Communication
Audit Report

Contents

The Big Picture

What we learned at MESD

Celebrate this:

PRIDE

All employee groups are passionate about their work and believe in the MESD mission of serving all students.

HOPE AND OPTIMISM

Despite challenges in MESD's past, employees feel optimistic and hopeful about the future.

RELATIONSHIPS

In general, employees feel they have good relationships with students and their colleagues but they want to know more about what is happening across the agency.

CREDIBILITY

Numerous high-level leaders and frontline staff were identified as credible communicators.

CHANGE

Employees recognize and appreciate that positive change has already begun to take place in the organization.

Consider this:

TRUST

There is disconnect between leadership and frontline staff, and a perception that information is being withheld.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONSISTENCY

There is a perceived lack of accountability of supervisors and inconsistent treatment of employees across departments.

COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS AND TRAINING

There are no communication protocols or training in place, and information sharing differs across the agency.

THE SILO EFFECT

Staff desire a greater connection with each other and with their leaders.

COLLABORATION

Employees believe the organization is managed from the top down and that leaders make decisions that affect everyone before sharing information or seeking input.

Introduction & Overview

SPECIAL NOTE

Typically, the consultants conduct a communication review that spans both internal and external perspectives. In this case, the consultants received significant feedback early in the process from internal groups that indicated it would be more appropriate for the work to be separated into two reports: one focused on internal perspectives and recommendations, and another focused on external audiences. What follows is the Internal Audit Report.

In the fall of 2015, Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) contracted with Educational Service District 112 to conduct a review of the organization's current communication practices, marketing strategies, materials and needs in order to make recommendations for improvements.

The review was, in part, prompted by new leadership and by challenges associated with high-level turnover and high-profile problems at the agency. In addition, the new public information officer (PIO) desired broad input in order to develop a comprehensive strategic communication plan to improve practices and guide the organization into the future.

This audit enables MESD leadership to learn from an "outside" perspective, and from a team that fully understands, and has experience working with, similar educational organizations.

Specifically, the communication review was designed to:

» Assess the effectiveness of MESD's current communication program.
» Solicit opinions, concerns and perceptions of stakeholders who represent various internal and external audiences.
» Discover communication and service gaps.
» Recommend strategies to enhance communication with key audiences.

Prior to reading this report, please consider these important notes:

» The majority of the information used to write this report came from internal focus group interviews with MESD employee groups and data collected via an online survey. It is important to note that ***audiences stated what they know and believe, regardless of what is real or actual.*** Whether real or perceived, improvement is impossible unless there is a plan to address what people ***perceive*** to be true.

» During the stakeholder interviews, significant information was shared with the consultants that might appear to be outside the realm of the communication review. However, we believe that all information is important to include in this report because most every aspect of an organization is judged on how the organization ***communicates*** with its stakeholders. The consultants considered ***all*** data as they developed recommendations, ***regardless of if it was specific to the topic of communication.***

» Although gauging perceptions about MESD and assessing communication practices was the initial goal of this study, we believe a fundamental shift needs to occur in the way MESD thinks about communication. This will be addressed in the recommendations.

This report should help MESD leadership achieve clarity in its internal communication practices and help it remove negative barriers, whether real or perceived, in order to improve communication throughout the agency.

About the Consultants

The consultants for the audit have significant experience in the field of communication. The ESD 112 team has worked with educational entities for 30+ years on communication practices, marketing strategies, messaging and creative imagery. They are familiar with the challenges and opportunities of both large and small agencies that are complex in nature.

Lori Oberheide, Executive Director, Communication and Public Engagement

Lori Oberheide has 32 years of professional experience in public relations, marketing development and implementation, strategic communication leadership and related support services. She has successfully developed, coordinated and implemented a variety of community outreach and communication programs for individual schools, districts, Educational Service Agencies and community organizations throughout Washington and other states. She provides leadership and expertise in crisis communication, strategic messaging, school funding campaigns, communication audits and educational business development. She maintains broad knowledge of the issues and challenges faced by public, private and state systems, and successfully communicates the most difficult issues to a variety of audiences. Lori serves as a member of the ESD 112 Cabinet and as a trusted adviser to the ESD 112 superintendent and other superintendents and advisory groups throughout the region.

Sarah Coomber, Communication Coordinator

Sarah Coomber's communication background includes work as an award-winning reporter, a public relations consultant and a science writer. With master's degrees in journalism and creative writing, and experience teaching overseas, she brings a diverse set of tools and perspectives to every project. At ESD 112, Sarah works with school districts and educational service districts to convey the importance of the work they do preparing students to pursue their dreams and succeed in life.

Data Collection

**TAKING A
CLOSER LOOK**

Appendix A:
Sample questions

Appendix B:
Snapshot of the most prominent themes recorded during stakeholder interviews with each focus group.

Appendix C:
Online survey data

Appendix D:
Materials and website review

Appendix E:
ESD 112's Agency Culture Initiative and Survey Questions

Stakeholder Interviews

The first step in this communication review was to interview employee groups to gauge perceptions of their workplace and their organization. The interviews were conducted in December 2015 and January 2016.

Most interviews were conducted in person. A couple were conducted in scheduled telephone conversations. Questions were similar for all participants, although some wording may have been adjusted to make it appropriate for the target audiences, which included:

» Cabinet members
» Administrators (coordinators, officers, managers and supervisors)
» Key communicators (staff from each department who assist with communication activities)
» Frontline office staff
» Board members
» Union members

The consultants found every group to be forthright in offering feedback, productively sharing positives along with concerns that could be improved through more effective communication.

Online Employee Surveys

In an effort to gather broad feedback from the MESD organization and give every agency employee an opportunity to participate, the consultants created a 40-question online survey to gather information and perceptions about MESD's internal communication. A total of 140 employees participated in the survey, many investing the time to offer thoughtful and insightful comments.

The consultants found the feedback offered many helpful specifics—both in terms of actions MESD could take to improve its internal communication and examples of things that already are working well. What was especially interesting is that the feedback received via the online employee survey closely echoed the input the consultants received in the stakeholder interviews.

Materials and Website Review

A review of MESD's website and electronic and printed materials was conducted by the ESD 112 Creative Services team. The team spent time assessing branding, messaging and overall impact of the materials submitted by MESD, both in hard copy and electronically.

The Challenges

No. 1 – Trust | *AGENCY LEVEL*

Three words that came up repeatedly in stakeholder interviews and the online survey are "trust," "transparency" and "retaliation"— there is too little trust and transparency, and too much retaliatory behavior.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 21 from our online survey illustrate this:

Does MESD have mechanisms in place for leaders to hear employee concerns and ideas in an atmosphere of safety and without fear of retribution?

Especially concerning, three quarters of respondents said they either do not know whether there is a safe place or believe there is not a safe place for MESD leadership to hear their concerns.

31%
No

45%
Don't Know

24%
Yes
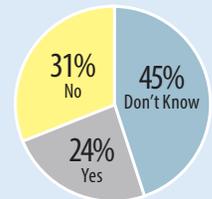
In focus groups and online, many frontline employees expressed that they often do not receive the information they need, and when they ask questions or offer feedback on happenings in the agency, they experience retaliation. There seems to be a communication chasm separating upper management and frontline employees. Some commented that they have many masters—at the agency and in the field—but no one has their back, and they don't know whom to ask for help or for information.

Leaders in the organization reflected this, with one supervisor commenting that MESD has historically fostered a punitive rather than coaching environment. Sounding frustrated and somewhat fearful themselves, some supervisors commented that they do not know how much information they should share with staff members—what is theirs to share and what should come from top MESD administration. It seems that many feel safest keeping whatever information they have to themselves.

Supervisors indicated that frontline staff seem to feel engaged with their teams, departments or buildings but not with MESD as an agency—and that administrators are the most suspect members of the chain of command.

Part of this lack of trust seems to be related to transparency. Many employees mentioned a lack of interaction with their supervisors—leaders not responding to emails and some completely missing in action. Either way, employees have a hard time getting information and support.

