

Community Engagement Plan with
Evaluation Systems Report

January 12, 2010

BOULDER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION 2009-10 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Boulder Valley School District
6500 Arapahoe
Boulder, CO 80303
303-447-1010 • www.bvsd.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	2
Overarching Goals and Major Strategies	3
What is Community Engagement?.....	4
Strategic Messages.....	5
2009-10 Community Engagement Plan.....	7
Appendices	
Engaging the Boulder Valley Community—A Report of Findings	Appendix 1
Community Engagement Advisory Team Description	Appendix 2
Community Engagement Toolkit.....	Appendix 3

OVERVIEW

The Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) board of education contracted with the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) and Schoolhouse Communications to work with the board to develop a process that effectively and continually engages the district's diverse community, especially underrepresented or non-represented groups.

CASB/Schoolhouse began the process with interviews and focus group research about how community engagement efforts were viewed in BVSD. Key questions: What's working? What strategies need to be improved? What topics are members of the community eager to discuss and why? The interviews and focus group findings helped to shape the board's priorities for community engagement.

A copy of the report is included in the appendix of this document.

This 2009-10 community engagement plan for the BVSD board is informed by the interview and focus group findings as well as dialogue sessions with a Community Engagement Advisory Team made up of representatives of the BVSD community. The plan integrates internal and external communication strategies to keep the public and staff informed about the board's community engagement efforts.

The community engagement research resulted in the following recommendations to the board for its future community engagement efforts.

- Establish clear expectations from the start.

- Engage us *before* decisions are made.
- Explain clearly how community input is used.
- Talk with us on our turf.
- Reach beyond the "usual suspects."
- Use multiple methods to engage the community.
- Recognize the unique differences from community to community.
- Invest the time and resources to do it well.

Given these community expectations and the goals the board of education set out for community engagement through its Request For Qualifications process, the 2009-10 community engagement plan will focus on creating a community-wide conversation on student success.

The plan is intended to provide a structure and tools for community engagement that will serve the district for years to come, no matter the issue discussed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PURPOSE STATEMENT AND GOALS

Community Engagement Purpose Statement

The mission of BVSD is: “To graduate students in the New Century who have the knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that will make this world a safer, more thoughtful and more inclusive place in which to live.” The BVSD board has a responsibility to understand the needs and desires of the community, as well as to understand its willingness and ability to support the district’s education program. The board believes that such understanding can be best gained by direct personal interaction, not just between the board and community members, but also among the community members themselves.

The purpose of the board’s community engagement program is to provide our community with the opportunity to discuss public education in a way that will:

1. create a common understanding of the public values underlying our vision of the 21st Century graduate;
2. examine how these values are supported, or not supported, by the policies and programs of the district;
3. provide information to help guide the board in maintaining the proper balance when values are in conflict or insufficient resources exist to fully satisfy all values.

Goals

BVSD’s Request for Qualifications outlined these community engagement goals:

1. To have a process that effectively and continually engages the full extent of the district’s diverse community, especially underrepresented or non-represented groups.
2. To create more opportunities, formal and informal, for meaningful dialogue and interaction between board members and district community members.
3. To involve the community more in the decision-making process, while recognizing and acknowledging the board’s role as final decision maker for certain issues.
4. To ensure that the district community is informed about, and understands board decisions and how they may be implemented, especially when the community plays a role in that implementation.
5. Ideally, the process could be extended to the Boulder Valley School District staff and local schools to improve community engagement districtwide.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ?

Simply put, community engagement is the process of involving people in decisions that affect them. A well-planned process can result in a common vision and shared responsibility for educating students in BVSD. School board members' decisions are more richly informed when the public weighs in. As leaders listen to community members' questions and concerns, they can better determine public support for an issue, areas in need of more clarity, trade-offs and potential solutions.

Community engagement can help citizens better understand the tough choices confronting district leaders and school board members so they can provide input into those decisions early on.

Community engagement is:

- A two-way dialogue that can lead to a shared sense of direction, responsibility and resources for decisions affecting public schools
- A long-term effort to identify a community's perspectives and questions about key issues
- A means of helping citizens understand the issues confronting the community and giving them a voice in their resolution

Community engagement is not:

- A strategy for swaying public opinion under the pretense of "community dialogue"
- A public relations campaign that has a predetermined end
- An initiative to sell ideas to the community to win its approval

Community engagement takes place in a variety of ways, but successful efforts involve opportunities for everyday people to talk about education issues of communitywide importance. Often these conversations take place over time, giving participants time to study, process and weigh the trade-offs of different outcomes.

