



MILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Communications Report - 2019-20



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COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

During the 2019-20 school year, we worked to provide regular communication to all stakeholders, engaging video content, and clear website information. We started off the school year with a focus on building community with the 30 Day Challenge campaign, #MVSD30DayChallenge, and the State of the Students Address.

In addition to regular communications, we faced Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) in the fall as well as the COVID-19 pandemic starting in March. These events required more of a focus on providing timely information and sharing updates as they became available. These events changed our communications strategy for the school year.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Communications is one of four objectives of the Mill Valley School District Strategic Plan: "Maintain positive student, staff, parent/guardian, and broader community support for our district and schools."

Strategies include:

- Widely promote the district's vision for all students' success by effectively communicating with students, parent/guardians, staff, trustees, and the community-at-large.
- Proactively communicate future issues, initiatives, and opportunities.
- Encourage open communication (through group interaction between school officials and staff/community).



Strategic Plan
Initiatives for the future

*Action Plans for the
2018-19 School Year*



WEBSITE STATS

Our website is our "home" online and primary source of information. Home page content is refreshed regularly to provide up-to-date information, now more than ever. We have been highlighting virtual meetings such as the Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan (LeCAP) meetings, Waiver Consultation sessions, and Board Meetings. Additionally, we have been highlighting return-to-school information.

This past November, the District launched a new website template to increase usability, to move the main navigation bar to the top, and to improve appearance.

Compared to other K-12 Schools with a similar number of average daily website sessions, we had higher benchmarking rates than districts with comparable daily website sessions in a few main areas. Overall, in comparison to other districts, we had:

- 21% more website sessions
- 5% more new users
- 5% more pages per session
- 51% more organic search traffic
- 25% more referral traffic
- 9% more direct traffic

Another interesting note: we had much less traffic from social media, but for the traffic we did have, the pages per session and average session duration were much higher than other similar sites (65% and 81% respectively).

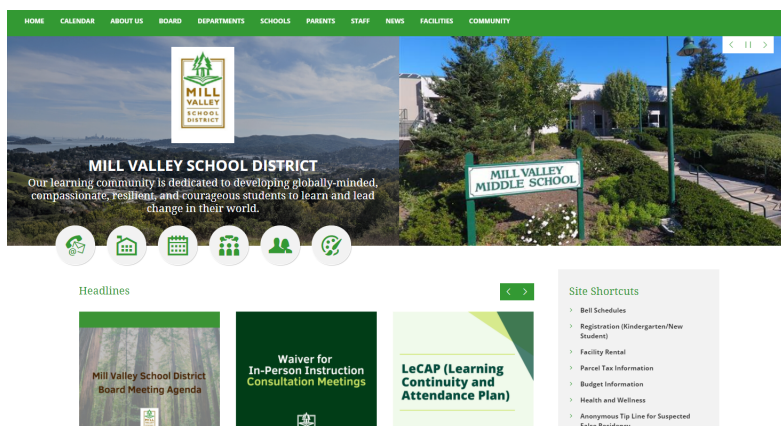


Our website had its highest traffic in October 2019 – 63,070 page views and 15,804 users.



Top pages visited:

- MVSD home
- Middle School home
- Staff Resources
- Middle School Teacher Sites
- School Year Calendars
- Middle School Library



THIS SCHOOL YEAR:

- 145,107 users visited our website
- There were 259,544 sessions on our website – an average of 21,629 sessions per month per month and 1.8 sessions per user.
- We had an average of 49,934 page views per month, with a total of 599,212 page views.
- An average of 2.5 pages were visited per session.
- Average daily sessions on our website is 753.
- 13.84% of visitors were in Mill Valley, 7.57 in Tam Valley
- Our largest demographic is women ages 35-44
- Visitors are primarily navigating to our website via organic search (google, bing, etc.) – 59.7%, followed by directly navigating to the site – 36.9%
- Website most visited on Wednesday mornings

DISTRICT NEWSLETTERS

We sent 17 newsletters during the 2019-20 school year, along with many other messages.

