsletter in spring (TBD). This newsletter is geared toward members of the community that may not have a vested interest in the district that would drive them to the district's website. This is a direct-connection-with-the-community piece.

The budget newsletter highlights the current proposed budget and serves as an informative piece for the public to understand how school tax payments are used by the district to educate students.

### Website

<http://www.canajoharieschools.org/>

The district's website had just under 450,000 page views from just under 85,000 unique users from the end of June 2016-June 2017.

On average:

- users stayed on the site for about two minutes
- users looked at two pages
- Roughly two-thirds of visitors were returning ones
- Just over half of those sessions came through direct URL input
- About half of the traffic was mobile generated

Top five pages:

- Elementary homepage
- Middle School homepage



- High School homepage
- Athletics
- district homepage

The current website is not mobile-friendly lacks accessibility functions.

The web team at Capital Region BOCES is currently working on a website redesign plan for a migration of the district's website from the current one contained with the Microsoft Expression content management systems to one based on a Wordpress platform.

The ideal content for the website is often long-term and static information that doesn't change often:

- District Mission and Vision Statement
- Important, often used phone numbers and email addresses
- Bell Schedules
- Breakfast and Lunch Menus
- Directions to School
- Athletic Schedules
- Important and often used forms
- Board of Education Meeting Schedule, Notes/Videos
- District Budget Information
- District Emergency Plans
- Student Code of Conduct
- Bus Routes
- Staff Email, Resources
- Attendance Policy
- Immunizations, Health Services
- News Section (lone dynamic section of website)
  - Event announcements
  - Embedded video streams of selected district events (Concerts, Athletics, etc.)
  - Stories about academic highlights in the classroom (Students of the month, guest speakers, new approaches to teaching, etc.)
  - Longer feature stories about people, successes in the school

The web will also be for announcements such as:

- Student-related incidents
- School closings
- Safety messages
- Budget updates

## Mobile App

<https://builder.customschoolapps.net/builder/content?nid=863>

The district launched its own digital application in the 2016-17 school year.

Since the app's launch there over 500 downloads and active users. Overall, there were 7,824 sessions opened in the app and 30,481 pageviews from January thru June. About two-thirds of that traffic was through iPhones.

The app has a push notification capability which informs users of important content through a notification on their smartphones.

The app is a combination of long-term information similar to the website along with short-term dynamic information (through push notifications).

Most of the current app traffic goes to:

- Push notifications
- Menus
- Calendar
- athletics

Ideal push notification content for the mobile app includes:

- Calls to action for large public events that the district hosts (Budget Vote, Back to School Night, Prom, Homecoming, etc.)
- Reminders (Menus, various district drills, test schedules, etc.)
- School Closings
- Emergency Notifications

Ideal static content for the mobile app includes:

- Important, often used phone numbers and email addresses
- Bell Schedules
- Breakfast and Lunch Menus
- Directions to School
- Athletic Schedules
- Bus Routes
- Staff Email, Resources
- News Section (updated regularly)

## **Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/canajohariecsd>

The district's Facebook page had 1,340 likes through June 2017 with 1,327 of those following the page.

The majority of users on that platform are female (72%) that are 25-34 years old (34%) and the page sees its most activity between 6-9 p.m.

Facebook acts as the conduit to spread the positive school news and successes of the district to the public.

## **Instagram**

<https://www.instagram.com/canjoschools>

With the current resources that the district has available Instagram has become the ideal medium to connect with students directly. The account currently has 88 followers.

Instagram also allows for the district to have students take over the account and represent the district.

For student take overs of the Instagram account will be done through the app "Buffer" so they are vetted by the Public Information Specialist before going live.

The Canajoharie Middle School is also on Instagram (@canjo.middle) and Canajoharie Aquatics is too (@canjo\_aquatics).

## **Twitter**

Superintendent - <https://twitter.com/dgcanjoschools>

High School Principal - <https://twitter.com/CanjoHSPrin>

Athletics - <https://twitter.com/CanjoAthletics>

Middle School - <https://twitter.com/CanjoMS>

With its limited size (140 characters) and its constant updating Twitter is a very dynamic medium. It is a place for quick updates and messages.

## **Google Calendar**

<http://www.canajoharieschools.org/calendar.cfm>

The district maintains a calendar with static dates of significance that affect many. This calendar is integrated into many platforms.

