Website launch guide

Best practices, tips, and document templates to help launch your district and school websites

Blackboard

Contents

Welcome

This ebook includes resources and tips to help you effectively communicate the transition from your previous district and school websites to new, re-designed Blackboard websites.

The tools and document templates you'll find here can be used to better inform your community about the change, encourage staff adoption of the new websites, and motivate your community to engage.

Communication best practices

Since 1997, we have been working with school districts to design and launch websites that engage and inform their communities. We have built best practices for districts to successfully transition to new websites.

A best practice to communicate the launch of your new websites is to roll out your launch announcements early—months ahead of the planned launch date.

Start with your teachers and staff. Keeping district employees in the loop will make them feel more informed and included in the changes. This will help eliminate barriers to adoption and usage.

Examples of internal communication channels include:

* Memo (printed and distributed)
* Email
* Post to internal message board
* Transition FAQs

These channels should be used to reinforce the initial communication and provide updates as the launch date approaches.

After the news has been shared internally, start to deliver the information to your community. Several messages via multiple channels are recommended to ensure the broadest reach.

> **"***We have received rave reviews for our website thus far. The information families said was most important to them is just a click away.***"**
>
> **Mary Olson**
> Director of Communication and PR
> Anoka-Hennepin School District (MN)

Examples of community outreach channels include:

- Mail a **letter** and send an **email** to parents, board members, PTO/PTA presidents, and your community ahead of your scheduled launch
- Send a **postcard** to parents
- Include an announcement in your **newsletter**
- Issue a **press release** to media
- Announce the new website on **social media** posts
- Display an **announcement** on your new website homepage

Some of our customers have used these additional tactics with great success:

- Provide updates and progress reports about the new website on social media channels
- Produce a welcome video; a virtual tour of your new website that guides visitors the first time they experience the new site
- Use your automated voice notification system to send a message from the superintendent announcing the launch of the new websites
- Submit an editorial to your local newspaper explaining the change and how it benefits those in the community

Click the play button above to view an example of a
welcome video supporting a new website

Promote your district brand

Your district is unique, with different needs and goals for each of the populations you serve.

You need to effectively communicate what makes your district special—to tell your own story and project a positive image.

Websites are often the first place the public visits to learn about a district, **including new families to the community and teachers looking for jobs.**

This provides your administrators with a great opportunity to communicate and strengthen your district's brand.

Leverage your websites to enhance your district brand

- Communicate brand throughout all websites in district
- Showcase successes; photos tell the best stories
- Update content frequently
- Highlight the strengths and differences of individual schools
- Demonstrate consistency across schools with common templates and consistent placement of information
- Leverage social media to extend reach of messaging

Building and maintaining your district brand can be a challenge. Here are some **FREE resources** to help guide your efforts and inspire you to take control of the stories being told about your district:

ebook

Message Received: A guide for building a successful K-12 communication strategy

ebook

Why Blackboard? K-12 communications leaders share real results

Blog

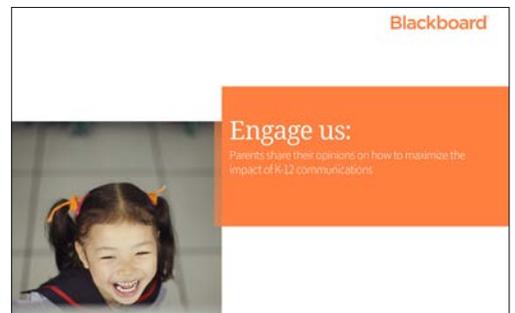Key insights into parent communication preferences

Blog

10 tips to avoid a disconnect in school communication

ebook

Survey says: There's a new culture of K-12 communication

ebook

Engage us: Parents share their opinions on how to maximize the impact of K-12 communications

70%

of Americans say mail is more personal than the internet.

Source: Direct Marketing Association via compu-mail.com

Documentation templates

Use these document templates and copy samples to inform your community about your new websites and beyond.

Email

Email is the most common form of communication today. It has the broadest reach of any media. Your community can receive email on their desktop computers, smartphones, and tablets.

An email best practice is to keep your message concise. Email copy should be direct and centered on a single topic. Subject lines are vital to getting the recipient to open the email. Readers tend to skim email copy—keeping the email length short increases the chance that your message will be read.

DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE

Letter (Direct mail)

In today's digital age, the written word can sometimes be overlooked in favor of digital channels, including email or text.

But consider how many emails and text messages you receive each day; compare that to the number of actual mail pieces you get. Letters can still be effective for vital messages.

DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE

Postcard

Postcards are another great way to grab your reader's attention. These can be used in place of, or in addition to, a letter.

Postcards are very versatile. You can also use them as a "take-away" during school events, including parent conferences, back-to-school night, etc.

DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE

Press release

The purpose of a press release is to attract favorable media attention and/ or provide publicity for news-worthy events.

You can distribute press releases through commercial, fee-based distribution services, such as news wire services. Free website services are also available, in addition to contacting local media channels directly, making news distribution more affordable for school districts.

DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE

Social media posts

The popularity of social media is undeniable. Many parents in your school district rely on Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and other outlets to stay engaged with friends, families and institutions—like yours.

Leverage these platforms to build excitement for your new websites before the launch, keep your community up-to-date during the transition, and drive traffic to the sites after launch.

Sample posts

- Announcing our new district and school websites! Look for them to go live [Date]
- District and school websites are being redesigned to serve you better. The new look launches [Date]. More info at [Link to info page]
- Today's the day! New websites go live—check them out [Link to district URL]

Announcements

Districts can craft announcements and use them in a variety of placements, including:

- Newsletters
- Voice mail messages to parents
- Posts to the former website

DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE

FAQs

A common best practice when introducing change to a large group of people (including your district staff and broader community) is to offer Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs.

It is recommended that you collect additional questions from your website visitors and continually update your FAQs document.

DOWNLOAD SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Resources for your schools and principals

You know many of your school leaders will need tools to help you roll out the new websites to parents. Here are some tips and tools to help your principals and other school leaders gain adoption.

- Give principals a school website fact sheet they can use when talking with families
- Use an office counter info card that secretaries can distribute with new website info and tips
- Create a backpack flyer that can be sent home in backpacks with students
- Ask principals to do a **new website demo** at back-to-school meetings and parent conferences

Optimize your launch

A well timed plan will ensure your parents, families, and entire K-12 community will be excited for and engaged with the entire new website process.

When you successfully communicate your website launch, your community will embrace the new websites and realize all the benefits they provide.

> **DOWNLOAD LAUNCH CHECKLIST**

Next steps

- Visit the Blackboard community engagement resource center
- Visit our Blackboard K-12 blog for more communication tips

We provide our customers with ongoing support to ensure quality implementations and to help drive community and staff adoption.