



**Fort Plain Central School District  
2017-18  
Communications Plan**

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## **Overview**

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

The district will continue to be known for its mission statement, “Our goal is to prepare each student for success beyond graduation,” and within that statement its five areas of leverage in the 2017-18 school year:

- Safety and Student Social and Emotional Developmental Health
- Curriculum Development and Support
- Fiscal Resources
- Family and Community Engagement
- Use of Data to Inform Teacher Practice and Improve Learning

If the district improves practice in the five leverage areas, then we will see improvements in achievement and learning environments.

## **The District**

The district covers approximately 57 square miles and serves parts of the towns of Minden, Palatine, and Canajoharie in Montgomery County; part of the town of Danube in Herkimer County; and part of the town of Ephratah in Fulton County.

Fort Plain Central School District, formed in 1951, serves approximately 850 students in Kindergarten through twelfth grade. FPCSD students are housed in two buildings: K -6th grade is in the Harry Hoag Elementary building and students in 7th-12th grade are housed in the Jr./Sr. High School building.

## **The Communications Office**

The Fort Plain 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 Fort Plain.

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 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 the community will understand what the district's vision is.

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**

During the 2015-16 school year, the district became part of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) that allowed for free breakfasts and lunches for all elementary and high school students in the 2017-18 year.

Although the district's expenses are rising, Fort Plain residents expect the quality of its schools to remain high. The school is a hub of the community. The district will continue to communicate that it will always look for ways to control costs, but it will do so in a responsible way that will preserve program quality.

## **Major District Events**

See included school calendar

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

See included school safety plans and emergency communications plans.

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

The district has been able to avoid any major controversies in the past year.

The Fort Plain School District is comprised of a large population of low-income families which makes tax, budgetary and state funding issues a consistent priority. The \$19,890,000 2017-18 budget calls for a 2 percent spending increase over the the 2016-17 budget with a 1.95 percent tax levy increase. The budget proposal passed, 159-48, in May.

Academically, the school has been recognized by US News and World Report along with state-wide athletic team scholarship awards. Overall, there is an 88% graduation rate.

Even though the Fort Plain Schools are located on tall hills, many students and their families live in areas that are affected by severe weather, especially flooding. As with all Upstate New York districts, winter is also a challenging time of year due to the weather.

A new elementary principal began in January 2016. This will be the start of her second year in the elementary school which will continue to settle staff, students, and parents after a lack of stability that preceded the hire.

The Superintendent of Schools begins his third full academic year in September.

In 2015-16 the district began to offer free breakfast and lunch to all elementary students and this program expanded to all Junior/Senior High School students in 2016-17. Even though this is a positive development for the district it is important to help both the guidance and food services offices to distribute and collect home income forms to maintain accurate records to maintain this and other programming.

With limited cultural and social outlets throughout the area, school functions - athletics and the arts, especially - are large parts of daily life in Fort Plain.

The district's baseball program is a source of much pride throughout the town due to the team's success. The team won the Class D state championship in 2016 and is consistently near the top of Section II.

The district is launching a new website for the start of the 2017-18 academic year. The prior web presence of the school was outdated. The new site will provide a much more organized and streamlined experience for users. As with all change there will be some difficulties after the launch, but the Superintendent, Board of Education, and Public Information Specialist are prepared for any issues that may arise.

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

During the last 15 years, student enrollment in Fort Plain has declined by about 22 percent (High School populations of 433 in 2000-01 to 334 in 2016-17). 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 Fort Plain school district.

Census data about Fort Plain (from censusreporter.org):

- 44.2 median age (NYS avg. 38.1, US avg. 37.6)
- 8 percent 30-39 years old
- 94% White
- \$20,978 per capita income (NYS avg. \$33,236, US avg. \$28,930)
- \$41,168 median household income (NYS avg. \$59,269, US avg. \$53,889)
- 21.6% Poverty - about 31% of children (NYS avg. 15.7%, US avg. 15.5%)
- 24.2 minute travel time to work
- 52% of households with married couple
- \$82,900 median value of owner occupied housing (NYS avg. \$283,400, US avg. \$178,600)
- 84.8% high school graduates (NYS avg. 85.6%, US avg. 86.7%)
- 14.8% bachelor's degree or higher (NYS avg. 34.2%, US avg. 29.8%)
- 9.1% Veterans (NYS avg. 5.4%, US avg. 8.3%)

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

- 41 median age - pretty even age splits
- 84% white
- 12% hispanic
- \$23,554 per capita income
- \$43,764 median household income
- 20.6% Poverty - about 32% of children
- 24 minute travel time to work
- 56% of households with married couple
- \$101,600 median value of owner-occupied housing
- 84.4% high school graduates
- 16.2% bachelor's degree or higher
- 8.9% Veterans

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

- 42.9 media age
- 95% white
- \$23,753 per capita income
- \$46,229 median household income
- 14.6% poverty - about 22.6% of children
- 23.4 minute drive to work

- 61% of households with married couples
- \$96,100 median value of owner occupied housing
- 89.8% high school graduates
- 22.4% bachelor's degree or higher
- 10.3% Veterans

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

- 42.8 median age
- 93% white
- \$24,339 per capita income
- \$46,969 median household income
- 17.1% poverty - about 24% of children
- 24.1 minute drive to work
- 57% of households with married couples
- \$108,200 median value of owner occupied housing
- 86% high school graduates
- 16.2% bachelor's degree or higher
- 9.4% Veterans

### **Local News/Economic Developments**

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 three major printed products during the academic year: the district calendar and the budget newsletter.

