



## **Community Engagement Report**

### **April 2021**

#### **Background**

Fulfilling our district's mission - each student will graduate with the skills needed to contribute and thrive in a changing world - depends on students being successful in school. Family engagement is one of the single most important factors in ensuring student success in school. Through the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), educators in California are charged with engaging families in the education of their children. Family engagement relies on effective communication, outreach, and connection to our schools. Realizing our mission involves a combination of connecting with families as well as directly connecting with our larger community to involve them in the success of our students and our schools. Our Community Engagement Department leads and supports our district in realizing these goals.

Our district's LCAP Goal #3 prioritizes the need for family engagement and communication: "Enhance parent and community engagement and communication." Specifically, within LCAP Goal #3, our district continued our commitment to "Improve communication tools in use by District staff to reach all parents effectively, thereby increasing the percentage of parents engaged in their children's learning." What began as a process by the Communications Task Force three years ago has resulted in our acquisition and implementation of communication tools that allow us to reach and maintain the highest level of community engagement through communication. We include strategic utilization of social media platforms and other online outreach tools to provide communication in whatever form our parents most prefer.

Our LCAP Goal #3 also identifies the need to provide "ongoing education, support and resources to include assistance navigating the educational system, supporting students with preparing for college and careers beyond high school, and topics generated by parents." Key to engaging both families and community, personal outreach extends opportunities for learning and collaborating. Through District and site level meetings and workshops, with a variety of purposes and participants, we partner with our parents to inform them, support them, and learn from them. In 2020-21, we have implemented Livermore Learns, a formal program which serves our parents and guardians by providing them with resources and tools to support their children's education.

We engage with our broader community in Livermore to showcase our schools, build confidence in our work, and facilitate partnerships that enrich our ability to educate our students. By literally - or virtually - being in the room and sitting at the table with members of our community, we bring our schools to the attention of civic, business, and non-profit organizations. By cultivating existing relationships with partners and building new ones, we embrace opportunities to enrich our programs. The work of the Community Engagement Department staff brings our schools into the community, always keeping our voters informed when an opportunity to support our schools arises.

In addition to external communication and outreach, our district is committed to fully implementing efficient internal communication practices using tools that provide systematic means of conveying information, fostering collaboration, and supporting professionalism. In addition to our now-routine tools - Blackboard Communications, District and School websites, Livermore Schools App, Peachjar, and Google - in 2020 the Community Engagement Department expanded our district's access to Thoughtexchange, Qualtrics, and Zoom Webinars. Effective internal communication supports student achievement, which in turn enables us to fulfill our mission.

### **Status**

Parent and community engagement and communication were taken to a new level in 2020, when the Community Engagement Department became the liaison between our District Leadership and our community as we shared Health Department news and District information, supported families and staff, and sought family and staff input so that we could continue to provide quality education for our students during the COVID-19 pandemic. We continued to lead District celebrations, and we nurtured our community partnerships. While our usual work continued, a new layer of needs propelled our work to a more urgent level of implementation.

### **Sharing Information**

Our website, [LivermoreSchools.org](https://www.livermoreschools.org), continues to evolve so that it remains the primary information resource for our entire LVJUSD community. In addition to sharing current news, announcements, meeting agendas, photos, events, and celebrations, our website in 2020 and 2021 has become a living document that provides families and staff with the most up-to-date information as we navigate the path of adapting education within the restrictions of the pandemic. We developed the LVJUSD 2020-21 School Year Resources Section, posted on our homepage (and linked to each school's website) to connect users to the *2020-21 LVJUSD Handbook* (as well as the recently published *LVJUSD Spring 2021 Handbook*), Child Nutrition Information, COVID-19 Information, Reopening Information, Livermore Library's Online Resources, Student Support Resources, Mental Health Resources, Communication & Updates, and the ever-changing Frequently Asked questions. Each of these links, in turn, connects to web pages that offer the most current information in each of the designated areas.

Our website continues to offer a contemporary format for all school sites and departments throughout our district and provides accessible content to all users. The content management system (back end of the website) includes built-in support for our editors to ensure that content on the website is compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA). One of our LCAP action items asserts that we will provide translation and interpretation services for parents and guardians. In addition to this need being met through translation services during person-to-person meetings through Language Line or interpreters, our website allows users to access content in their preferred language (over 70 languages are available).