The Mill Valley School District Newsletter was re-branded from "The District Flash!" to better reflect current newsletter best practices and to be more clear about its purpose of informing our community. The re-branded newsletter header for the 2019-20 school year featured a minimal design using the district's shade of green overlay with redwoods and a white newsletter background.

The newsletter is one of the primary communications platforms used by the District to keep all stakeholders aware of news and updates district-wide, upcoming events and meetings, and messages from the Superintendent and other leadership.

Newsletters and other messages are sent via ParentSquare, the district-wide closed communication system that we adopted in 2019. Currently, 100% of district families and staff are able to receive district communications, including newsletters, through ParentSquare.

**OPEN RATE IS
14.1% HIGHER
THAN 2018-19
SCHOOL YEAR**

**58.8%
AVERAGE
OPEN RATE**

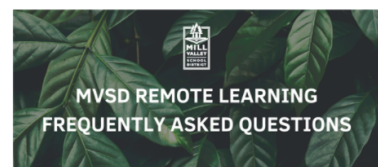
During the 2019-20 school year, we had an average newsletter open-rate of 58.8%.

According to Campaign Monitor, the 2019 Education industry average open-rate of 23.4%



Thank you for providing your feedback in last week's Remote Learning Parent Input Survey. If you haven't had a chance to fill that out but wish to, you can fill it out below. As you may have read, the Bay Area County Health Departments announced that they are extending the shelter-in-place for the month of May. We have yet to receive definitive information from the County or State levels regarding changes or regulations for next school year, but we will be sure to inform you once we receive that information. We will continue to move forward with a continuous improvement mindset and a focus on making decisions that have positive outcomes for our students. Please read the "Future Planning" section below for more details.

As a reminder, you can view our [FAQ page](#) to answer questions you may have, and you can submit additional questions in the form linked on that page. We consider all of your input and feedback and are working with a collaborative mindset, considering the variety of needs among our families.



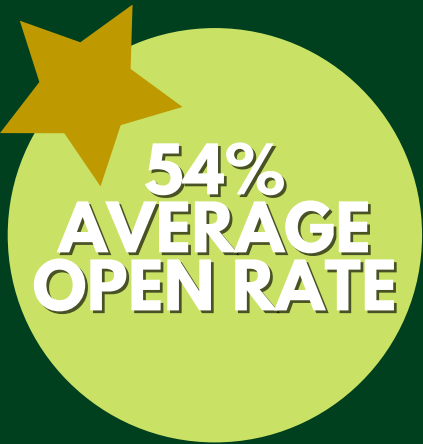
Board of Trustees Meetings

We invite you to join us at our Board Meetings. The next board meeting will take place remotely **Thursday, May 14th at 6:00 pm**. To access the meeting, please [visit this page](#) at 5:45 pm on May 14th. You may view the [full board meeting calendar on our website](#). Please access board meeting agendas on [Agenda Online](#).



BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

We sent 12 Board Meeting Highlights publications during the 2019-20 school year.



In the first half of the 2019-20 school year, we had an average open rate of 54%.

According to Campaign Monitor, the 2019 Education industry average open-rate of 18.90%

The Board Meeting Highlights newsletter was created as a strategic effort to provide summarized, accessible information about presentations at board meetings. The Mill Valley School District community desires transparency from the district, and this digital publication provides is part of that effort.

The highlights were launched in Spring 2019 and had an average open rate of 46.6%. The average open rate for the Board Meeting Highlights for the 2019-20 school year is 54%, an increase of 7.4% since last school year.

In addition to sharing highlights, we will explore sharing recordings of meetings in the 2020-21 school year to further reach those who are unable to attend board meetings.



Mill Valley School District Board of Trustees

Board Meeting Highlights
May 14, 2020 Board of Trustees Remote Regular Meeting

To view attachments related to the presentations summarized below, please view the [board.meeting.agenda](#).

Recognition of Outstanding Golden Bell Awards

Each May, Marin County recognizes outstanding certificated and classified staff at the annual Golden Bell Education Celebration. The event is sponsored by Marin County School Boards Association and Marin County School Districts and will occur virtually on May 21, 2020. The Superintendent and Board of Trustees recognized the teachers and classified staff nominated for the 2019-20 school year.