## **YouTube**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyZN8aTdIpdwN2iXykFADA>

The district's YouTube page shares videos about the administration of the district (Board of Education), classroom learning and social happenings within the district buildings.

## **Plan for Upcoming School Year**

### **Opportunity Statement**

The district will engage parents and the community with existing communication efforts while implementing new communications initiatives to reach additional stakeholders and potential future residents.

### **Communications Goal**

The district will highlight that it does, "cool stuff for kids," throughout all of its communications efforts.

### **Target audiences**

#### **Internal**

Board of Education  
High School Faculty  
Middle School Faculty  
East Hill Elementary School Faculty  
Maintenance/Transportation Staff  
Students

#### **External**

Parents

Community members  
Business Owners  
Community members without children  
Alumni  
New residents

## **Objectives**

**1. The current CanajoharieSchools.org website will be redesigned and organized with a new content management system by the end of the school year.**

### **Core Message**

Canajoharie Central School District does, “cool stuff for kids,” and our website demonstrates this.

### **Strategies**

- Utilize combined expertise of Capital Region BOCES team to plan, build, and execute launch of new website.
- Consult with the district about the needed content for new site.

### **Tactics**

- BOCES team creates website outline
- Small group meetings with district administrators
- Collect variety of videos and photos for new site
- Utilize communications@canjo.org to manage faculty/staff requests
- Launch new website

**2. Through engagement with a variety of weekly communications there will be increase in social media likes/followers/downloads by 20 percent by the end of the school year.**

### **Core Message**

Canajoharie Central School District does, “cool stuff for kids,” and demonstrates this to the public through social media.

### **Strategies**

- Promote learning in the classroom and beyond
- Determine best push notifications for the application that may differ from traditional print and digital content.

- Inform public that app is free and the small amount of data required to download, run application (less than 20 MB) and content that is on it (Notifications, Calendar, Directory, Menus, News, etc.)
- Seek out interesting people/events/accomplishments in the Canajoharie school district (students, faculty and staff) and tell their stories in written and visual media.
- Utilize media beyond traditional written stories to showcase the district (photo, produced video, live/raw video, podcasts, infographics, etc.) in an interactive way

### Tactics

- Use the following hashtags on all posts: #CanjoCSD #GoCanjo #GoCougars, #CanjoGreat
- Utilizing Storify to gather all relevant tweets, facebook posts, and Instagram photos from a big event and promote that to the public.
- Have a relevant Facebook post once a day
- Launch a Superintendent’s Blog to hear directly from district administrators
- Properly brand all of Canajoharie-related social media accounts
- Have Facebook Live broadcasts of selected athletic, music, and performing arts events throughout the school year
- Facebook Live broadcast of fun middle/elementary school events (Halloween Parade, Medieval Feast, etc.)
- Produce photo/video content throughout the school year
- Have trusted students “take over” district Instagram account to generate student-centered content during major events (Homecoming, Internships, etc.)

### Schedule for Social Media Posting

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram
<b>Monday</b>	Menu Mondays		BOE Meeting (Every other)	Start your week with...
<b>Tuesday</b>	Board Tuesdays			
<b>Wednesday</b>	Humans of Canajoharie			Humans of Canajoharie
<b>Thursday</b>	Throwback Thursdays			Throwback Thursdays
<b>Friday</b>	Arts & Athletics Fridays, Moment of Zen			

<b>Weekly Min.</b>	5	N/A	N/A	3
<b>Weekly Max.</b>	10	N/A	N/A	10
<b>Monthly</b>	New menus		2 BOE meetings 1 produced video	1 Student Takeover per month

### **3. Build informed consent about the 2018-19 budget proposal leading to a 75% ‘Yes’ vote in May.**

#### **Core Message**

Canajoharie Central School District does, “cool stuff for kids,” through sound fiscal stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

#### **Strategies**

- According to survey results from 2016-17 budget vote about 2/3s of residents get their budget news from the annual hardcopy newsletter
- The 2017-18 budget was passed with a total vote of 278-172 (61%, yes).
- Provide factual and easy to understand information regarding budget issues (taxes, voting, expenditures, etc.).
- Keep community informed on budget vote date and times, locations and planning meetings using social media and other district communication channels.