The Challenges

No. 1 – Trust | *DEPARTMENT LEVEL*

For healthy communication to occur at MESD, trust must be established and transparency practiced across the board.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 30 from our online survey illustrate this:

Does your department have mechanisms in place that make it possible for leaders to hear employee concerns and ideas in an atmosphere of safety and without fear of retribution?

24% No

37% Don't Know

39% Yes
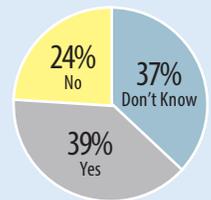
As you can see, 61 percent of respondents expressed that they are unaware of or believe there are no protocols in place that enable employees to express concerns to their leaders without fear of retribution.

It should be mentioned that some employees did praise their supervisors as supportive and engaged, but that is not the case across the agency. Face-time seems to be especially appreciated by those who get it—and craved by those who don't. One employee observed, "My team has regular meetings, which keep everyone on task and in the loop." Others wish they had the same opportunity.

With few exceptions, MESD leaders seem to be regarded as "the wizards behind the curtain." All levels of employees are looking for a greater sense of transparency throughout the organization, and they encourage leaders to "err on the side of oversharing."

LEADERSHIP BRAINSTORMING QUESTION

How can we gain the full trust and confidence of our entire staff?

What are the steps we must take to begin this process?

The Challenges

No. 2 – Accountability and Consistency | *AGENCY LEVEL*

As part of building the trust discussed in No. 1, it will be important to find ways to foster accountability and consistency districtwide.

Many participants described a workplace where treatment of employees varies, depending on the department and supervisor for whom they work.

Our online survey showed that according to MESD staff, departments have difficulty communicating with one another—37 percent said they do not communicate well and only 15 percent said they do.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 18 from our online survey illustrate this:

Is communication between MESD departments effective?

37% No

48% Sometimes

15% Yes
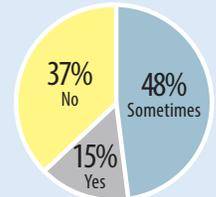
Frontline employees are well aware that some departments receive much more information than others, which creates a rumor mill situation in which some have firsthand knowledge of happenings or policy changes that will impact them while others hear information through the grapevine and question its accuracy. Some receive no information until after a policy or pay change is implemented. They say it feels political, that only the chosen ones are kept informed. Some describe it as "cloak and dagger"— leaders keeping staff in the dark so they can gloss over the truth or not admit mistakes.

Another area of inconsistency involves contracts. Frontline employees describe disparities among supervisors and how they follow contracts, causing varying workloads among employees with similar job descriptions. In addition, some departments do not receive employee reviews, a time that staff regard as an opportunity for communication— although some say they do not feel safe enough to express concerns or ask questions.

It should be noted that there is a lack of consistency and effectiveness **within** departments too. Our online survey showed that less than one third of respondents believed communication within their departments was effective.

The Challenges

No. 2 – Accountability and Consistency | *DEPARTMENT LEVEL*

To assist with communication within individual departments, supervisors indicated in the online survey that they would like training in best communication practices to learn how to better communicate with their staff members.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 28 from our online survey illustrate this:

Is communication in your department effective?

10%
No

31%
Yes

59%
Sometimes
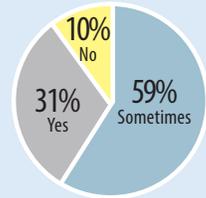
Another thing that contributes to this issue is the oral tradition that exists at MESD. Numerous focus group participants described it as a culture where job descriptions and tasks are not written down. For example, if an employee leaves before his/her successor begins, there is no one to explain the job responsibilities. From a systems standpoint, if someone from a district calls the MESD seeking guidance, there is no guide or flow chart to reference when offering information.

Communication-wise, one example of inconsistency we heard numerous times had to do with the agency's mission statement and tagline(s). Staff expressed that they do not necessarily reflect the true work they do—providing services that are unavailable elsewhere and helping students no one else can help.

LEADERSHIP BRAINSTORMING QUESTION

What are the benefits of creating a culture of predictability and consistency where expectations are understood and appreciated? How can we create that culture?

The Challenges

No. 3 – The Silo Effect

Part of what exacerbates the first two issues is the "silo" effect, which was described many times both in the focus groups and in the online survey. Many departments feel as if they work in a vacuum, disconnected from other departments. Survey takers indicated they would appreciate knowing more about the work of other departments and how all employee efforts fit together. (For example, in one focus group, two people were working on the same project but had not realized it.)

This is not simply because people are busy; it also stems from friction among departmental leaders and from a lack of systems for interacting with others.

Also, because of the above-mentioned issues with trust, employees have been fearful to communicate outside their departmental safety nets and to former superintendents/leaders.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 23 from our online survey illustrate this:

Do you believe your ideas and concerns have an impact on directions and decisions pursued by MESD leadership?

The online survey demonstrated that respondents feel it might not even be worth offering their ideas and concerns to MESD leadership. Only 13 percent of respondents felt confident that their input would have any impact.

33% No
54% Sometimes
13% Yes
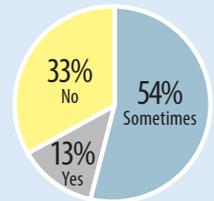
LEADERSHIP BRAINSTORMING QUESTION

What opportunities are we missing when people work in silos? How do we get them out of their silos and more connected with each other to further the mission of MESD?

Newer supervisors say it is difficult to be new at MESD, because of the lack of information—or consistent information—and lack of support from the agency. The protocol for completing tasks can be different depending on whom you ask. In one focus group, long-term leaders downplayed the importance of meetings whereas a newer leader described meetings as invaluable. It is important to balance the discrepancy between the perceptions of newer employees and long-time employees.

The silo effect also extends to MESD as a whole. Employees feel that the community and even school districts do not understand what the agency does. Healthcare professionals in particular find schools and districts often do not understand their legal limitations—especially with fewer staff members serving more students, and those students having higher needs.

Additionally, the general public only receives information about MESD from the media, and that is generally negative.

Your Assets

No. 1 – MESD Pride

"I had no idea the magnitude of what goes on here!"

We heard consistently from focus group participants and in the online survey that MESD employees are deeply dedicated and they love their jobs.

Both staff in leadership positions and frontline employees long for a new and consistent rebranding that conveys pride in the amazing work the agency accomplishes.

While employees complain of working in silos, they find themselves rejuvenated when they get to glimpse the broader work and the magnitude of what MESD accomplishes for students in the region.

Employees embrace the goals of their programs but feel distanced from the agency. People in schools seem especially passionate about what they do and seem to enjoy a closer team atmosphere than at the MESD headquarters.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 32 from our online survey illustrate this:

Do you believe your ideas and concerns have an impact on directions and decisions pursued by your supervisor(s) and department?

It is important to note that whereas only 13 percent of survey respondents believe their ideas/concerns have an impact on MESD's direction (agency wide), 35 percent believe they have an impact on their department's course.

16% No
49% Sometimes
35% Yes
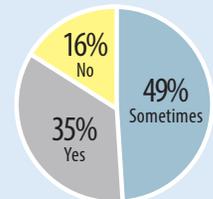
Asked in the online survey what they like most about working for MESD, 127 respondents offered answers that fell generally into the following categories:

» The positive atmosphere
» The collective goal to serve children and families
» Making education accessible to students with medical conditions
» Relationships with colleagues and students
» A supportive supervisor
» The benefits, time off
» Making a difference

Your Assets

No. 2 – Relationships

"Please visit and talk to us."

Leaders expressed a desire to make MESD a more collaborative—as opposed to top-down— work environment. They want to provide opportunities for employees to get to know each other and build deeper working relationships. The fact that they crave more face time with each other is a good sign.

Employees expressed they have respect for many of their colleagues. The online survey asked "Who are the most credible communicators in the organization," and we received dozens of names and employee groups ranging from frontline employees to people in top leadership positions.