During a community dialogue session, participants deepen their understanding of issues, listen to differing viewpoints and develop potential solutions. Informational materials often help inform the conversations. At the end of a dialogue, further exploration of an issue may be needed, group recommendations may be submitted and, ultimately, changes in policy and practice may be adopted.

STRATEGIC MESSAGES

Throughout the year, these strategic messages with supporting talking points should be repeated in all materials that communicate about the board’s community engagement program. The purpose of the messages and talking points are to create a clear understanding of the board’s purpose and goals for engaging the community.

THEME: What is community engagement and why is it significant to BVSD?

Message One: We believe our public schools belong to the communities they serve. That’s why the Boulder Valley Board of Education takes its role to listen and talk with the community about the issues affecting our public schools very seriously.

Talking points:

- The Boulder Valley school board wants to make sure that our decisions reflect the values of the communities we represent.
- In response, we are developing a new way of listening to and talking with members of our community - parents, students, taxpayers, educators, and others.
- This improved approach – referred to as “community engagement” – is a thoughtful, more meaningful way to bring the public’s voice to public education. It does so by connecting people to each other and to the institutions and leaders that affects their lives.

- And you’ve told us we can do better job of connecting to our communities. A 2008 poll showed 58 percent of those surveyed didn’t feel the Boulder Valley School District was particularly connected to their respective community.
- That’s not acceptable. After all, everyone has a stake in our public schools and our students’ education – not just elected officials.
- Community engagement, however, is not a quick fix to a problem or an issue. It requires a new way of thinking, listening, and talking about what we value as a community.
- Engaging the community is a big part of our job as board members.

THEME: Why invest in this work now – especially in such a tough economy?

Message Two: The board of education’s comprehensive community engagement project is especially timely and necessary during these difficult economic times. Now more than ever, we must be clear about what our community values most as we make critical decisions that affect our kids’ education.

Talking points:

- The downturn in the economy has prompted difficult discussions about issues ranging from

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

increased class sizes to sustaining teacher quality.

- A more thoughtful, long-term community engagement process will help us better listen to our community as we make these critical decisions and others about our public schools. It will also help us identify ways to use scarce resources wisely.
- Our goal is to have deeper and richer conversations with our community that result in better achievement for kids.
- That's why the Boulder Valley Board of Education has worked with experts to assist us in developing an effective community engagement process.
- It will take time to refine and take root, but we feel that it is an investment worth making.
- We are pioneering this work in our community. Some public entities limit decision-making only to expert advice or to pressure from a special interest group. Instead, the school board will be able to factor in a wide-range of values and ideas from the broader community, which will help guide our decisions.
- We know this investment will be money well spent if community engagement sustains itself over time – regardless of changes in leadership both on the board and in the superintendent's office.

2009-2010 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The community engagement strategies and tactics in the following table are intended to help meet the board’s community engagement goals outlined on page 3. The plan closely follows recommendations made in the Report of Findings from focus groups and interviews conducted in BVSD in March and April 2009. (See report of findings in the Appendix to this document.) Those recommendations are as follows.

1. Advisory Team. Create a community engagement advisory team of internal and external stakeholders to help the board extend its reach into the community and to build support for its engagement efforts. Members will promote community engagement sessions among their networks, encourage broad support for the community engagement process and help the board evaluate the effectiveness of its community engagement plan.

2. Board vision/definition. Clarify and communicate the board’s vision and an agreed-upon definition for community engagement. This is essential to creating sustainability for the program and clearly defining the board’s role in the community engagement process.

3. Communications plan. Promote and support the community engagement program by developing a communications plan that focuses on major categories such as feedback loops (how participants’ input was used in the decision-making process), broad promotion of community engagement sessions, information about what community engagement is and why it is relevant to BVSD’s mission, and media relations.

4. Design and recruitment. Design a variety of methods to engage the community — using and improving existing efforts as well as creating dedicated dialogue sessions on student achievement topics.