Our website provides a home for informational outreach that works toward our mission, and shares District philosophy and core values. We share relevant resources and develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as needed to educate and inform our community and to support safe schools. Working within our content management system, we enter the metadata that allows for search engine optimization (SEO) so that information on our website can more easily be found when searched online. Our commitment is to use our website to engage our families and community in our schools, so that they understand what we do and learn how they can be engaged in our shared work to support students.

Even as our website houses information, we rely heavily on our Blackboard Communications (Bb Comm) tools to bring that important information into the hands of our families. In 2020, District staff sent almost 60% more messages than in 2019, including several months where the number of messages approached 1,000,000 (September and October of 2020). Emails and text messages in English and Spanish are the primary methods of communicating urgent information as well as more routine school and District updates. Important messages are also posted to our mobile app, Livermore Schools.

We currently have over 6,500 downloads of our mobile app. All community members are able to use the app to access calendar items and homepage news from any and all schools, if they choose, as well as to receive all general app notifications sent out by school sites and our District Office. They can follow social media accounts and peruse Peachjar flyers, all available through the app. The app includes one-click access to Tip Line, which allows our community to send positive messages as well as to alert administrators of potentially unsafe conditions. Additionally, parents and guardians who have logged in to the app are able to view their library and textbook records, through a link to our Destiny system. They can see student attendance, and modify their own notification preferences. Our app provides direct, easy access to featured areas of our website, such as the Mental Health section, and we are able to add icons to the app to increase its versatility; we recently added an icon that allows direct access to the Student Daily Health Screening page in PowerSchool that has been used since students returned to campus on March 22, 2021. As with our website, the app allows our community members to translate the content into their preferred language.

The Community Engagement Department manages our district's Peachjar program, through which all sites, including District-level staff, share electronic flyers with our families and

community. These flyers provide site-specific and district-wide information, and also share community opportunities for enrichment. We frequently make use of an online graphic design program (Canva) to facilitate creation of engaging and informative flyers, website posts, and social media posts.

We continue to utilize our social media platforms to provide updates, with each platform designed to provide a slightly different focus, all working together to inform and engage. (And all are available on the mobile app for easy access.) Facebook is our community bulletin board, where we share news and events from school sites, our district, and within our community. Twitter is the place to find resources available to students, parents, and educators. We retweet parent resources from Choose Love, Common Sense Media, Challenge Success, and other vetted sources. We also retweet news and information from our partners such as the Livermore Valley Education Foundation, the Pedrozzi Foundation, the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (LARPD), and the Livermore Library. Instagram is our platform to invite our community into our schools; we picture learning in action (in 2020, we pictured a lot of distance learning), we showcase teams and individuals contributing to our students' education, and we share images that celebrate our students' accomplishments and our district's progress. We also partner with the City of Livermore to share news on all platforms, and the City, in turn, uses its Nextdoor account to post District news and events, as well as safety reminders. Having varied social media platforms is an example of responding to the generational preferences of our parents and community.

### **Supporting our Families**

Our website content, direct communication, and social media posts provide resources and support to our families, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has unfolded and continues. In Spring 2020, the Community Engagement Department provided daily email updates about the status of the Shelter in Place Order, as our entire community was watching to see how long the pandemic would alter our lives. Our frequency of messaging relaxed as we settled into the pandemic way of life, while the relevance of our communication continued.

As soon as schools were dismissed, we created flyers for our Child Nutrition Department, providing our families with vital information about how to pick up meals, at no cost. We collaborated with our District nurses to distribute mask-making materials and digital thermometers to families who needed them. Our department participated in Alameda County Office of Education meetings, served on our District Reopening Task Force, and consulted with our communication partners in the California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA) to understand the scope of information our families would need, pulling together a plethora of resources over the summer of 2020 to create the *LVJUSD 2020-21 School Year Handbook*.

As we realized the need to begin the 2020-21 academic year through distance learning, the Community Engagement Department worked with school sites to develop First Day of School protocols, share bell schedules, communicate details of material and supply pick-ups, and

create Schoology login procedures for students and parents. Everything was provided to parents in both English and Spanish.