One of the main requests was more emails from the PIO and superintendent. These seem to be well-read and appreciated. People want to know what's happening in the agency as a whole and in other departments. And—whether it's good or bad news—they definitely want to hear it before it comes out in the media and/or they hear it from a neighbor.

"We have the most dedicated employees."

They also desire more face time. One survey respondent summed up the sense we received from many: "Please visit us and talk to us."

LEADERSHIP BRAINSTORMING QUESTION

Can we make the commitment to strengthen relationships as an agency and not just within departments? What does this look like?

Your Assets

No. 3 – Hope for the Future

WORTH A LOOK:

Appendix E:
ESD 112's Agency Culture Initiative and Survey Questions

This provides an example of a survey intended to gauge what is important for a positive agency-wide culture.

The words "hope" and "optimism" emerged again and again in our focus groups and in the online survey responses, proving a counterbalance to the concerns expressed about "trust," "transparency" and "retaliation."

In fact, numerous online survey respondents and focus group members expressed their appreciation of the agency embarking on this communication audit and said it demonstrates that change is already under way and the agency is making an honest effort to improve its communication processes.

As we digested the data, we came to believe that MESD employs a remarkably resilient group of people who, despite the turmoil of the past several years, has retained an impressive sense of optimism and hope for a more stable, positive future.

Frontline employees believe today's "new regime" recognizes the importance of dealing with the agency's challenges and is working hard to address them. One leader commented that although "the communication is beyond awful"—she loves working for MESD with the freedom and possibilities it offers.

Staff and supervisors are not only looking for the agency to improve—they want to improve their own skills as well. A number of survey respondents said they would like to receive training on communication protocols, and supervisors expressed a desire to learn about best practices.

In a focus group, leaders expressed joy at the training offered by the interim superintendent about communication continuums—how to avoid destructive patterns and instead make them collaborative. They reported implementing these ideas immediately with staff and getting great results.

Adoption of Best Practices

MESD Internal Communication

The auditors have adapted IPR's 10 Best Practices into action statements reflecting ways MESD could re-vision its internal communication. More specific information can be found in the "Action Items" section of the report.

1. **We expect each leader to serve an important role as an internal communicator.**
   - » Communication with employees is one of MESD management's primary job responsibilities

2. **We will consistently ensure employees understand important changes and receive information about decisions that affect their work and the organization.**
   - » Consistent and anticipated communication
   - » Gathering feedback before important decisions are made.

3. **We will challenge a new generation of employees to contribute to organizational growth and change.**
   - » A new and consistent employee onboarding program
   - » Engagement of all employees as a critical link in the organization's future

4. **As we develop a roadmap (strategic communication plan), we will take steps to ensure employees see a clear, measureable path forward in their journey.**
   - » A plan that is specific and encourages participation by all employees

5. **We will create an internal process that better integrates employees with key stakeholders, and identifies and highlights special internal stakeholder needs.**
   - » Opportunities for frontline staff to engage and share work with stakeholder decision-makers

6. **Leaders will take a "seat at all tables" (at all employee levels) to listen and help shape and influence organizational practices, drive performance and reinforce organizational culture and values.**
   - » Engagement with employees at all levels (listening, learning, influencing, valuing)
   - » Keeping values and culture consistent top to bottom

7. **We will adopt an "authentic" voice that supports greater transparency and drives dialogue and engagement in the workforce.**
   - » Consistent voice and protocols
   - » Transparency in all matters

8. **We will utilize the power of "line-of-sight" managers as communicators.**
   - » Internal communication is one of their most important roles
   - » Comprehensive training

9. **We will relentlessly reinforce and articulate the path forward by identifying important messages and using them consistently and with conviction.**
   - » Identify key messages and integrate them into daily conversations
   - » Messaging multiple times and using multiple tools

10. **We will use measurements to benchmark strategies and programs to prove that our work is enabling the workforce to achieve key objectives.**
    - » Use powerful data to tell stories

Action Items–Recommendations

Introduction

The consultants typically develop recommendations and suggest they be implemented in phases over the course of one to two years. In this case, we chose to make recommendations by category, rather than assigning priorities and a timeline.

It is strongly recommended that upon receipt and review of this report, an internal workgroup be identified for each action item category, with the goal being to develop a prioritized task list. **Resources for this work will also need to be considered.**

Once work teams have identified priorities, it is imperative that the PIO lead the process of developing a strategic communication plan, complete with timelines, strategies and assignments in order to move the work forward.

A MAJOR FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT needs to occur in the way MESD thinks about internal communication, and leadership must work together on solutions. Consider the following as you work to improve internal communication:

» Employees are your greatest investment; help them become your greatest ambassadors.
» Empower them to build relationships with districts and be part of the decision-making process.
» Adopt this statement: "Communication is everyone's role in the agency."
» Get to a place where employees represent MESD with pride.
» Provide a safe forum for openly sharing ideas. Promote the mantra, "There are no bad ideas."
» Walk the talk.

The following recommendations will help MESD address internal employee communication needs and harness the energy of employees at all levels.

"Communication is everyone's role in the agency."

SPECIAL NOTE

There are assumptions that the activities recommended in this section do not currently exist. This may or may not be true. If there is a recommendation that the MESD is already doing, the way in which it is occurring might not be effective, and it might need to be retooled based on the feedback we received.

Take Action

No. 1 – Face Time

RECOMMENDATION

Establish a consistent schedule for agency and departmental meetings, leadership tours in the field and coordinated staff activities.

IMPLEMENT CONSISTENT AGENCY-WIDE MEETINGS

» Establish a schedule and guidelines for effective agency-wide meetings. Make these regular and anticipated. As part of the trust-building (and habit-building) process, set these up on a quarterly basis.

» These meetings are to be a time for MESD leadership to share important news, achievements and concerns, and a place where employees feel safe to ask questions and discuss solutions.

» These meetings should be about more than business. We encourage you to set aside part of the meeting as a social time, including time for employees to visit informally, for departments to share news or success stories, to have table talks with discussion questions and/or for team-building activities.

» Because regular meetings could be a burden for employees in more distant programs, explore ways technology can be used for them to participate remotely.

» If it is logistically feasible, consider hosting agency and departmental meetings in the field. Meet employees where they are.

DEPARTMENTAL MEETINGS

» Set guidelines so all departments have consistency in gathering their departments together. Set protocols for how often meetings should occur and ideas for what they could include.

» Encourage these gatherings to include both information from leadership and sharing by employees, and ensure they are safe places for employees to ask questions and express concerns.

LEADERSHIP TOURS (CABINET AND SUPERVISORS)

» Set a visitation schedule for leadership to visit programs, classrooms and schools out in the field.

» Make the goal one that thanks and praises employee efforts and allows them to showcase the good work they are doing.

STAFF ACTIVITIES

» Create a social committee or employee group responsible for staff activities, luncheons, celebrations, etc. These activities are designed to get staff out of their offices to bond and enjoy one another's company.

SUPPORTING DATA:

» Staff at all levels expressed the desire for more face-to-face meetings—both at the agency and department level. This seems especially important to newer staff members, but even those who have been with MESD for some years seek more personal interactions with supervisors/leadership.

» Staff is not interested in additional "sit-and-get" meetings (although at times these are important) but rather real opportunities for interaction, places where employees can both receive and share information, and engage in conversations.

» In light of the internal challenges surrounding trust, transparency and retaliation, it will be important to lay an appropriate groundwork for these gatherings, so they become a safe place for two-way interaction.

» Staff crave some fun interactions with their colleagues. A quick gathering with no business agenda but some coffee and snacks can be a good boost to morale.

» People want to feel they are part of something larger—and they are inspired when they learn what other groups in the agency are doing. They are curious about what is happening in other departments and want to hear success stories that will make them better ambassadors for the agency.

» Consider planned activities such as celebrations, staff potlucks, parties and recognitions.

Take Action

No. 2 – Employee Engagement in Agency Mission & Goals

RECOMMENDATION

Involve staff in a project to re-vision MESD's mission statement, logo and taglines to better reflect the agency's work and honor its employees. Use these work products to help build a more cohesive identity for MESD—internally and externally.