5. Facilitator “bank.” Develop a bank of skilled, unbiased facilitators to conduct formal dialogue sessions.

6. Communications Department liaison. Assign community engagement management responsibilities to the Communications Department. To be effective and sustained, the community engagement initiative needs a staff member who can navigate internal structures and serve as a day-to-day contact. We recommend that this position be housed in the Communications Department and led by an individual who collaborates closely with departments in the district.

7. Evaluation. Develop methods and tools to enable the superintendent and the school board to evaluate the effectiveness of its community engagement program on an ongoing basis.

A year-long community conversation about student success

The overarching goal of the community engagement plan is to create a year-long conversation about student success in the Boulder Valley School District. This conversation will inform the board of education about the community’s values regarding the success of its students.

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

It will help the board better reflect these values as it makes policy decisions regarding the success of students, and will allow the community to weigh in on issues before decisions are made.

The engagement process will attempt to reach far and wide throughout the district to include the “voices” of those who have not typically been heard on school district issues. It will provide the board and the district tools to assist in the engagement process and a framework that may be used for years to come.

Plan is guideline

This community engagement plan is intended to serve as a guideline to the board and the school district—one that can and should be adapted as needed. It should be understood that community engagement is an “organic” and dynamic process. Therefore, additional strategies may emerge from the ongoing dialogue with the community. In addition, evaluation methods have been built in throughout the process to allow the board and staff to modify the process as needed along the way.

DEADLINE	CATEGORY	MAJOR STRATEGIES AND TACTICS	RESPONSIBILITY
DONE	Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	<i>Community Engagement Advisory Team</i> Invite representatives of BVSD’s diverse communities to comprise a Community Engagement Advisory Team to advise the board on its process, issues to be discussed and to help with outreach to the community. Team meets regularly on an ongoing basis. (See Advisory Team description, Appendix 2.)	School board with assistance from CASB/Schoolhouse
DONE	Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	<i>Advisory Team Meeting 1</i> Board hosts first meeting of Community Engagement Advisory Team to brief team on board’s community engagement plan and seek advice on issue to be discussed.	School board Superintendent Communications Director CASB/Schoolhouse

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

DONE	Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	Advisory Team Meeting 2 Board hosts second meeting of Community Engagement Advisory Team to frame the issue of student success and to begin discussion participant recruitment.	School board Superintendent Communications Director CASB/Schoolhouse
DONE	Sustainability	New school board member community engagement orientation Provide orientation on community engagement for newly elected school board members.	School board with tools developed by CASB/Schoolhouse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of Findings • Community Engagement Toolkit
DONE	Formal dialogue Sustainability	Essential question With advice from Community Engagement Advisory Team, board determines the main question to be discussed at dialogue sessions.	School board
January 2010	Formal dialogue Reaching diverse audiences	Planning for winter dialogue sessions In order to assure outreach to diverse audiences, the board should specifically invite participants to winter dialogue sessions as well as publicize them to the community at large. District collects contact information for individuals to be invited to dialogue sessions from Advisory Team and other sources. District selects and reserves locations for dialogue sessions.	Community engagement work group Communications Department

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

<p>January 2010</p>	<p>Formal dialogue</p>	<p>Facilitator/recorder recruitment Community Engagement Work Group identifies and invites individuals, including members of the Advisory Team to be facilitators or recorders for dialogue sessions. Advisory Team contacted by email to provide names and contact information for invitees.</p>	<p>Work Group Advisory Team</p>
<p>January 2010</p>	<p>Communications plan</p>	<p>Communication to district staff about community engagement Place article in staff newsletter about the board’s community engagement program and the plan.</p>	<p>District staff *CASB/Schoolhouse available to develop article if needed. Cost TBD.</p>
<p>January 2010</p>	<p>Communications plan</p>	<p>District Web site development Develop a new “Community Conversations on Student Success” section on the BVSD Web site to be launched in January. Key sections should explain what community engagement is/is not; why the board is making it a priority; what the research revealed; upcoming sessions; the district contact; resources; etc. Key messages noted earlier should be embedded in some of these sections. Future postings might include online survey for participants; key themes raised at dialogue sessions; news coverage; board president’s</p>	<p>District staff *CASB/Schoolhouse available to develop Web content if needed. Cost TBD.</p>

