PALO ALTO
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Meeting Notes

MEETING 1

- **Committee Title:** Parent/Guardian Communication Ad Hoc Committee
  Date/Time: October 10, 2023
  Location: District Office

- **Charge of Committee:** Develop communication strategies to enhance parents/guardians relationships.

- **Recommendation Deadline:** February 15, 2024

- **Committee Members Present:** Jim Sherman, Jeong Choe, Rachael Kaci, Hannah Banks, Isidro Pimentel, Shannon Coleman, four parents/guardians

- **Narrative Meeting Notes:**
  - Committee members reviewed the charge of the Short Term Ad Hoc Committee and introduced themselves.
    - The charge of the committee is to develop communication strategies to enhance parent/guardian relationships.
    - Some considerations include language and cultural barriers, open channels including social media usage, timely updates, empowering engagement, family needs and preferences, expectations of diverse communities.
    - Trust building is important.
    - The committee hopes to answer these questions: How to better engage the community? What are some helpful strategies? What are the deliverables?
  - Committee members collaboratively established norms.
  - Committee members discussed how they receive communications from PAUSD/school in general. Some takeaways include:
    - **Diverse Communication Methods:** Parents, teachers, and the community use a wide array of communication channels, including flyers, emails, ParentSquare, social media, phone calls, and more. This diversity necessitates a clear understanding of the preferred communication methods for different parties.
    - **Official vs. Unofficial Communication:** It is worth considering unofficial communication channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook groups, and Nextdoor. Differentiating between official and unofficial channels is vital.

- **Understanding Diverse Backgrounds:** Schoolsites and the District should maximize clear and consistent communication to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds and preferences. This includes providing information in preferred languages and simplifying complex messages, especially regarding issues like food services, registration, and attendance. Not all families are accustomed to the volume of communication in the District. To address this, PTA encourages elementary schools to describe their traditions to new families.
- **Feedback and Responsiveness:** Strengthening the feedback mechanism and expectations for responses would be helpful. This will help gauge the effectiveness of communication and ensure that important messages do not go unnoticed.
- **Coordinated Messaging:** Principals and teachers at each school level should coordinate their messages and frequencies to avoid overwhelming parents with redundant information, and to maintain consistency in the messages sent.
- **Emergency Notifications and Registration:** Ensure emergency notifications reach all parents, even if they have different notification settings. Additionally, work on improving the automatic sending of messages in preferred languages during registration processes.
- **Attendance Notifications:** These are automated. Using attendance data to support students is important, especially when there are concerns like mental health.

- Committee members started exploring communication preferences. Some key themes included:
  - Parents are feeling overwhelmed by the volume of communication they receive. They find it beneficial to have a consolidated weekly newsletter that contains important information. This approach helps them focus and reduces the clutter in their inboxes.
  - Strategies should be developed to streamline the collection and dissemination of information. It's essential to help parents understand the preferred methods for asking questions or seeking assistance. For general inquiries, Let's Talk and other established channels can be used, while contacting teachers is preferred for academic concerns. District offices should be contacted for registration-related issues.
  - In response to feedback, there is an effort to diversify social media channels to share school-related information. Linktree is being used to provide parents with a comprehensive overview of available social media and communication channels. This initiative aims to keep parents informed and engaged with what's happening at the schoolsite.

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IMPORTANT: Reserve last 10 minutes of the meeting to synthesize what has been discussed as a group.

➢ **Key Takeaways**

- There's many diverse communication channels, which can be overwhelming for families, parents, and guardians.
- There is a need to identify the official communication channels vs. the unofficial communication channels. Unofficial communication channels may not have the most accurate information.
- There is a preference for families to receive critical messages in one place, with clear, concise messaging. There is a need for clarification/categorization when sending out messages. For example, whether the message is FYI or if action is needed.

➢ **Next Steps / Next Meeting – Tuesday, November 14, 2023**

- Discuss Communication Guidelines from PTA.
- Review Board Policies.