The district sends a monthly newsletter through the Pennysaver newspaper that re-hashes much of the districts announcements and news once a month. This newsletter is constructed by Lauri Broady and then reviewed by the Communications Specialist.

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.). Many families in the Fort Plain community use the calendar as an organizational tool at home.

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**

The start of the 2017-18 school year also marks the launch of the district's new website.

The new site is a simpler and consolidated design that presents needed static information while also presenting a dynamic news section that will be updated throughout the school year.

The new site is also mobile friendly which will help navigation. Roughly a third of website traffic last year was mobile, but that was on a non-mobile-friendly site. This number should improve this school year.



In general, coming into the new launch, users:

- Stay on the site for about 2:25
- look at two pages
- Split about 70/30 between returning users/new visitors
- Opened up 106,378 sessions on the site between July 2016-2017 (about 67% from Fort Plain itself)
- Viewed 229,605 pages

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
- Building/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 deaths
- School closings
- Safety messages
- Budget updates

## **Remind App**

Remind is a free, safe, and simple messaging tool that helps schools share important updates and reminders.

All personal information is kept private.

It's simple to sign up: text @fpcsd1 to 81010.

Ideal push notification content for remind 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

## **Facebook**

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

The district's Facebook page is young, but in that short time it has already amassed over 1,000 likes.

Users who like the district's page:

- 76% are women
- 28% are 25-34 years old
- On the page between 3-9 p.m.

## **Google Calendar**

<http://www.fortplain.org/calendar/>

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

## **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 innovative learning and student/staff achievement so the community will understand the district’s vision. The district will also market itself to potential future residents moving into the Mohawk Valley through print and digital platforms.

### **Target audiences**

#### **Internal**

Board of Education  
Harry Hoag Elementary Faculty  
Jr./Sr. High School Faculty  
Maintenance/Transportation Staff  
Students

#### **External**

Parents  
Community members  
Community members without children  
Alumni  
New residents

### **Objectives**

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

### **Core Message**

In order to, “prepare each student for success beyond graduation,” we will demonstrate how we embrace safety (physical, social, emotional), curriculum, the community, and data-informed instruction through a variety of media channels.

### **Strategies**

- Promote different kinds of learning in the classroom and beyond

- Seek out interesting people/events/accomplishments in the Fort Plain 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
- Launch a new social media stream (Instagram or Twitter) to directly reach a younger demographic of students in the district
- Utilize Communications Updates page to manage faculty/staff requests

**Tactics**

- Encourage students and family to use the following hashtags on all posts: #FPStrong, #TopperStrong, #FPCSD, #GoToppers
- Utilize 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
- Properly brand all of Fort Plain-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
- Begin an Instagram account to attract younger community members
- Have trusted students “take over” a district Instagram account to generate student-centered content during major events (Homecoming, Internships, etc.)

**Schedule for Social Media Posting**

	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Instagram (Pending)</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Menu Mondays	Start your week with...
<b>Tuesday</b>	Board Tuesdays	
<b>Wednesday</b>	Humans of Fort Plain	Humans of Fort Plain
<b>Thursday</b>	Throwback Thursdays	Throwback Thursdays
<b>Friday</b>	Arts & Athletics Fridays, Moment of Zen	
<b>Weekly Min.</b>	5	3
<b>Weekly Max.</b>	10	10

Monthly	New menus	1 Student Takeover per month
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## 2. Build informed consent about the 2018-19 budget proposal leading to a 60% 'yes' vote in May.

### Core Message

As we pursue, "our goal to prepare each student for success beyond graduation," we will do so in a fiscally responsible way throughout the the 2017-18 school year and beyond.

### Strategies

- The majority of 2016-17 voters received their most complete budget information from the annual hardcopy newsletter
- 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 - Weekly Content

- Launch new website, August 2017
- 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 Fort Plain social media outlets consistently, Summer 2017
- Write regular stories about successes in the district, Academic year 2017-18
- 1 produced video per month of Fort Plain successes, Academic year 2017-18

- Explore and execute use of more visual media as much as possible, Academic year 2017-18
- Weekly social media posts: See Attachment
- Post to Facebook at least once a day
- 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

### **Objective 2 - Budget**

- Develop detailed outline of budget messaging, Winter 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 - Weekly Content**

Success in the posting of content every day during the week

Sustainable weekly content

Review statistics on website use after a few months of new site launch

Monitor following numbers by month for social media accounts

#### **Objective 2 - 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

### **Enhanced Specialty Hours**

Enhanced specialty hours (ESH) are an added benefit to school districts and are customized to fit annual communication needs and priorities. These specialty hours can be used for graphic design, video production, focus group facilitation, and more. Fort Plain has used many of its ESH this year for website planning and redesign.

### **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 (Continue to make social media approach younger for the district, Primarily to reach students)
- Redesign Calendar (To reduce page number - information is on the website - and to modernize the design overall)

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Communications specialist, Date

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Superintendent, Date