

NSPRA
COMMUNICATION
AUDIT REPORT

Duluth Public Schools

June 2026



National School Public Relations Association
P.O. Box 1493 | Rockville, MD 20849
(301) 519-1225 | www.nspr.org
www.facebook.com/NSPRAAssociation
x.com/nspra

COMMUNICATION AUDIT TEAM

Lead Auditor:

- Jessica Scheckton, APR, PMP



NSPRA Research Team Staff:

- Mellissa Braham, APR - Associate Director
- Alyssa Teribury - Communication Research Manager
- Jessica Scheckton, APR, PMP - Communication Research Specialist

AGENDA

- ❑ Goal of the NSPRA Communication Audit
- ❑ Audit process
- ❑ Key findings – overall perceptions
- ❑ SWOT analysis
- ❑ Recommendations and action steps
- ❑ Benchmarking against best practices
- ❑ Considerations for implementation
- ❑ Questions



WHAT IS A NSPRA COMMUNICATION AUDIT?

- **A comprehensive assessment** of current communication efforts and the effectiveness of the overall program
- **A snapshot of current perceptions** about your schools, district and leadership
- **A tool** that provides baseline research to evaluate progress and a framework for developing your communication plan



NSPRA AUDIT PROCESS: Research Components

Review of district materials

- Print & digital publications, policies, goals reports, campaigns, plans, media coverage, websites, social media, etc.

SCOPE Survey

- Administered in Nov.-Dec. 2025 to 600+ participants
- Surveyed parents, employees, community and HS students

Focus groups

- Held virtually in December 2025 with parents, employees and business & community partners

Interviews with:

- Superintendent
- Communications Officer
- Family and Community Engagement Specialist

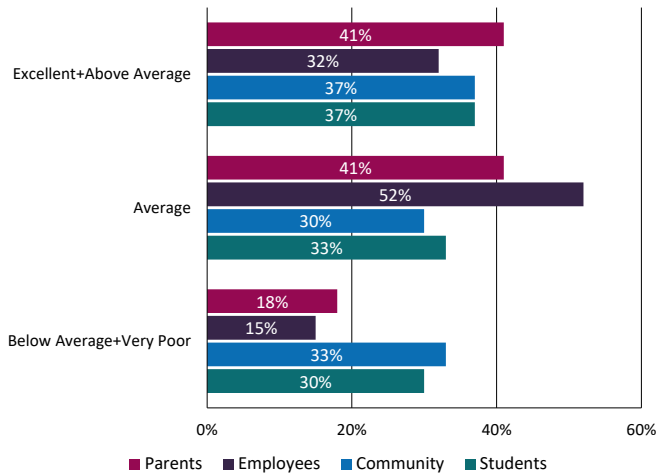


SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Stakeholder Group	Total Population	# of Surveys Completed	Margin of Error* Achieved	Margin of Error* Target
Parents/Guardians	8,700	315	±5.4%	±5.0%
Employees	1,777	182	±6.9%	±5.0%
Community Members	94,726	27	±18.9%	±10.0%
Students	2,757	108	±9.2%	±10.0%

*Using the industry-standard equation for reliability

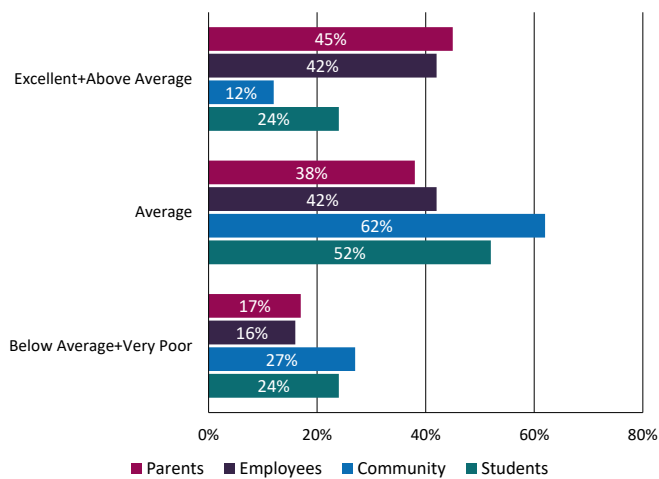
KEY FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDERS' OVERALL PERCEPTION OF ISD 709



SCOPE SCORECARD

Stakeholder Group	ISD 709	National Average	National High	National Low
Parents	3.3	3.8	4.7	2.6
Employees	3.2	3.7	4.5	2.3
Community	3.0	3.4	4.5	2.1

KEY FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDERS' SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATIONS

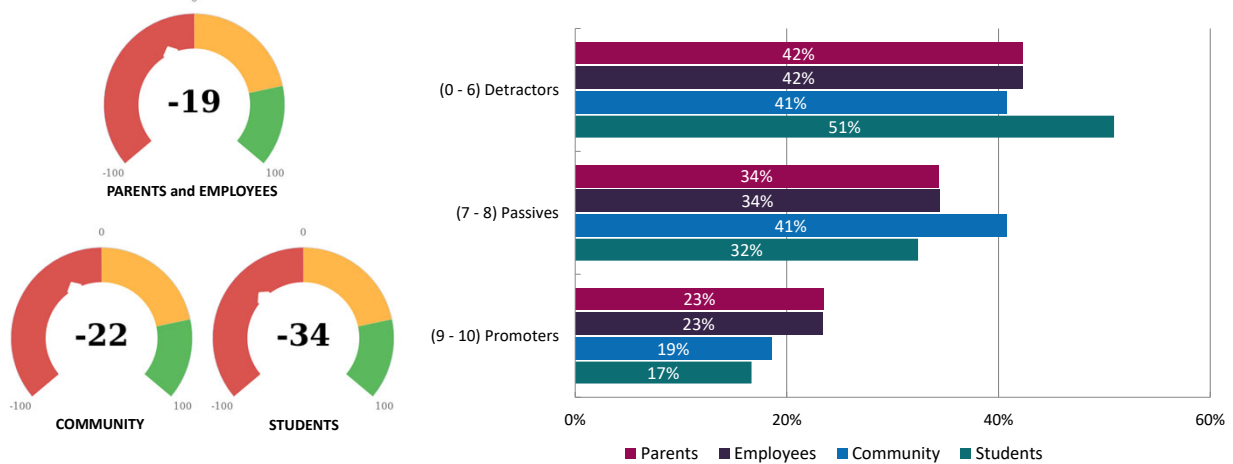


SCOPE SCORECARD

Stakeholder Group	ISD 709	National Average	National High	National Low
Parents	3.4	3.8	4.6	3.1
Employees	3.3	3.6	4.3	2.6
Community	2.8	3.2	4.3	2.0

KEY FINDINGS: LIKELIHOOD OF RECOMMENDING THE DISTRICT

Net Promoter Score: Measure of overall satisfaction and loyalty



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- ◆ District leaders and the Communications Officer acknowledge gaps in strategic communication and have demonstrated openness to improvement by engaging in a comprehensive audit to inform more planned and systematized practices.
- ◆ Strong school-level relationships among staff, families and community partners create a foundation for effective communication and engagement with students and families.
- ◆ ISD 709 offers a broad range of programs and opportunities for students, including diverse academic pathways, electives and specialized offerings that many families view as a distinguishing strength of the district.
- ◆ Equity and inclusion are clearly embedded in district values and messaging, providing a consistent anchor for future communication efforts.
- ◆ The district actively cultivates community partnerships to enhance programming quality, expand access to services and support students and families.

SWOT ANALYSIS

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ The district lacks a strategic communication plan to guide priorities, messaging and audience targeting.
- ◆ The Communications Officer is not consistently included early in discussions and decisions on issues that affect families, staff and the community, limiting the district's ability to support clear and proactive communication.
- ◆ Limited staffing and unclear expectations for shared communication responsibilities constrain the district's ability to expand or sustain effective communication efforts.
- ◆ The district communicates inconsistently and with insufficient depth about high-stakes issues such as funding, staffing, curriculum and long-term plans.
- ◆ Leadership turnover has contributed to communication practices that are driven by individuals rather than systems, resulting in inconsistency and unclear expectations.
- ◆ Diffuse responsibility and unclear decision-making processes hinder timely information flow and leave frontline staff without sufficient context to communicate effectively.

SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Values-based and community-focused content generates strong engagement, underscoring the need for clearer planning, framing and expectations for dialogue around complex or sensitive topics.
- ◆ Strong pride in local schools and positive school-level relationships highlight a disconnect between lived experiences and broader district perceptions that could be addressed through more targeted, substantive and audience-centered communication.
- ◆ Broad recognition of the district's people, programs and commitment to students provides a platform to more clearly articulate the district's value proposition and align communication with what families and community members value most.
- ◆ Stakeholder expectations for clearer transparency and meaningful two-way communication create momentum for improving how feedback, decision making and follow-through are communicated.

SWOT ANALYSIS

THREATS

- ◆ Limited direct communication with non-parent residents increases reliance on third-party narratives, reducing the district's ability to shape understanding and build support among community members and taxpayers.
- ◆ Lingering distrust tied to historical leadership decisions and engagement approaches continues to influence how current communication is received, regardless of intent or content.
- ◆ Mixed and often negative perceptions of the district—particularly among community members and students—pose an ongoing risk to credibility and public understanding if not addressed through clearer, more substantive communication.
- ◆ Persistent perceptions of an east-west divide undermine confidence in equity efforts and complicate districtwide messaging about fairness, access and shared priorities.
- ◆ Budget pressures and enrollment growth strain staff capacity and morale, reducing the district's ability to respond nimbly and consistently and, over time, threatening to erode trust and confidence among families and community members.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Align communication staffing and capacity with district expectations and stakeholder needs.
2. Develop and implement a strategic communication plan that includes measurable objectives focused on moving the district toward achieving its goals.
3. Strengthen internal communication systems to improve information flow and staff readiness.
4. Increase transparency around decision-making processes and the role of stakeholder input to build and sustain trust in district leadership.
5. Shift district communication toward more targeted, substantive and audience-centered content.
6. Streamline and clarify the district's communication ecosystem to reduce overload and improve access.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Align communication staffing and capacity with district expectations and stakeholder needs.

