

Communications Committee Meeting Minutes  
April 25, 2023  
7:00pm via Zoom

In attendance: David Cantor, Brian Fleischer, Eric Scherzer, Monk Inyang (portion)

1. Update on Web redesign and rebranding

Leveraging PowerPoint slides that were shared prior to the meeting with the Committee, Mr. Cantor presented a summary of his research/outreach to compare quoted pricing and features of different prospective website vendors, as well as the incumbent vendor, School Messenger. He had conversations with six different vendors and looked at dozens of school websites supported by those vendors. Mr. Cantor believes that Finalsight is the best option. It is used in over 5,000 school districts, including several surrounding New Jersey districts, has fresh and flexible design options, a simple and effective notification system, strong integration to support expanded and more effective use of social media channels, and automated formatting that make it easy to use. It would cost approximately \$22,000 additional in Year 1 to switch from School Messenger, of which \$15,000-\$18,000 would be start-up costs. Going forward, the cost difference would only be around \$3,000. The other prospective vendors were in a similar range.

Mr. Cantor has shared his analysis with Dr. Ponds and Ms. Hunt. Ms. Hunt believes this should be put out for competitive procurement, under which the proposed costs could come down from the prices quoted. The current contract with School Messenger expires on June 20, and a new provider would need approximately two months to get up and running. School Messenger would allow us to extend month-to-month, but Mr. Cantor would like to move quickly with an aim of being up with a new website before the start of SY 23-24.

2. Communications to parents (planned vs reactionary; proofing for errors)

The Committee asked about the process to avoid errors in communications sent out to parents. Mr. Cantor briefly discussed the process for drafting, copy editing and sending out announcements and emergency communications. While emergency communications are often drafted under significant time pressure, Mr. Cantor aims to have controls in place that drive timeliness and accuracy.

### 3. Communications on the budget process

The Committee expressed a desire to effectively communicate to the public how the budget is being balanced, to meet the intent of a public budget hearing and to meet the stated commitments to collaborative and transparent communication around the budget. Mr. Cantor shared that he has not yet been pulled into discussions about the presentation or communications strategy for the public hearing on the budget. He felt it would benefit the district to have “surrogates” outside of the district who can explain the constraints and mechanics of school budgeting under a 2% cap to the public.

The Committee discussed that ideally we’d have completed efficiency and scheduling analyses needed to support effective decision-making on potential budget cuts earlier and we would all like to avoid a situation where large numbers of non-tenured staff are again non-renewed in May only to be offered/re-hired in June.

### 4. State of the District

The Committee discussed that the plan previously discussed about a “State of the District” communications push this Spring is made more difficult if we’re in a period of significant staff reductions, but Mr. Cantor expressed that there are a lot of positive achievements and new initiatives, particularly in the area of community engagement, that would be worth touting. Mr. Cantor has not revisited the topic of a “State of the District” address/event with Dr. Ponds in a few weeks. They do still intend to send out a mailing to all Montclair residents touting highlight accomplishments. Mr. Scherzer wondered if such a communication might be better saved for September rather than May. Mr. Fleischer said he could see benefits and drawbacks with either timeframe. Mr. Cantor expressed that the timing could hinge on the wishes of the donor who may be supporting the cost of the mailing.

### 5. Communications on the Capital Construction Program

Mr. Cantor is preparing for the meeting with the Community Advisory Committee for the Capital Construction Program on May 10 and asked the Communications Committee for any feedback on the draft construction schedule presented to the Facilities Committee. Mr. Fleischer and Mr. Scherzer summarized the discussions from the Facilities Committee meeting and emphasized the importance of being able to clearly and effectively communicate the principles and considerations behind the proposed ordering of projects (e.g., health and safety; building systems/building envelope; instructional spaces; performance spaces), as well as the controls that will be required and monitored to ensure the security, health and safety of students and staff during periods of active construction in occupied buildings, and the efforts that will be undertaken to minimize disruption of teaching and learning environments.