RE-TOOL THE AGENCY'S MISSION

» Engage in a strategic process to vet the MESD mission. Does it resonate with internal stakeholders?

» Conducting agency-wide meetings, departmental meetings and leadership tours would dovetail nicely with action items from the Face Time section. If appropriate, the mission statement effort could become a centerpiece of initial meetings/tours, giving departments and the agency a reason to meet and begin collaboration efforts.

CELEBRATING THE NEW MESD

» When this activity is finalized, re-introduce MESD to your internal and external stakeholders. Combine a celebration with an agency-wide meeting that includes employees from all sites. Consider "reintroducing" MESD to the community and to its partner districts via an ad campaign, updated services materials and SWAG that incorporates messages about the agency.

SPECIAL NOTE

Due to work responsibilities and locations, some employees identify more fully with schools and other off-site programs, so the mission statement should have enough breadth and portability to include them.

Take Action

No. 3 – Communication Tools

RECOMMENDATION

Increase or enhance ALL available communication tools. These include consistency in producing an all-staff internal newsletter, addressing web improvements, continuing leadership blogs and all-employee emails.

A CONSISTENT MONTHLY INTERNAL NEWSLETTER FOR THE AGENCY

» We recommend developing a monthly internal agency-wide e-newsletter that puts all of the latest information employees need to know—along with a couple of human interest stories—in one place. Human interest stories would focus on work being done at various sites and in departments, featuring and recognizing staff and students.

» A suggestion: Send out the newsletter after the regular monthly Board meeting, so it could include timely publication of Board highlights—something staff indicated they would appreciate.

A REDESIGNED WEBSITE

» We recommend initiating a redesign of the website, beginning by answering a key question: What is the website's purpose? Answering that question should help designers curate the content in a way that will make it easier to navigate and more user-friendly. If the agency decides the website is both for employees and clients, consider creating an intranet to serve staff-specific needs.

THE "ASK JIM" BLOG

» There is tremendous support for, and interest in, the "Ask Jim" blog. Employees love having the opportunity to submit questions and read the answers. They found it to be a safe source of accurate, reliable information. The only negative comments were that some thought it was a bit too sanitized, and it took too long to receive answers.

» Many are hopeful that the blog will be continued and that other administrators will consider creating their own blogs. (In light of changing leadership, the name of this tool would change.)

Continued on next page >

Take Action

No. 3 – Communication Tools *(continued)*

"We need to get better about telling our story and using data to show it."

MESD EMAILS

» Focus groups and the online survey indicate that email is currently an essential way employees receive agency-level information. The results for department-level information were similar with the highest numbers of employees liking MESD email, face-to-face meetings and e-newsletters. In both cases, many disliked getting their information via Facebook and Twitter.

Even with implementation of the proposed e-newsletter, MESD email will remain an important source of immediate information. A few improvements will make it more effective:

» Establish MESD emails as the preferred method of communication for key information.

» Create a "news flash" heading and subject line, so employees recognize when important information is being transmitted.

» Ensure that all employees are connected to the All-MESD email address list, so everyone gets important information at the same time.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK:

The results of Question 20 from our online survey support the importance of these communication tools:

How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?

Legend: LIKE (yellow), NEUTRAL (gray), DISLIKE (blue)

Categories: MESD Facebook Updates, MESD Twitter Updates, MESD Homepage Updates, MESD Email, E-newsletter, Face-to-face Meetings, Paper Fliers and/or Posters, Other
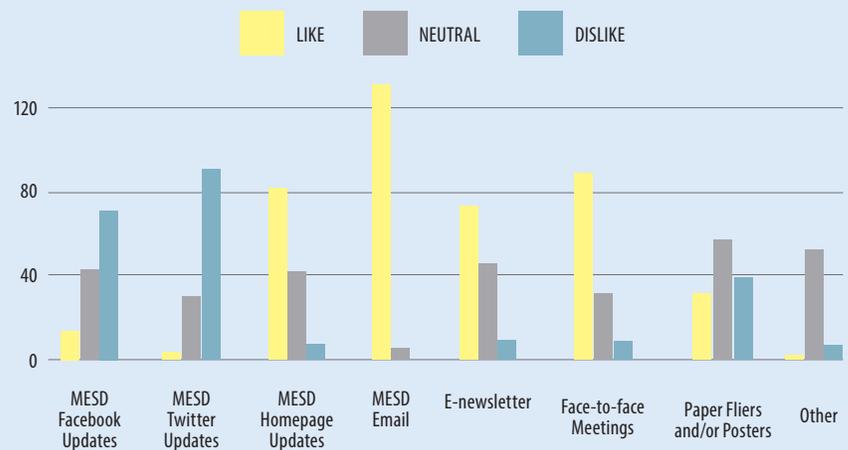
Take Action

No. 4 – Communication Training for Supervisors

RECOMMENDATION

Implement strict communication protocols and an accompanying supervisor training program to provide guidance and set expectations regarding communication across the agency and in individual departments.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

» Establish consistent onboarding protocols that supervisors should use with new employees agency-wide.

» End the agency's oral history style of institutional memory. Work with supervisors to formalize meaningful job descriptions and protocols for accomplishing employee tasks.

» For departments whose employees work in the field, determine the most effective ways for supervisors to engage with those districts and schools, to have conversations about the parameters of employees' job responsibilities.

COMMUNICATION TRAINING

» Dedicate time for communication training for supervisors—educating them about best communication practices.

» Develop protocols and share the expectation that all supervisors adhere to basic practices. For example, share situations in which email might be a better tool than face-to-face meetings and vice versa.

» During regular meetings of supervisors, take time to discuss what information they should convey to their staff members and provide key talking points. Suggest the platform they should use to help them convey information.

» Encourage supervisors to share what communication tools and strategies have worked well in their departments.

Conclusion

As suggested earlier in this report, we recommend convening four different internal groups to spearhead implementation of action items contained in each category. This process will take some time and results should not be expected overnight. However, the importance of taking the time needed to work through each recommendation is critical.

It will be very important to keep employees updated along the way.

The end result of this work will be a comprehensive strategic communication plan that will guide the agency's communication efforts into the future.

Additionally, it is recommended that MESD consider re-visiting employee engagement and employee satisfaction with communication improvements following implementation of the action items—after 12 to 18 months.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with MESD and we valued the conversations and candid feedback that will help the organization as it moves forward with a strategic communication plan.

Appendix A

Sample Stakeholder Interview Questions

Questions were adapted as appropriate for each group.

1. Do you know and understand the MESD mission, goals, purpose?

2. Do you receive timely information about decisions and actions that impact you?

3. What do you tell people about your workplace?

4. Do you have protocols in place in your departments that help you be a good communicator? What would help you?

5. What do you like most about working for your organization?

6. What do you like least?

7. In your opinion, is MESD currently reaching key audiences?

8. Who is your primary audience?

9. Do the messages you receive from MESD move you to take action?

10. What information is not being conveyed that should be?

11. Who are the most credible messengers in the organization?

12. What do you believe would make clients want to use MESD services in a more significant way?

13. What tools would help you better share information within your department and with other departments?

14. What do you perceive to be the strengths of MESD's current communication efforts?

15. What do you perceive to be the weaknesses of MESD's current communication efforts?

16. What communication tools and practices have been most effective?

17. What communication tools and practices have been least effective?

18. What communication opportunities is MESD missing?

19. Is there a specific piece of communication that is missing from your communication library?

20. Do you use the MESD website (or direct people there)? Why or why not?

21. What do you need MESD to improve on in its communication with you as a staff member?

22. Share your opinion about the impact of MESD's printed and electronic communication materials – what's working, what's not? (Visually appealing? Color and font choice? Key messages? Style?)