The following Mill Valley School District teachers were nominated for Golden Bell Education awards and three words were submitted to describe each teacher:

- Erin Cooney - Conscientious, Collaborative, Hilarious
- Kristina Putalik - Reflective, Insightful, Passionate
- Lisa Monge - Idealistic, Effective, Globally-minded
- Mari Mounstier - Calm, Caring, Skilled
- Maria Brundage - Organized, Patient, Flexible
- Phoebe Dong - Caring, Devoted, Detailed

The following Mill Valley School District classified employees were nominated for Golden Bell awards and three words were submitted to describe each person:

- Daria Painter - Patient, Loving, Dedicated
- Dierich Carver - Dedicated, Loyal, Conscientious
- John Sy - Hard-working, Friendly, Kind
- Monica Tasso - Efficient, Dependable, Resourceful

Recognition of Chamber of Commerce Award for Excellence in Professional Education Service Recipients


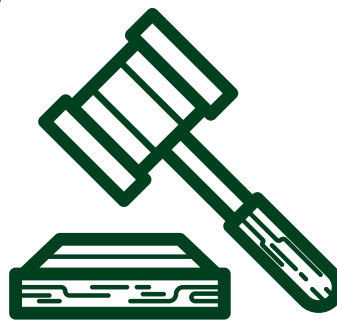
The Superintendent and Board of Trustees recognized teachers Katie Fisher and Ann Marie Padilla for receiving the award for Excellence in Professional Education Service from the Mill Valley Chamber of Commerce. The award recognizes outstanding contributions in the following areas: Curriculum Improvement, Overall Program Improvement, Instructional Excellence, Exemplary Support to the Classroom, Personal Involvement and Leadership and Technological Leadership.



Bond Feasibility Discussion

The Superintendent and the Board of Trustees continued their discussion of the feasibility of a school improvement bond measure for the Mill Valley School District. The consensus of the conversion was that this is not an ideal time to move forward, considering the economic needs of the community as well as the need for staff to focus on remote learning and transitioning to classroom learning in the fall. The Superintendent and the Board of Trustees will reconsider at a future time and address maintenance on an as-needed basis.

Resolution #19-19/20, Designation of District Representatives and Authorizations to Sign



OPEN RATE IS 7.4% HIGHER THAN 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR

STAFF NEWSLETTER

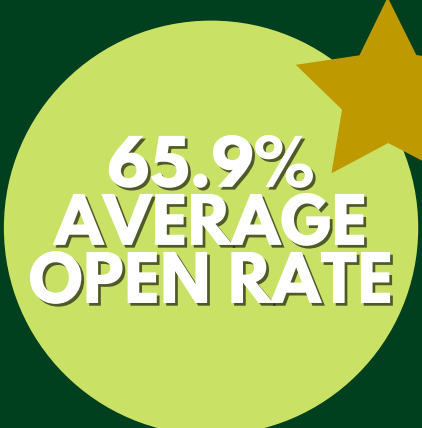
The District launched a differentiated internal newsletter at the start of the 2019-20 school year.

The Staff Newsletter was initiated in an effort to support the Strategic Plan goals of Communications and Supported Staff. This publication was intended to streamline communication from the various departments of the district and keep all staff in the loop at the same time.

We have continued to experiment with sending staff news via a staff newsletter in ParentSquare, an internal email with a newsletter attachment, and providing the same newsletter to staff and families.