We continue to meet with our District Parent Liaisons to develop outreach strategies to engage our families who need additional support. Our department is part of the monthly meetings of our Health and Wellness Committee, and we publish a monthly “Nurse’s Station” section in our Superintendent’s newsletter, *The Grapevine*. We sit on the Mental Health Advisory Committee, interfacing with others in our community to provide support to our families. Our continual updating of our mental health website, including the addition of information about Care Solace, a 24-hour concierge service for providing families and staff with support in scheduling mental health appointments, reflects our understanding of our community’s needs and our commitment to providing support, particularly during these challenging times.

We are proud to provide a structured parent education program, Livermore Learns, that offers workshops - first in-person and, since COVID-19, online through Zoom meetings - to support our parents and guardians. The mission of Livermore Learns is to educate, inform, and engage parents and guardians as they support their children throughout their education. Livermore Learns is modeled after LVJUSD’s Framework for Success - a comprehensive framework that aligns academic, behavioral, and social emotional learning - to meet the needs of all students in our district. Just as our students are provided support and education in these three major areas, our parents will have opportunities to build their knowledge and skills around these areas as well.

Since Livermore Learns began in Fall/Winter 2020, we have offered over twenty workshops for parents and guardians around pertinent topics including Establishing a Routine; Motivating Your Child; Dealing With Distractions; Supporting Mild/Mod SDC Students During Distance Learning; Talking with Children About Social Justice & Equity; Parenting with Love & Logic; Work/Life Balance; Coping with Anxiety & Depression; Coping with Grief & Loss; Anxiety & Depression in Elementary Children; Anxiety & Depression in Teens; Mental Health Impacts of Social Media & Screen Usage; Supporting Children Returning to In-Person Learning; and Mental Health Impacts of Vaping, Nicotine & Marijuana (coming in April). In addition, through Livermore Learns we have offered Youth Mental Health First Aid Training classes, and have provided college planning information for middle school students and parents. The topics were generated through survey questions and participants are asked to provide feedback after workshops so that we can continue to offer relevant programming that meets the needs of our families.

### **Supporting our Staff**

For the past five years, the Community Engagement Department has shared communication guidelines, templates, calendars, and best practices that help administrators and teachers navigate both the routine outreach during a normal school year, and the crisis communication needed during times of emergency, stress, and now during the pandemic. In 2020-21, our department stepped up to support staff in their use of online platforms, especially Zoom, so that

collaboration, planning, and getting things done could continue as seamlessly as possible. We even created and shared with all staff an LVJUSD logo Zoom background that can be used to provide professionalism during participation in online District and community meetings.

In January 2021, when we realized our district could not host our annual Kindergarten Registration Fair in person, we supported our Student Services Department by offering our first webinar version of the Registration Fair. We helped facilitate Task Force meetings by conducting breakout rooms for discussion and collaboration. We facilitated a community webinar which allowed LVJUSD Leadership to provide information and ask questions, in real time, with parents and guardians who sought information about the transition toward in-person learning. Our department supported public access to Board of Education meetings. We developed and continue to monitor the online forms through which community members indicate their intent to share public comment at a Board meeting, and we manage the webinar details behind the scenes during meetings so that our Board can continue to engage all parents and guardians in the process of District decision-making and governance, even during Shelter in Place.

We continue to participate in monthly meetings for both elementary and secondary principals, using our time on the agenda to increase their mastery of our communication tools and hone their outreach and engagement practices. Our Community Engagement Department continues to provide training of site and district staff in the use of website and mass notification tools, offering workshops and individualized assistance, as needed. We support specific department outreach, from composing letters, to creating flyers, to planning events. We lead the work in ensuring our district's reputation is intact, training staff to incorporate our logo, mission, and colors into their publications so that the excellence of our district is consistently portrayed. We continue to provide training and coaching, so that all teachers who want to be able to build their webpage are trained, and all teachers feel comfortable using Blackboard to communicate with their students and parents.