23. What is your favorite MESD publication/webpage/other communication? Why is it your favorite?

24. Is communication within your department effective? Why or why not?

25. Is communication among MESD departments effective? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Stakeholder Interview Snapshot – Leadership

Administrators and the Board should be commended for taking time to work through a comprehensive review process and accept guidance about how to improve communication and marketing strategies for MESD. During our interview with key leadership we learned:

SPECIAL NOTE

The following snapshot represents the most prominent themes recorded during stakeholder interviews with each focus group.

Perceptions

» There is unrest because of the leadership turnover. Supervisors are having difficulty knowing how to guide their employees because they don't know where to get information and how to consistently share it. Lack of consistent approach.

» There is a culture of information being passed along verbally, and because many people have left, there are many holes to be filled. It's evident there is no protocol in place for how to get needed information.

» There are many broken links in the chain of communication.

» There seems to be a punitive approach more prevalent than coaching.

» People trust their supervisors and the union, but not as much administrators.

» Staff morale is a concern.

» The general public does not know or understand what the agency is and what it does.

» Data is either not available or not being used effectively.

» A new brand is needed that more closely aligns with what MESD does.

Appendix B

Stakeholder Interview Snapshot – MESD Frontline Staff

The focus groups with three different MESD staff groups were insightful. It is clear employees feel passionate about their work and dedicated to their programs.

Perceptions

» There is inconsistent treatment of employees.
» There is a lack of responsiveness from supervisors in some departments.
» There is a perception that there is great dysfunction, especially in the last two years.
» People keep their heads down because they don't understand what can be said legally.
» There is lots of mistrust; a big communication gap between upper management and the rest of us.
» Information about decisions or actions that impact employees is hit and miss, depending on supervisor's communication style.
» Lots of information is being shared through the rumor mill, which may or may not be factual.
» The website is difficult to navigate and is not being managed effectively. It's difficult for employees to find what they need. New employees feel helpless when trying to find information.
» There is a lack of consistent training and onboarding. Supervisors don't always know what their people do.
» There is a lack of styles and standards for communicating professionaly in writing and online.
» Employees do not believe the mission statement reflects the true purpose of the agency.
» Employees feel that the MESD needs a new and consistent rebranding that reflects what they truly do.
» MESD has hit rock bottom in terms of moral and public perception. However, there is hope that it will improve.
» Employees are working in silos and have no idea of the magnitude of what the agency accomplishes.
» Apparent lack of communication protocol across the agency.
» People are not necessarily on the correct email lists.
» New employees are not introduced around the agency in a consistent manner.
» Employees embrace program goals more than agency-level goals.
» People want to have autonomy in their jobs but also to feel supported and valued.
» New regime is recognizing the importance of dealing with challenges in the agency and discussing how to address them.
» There is a lack of clarity around expectations of workload and disparities among supervisor approaches to following employee contracts.

Appendix B

» Workload is up and finances are down. This is causing great stress around the agency. (For example: School Districts are paying less but expecting the same amount of work from MESD employees.)

» There are employees who work out in the districts who feel challenged because their supervisors there don't understand what they can and can't do legally. This causes tension and disconnect.

» There are rumors about supervisors getting pay back while frontline employees have to take cuts. (This speaks to the need for clear communication.)

» Don't know who to call for help.

» MESD employees feel like they have many masters but no one has their back. They worry about relationships with districts because they don't want to lose contracts.

» Little acknowledgement of staff, high emotional toll – but staff keep going.

» Staff don't feel engaged with MESD as an agency, but they do with their team, department or building.

Online Survey Data

Appendix C

APPENDIX C
MESD Online Survey Data

Board decisions [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]
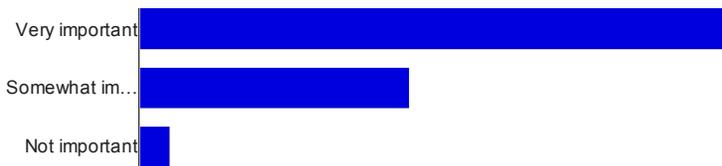
Very important	**92**	66.2%
Somewhat important	**42**	30.2%
Not important	**5**	3.6%

New employees [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**53**	38.7%
Somewhat important	**74**	54%
Not important	**10**	7.3%

Departing employees [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Positive news and stories about staff members [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	70	50.4%
Somewhat important	62	44.6%
Not important	7	5%

Legislative updates [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	81	58.7%
Somewhat important	53	38.4%
Not important	4	2.9%

Workshops and seminars [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**84**	60.4%
Somewhat important	**50**	36%
Not important	**5**	3.6%

Department decisions about procedures and practices [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**129**	92.8%
Somewhat important	**8**	5.8%
Not important	**2**	1.4%

MESD staff events (appreciation days, etc.) [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**73**	52.5%
Somewhat important	**62**	44.6%
Not important	**4**	2.9%

Scheduling updates (holidays, building closures, etc.) [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**114**	81.4%
Somewhat important	**24**	17.1%
Not important	**2**	1.4%

Media coverage of MESD [How important is it for you to receive the following agency-level and department-level communications?]

Very important	**78**	56.9%
Somewhat important	**51**	37.2%
Not important	**8**	5.8%

Are there types of information not listed above that are important for you to receive?

Answers to this question include:
- Many requests to receive information before changes occur in terms of contract, pay, benefits, scheduling/programming, new tools/apps, technology, policies, practices, departmental changes and cabinet decisions.
- Requests for opportunities to be included in decision-making.
- Requests for information on different departments, on districts and on education/school health throughout Oregon.
- Requests to be alerted to job opportunities within the MESD organization.

Do you receive information in a timely manner, so you can do your job?
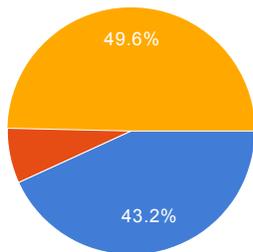
Yes	**60**	43.2%
No	**10**	7.2%
Sometimes	**69**	49.6%

What do you like most about working for your organization?

In general, people were most pleased about the people they work with, their perceived mission, the work they do and the benefits they receive. Here is a sampling of responses:

- Relationships with colleagues and students
- The facility I work at
- Positive atmosphere
- Making a difference
- Making education accessible to students with medical conditions
- Collective goal to serve children and families
- Supportive supervisors
- Support for school nurses

- Benefits, time off

What do you like least?

Answers ranged from specifics such as leadership issues and website problems to the more general issue of atmosphere and a lack of vision. Here is a sampling:

- Not feeling valued
- Workload is massive.
- Negativity, dysfunction of MESD admin and HR
- That key positions are filled by interim people, the revolving doors of administration
- No encouragement to learn more, get promoted from within.
- Inconsistent communication—frontline employees are the last to know what's going on.
- Lack of info flow among some departments
- Secrecy, dishonesty
- Lack of transparency at cabinet level, us vs. them mentality, lack of consulting with subject matter experts
- Atmosphere of reacting vs. acting
- Right hand doesn't know what left hand is doing.
- High stress—high turnover, disorganization
- Negative image from media—and lack of positive stories about the good done by nurses
- Not fairly compensated
- Departments in siloes
- Oral history-style training/lack of training
- Lack of team decision-making, any decision-making
- Lack of vision
- Top-down attitude
- Website is out of date (current employees, bios)
- Lack of flexibility in schedule
- Board is unprofessional
- Difficult to explain our purpose/mission—it seems to have evolved.
- Inconsistent, ever-changing procedures

Who are the most credible communicators in the organization?

Dozens of people—from top administrators to frontline employees—were named in these responses, but the ones who came up most often:

- Jim Rose (many times)
- Laura Conroy
- Margo Lalich
- Scott Perry

What do you perceive to be the strengths of MESD's current communications efforts?

Responses included both current and past efforts, most notably:

- The "Ask Jim" blog, and Jim in general. Responders observed that the blog made them feel as if he cared about schools and employees.
- The communication audit—some expressed that it shows MESD is addressing the lack of process, making an honest effort to improve and communicating more openly and clearly and trying to create climate of transparency. Change is under way.
- More frequent agency-wide emails.
- Emails and updates from the CIO, interim superintendent
- PIO is approachable and open to feedback.
- Website, social media, email
- Videos Skolnick put out a year ago to share vision
- Skolnick's "All Access" was good—stories about kids, staff in schools, etc.
  Miss the regular newsletter

What do you perceive to be the weaknesses of MESD's current communications efforts?