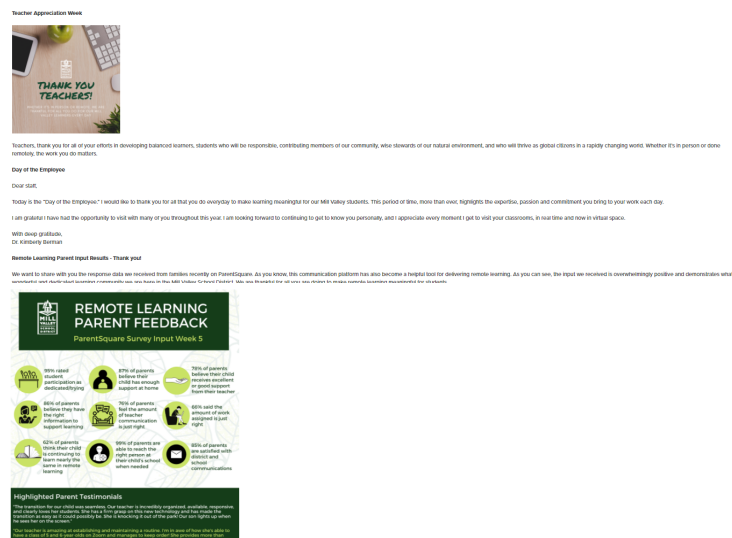
Sending a separate newsletter to staff via ParentSquare is the best way to track open rate data. For most of the 2019-20 school year, we sent a newsletter to all stakeholders (staff and families) in addition to 8 separate Staff Newsletters.

We will continue to determine the best method to communicate with our internal staff, based on feedback and data.



Since launch in August 2019, we had an average open-rate of 65.9% on the Staff Newsletter.

According to Poppulo, the average internal newsletter open rate in the Education industry is 49%.



SOCIAL MEDIA



266

Facebook followers as of June 2020



1,394

Twitter followers as of June 2020



1,216

Instagram followers as of June 2020

FACEBOOK

We grew our Facebook following by 40% during the 2019-20 school year, going from 159 to 266. Our best month on this platform was March 2020, when we had a Reach of 9,711 people, Post Engagement of 1,033, and 2,876 video views. This was from the March Board Meeting Livestream. While our audience is more active on Instagram, maintaining this presence has allowed us to reach those who actively use Facebook and share our content.

TWITTER

Our largest social media audience is on Twitter, although Instagram continues to gain and will soon take over. Our Twitter audience is less engaged and consists of more professional educators and local public figures. With that in mind, our Twitter content has been geared toward sharing information that celebrates district educational achievements.

INSTAGRAM

We grew our Instagram audience by 35% during the 2020-21 school year, from 785 followers to 1,216. We receive an average of 354 post likes per month and an average of 16 comments per month. This remains our fastest-growing platform. Our Instagram audience consists of parents, staff members, middle school students, local businesses, and community members. August was our best month on Instagram this year in terms of engagement, with 511 likes and 31 comments. Additionally, our community has enjoyed our Instagram Stories, which generally receive 150-200 views and regularly receive celebratory replies from parents.

YOUTUBE

We post district videos on YouTube, where we have gained 368 average views per month and over 103 hours of total watch time. Our top videos were: "A Challenge from MVSD Elementary Principals" and "Dr. Kimberly Berman - Beginning of the Year News & Events." 37.5% of our YouTube traffic comes from ParentSquare and another 11.5% comes from Gmail.

NEXTDOOR

We regularly monitor Nextdoor to be aware of community sentiment for the District and our schools and to monitor vital topics being discussed in our community. We respond when appropriate to provide accurate information.

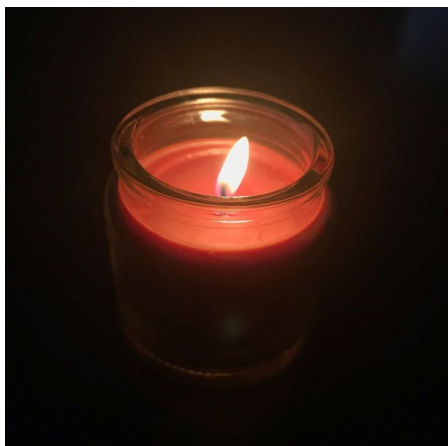


CAMPAIGNS/THEMES

30-DAY CHALLENGES - #MVSD30DAYCHALLENGE

At the start of the school year, Dr. Berman launched a 30-Day Challenge theme for staff, and then expanded the challenge to district families. Staff quickly embraced the idea - many were featured in the "Mill Valley School District Staff 30-Day Challenges" video which received 187 views on YouTube and 89 views on Facebook. Throughout the month of September, the MVSD community was invited to share their personal challenges using #MVSD30DayChallenge on social media. In October, the District launched a "green" or environmentally-friendly 30-Day Challenge Theme.

