

Keep in Touch with Dist. 204 via a direct line — the Internet

by Howard Crouse, Superintendent

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Communication is critical. We live in an increasingly complex world of interconnected circles of influence. Actions have reactions in places that are sometimes difficult to foresee. It is important for us to make sure our community is well informed since they provide us with input on almost every critical issue. Effective communication can be challenging with a district our size.

As with any local governmental agency, Indian Prairie continuously provides information to its public. To do so, we communicate in many formats. Without a doubt, electronic communication—using email and the district's website (www.ipisd.org)—is the fastest, most efficient, and least expensive method available. The district has a list serve called 204 E-News that disseminates important district information and news. For those unfamiliar with a list serve, it is similar to an electronic newsletter, sent to those people who take a free subscription by simply giving us their email address. More than 12,000 community members have already subscribed to 204 E-News.

In addition to the district's email list, each school has its own, aimed primarily at its parents. The schools send out announcements, reminders, updates on activities, and other timely information. This is especially important for middle and high school parents. While we send out many announcements on paper through the elementary students, secondary students are not always reliable mail carriers. Our school email lists replace that reliance on them, allowing us to get information out easier and quicker. For example, when we have had a significant incident occur at school we have been able to tell our parents about the incident and what we are doing even before the students get home.

Even though electronic communication is increasing, we still send out a lot of paper. Not everyone has email. Critical information is always available in paper format. But as the costs of paper, copying, and distribution grow, we prefer to move to an electronic format. Currently, our operating budget for 204 E-News is \$600 a year. By moving to an email list serve, the district has saved thousands of dollars in printing and postage costs while increasing the frequency of its communication with the community.

We also capitalize on the Internet by making our award-winning website as informative and navigable as possible. We have upgraded how news and events are posted, making it easier for parents to see what is happening in their students' schools. We also post Board of Education meeting agendas and minutes, the annual budget, our policy manual, high school course catalogs, and parent-student handbooks on our website. Parents can even check what's being served for lunch in their child's school.

The district's electronic communication efforts are certainly intended as an outgoing stream of important information, but an added benefit is that it opens up another channel of incoming communication. By simply clicking "reply" in response to a district email, you can easily send a message back to the district. We also provide a link on the bottom of every page of the website for sending your comments to the district.

By focusing our efforts on increased communication, we hope to not only keep our large community informed, but also make it feel a little smaller.

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