Our district embraces G Suite technology to facilitate communication and collaboration. Additional support by our Community Engagement Department provides site administrators and others with tools to communicate effectively with staff and families. Staff members benefit from the collaborative platform that enables sharing of information, and we use Google to share our numerous training documents and messaging templates. "Leadership Weekly" is compiled through online collaboration by Cabinet members and their departments and shared each Thursday with site principals to pass on relevant information to their staff, students, and/or their parent/guardian communities. In 2020, at the request of teachers and principals, we added "Educator Weekly," a version of "Leadership Weekly" that is shared with all employees at the same time administrators receive "Leadership Weekly." For the 2020-21 school year, all site principals have committed to sharing regularly scheduled newsletters with their families; "Leadership Weekly" provides timely information to include in those publications.

The Communications Toolkit for Administrators is a living online resource that provides communication templates for messaging and outreach (e.g., letters to parents/guardians, crisis

notifications) as well as procedural best practices for conducting school events (e.g., first day of school, Back to School Night, State testing). Professional development to ensure consistent communication that reflects our district's high standards is ongoing. We continue to support staff throughout our district as we attain our goal of an engaged community.

## **Seeking Input**

The results of our combined work as a district to engage parents and guardians are captured in an annual survey and reported through our Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) Goal #3 each year. We have as a Goal #3 Action Item: Annually survey parents, primarily parents of English Learners and at-risk students, to determine parent education/information topics, and, once education/information is provided (through workshops, training etc.), survey parents to make sure the information was relevant and their needs were met. In 2020, we conducted the outreach required for the development of our Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan, and in 2021, we are leading the outreach of our LCAP Listening Campaign. In both instances, we are pioneering our district's implementation of Thoughtexchange, an online tool that gathers input from stakeholders while also allowing participants to rate input shared by others. We have also used Thoughtexchange during management team meetings, Task Force meetings, and principals meetings to readily identify salient points that need further discussion. Thoughtexchange is proving to be a valuable tool to identify priorities so that we can develop timely, strategic plans.

Our department also manages Qualtrics, our district's survey tool for more traditional questionnaires. We continue to create and administer surveys for annual feedback from parents and guardians, for our annual Senior Exit Survey, and as follow-up to professional development sessions and parent workshops. In 2020, we have used Qualtrics extensively to seek input from students, parents and guardians, and staff on distance learning, return to in-person learning, child nutrition needs, technology needs, feedback on communication, and, in spring 2020, on preferences for high school graduation options during the pandemic. The surveys we develop within Qualtrics seek input and provide the data we need, as a district, to make informed decisions that lead to continual improvement.

In addition to electronic input, communication in the form of meetings and seminars is particularly effective in engaging parents and guardians in the education of their students. District staff, as well as the leadership of our parent organizations, provide myriad opportunities for parent education and involvement. We invite (and require, in some cases) parent and guardian representation on school and District committees and boards. We want our parents and guardians to have a voice in the decision-making processes in our schools, and to have ownership of the progress our students make. Each of our schools has a parent organization, and each has a representative who participates in our Parent Club Information Council (PCIC), a monthly forum with our superintendent and senior staff, attended by school representatives along with representatives from the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (LARPD), the Livermore Valley Education Foundation (LVEF), the Livermore Library, and from our Board of

Education. At PCIC, participants share information and ideas, seek and receive guidance on projects, and provide input on District planning and policies

### **Celebrating Achievements & Milestones**

Our Community Engagement Department supports our district's celebrations of student and staff accomplishments. When COVID-19 derailed our traditional plans for middle school promotions and high school graduations, we stepped up to help allow the celebrations to continue, albeit in a pandemic-appropriate manner. We met with middle school principals and then worked with a local videographer to develop a promotion slideshow video for each of our 8th grade classes. We supported our high school principals, including facilitating online meetings with parents and with students to solicit their input on what the ceremony could look like. We supported our parent organizations to create and order celebration lawn signs for 8th and 12th graders. Instead of helping to serve at the annual Retirement Tea, we served on the Retirement Recognition Planning Committee and created a slideshow video honoring each District retiree in June 2020.