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

		blog section focused on topic of discussion featured in dialogue sessions (two-way); etc.	
Late January 2010	Communications plan	<p>Media placement Schedule editorial board meetings with the Denver Post, Boulder Daily Camera and other pertinent community newspapers to discuss the board’s community engagement program, including web site.</p> <p>Draft op-ed for submission, drawing from key messages noted earlier and promote upcoming dialogue sessions (Denver Post and Boulder Camera).</p> <p>Contact reporters who cover the school district with information about the community engagement program (some may be in attendance at editorial board meetings too).</p>	Board president Superintendent Communications Director
Late January 2010	Communications plan	<p>Articles in school newsletters Submit an article about the board’s community engagement program, including web site, geared to parents for publication in all school newsletters across the district.</p>	Communications Director *CASB/Schoolhouse available to develop article if needed. Cost TBD.

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Late January 2010	Communications plan	Web site launched “Community Conversations on Student Success” web site as described above is launched and publicized to staff and media.	Communications Department
January 2010	Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	Advisory Team Meeting Continuation Determine schedule for ongoing meetings of Advisory Team, including possible online discussions with the team.	Work Group Communications Department
January 14, 2010	Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	Advisory Team Meeting 3 Board hosts meeting of the Advisory Team to seek assistance in recruiting participants and to brief the team on the format of the dialogue sessions and discussion guide. Short promotional blurb and messages/talking points about upcoming sessions are provided to the advisory team to promote through their networks (presentations, Web sites, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	School board Superintendent Communications Director *CASB/Schoolhouse available to facilitate. Cost TBD.
By Early February 2010	Formal dialogue Sustainability	Dialogue session agenda CASB/Schoolhouse develops agenda and discussion guides for dialogue sessions that the board may also use as a model for future community dialogue sessions.	CASB/Schoolhouse

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

February & March 2010	Communications Plan	Dialogue session publicity District uses all channels of external communication (i.e., key communicators networks, district Web site, newsletters, social media) to publicize February and March dialogue sessions, encouraging the public to attend.	Communications Department
February 17	Formal dialogue	Facilitator/recorder training CASB/Schoolhouse conducts a community engagement facilitator training session to prepare facilitators and recorders for the February and March dialogue sessions.	CASB/Schoolhouse
Week of February 15, 2010	Formal dialogue	Reminder contacts District sends reminder e-mails (or makes reminder calls if necessary) to dialogue session participants.	Communications Dept.
Week of February 15, 2010	Communications plan	Follow-up media contact District makes contact with reporters to remind them of dialogue sessions.	Communications Dept.
February 2010	Informal dialogue Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability	Community dialogue tools development Tools to be used to expand student success dialogue throughout the community are developed. Tools will include, but are not limited to, dialogue session recruitment and logistics tips, discussion guide and report forms for community use.	Work Group Communications Dept. *CASB/Schoolhouse available to develop tools as needed. Cost TBD.

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

		Consider putting tools up on Web site.	
February 20, 2010 March 13, 2010	Formal dialogue	Community dialogue sessions Hold six dialogue sessions on the topic of student achievement in across the district on two Saturdays—February 20 and March 13. The dialogue sessions serve as a kick-off to a year-long community conversation about student success. Two school board members and one superintendent’s cabinet member attend each meeting to listen/take notes. Advisory Team members are encouraged to attend.	CASB/Schoolhouse School Board Superintendent’s Cabinet Advisory Team *District has contracted with CASB/Schoolhouse to facilitate up to three dialogue sessions.
February 20, 2010 February 22, 2010	Evaluation	Dialogue session debriefs Hold a 10-15 minute, in-person debrief with all facilitators immediately following the session to find out what worked and didn’t and what additional support they need to be successful. Hold conference call on Monday following the session with board members, superintendent, communications director, Advisory Team members to evaluate the meetings and make any tweaks necessary for next dialogue sessions. Share earlier feedback from facilitators with the group too.	CASB/Schoolhouse School Board Superintendent Advisory Team Communications Director CASB/Schoolhouse