Responses ranged from specific communications topics and platforms to more general organizational challenges. They include:

- Lack of newsletter re: MESD and employees ("the Interaction")
- Lack of trust
- Lack of face-to-face interaction out in work places (they want superintendent and others to visit programs and share stories about them)
- Communications are not up front, gloss over the truth and do not admit mistakes.
- Resistance to change
- Inconsistency among departments
- Classroom-level staff disconnected from Cabinet/Board members
- Last-minute communications or lack of information (and decision-making ability) on changes affecting employees
- High turnover of leadership
- Lack of input from staff
- Hearing about the internal workings of MESD/department from news agencies
- Conflicting information
- Lack of communication with districts causes them to expect unsustainable levels of service
- Too many places to look for information
- Emails not sent to those who need them but sent to those who don't
- Lack of good news
- Lack of news on what's happening with Board.
- Messages from admin and ER(?) are too long.
- Website is hard to navigate.
- Lack of communication pathways in departments
- Slow communications
- Too much politicking—information released on a need-to-know basis
- Lack of information being shared outside Ainsworth building

. Do you use the MESD website (or direct people there)?
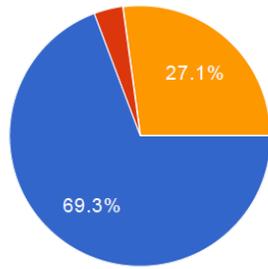
Yes	**97**	69.3%
No	**5**	3.6%
Sometimes	**38**	27.1%

Why or why not?
Responses included both positive and negative attributes of the website:
<u>Positives of the website</u>
- It contains the information I need to do my job.
- It contains necessary forms.
- It has useful information for parents.
- It contains contact information on programs and people.
- It contains information about my department.
- It contains information about other departments.
- It's a good staff tool but not a good marketing tool.

<u>Negatives of the website</u>
- The program doesn't have time to keep it current.
- It's hard to navigate if you're not familiar with it—you will waste time hunting down information.
- It is not intuitive.
- I only direct MESD employees there.
- We need an employee cheat sheet or training to navigate email, Helpdesk, server, etc.
- The website needs updating.
- It's unreliable.

What is your favorite MESD publication/webpage/other communication?
Responses included both current and past communications platforms:
- The "Ask Jim" blog (many)
- "Pulse Points," Department of School Health Services (many)
- The homepage (numerous)
- The MESD (former?) "Interaction" (several)
- Skolnick's newsletter (several)
- Wellness updates (several)
- All Access (from years ago) (several)
- Facebook (a few)
- HR newsletter (a few)
- Board minutes
- All-staff emails
- Staff health info
- Job openings
- Local Service Plan
- Marshall Memo

Why is it your favorite?

Survey respondents offered many reasons why they like certain publications. Here are the most common:

- I get to hear what's happening in different programs.
- Agency and department-level communication is in one place.
- I can read about decisions/budget issues.
- It's clear, concise, honest.
- Pulse Points because there is a lot of information and updates.
- It's a reminder that we are serving students.
- It offers timely information about events.
- It's applicable to work.
- It generates thought.
- We can speak freely without retribution.
- It's short but informative.
- It's positive and focuses on employee health.
- It offers news plus information on student/staff celebrations.
- It offers open, frank communication between supervisors and staff.

What do you need MESD to improve on in its communications with you as a staff member?

These are the most common types of responses:

- Consistency
- Transparency
- Create an environment where staff can trust administration to not retaliate.
- Be united, transparent
- Offer timely information, especially on changes.
- Satellite programs want communication about MESD programs.
- Share what's happening throughout agency, in various departments.
- Give budget projections, offer insight into legislative issues.
- Meet with colleagues in small, informal groups.
- Offer a biannual open forum/Q&A with component district leaders.
- Provide clear, concise information with more perspectives.
- Clarify for supervisors what they should tell staff vs. what MESD administration should tell staff.
- Provide consistent messaging to entire agency and talking points for supervisors to share.
- Share the five-year/future plan.
- Get cabinet members out into programs.
- Provide Board updates.
- Offer how-to tutorials for technology and training for teachers/staff.
- Ask for staff input via discussion at meetings before changing policies/procedures.
- Respond to concerns.
- Let staff know when news releases go to media. We don't want to learn about MESD from the newspaper/neighbors.
- Create onboarding procedures.

What do you tell people about communications within your workplace?

Respondents provided mostly negative responses, but there were a few positives. Here are representative responses:

- It's not good/very poor.
- It's inconsistent and disorganized.
- It's retaliatory.
- It's a professional embarrassment.
- Improving, but we still have a ways to go.
- MESD is trying to change (this survey is example).
- Silos need to come down.
- I need more contact with my supervisor.
- MESD's communications demonstrate a lack of understanding of its programs when it makes universal decisions.
- We have contract issues.
- It's very good.
- My site is fine.
- We have some great school teams.

Do you feel you are considered an integral part of the organization?
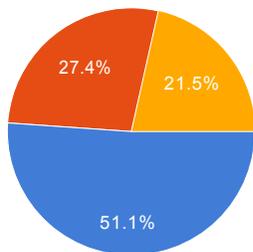
Yes	**69**	51.1%
No	**37**	27.4%
Don't know	**29**	21.5%

Do you believe your workplace is responsive to ideas and input from employees?
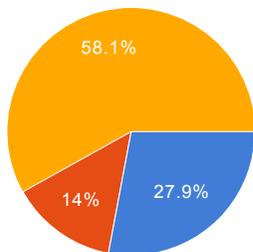
Yes	**38**	27.9%
No	**19**	14%
Sometimes	**79**	58.1%

AGENCY-LEVEL QUESTIONS

Do you receive information about agency happenings and decisions in a timely manner?
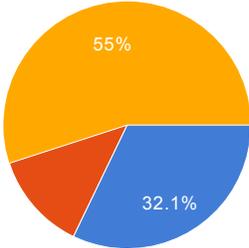
Yes	**45**	32.1%
No	**18**	12.9%
Sometimes	**77**	55%

Is communication between MESD departments effective?
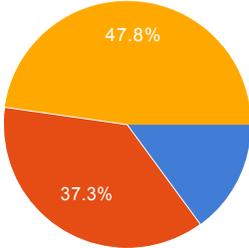
Yes	**20**	14.9%
No	**50**	37.3%
Sometimes	**64**	47.8%

Why or why not?

Respondents offered a number of reasons why communications between MESD departments is ineffective and a few reasons why it is working, including:

- Departments feel like separate organizations and don't all get along.
- It's done without students in mind.
- There's no visible system other than 1:1 email/group email/phone/text. Communication is at an individual level, not at high level.
- "I've never seen it."
- Departments are siloed.
- There is friction among leadership in different departments.
- Lack of consistency in hearing about other departments
- No mechanism to promote this.
- There are just rumors.
- There are no standards/expectations.
- "Ever since Laura Conroy arrived, communication has improved dramatically for the better."
- We are at 75-80% effectiveness—and improvements are continuing.
- SHS is effective in communications.

## MESD Facebook updates [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	**14**	10.8%
Neutral	**44**	33.8%
Dislike	**72**	55.4%

MESD Twitter updates [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	**5**	3.9%
Neutral	**31**	24.2%
Dislike	**92**	71.9%

MESD homepage updates [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	**83**	61.9%
Neutral	**43**	32.1%
Dislike	**8**	6%

MESD email [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	**132**	95.7%
Neutral	**6**	4.3%
Dislike	**0**	0%

E-newsletter [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	74	56.5%
Neutral	47	35.9%
Dislike	10	7.6%

Face-to-face meetings [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	90	68.7%
Neutral	32	24.4%
Dislike	9	6.9%

Paper fliers and/or posters [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	32	24.6%
Neutral	58	44.6%
Dislike	40	30.8%

Other [How do you prefer to receive agency-level information?]