1. Create a communications or digital specialist position to support and supplement the work of the Communications Officer.
2. Formalize and strengthen a districtwide network of communications liaisons to improve coordination, consistency and adherence to district communication expectations.
3. Expand storytelling capacity through high-quality, student-generated content.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop and implement a strategic communication plan that includes measurable objectives focused on moving the district toward achieving its goals.

1. Follow the four-step strategic public relations planning process.
2. Include proactive issues management as a component of communication planning.
3. Focus strategies on increasing stakeholder understanding and engagement.
4. Include crisis communications as a component of strategic communication planning.
5. Provide opportunities for administrators to review the communication plan.
6. Provide regular strategic communication plan updates to the school board.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Strengthen internal communication systems to improve information flow and staff readiness.

1. Consistently take an employees-first approach to disseminating information.
2. Establish and follow a consistent process for how key information is shared with staff.
3. Develop a more robust, “true” staff intranet to provide targeted, up-to-date information to all employees.
4. Rethink the staff e-newsletter to better prioritize and curate internal information.
5. Establish baseline communication expectations and resources for new and existing employees.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Increase transparency around decision-making processes and the role of stakeholder input to build trust in district leadership.

1. With all major decisions, consider first how best to include stakeholders in the decision-making process.
2. Clarify and consistently communicate decision-making roles and expectations.
3. Establish consistent systems for communicating pending decisions.
4. When gathering input, seek a variety of voices and perspectives.
5. When announcing a decision, highlight how feedback and data shaped it.
6. For quick and informal staff input, try rounding conversations.
7. Raise awareness of feedback channels and how to use them most effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Shift district communication toward more targeted, substantive and audience-centered content.

1. Incorporate planning principles into communication initiatives that improve stakeholder understanding and awareness of important district matters.
2. Create and implement a comprehensive, year-round budget communication strategy.
3. Create an editorial calendar to plan ahead for storytelling around high-impact and high-stakes issues.

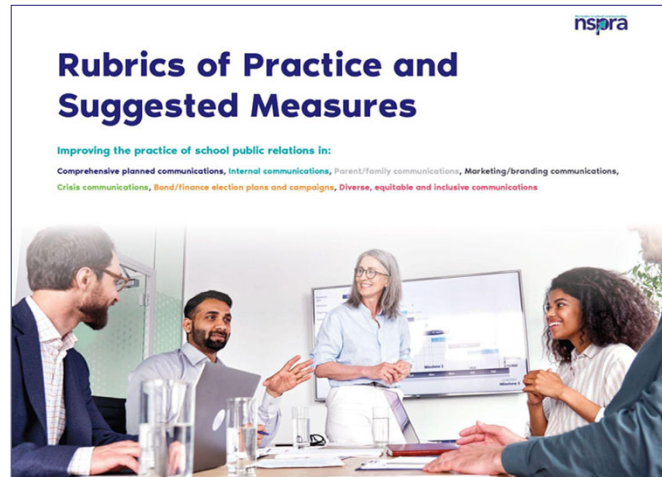
RECOMMENDATION 6

Streamline and clarify the district's communication ecosystem to reduce overload and improve access.

1. Use SCOPE Survey findings to establish a common framework for parent communications.
2. Clarify and communicate expectations for updates to parent portals and other parent communication platforms.
3. Expand use of district and school websites as centralized repositories for key information.
4. Provide clear, proactive guidance for families and the community on where and how to find information.
5. Make information easier for audiences to consume.

BENCHMARKING AGAINST COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES NATIONWIDE

How the district is doing compared to standards of excellence in school public relations, as outlined in NSPRA's *Rubrics of Practice and Suggested Measures*.



BENCHMARKING AGAINST COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES NATIONWIDE

- ❑ CFA 1 – **Comprehensive planned communications:** Emerging
- ❑ CFA 2 – **Internal communications:** Emerging
- ❑ CFA 3 – **Parent/family communications:** Established
- ❑ CFA 4 – **Marketing/branding communications:** Established
- ❑ CFA 5 – **Crisis communications:** Established
- ❑ CFA 6 – **Bond/finance plans and campaigns:** Emerging
- ❑ CFA 7 – **Diverse, equitable and inclusive communications:** Established

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION



Team effort:

Recommendations go beyond what can be achieved by Communications Office alone.

Long-term effort:

- Introduce new components when budget, resources and staff capacity allow.
- While maintaining existing programs, it may not be feasible to undertake more than one to two major recommendations in a year.

QUESTIONS?

Jessica Scheckton, APR, PMP

- jscheckton@nspra.org

NSPRA

- (301) 519-1225
- audit@nspra.org
- www.nspra.org

