



Antennae Up: Communications and Community Relations

Winning ticket

In November 2006, for the first time, Katy ISD put a bond authorization on the general election ballot. Without the need for a major “get-out-the-vote” component, the district’s bond communications plan aimed at distributing information as widely as possible throughout the community. The six-page brochure published for previous elections was replaced with seven individual information sheets focusing on specific areas such as finance, new construction, existing facilities, technology, how bonds work and how the package was put together. The Communications Department also created two direct mail pieces, one for all voters and another for senior citizens, fast-fact fliers in English and Spanish, and an employee election guide in English and Spanish. All publications were posted in print-on-demand format on the website, which also featured a mailbox link for questions and a frequently-asked-questions page. Individualized PowerPoint presentations prepared for school television monitors highlighted past and proposed bond projects at each campus. The Communications Department also scheduled speakers for 110 presentations to school and community groups during the campaign.

From publications to pixels

The Communications Department continued its move to provide parents and community members more information about the district electronically with the launch of *KatyISD Update*. Published approximately once a month, *KatyISD Update* provides subscribers with a quick overview and links to the latest district news headlines, action taken by the Board of Trustees, bond project updates and other important news. Parents could also sign up for campus *eNews* to receive news and information specific to their child’s school, as well as *Stranger Danger*, the district’s notification system to parents and community members regarding possible threats.

Seek and find

The January retirement announcement of long-time superintendent Dr. Leonard Merrell touched off a busy spring as the Board of Trustees initiated the search for his successor. In February, the Board heard proposals from consultants and selected Dr. Bob Thompson to conduct a nationwide search. Dr. Thompson spent two weeks meeting with community representatives and staff members to create a candidate profile that identified the qualities the district valued in a new superintendent. The position drew both in- and out-of-state applicants, from which the Board interviewed a pool of four candidates in mid-April. Their choice was Alton Frailey, superintendent of the DeSoto ISD, who was announced as the lone finalist on April 19.

Nose for news

From the *Wall Street Journal* to the *Houston Business Journal*, CNN to the Discovery Channel, network television from Japan to France – 142 reporters representing 45 different print, broadcast and electronic media outlets, contacted the Communications Department during the year. Among 692 contacts were 100-plus in-depth phone and on-camera interviews with Communications staff. The department sent out 136 news releases, in-depth feature stories, photos and press advisories. Throughout the year, staff also worked on other media-related activities including arranging interviews, preparing interviewees, requesting corrections, maintaining and sharing media contact lists, assisting with ad placement, working with campuses on release of student information and photos, coordinating media coverage, fielding media-related calls from community members and escorting media on site visits.

The Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council brings student leaders from all six high schools together four times a year to learn about district issues, ask questions and share student concerns and campus activities. Meetings rotate among high school campuses, and once a year members gather at an off-campus site for a “behind-the-scenes” look at district operations. In February they toured the Maintenance and Operations facility.

A marketing package for the Merrell Center developed by the Communications Department captured a 2006 “**Best of Category**” award presented by the Texas School Public Relations Association.

In the wake of the successful November bond election, the Board of Trustees requested the district to appoint a **Bond Review Committee** comprised of members of the November Bond Planning Committee. The 69 members of the committee began quarterly meetings in February to track the progress of bond projects, ask questions, assist with bond-related communications, and review financial information about the package.

During 2006-07, the Communications Department received and processed **380 formal public information requests**. That includes 15 subpoenas for personnel or student records, 109 requests for student and staff directory information, 56 requests from Child Protective Services, law enforcement agencies and other school districts for verifications of enrollment, 28 for police records, and 183 requests for other types of information. Of these, 14 required requests for rulings from the Texas Attorney General. The total represents a **20% increase over the previous year**.

Katy ISD **donated more than 10 pallets** of purged library books and resource materials to the Rotary Club of Katy for the **South African Book Project**, a Rotary service project that provides reading materials to children in less-developed countries.