Like	2	3.2%
Neutral	53	84.1%
Dislike	8	12.7%

Does MESD have mechanisms in place for leaders to hear employee concerns and ideas in an atmosphere of safety and without fear of retribution?

| Yes	34	24.5%
No	43	30.9%
Don't know	62	44.6%
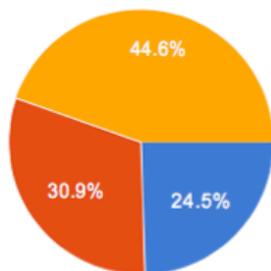
If yes, what do these mechanisms look like? If no, what would make this possible?

Respondents answered this question with answers about methods that would be useful for conveying information and issues with leadership:

- Lots of comments about the need to reestablish trust in administrators, relationships between managers and employees.
- The annual review can be a good time to communicate, but not all supervisors are receptive/helpful; there's been retaliation in the past.
- We are directed to go to our supervisor first, but sometimes they are the issue.
- There is no consistent mechanism—it depends on individual supervisor.
- "Ask Jim" has been helpful, but sometimes it took too long to get response and seemed censored.
- There should be a blog for every director.
- How about department suggestion boxes?
- There are suggestion boxes, but not aware of outcome of usage.
- Used to have operations meeting at Ainsworth led by Skolnick—a safe and confidential place to make suggestions to leadership team.
- Listening sessions haven't happened for a while
- Open meetings with superintendent would be helpful.
- People fear retribution, whether real or just perceived.
- You never see leaders unless you're at Ainsworth.
- Email or face-to-face meetings would be most helpful.
- We address at Labor Management Meetings when there is a problem or concern.
- Email works great.
- Some employees feel well-supported by responsive administrators.

Do you believe your ideas and concerns have an impact on directions and decisions pursued by MESD leadership?
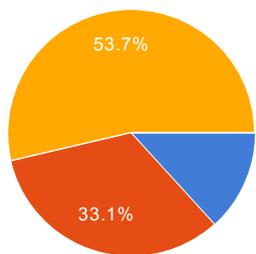
Yes	**18**	13.2%
No	**45**	33.1%
Sometimes	**73**	53.7%

Do you feel that the communications you receive from MESD are real and genuine?
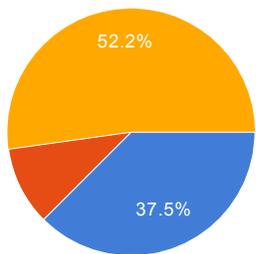
Yes	**51**	37.5%
No	**14**	10.3%
Sometimes	**71**	52.2%

DEPARTMENT-LEVEL QUESTIONS

MESD Facebook updates [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**6**	4.9%
Neutral	**28**	23%
Dislike	**88**	72.1%

MESD Twitter updates [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**2**	1.6%
Neutral	**17**	13.9%
Dislike	**103**	84.4%

Departmental homepage updates [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**52**	41.3%
Neutral	**44**	34.9%
Dislike	**30**	23.8%

MESD email [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**132**	96.4%
Neutral	**5**	3.6%
Dislike	**0**	0%

E-newsletter [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**68**	54.4%
Neutral	**37**	29.6%
Dislike	**20**	16%

Face-to-face meetings [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**103**	80.5%
Neutral	**18**	14.1%
Dislike	**7**	5.5%

Paper fliers and/or posters [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**24**	20%
Neutral	**49**	40.8%
Dislike	**47**	39.2%

Other [How do you prefer to receive department-level information?]

Like	**4**	6.5%
Neutral	**47**	75.8%
Dislike	**11**	17.7%

Do you have protocols in place in your department that help you be a good communicator?
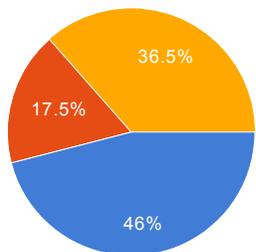
|		
Yes	**63**	46%
No	**24**	17.5%
Not sure	**50**	36.5%

What would help you be a good communicator?
Respondents offered ideas that fit in the following themes:

- Working as a team.
- Having more informal meetings, weekly meetings, more face-to-face meetings, scheduled opportunities to discuss concerns.
- Reading my own emails more frequently.
- If I knew there would be no retribution for speaking up.
- Trust
- Opportunity to give input on possible changes.
- If this culture were one that would close the loop on communications. We need timely, responsive communication, we need to know it matters.
- We need replies to our emails.
- Communication classes/workshops and documents with strategies for positive, clear communication.
- Supervisors want to know best practices, expectations for what to tell employees.
- Want supervisors to be role models
- Want clear expectations from director
- Training on protocols
- Would like HR visits, informing us of what's going on and seeking input
- We have good protocols; I have the tools I need.
- I am satisfied.
- My team has regular meetings, which keep everyone on task and in the loop.

**Is communication within your department effective?**
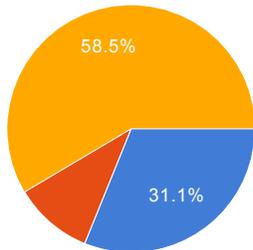
Yes	**42**	31.1%
No	**14**	10.4%
Sometimes	**79**	58.5%

Why or why not?

Respondents offered many reasons why communication within their departments is or is not effective. They generally fall in the following categories:

- No clear vision is set by director.
- Some never hear from their directors.
- Some principals aren't receptive/supportive.
- It's sometimes too vague.
- It's top-down.
- Peers don't communicate well
- We are flooded with email, so it's hard to prioritize.
- Information is given in too many formats.
- If you're there to hear information, you'll get it; if you're sick, you might never know.
- Still lots of secrecy at administration level.
- There is inconsistent delivery of information.
- We hear conflicting information from multiple higher ups.
- Sometimes decisions are made and then input is sought.
- Some people are not on the right email lists, so they miss out on information.
- Some lack physical proximity to others with similar responsibilities and have no central communicator.
- We are heard and decisions are agreed upon but often not followed through on.
- Department meetings every other week.
- We are led to be problem solvers and free to initiate and work things out.
- Bi-monthly meetings and daily emails when needed.
- We are a small, tight-knit group.
- Monthly department meetings are open and allow for open communication.

Does your department have mechanisms in place that make it possible for leaders to hear employee concerns and ideas in an atmosphere of safety and without fear of retribution?
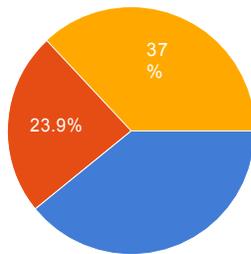

Yes	**54**	39.1%
No	**33**	23.9%
Don't know	**51**	37%

If yes, what do these mechanisms look like? If no, what would make this possible?

Respondents offered the following suggestions and experiences that have given employees safe ways to express concerns to leadership:

- Shared leadership meetings, supervisors active in program activities
- Regular meetings, 1:1 conversations
- Open door policies
- Accepting any Google invite to meet
- Suggestion box
- Bi-monthly staff meetings
- Weekly meetings
- Nurse council
- Positive conversations with supervisor
- We have ground rules, but still lack trust and fear retribution
- Surveys might help
- Suggestion boxes
- More administrator blogs like Jim's
- Anonymous suggestions, so no retribution would occur
- Need follow-up when employees share concerns.
- Need to first establish trust
- Frequent staff meetings

Do you believe your ideas and concerns have an impact on directions pursued by your supervisor(s) and department?
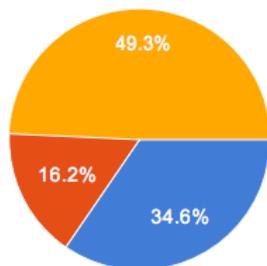
Yes	**47**	34.6%
No	**22**	16.2%
Sometimes	**67**	49.3%

Do you feel that the communications you receive from your department are real and genuine?
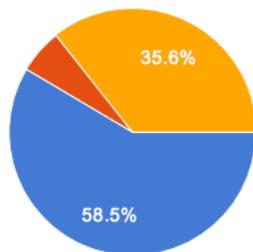
|		
Yes	**79**	58.5%
No	**8**	5.9%
Sometimes	**48**	35.6%

Wrap-up question

Do you have anything else you would like to say about MESD's internal communications?

