**CHCCS Communication Audit**

Background

We are a small group of students studying at the Hussman School of Journalism and Media at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This semester, we are taking a class on public relations writing where we have been paired with a partner site for service-learning through the APPLES Program. We are paired with Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and, after this semester-long partnership, we have created this audit that compiles our thoughts and recommendations for the Public Information Office at CHCCS.

**About Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools**

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools is a public school district that was founded in 1909 in Orange County, North Carolina. This school district educates over 12,000 students in three high schools, four middle schools, 11 elementary schools, an alternative high school and a school that serves children being treated at UNC Hospital. Three elementary schools and three middle schools offer dual-language programs. Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools strives to enable students to acquire the necessary skills to live rewarding and productive lives. For more information, visit the CHCCS [website](https://www.chccs.org/Page/1) or call CHCCS at (919) 967-8211.

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**Public Information Office People of Interest**

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**Mission Statement**

CHCCS: “Our learning environments are intentionally designed to empower, inspire and engage students.”

Public Information Office : "The office issues regular press releases to local media, publishes news articles and a weekly newsletter, designs special publications and calendars, maintains and expands the content on the district website and our social media sites, and seeks to develop and improve communications with our under-resourced families. We hope to increase visibility for teachers, students and programs that highlight equity work and the new district strategic plan."

**Public Information Office’s Objectives**

The office strives to better communicate with families in the school system and highlight equity efforts and the new district strategic plan. They provide a communication link between the district and the families whose children attend their schools. The office’s key publics are the families and children that attend their schools.

SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**

The Public Information Office at CHCCS is dedicated to keeping key publics informed and they use various platforms to do so such as their website, facebook, twitter and newsletters. The staff is engaged with the community and CHCCS programs, such as the Dual Language/English Learners Program, through attendance and coverage of important events and promotion of services. The staff is passionate about their work and ensuring that families receive important information that affects their children. Specifically, on social media, the department is good at highlighting work to increase equity throughout the school system and engaging with many schools throughout the district. They incorporate images that are beneficial and visually engaging to keep the public interested in their work. The pictures of the students and staff show commitment, support and pride in their students which helps represent the schools. The staff puts a wide variety of significant information on the website that, if community members take the time to navigate, could answer almost any question. The homepage of the website immediately gives viewers the most important and current news, which helps quickly inform and lessen any confusion.

**Weaknesses**

Although the staff of the Public Information Office is clearly passionate about their work, the department seems to be understaffed as a whole. We noticed that the staff seems to scramble to have enough employees to cover important PR topics and events across the school system. With only three employees, the department struggles to execute their objectives properly and to engage with students and staff at the 20 schools in the district. With such busy schedules, the department struggles to answer emails. It seems like the department has little control over the website and keeping it up to date with news and communication efforts. We also didn’t find a location, whether on the department's homepage or an external source, where all of their work is present, such as any work that would be present in a media kit.

**Opportunities**

Opportunities for this department include social media, which provides a great platform for CHCCS to connect with its publics. CHCCS’s proximity to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides an abundance of resources and capable college students who are looking for hands-on experiences and internships. Many of these students, especially in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, would jump at the opportunity to help CHCCS with its communication efforts. There is also an abundance of parents and community members who are willing to help make their school system be the best that it can be, many of whom are already attending events at schools. The Public Information Office could reach out to these people to volunteer to take notes and photographs at events, which would provide much-needed manpower and allow communication staff to use their time and energy on other efforts. Lastly, with the current COVID-19 pandemic, the CHCCS Public Information Office staff can highlight the extra steps the school system is taking to aid those in need, such as providing meals through the Food for Students Program and giving out WiFi hotspots to students without internet access during the transition to remote learning.

**Threats**

Parents, students, and community members stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic may blame CHCCS for lack of information and updates, even if CHCCS does not have any way of knowing when schools might reopen. In addition, the transition to online instruction presents new challenges for CHCCS as it attempts to communicate and engage with their publics under unprecedented circumstances.

Team Recommendations

* **Social media & website integration:** Many families and students may not be aware that CHCCS is on Twitter and Facebook. Connecting these platforms by inserting a Twitter and/or Facebook feed widget onto the website homepage would not only raise awareness of these social media accounts for families and students who prefer to get their information this way, but it would also provide concise information to those who don’t frequent social media. With an increasing number of families no longer having landline phones, it’s important to be able to get information about closings and delays out in ways other than automated phone calls and emails. Featuring CHCCS’s twitter feed on the home page would help streamline the process by which the school system quickly and concisely communicates important information to its publics.
* **Media Relations:** Utilizing the existing “For the Media” section on the Community Relations tab of the website to house an archive of press releases and other communications materials would provide valuable information to interested citizens as well as journalists who may not be part of the local news media organizations that receive the press releases directly. Making communications materials more readily available would make sure the Public Information Office’s hard work is as fruitful as possible.
* **Volunteers and Interns**: The department could tap into outside resources, such as UNC PR students, to help staff with tasks as interns for a whole school year. They could also utilize volunteers that could cover the many events throughout the school year when there are too many for staff to cover at one time. Volunteers could do hands-on work that the staff doesn’t have the manpower to complete.