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

<p>After February 20, 2010</p>	<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Participant survey February dialogue session participants are encouraged to complete a brief online survey to determine their opinion of the dialogue sessions and suggestions for improvement. Introduction to survey will promote the upcoming community dialogue web site and tools. Survey results communicated to board of education.</p>	<p>Communications Department *CASB/Schoolhouse available to draft survey as needed. Cost TBD.</p>
<p>Late February/Early March 2010</p>	<p>Communications Plan</p>	<p>Dialogue session results publicity District uses all regular communication channels to publicize to staff, community and media the results of the February dialogue sessions and to encourage attendance at March sessions.</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>
<p>March 13, 2010</p>	<p>Formal dialogue</p>	<p>Community Dialogue Sessions Second round of community dialogue sessions on student success held on one Saturday in February (see description above).</p>	<p>CASB/Schoolhouse School Board Superintendent’s Cabinet Advisory Team</p>
<p>After March 13, 2010</p>	<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Participant survey March dialogue session participants are encouraged to complete a brief online survey (see description above).</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

<p>Begin after February 20, 2010</p>	<p>Reaching diverse audiences Sustainability</p>	<p><i>Community Dialogue Web site</i> Update Web site to include what was heard during the sessions, next steps, media coverage, and community dialogue tools</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>
<p>After March 13, 2010</p>	<p>Communications Plan</p>	<p><i>Dialogue session results publicity</i> District uses all regular communication channels to publicize to staff, community and media the results of the March dialogue sessions and to publicize community dialogue web site.</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>
<p>Feb.-March 2010</p>	<p>Communications Plan</p>	<p><i>Dialogue session follow-up</i> District sends summary of dialogue session results to dialogue participants, along information about how they can continue the conversation using district tools available on the web site.</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>
<p>April-Dec. 2010</p>	<p>Formal dialogue Sustainability</p>	<p><i>Board work session conversations</i> The board continues the community conversation by devoting one work session a month to dialogue on student success, specifically inviting representatives of targeted groups, such as parents of preschoolers, realtors, senior citizens, etc. Board uses community discussion guides, staff records and provides session feedback to participants.</p>	<p>School Board Superintendent Communications Department</p>

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

<p>April-Dec. 2010</p>	<p>Informal dialogue</p> <p>Reaching diverse audiences</p> <p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Board members meet with community groups and schools</p> <p>Develop calendar of major events, key community group meetings (e.g., service clubs, local governmental bodies) and school visits in the district's nine communities. Board members divide responsibility to attend these events and make school visits throughout the year. If appropriate, board members ask "one key question" on student success derived from materials already produced. Develop a simple form for board members to use to provide feedback to the board as a whole.</p>	<p>School Board Communications Department</p>
<p>April-Dec. 2010</p>	<p>Communications plan</p>	<p>Ongoing communication about community engagement</p> <p>At strategic points throughout the year, communicate to board, staff, community and media through district's regular communication vehicles and the community dialogue Web site progress on the district's community engagement program. Topics could include discussion trends, feature stories about individuals who have been engaged, the board's ongoing efforts to reach out, etc.</p>	<p>Communications Department</p>

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

April 2010	Evaluation	<p>Consultant check-in CASB/Schoolhouse conducts a meeting with board to review results of surveys and other feedback on community conversation, and to plan for future engagement activities.</p>	School Board Superintendent Director of Communications CASB/Schoolhouse
Additional Strategies to Consider			
April – Dec. 2010	Formal dialogue Reaching diverse audiences	<p>Conversations with specialists Invite 30-50 people each in four different role-alike groups to commit to three-part “BVSD conversations with specialists” series with superintendent and school board members. Actively select individuals from specific groups the board would like to hear from on the issue of student success. Seek counsel from Advisory Team on groups to include. Examples are: higher education, youth service providers, groups that serve immigrant populations, etc. Extend individual invitations and follow-up with participants after meeting series.</p>	School Board Superintendent Communications Department Advisory Team
April-Dec. 2010	Formal Dialogue	<p>Conversations with local governments Host a series of conversations between the school board and other locally elected officials to discuss how best to support children in the nine BVSD communities.</p>	School Board Superintendent Communications Department Advisory Team

BVSD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

<p>April – Dec. 2010</p>	<p>Informal dialogue Sustainability</p>	<p><i>Key influencers' network</i> Determine through various means the individuals at the hub of district's word-of-mouth network. Actively seek additional influential community members and partners to participate in two-way key influencers' network on community dialogue topics.</p>	<p>School Board Superintendent Communications Department Advisory Team</p>
--------------------------	--	---	---