#### **Tactics**

- Meet often with administrators during budget planning to remain an integral part of the budgetary process.
- Produce a budget newsletter with the help of Capital Region BOCES
- Create a variety of web stories about the budget and promote them via social media and school app
- Push notifications and social media posts through the school mobile app about important steps in the budget process (Proposal, Public Hearing, Day of Vote information)

#### **Implementation**

##### **Objective 1 - New Website**

- Capital Region BOCES audits current site, Summer 2017
- Capital Region BOCES recommendations to district, Summer 2017
- Capital Region BOCES builds initial version of new site, Fall 2017
- Approval needed by district of initial site, Fall 2017
- Content Migration to new site, Winter & Spring 2017-18
- Completion of new site, Spring 2018

- Launch of new site, Late Spring/Summer 2018

### **Objective 2 - Increase Following, Downloads**

- Creation of list of social media post ideas, Summer 2017
- Creation of sustainable weekly social media post series, Summer 2017
- Training on using the activity log for district personnel, Summer 2017
- Brand all Canajoharie social media outlets consistently, Summer 2017
- Write regular stories about successes in the district, Academic year 2017-18
- 1 produced video per month of Canajoharie successes, Academic year 2017-18
- Use as much visual media as much as possible, Academic year 2017-18
- Weekly social media posts: See Attachment
- Increase Instagram posting to three times per week
- Find students capable and willing to do Instagram takeovers
- Train students on acceptable practice for posting to social media on district's behalf
- Create ad for placement in on-campus programs, Summer 2017
- Write voiceover content for announcers at on-campus events, Summer 2017
- Placement of link to mobile app on Social Media and District website

### **Objective 3 - Budget**

- More detailed messaging developed, December 2017-18
- Post budget development timeline Jan. 2018
- Write and post stories concerning budget development process during the third quarter
- Mid April 2018 go to print with four-page newsletter.

## **Evaluation**

### **Objective 1 - New Website**

A successful launch of a new website by late spring 2018.

### **Objective 2 - Increased Following**

Success in the posting of content every day during the week

Sustainable weekly content

1 monthly produced video

1 monthly student Instagram takeover

Monitor following numbers by month for social media accounts

Monitor usage of mobile app

### **Objective 3 - Budget**

Result of May budget vote



Feedback at board budget meetings

## **Annually Requested Responsibilities**

The following is a list of duties and responsibilities that may be performed by the BOCES Public Information Specialist for the 2017-18 school year.

- Manage the district website
- Meet with superintendent weekly and provide professional level strategic communications support and advice
- Maintain contact with teachers and administrators for leads regarding student learning news
- Manage Facebook – Post regular updates and monitor comments and feedback
- Newsletter writing, layout and print management
- Write and submit press releases
- Provide press with advance notice of events and story ideas
- Handle press inquiries as needed
- Promote school district events
- Photograph school and district events
- Communications research — Conduct community surveys and surveys of communications efforts and initiatives of other district across the region
- Crisis communications — Respond to emergencies as they arise incorporating best practices in educational communications.
- Attend BOCES Communications Team meetings and staff development workshops to keep informed about trends in school district communications
- Produce the annual school district calendar
- Post Board of Education meeting video to the website via Youtube

## **Parent Today**

Also included in the Portfolio is Parent Today, a monthly e-newsletter for parents and educators backed by an information-rich blog.

Parent Today provides parents and caregivers the tools and support they need to help their children succeed at school, and bridges the gap between families and the classroom to foster stronger connections and improved parent involvement.

Districts may cross-feature content from Parent Today on their websites and social media feeds to maximize exposure and impact. This award-winning, research-based product is designed to improve relationships with a key stakeholder group in every district.

The School Communications Portfolio brings together the best thinking of the BOCES Communications Service to ensure that clients receive timely materials to help them communicate with transparency and clarity in an efficient manner.

Rather than duplicate valuable communication resources in every district, the School Communications Portfolio offers streamlined, strategic solutions for regional and statewide communications.

### **Areas for Growth**

Since I am new to both the district and BOCES overall this will be an area to constantly revisit during the school year. In the brief time I have been part of the district I think there are a few areas for growth:

- Produced and Live Video (1:00-3:00 minutes for produced, events for live streams)
- Instagram (Primarily to reach students)
- Redesign Hard Copy Newsletter (To minimize the amount of distractions, make photos bigger, and create room for more content.)

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Communications specialist, Date

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Superintendent, Date