In the 2020-21 school year, we managed the celebration of our newly fluent and bilingual students by hosting our annual Reclassification Ceremony through a Zoom webinar. We conducted both District Spelling Bees, for grades 4-6 and 7-8, also through Zoom webinars. We continue to plan celebrations for milestones in our Bond Department, sharing good news through press releases, videos, social media, and physically distanced ribbon cutting ceremonies.

We are eager to return to our usual practice of engaging our community by inviting them to participate in the ongoing achievements of our students throughout the school year. We invite parents and our larger community to a variety of events at our schools; press and social media coverage of those events heighten outreach to those unable to attend. Events such as Principal for a Day, Coffee with the Principal, Open Houses, and Expos traditionally offer parents, guardians, and community members a first-hand look at what our schools offer and how they are developing young global citizens. Frequently and throughout the year, the Community Engagement Department supports sites in publicizing assemblies, theater productions, concerts, and athletic events that are open to the community.

Whether our events are in-person or through Zoom, we will continue to celebrate the milestones that mark each child's journey through their years in our district.

### **Partnering with Our Community**

As our department name suggests, we regularly engage with members of our community, including organizations outside of our district. Regular participation by the Director of Community Engagement in community meetings complements our outreach efforts by providing personal representation and District voice in our larger community. The Chamber of Commerce,



Innovation Tri-Valley, the Pedrozzi Foundation, the Livermore Valley Education Foundation (LVEF), Rotary Clubs, and more all have District representation that serves to develop and cultivate partnerships that engage our community directly in the success of our students. We support partner organizations in their outreach to our schools, including the Livermore Shakespeare Festival's ongoing *So Wise So Young* program for second graders and, in 2020, Quest Science Center's sponsorship of Miss America meeting with our middle school Leadership students.

Our department's work with the Real Estate Alliance of Livermore as well as with LVEF and the Rotarian Foundation of Livermore was instrumental in garnering donations to purchase hotspots and Chromebooks for students. Our partnership with the Pedrozzi Foundation supports our sophomore students having access to the PSAT, fosters the growth of the Pedrozzi Young Scholars program at Marilyn Avenue Elementary School, and provides funding to pay stipends for presenters during the evening workshops of Livermore Learns. Our work with the Student Education Loan Fund organization helps publicize the opportunity for our graduates to receive interest-free loans to support their continuing education after high school.

In 2020, we had the opportunity to serve our district and community as our District Liaison for Census 2020. The *Livermore Counts!* marketing campaign was developed in response to the need to educate the Livermore community and encourage participation in the 2020 Census. This was a collaborative campaign with the City of Livermore, the Livermore Public Library, and the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District. Our implementation included the use of street banners, signage in both English and Spanish, website development, school marquee and newsletter announcements, social media postings, buttons, banners, magnets, and give-aways, all designed to share the importance of the Census with our community members. As a result of our combined efforts, the response rate for the 2020 Census in our community was 82.6% - an improvement from the 2010 Census rate of 78% - a growth rate of almost 5% with nearly 4,000 more people being counted in the 2020 Census. In addition, the 2020 Livermore response rate exceeded the overall 2020 Alameda County rate of 75.8% (by 7%).

Our collaboration on the Census set the stage for a City-wide effort to encourage community members to wear face masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The #MaskUpForLivermore campaign involved a joint press release, a banner on Fourth Street, marquee messages at all schools, and numerous social media posts. Again working with the City of Livermore and LARPD, our district stepped up to support the health and safety of our community.

Our Community Engagement staff members learn from colleagues through the Alameda County Office of Education Public Information Officer (PIO) Network, through monthly collaboration with lead communicators in agencies throughout the City of Livermore, and through membership and participation in the California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). We are lifelong learners, always striving to be effective, efficient, and engaging.

We were honored this year at the 2021 CalSPRA Conference to be recognized for our high caliber of work. We received the Award of Merit for our production of the Superintendent's monthly newsletter, *The Grapevine*. We received the Award of Excellence for our successful Census 2020 Campaign.

Our Community Engagement Department, in conjunction with District staff, all look forward to improving our work to better serve our students, families, staff, and community. Communication is the basis of relationships, and so we pledge to communicate with our families so that they are fully engaged in our schools and in their children's learning and with our community members so that they grow in their understanding of and partnership with our schools.