While the community did not heavily participate on social media, staff members and parents verbally shared anecdotes about how they have enjoyed participating in challenges.



PG&E PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFFS

During October 2019, the Mill Valley School District and surrounding communities were impacted by Public Safety Power Shutoffs from PG&E due to fires in the North and/or increased fire risks.

During the first event of October 9, 2019, Tam Valley Elementary School was without power and the district closed the school while other schools remained open. During the second event of October 26-30th, the entire district was without power and was closed.

For both events, the district decided whether school was open or closed by 5:30 am and communicated to staff and parents via email, voicemail, and text message. We also provided updates every four hours when possible via email, voicemail, and text message and sent a debrief document after the event to answer frequently-asked questions.

CAMPAIGNS/THEMES

YELLOW SCHOOL BUS PILOT PROGRAM

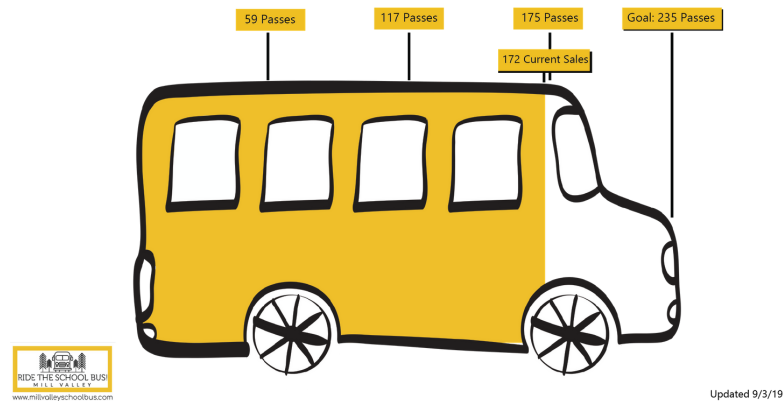
In 2019, the district is increasing the marketing efforts around the Yellow School Bus Pilot Program in order to make the program at least cost-neutral. The 2019-20 school year's pass sales goal is 235. Efforts throughout the first half of this school year include:

- Promoting annual and single-ride pass booklets across all district communications platforms (website, newsletter, social media)
- Targeted emails sent to families living within 1 mile of a bus stop who had not already purchased a pass - 466 parents/guardians notified from Edna Maguire, 41 parents/guardians notified from Strawberry Point, and 357 parents/guardians notified from Mill Valley Middle School.
- Collaborating with City partners to share messaging and increase visibility
- Providing copy and graphics to school PTAs for use in newsletters
- Branded graphics to promote pass sales across all district communications platforms
- Summer social media giveaway for students who had bus passes to
- Pass sales tracker updated regularly on MVSD website and millvalleyschoolbus.com
- Tracking effectiveness of efforts through social media

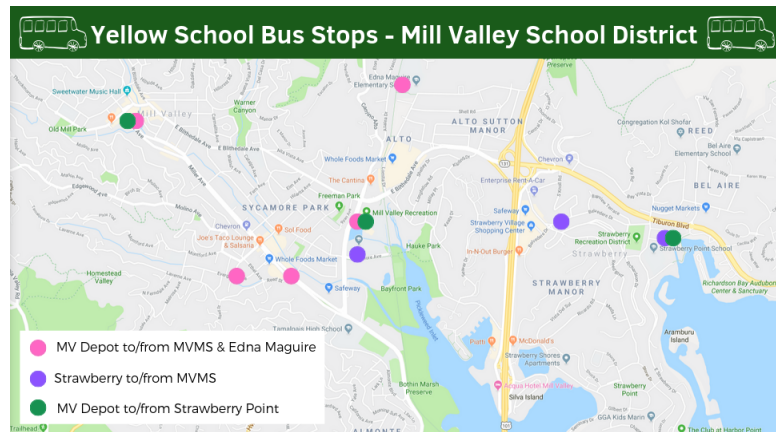
Currently the Yellow School Bus Pilot Program is on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Yellow School Bus Pilot Program Annual Pass Sales Tracker