Here are representative responses:

- There is a sense of lingering mistrust.
- Working off-site is hard. There is inconsistent communication follow-through, and it's hard to get a hold of people.
- People get pigeon-holed here and can't evolve.
- We need a culture of vision.
- Certain administrators are altogether missing.
- We need a consistent system for alerting all employees about good/bad news.
- I'm happy at my school but looking for consistency in how expectations are communicated for all teachers.
- Field staff feels forgotten.
- We need visionaries to move MESD forward, and serve in new and different ways.
- Communications and collaboration are improving now.
- I've worked here a long time, and communication has always been a problem.
- Please visit us and talk to us.
- We appreciate the survey and that MESD is asking our opinion.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**Including the current year, how many years have you worked for MESD?**
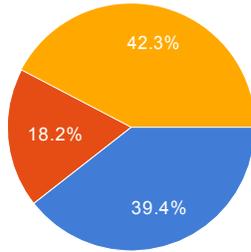
1-5 years	**54**	39.4%
6-10 years	**25**	18.2%
More than 10 years	**58**	42.3%

In what department do you work?
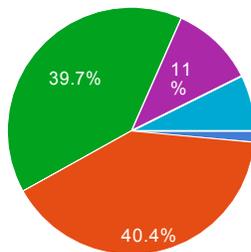
Business Services	**2**	1.5%
Education Services	**55**	40.4%
Human Resources	**0**	0%
School Health Services	**54**	39.7%
Technology Services	**15**	11%
Other	**10**	7.4%

Are you in a supervisory position?
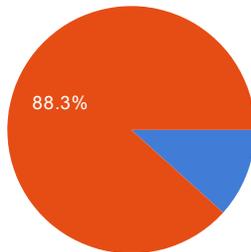
Yes	**16**	11.7%
No	**121**	88.3%

Are you a certificated or classified member of MESD?
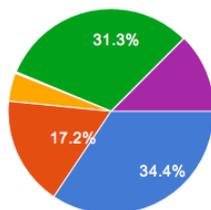
Certificated Board of Nursing	**44**	34.4%
Certificated TSPC	**22**	17.2%
Certificated other	**6**	4.7%
Classified	**40**	31.3%
Other	**16**	12.5%

**Where is your primary workplace?**
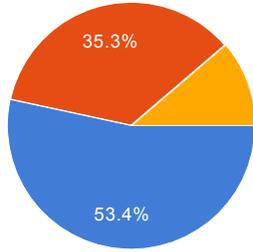
MESD campus (for example: Ainsworth, Wheatley, Helensview, Arata Creek, Burlingame Creek, WynneWatts)	**71**	53%
Out in a district or community served by MESD	**47**	35.1%
Both	**15**	11.2%

Are you ... ?
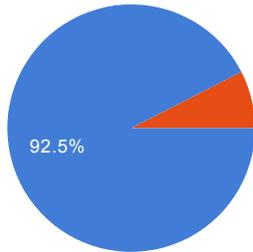
Full time	**123**	92.5%
Part time	**10**	7.5%

Number of daily responses
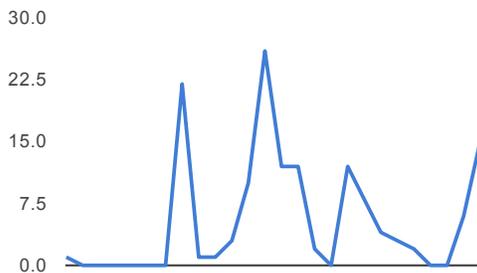
Appendix D

Materials Review

A review of the MESD website and printed materials was conducted by the ESD 112 Creative Services team. The team spent time assessing branding, messaging and overall impact of the materials submitted by MESD.

The following recommendations were made after reviewing samples of MESD marketing materials:

The materials created by Multnomah ESD lack brand consistency, including improper use (or lack) of MESD logo, color palette, fonts, key messaging and imagery. In order to establish consistency across all agency materials, it is recommended that MESD develop a set of brand guidelines.

The brand guidelines should consist of the following:
» Trademark/logo (and uses of)
» Tagline (and uses of, with or without trademark, etc.)
» Color Palette
» Typography
» Suggested use of Photography
» Messaging (brand personality/driver)

Once these guidelines are created it is advised that they be posted along with various useable formats of the logo and fonts on the MESD website/intranet and sent to all staff to implement in all of their materials. Training of employees responsible for creating any materials should be a top priority.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that MESD create a marketing plan after developing the brand guidelines. Rethinking communication strategies will yield targeted messaging.

Appendix D

Website Review

The ESD 112 Communication team conducted a review of the MESD website to assess whether content is relevant and engaging to users. Providing timely and targeted information is key to a user-friendly experience. The following observations and actionable recommendations are intended to help increase the effectiveness of your website.

NAVIGATION

» Creating user-friendly URLs would make areas of the website easier to refer to in marketing materials (ie www.mesd.org/businessservices instead of www.mesd.k12.or.us/domain/37)

» The implementation of a mega-menu (see www.chehalisschools.org) would allow users to access more areas of the site with just one click.

» Alphabetizing all links within menus would make navigation significantly easier.

» Typically, Quick Links should be a short, easily scanned list based on popularity/importance. These could be edited down and moved into the main navigation menu (rather than just shown on the homepage).

DESIGN AND ORGANIZATION

» Limit word count in articles featured on the homepage, and include "read more" links.

» Increase visual appeal and friendliness of the website by adding more imagery to content-heavy pages.

» Utilize design elements such as toggles, tabs and boxes to help organize content in an easy-to-read manner.

» Consider reorganizing information as referenced in the "Taking a Closer Look" sidebar on the left of this page.

RECOMMENDATION

If and/or when resources are available, it is our recommendation to redesign the MESD website to be more user-friendly.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

To consider a different strategy of organizing internal and external information electronically, take a look at these examples:

www.esd112.org

Public website targeting all audiences about ESD 112 programs and services.

www.esd112news.org

ESD newsroom targeting all audiences with stories specific to ESD 112 school districts and programs.

www.goesd112.org

ESD 112 staff website containing internal communication, events and staff engagement.

Appendix E

ESD 112's Agency Culture Initiative and Survey Questions

1. My primary workplace is…

2. I am… full time, part time

3. I am… a certificated employee, a classified employee

4. One of ESD 112's goals is to "Provide a work environment that values employees and creates opportunities for growth, contribution, and reward." Do you feel a shared value for our organization is important in order to do your work to the best of your ability? Yes, important, no, not important, unsure

5. Our ESD 112 workgroup has identified eight general concepts we believe are essential for providing a supportive work environment. Please indicate the TOP THREE concepts that are most important to you:
   » Employee engagement
   » Clear communication
   » Work/life balance
   » Employee recognition
   » Incentives and rewards
   » Special events
   » Succession planning/career growth…
   » Taking care of Employees

6. Do you have any other concepts that are not listed in the previous question that you'd like to share with the group?

7. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 meaning you strongly disagree with the statement and 5 meaning you strongly agree, please indicate your level of agreement for the following:
   » Employee engagement: I feel included and engaged in my workplace.
   » Clear communication: I receive timely and important communication about things that impact me or my job.
   » Work/life balance: I feel I can balance my work and my personal life appropriately.
   » Employee recognition: I feel like I am adequately recognized for the job I do.
   » Incentives and rewards: I feel ESD 112 rewards my work.
   » Special events: I feel there are opportunities to have fun in my workplace.
   » Succession planning/career growth: I feel the agency is committed to supporting career growth and advancement.
   » Take care of employees: I feel my employer takes care of me.

8. Do you have other items to share with the group that you believe contribute to a supportive work environment?

9. I am interested in participating in a focus group to further share my thoughts on agency culture.