www.millvalleyschoolbus.com



CAMPAIGNS/THEMES

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION 2020

After the 2018-19 school year, the District received feedback that we did not effectively promote kindergarten registration for the 2019-20 school year. More specifically, some parents who already had a child or children in the district did not know they needed to register their incoming kindergarten student. Therefore, the District focused on promoting kindergarten registration to existing families as well as throughout the community prior to the registration period for the 2020-21 school year which begins in January 2020. Efforts included:



ALL NEW STUDENTS MUST BE REGISTERED, EVEN IF SIBLINGS ALREADY ATTEND SCHOOL IN THE MILL VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

STARTING JANUARY 7, 2020, VISIT MVSCHOOLS.ORG TO COMPLETE 2020-21 REGISTRATION FORM & SIGN UP FOR YOUR REGISTRATION APPOINTMENT

- Sending targeted emails to current district families with incoming kindergarten students, both from the district and from site principals
- Creating and distributing flyers to school sites, community bulletin boards, and local preschools
- Posting about registration on Nextdoor and district social media
- Creating an updated banner to hang on the middle school fence at Camino Alto and Sycamore Ave.
- Updating the registration website with current information and making it more readable by using consistent fonts and colors

TWO NEW PRINCIPALS

During the first half of the 2019-20 school year, the District hired new principals at Park School and Strawberry Point School. Throughout the hiring process for both positions, the district regularly communicated with the school's staff and parent communities via email and ParentSquare messages.

Regular updates were received positively by Park and Strawberry Point parents. Updates included sharing that the job was posted, a survey to gather feedback from the community on attributes desired in a new principal, an overview of the survey feedback, informing them that interviews would occur, and finally, announcing internal hires for both positions. The announcements were received positively by the school communities.



CAMPAIGNS/THEMES

STATE OF THE STUDENTS 2019 ADDRESS

On November 14, 2019, Dr. Berman hosted the first annual State of the Students Address, featuring student panelists from all six school sites, videos featuring teachers discussing topics related to Strategic Plan objectives, and more. This event was held in the Mill Valley Middle School gym and was open to the public prior to a regular Board of Trustees meeting.

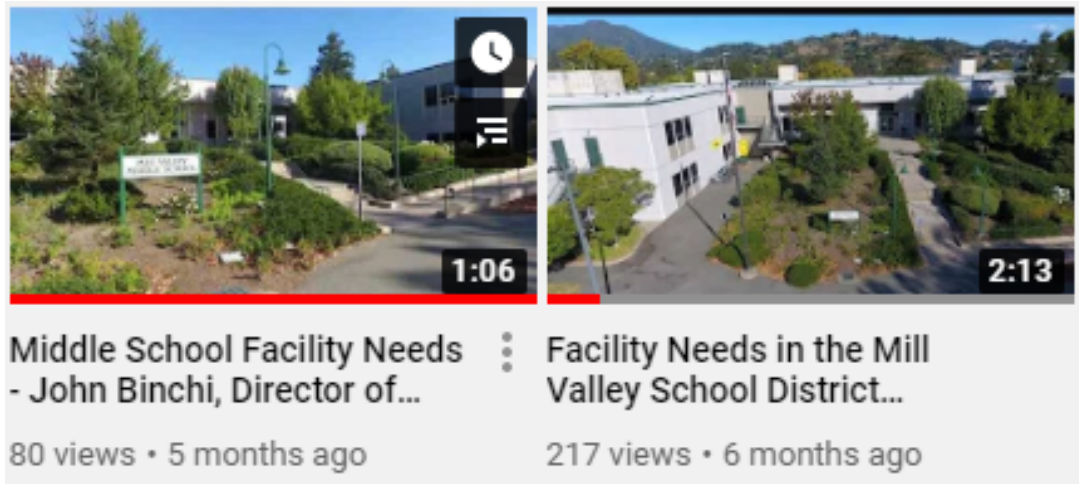
In preparation for this event, Dr. Berman met with parents, students, and staff at each school in the Mill Valley School District and reviewed survey responses from them. We also recorded the full event and the video can be viewed on the ["About Us" page on our website](#).



CAMPAIGNS/THEMES

FACILITY NEEDS

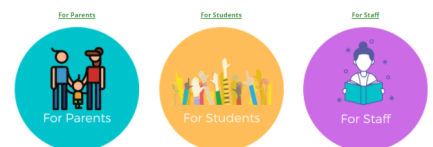
Facility needs was an emerging theme in the 2019-20 school year's communications prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Facility needs information that was presented at board meetings was summarized for district staff and families in the Board Meeting Highlights and the presentations provided on the district website. Additionally, we began a video series to portray the depth of facility needs to our community, highlighting the middle school.



COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic became the sole focus of MVSD Communications from March 2020 onward. In March, we went into Crisis Communications mode, sending regular updates and emergency alerts as we transitioned from traditional school to crisis remote learning.

We created a section of the website devoted to remote learning, with resources, updates, and FAQs. During the Summer of 2020, we created a "Return-to-School" page which again housed resources and an in-depth FAQ as well as plans for education both in distance learning as well as safety plans for a return to in-person instruction.



MEDIA RELATIONS

News

- There were 34 news articles published related to the Mill Valley School District during the 2019-20 school year.
 - 16 were Neutral in sentiment
 - 9 were Positive in sentiment
 - 9 were Negative in sentiment
- 24 articles were published by the Marin Independent Journal
- 4 articles were published by the Mill Valley Patch
- 2 articles were published by the San Francisco Chronicle
- 1 article was published by Capitol Weekly

Press Releases

- Park Principal Announcement
- Pop Up Food Pantry is a Strong Community Effort
- MVSD Appreciates Mill Valley Market for Partnership
- Mill Valley School District Saves Taxpayers Over \$3.8 Million
- Student Services Director Appointment
- Director of Human Resources Appointment
- Old Mill School Principal Appointment

The grid contains 34 news article thumbnails. Each thumbnail includes a title, a date, and a source. The articles cover various topics such as teacher salaries, school closures, district financials, and community events. The sources include the Marin Independent Journal, Mill Valley Patch, San Francisco Chronicle, and Capitol Weekly.

GOALS FROM 2018-19

STEPS TO IMPROVE FROM 2018-19 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT:

1

Send Flash! newsletters on Wednesday afternoons to continue increase in open rates.

2

Create more shareable video content to boost newsletter link clicks and engage social media followers.

3

Improve ease-of-use of website by continuing to improve ADA compliance and changing template design for easier navigation.

4

Continue to monitor analytics and progress toward Strategic Plan goals to assess communication strategies.

5

Communicate budget/finances using clear, precise language.

6

Anticipate hot topics and proactively communicate.

7

Survey community to understand needs and wishes.

PROGRESS/RESPONSES TO LAST YEAR'S GOALS:

Switched to ParentSquare platform and open rates increased. Sending day does not seem to make an impact.

Link clicks cannot be tracked on ParentSquare. However, videos have performed well this year.

We have ensured that new content is compliant. We switched to a new website template for easier navigation.

We have continued to monitor communications analytics and progress toward communications goals.

We provide information from board meeting budget presentations. Information could possibly be presented in simplified and more graphically-appealing manner for clarity.

Information has been changing at a rapid rate due to COVID-19 so it is unlikely anyone would be able to anticipate what to communicate.

We completed a communications survey at the start of the 2019-20 school year. However, preferences may have changed.

CONCLUSION

2020-21 Goals

1

Assess and determine best method/time for sending Staff Newsletter.

2

Continue to provide consistency and transparent information across communications platforms.

3

Improve analytics data across all platforms by increasing consistency for newsletters and social media posts. Increase engagement.

4

Support school sites and PTAs on ParentSquare.

5

Continue to increase frequency and quality of video production.

6

Increase frequency of press releases and continue to respond to all media inquiries