Concord School Board
City and Community Relations Committee

Date: May 15, 2019

Committee members present: Liza Poinier, Chair, Danielle Smith, Pam Wicks

Absent: Barb Higgins

Other School Board members present: Tom Croteau, Jennifer Patterson

Administration: Donna Palley, Assistant Superintendent

Liza Poinier called the meeting to order at 5:50 p.m. and reviewed the agenda, including the Committee’s goals, connecting with the City of Concord Public Information Officer, discussing the District website and brochure, and District communications in general.

Stephanie Breton, City of Concord Public Information Officer, described her new role and how the City addresses its communications needs. Her focus is media relations (press releases, city newsletter, meeting notices) branding and community relations. The City also has accounts with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. She said that Instagram may be a more contemporary platform than Facebook, and commented that it could be useful if the District had dedicated staff to manage it, i.e. taking pictures and posting them.

Donna Palley noted that currently, the Director of Technology manages the District-wide Facebook page. Ms. Poinier asked how Ms. Breton manages City departments’ participation in their Facebook pages. Ms. Palley noted that there have been conversations on the school and District levels about how much information each school wants to post.

Pam Wicks noted that the requirement to gain permission to post photos of individual students is important. She said she takes photos from a distance so that students are not identifiable.

Ms. Breton discussed the significant amount of material the City’s web page contains, its purpose, and the audience for its website. Ms. Breton remarked again that staff must be made available to manage social media accounts. She said each City department has several people managing its web pages. Ms. Poinier said that having a number of individuals managing all the web pages had been discussed for the District.

Ms. Poinier commented that nearly the entirety of the City Manager’s newsletter appears in the Concord Insider, and suggested District information could be included. Ms. Breton noted the subscription feature on the website for various City newsletter emails. There was brief discussion of printed marketing material. Jennifer Patterson asked about the City podcasts. These are monthly and consist of Department representatives and different community member interviews, which can be subscribed to via SoundCloud or iTunes. Tom Croteau asked how the District can measure the success of its online marketing efforts; Ms. Breton noted that social media analytics are available for Facebook and other media channels.
The Committee discussed the District website and social media presence. Ms. Poinier asked whether there was a role for the Committee in supporting staff in maintaining the website. The Committee viewed the website.

Pam Wicks noted that she liked the sliding photo on the main webpage. She said she did not know how difficult it would be to add more of these, including Board meeting dates. She said the calendar is too far down on the page.

Danielle Smith asked who manages the individual school web pages; Ms. Palley noted that school pages and calendars are maintained by designated staff at each school. She said that it is challenging for teachers to maintain their own web pages.

Ms. Palley stated that the website is a template, a purchased product that can be modified in some regards but is not entirely flexible. She said that a committee had worked on the website features and setup. She said that many items are posted in several places on the website.

Linden Jackett described the google calendars (School Board, School Year, individual school calendars) and how they are integrated by the vendor with the website calendar.

Ms. Smith said it would be nice to see more uniformity on the calendar pages between the schools and suggested guidelines to make the school pages more consistent.

Mr. Croteau remarked that it is sometimes difficult to figure out what should go on the web pages, and that administrators and staff are heavily taxed.

Ms. Patterson asked who the website is geared to and how parents get their information; when her children were in school she liked seeing the course offerings and theatre information. She suggested it was important to consider the audience outside the schools themselves and what information those people might be looking for.

Ms. Wicks said she does not view the BGS page except to verify a calendar event, and noted that, as PTO president, she has not updated that group’s page in a very long time. She wanted field trips, concerts and information nights to be included, but not math academy unless her own child was in it. She suggested adding the rotating schedule. Ms. Palley noted that the 6-day rotating schedule is in document form on the BMS page, while it is embedded in another school’s calendar. Ms. Wicks said she doesn’t want to “click” any further to find the 6-day schedule.

Ms. Smith said she liked the “For Families” box at the top of the page. She asked what “PowerSchool” is – Ms. Palley explained that the PowerSchool gradebook is available for middle school and high school students and families. Ms. Poinier suggested describing what PowerSchool is in the first paragraph of the “For Students” page

In response to a question from Mr. Croteau, Ms. Palley noted that there is a program that helps low-income families to gain internet access and the administration believes that most families have access to the internet.
Ms. Smith suggested checking what people are clicking through use of analytics; Ms. Jackett noted that analytics would need to be added manually to every single page, and that this feature may not be available.

Ms. Poinier noted that “Login” is right next to the “Search” box – she said she accidentally clicks on it, and asked if could be moved away from the search menu. Ms. Palley suggested this might be a fixed item.

Ms. Patterson said there is a great deal of useful material on the Board page, referencing the budgets, policies and CBAs. She suggested making the member roster more prominent and asked whether the page should be used to post agendas or minutes. Ms. Jackett suggested adding a photo of the Board; perhaps reprinting any “My Turn” editorials written by Board members, including any potential legislative stances established by the Board, and the member roster. She said this page should not become too cluttered.

The Committee then discussed the District brochure. Ms. Poinier noted that the project has been on hold, waiting for direction. There was discussion whether the product should be a booklet or a brochure. It was noted that the content is good, but far too text-heavy and needed more photos. Ms. Palley noted that most of the photos came from the website, and the text was written by building and District administrators.

Several Committee members commented that much of the text was valuable and should be used in some form, perhaps on the website. Hiring a consultant to revamp, streamline, provide key bullet points, and rewrite in “one voice” was discussed.

Ms. Palley said that inhouse staff has the capacity to do this work. She suggested more prominent pictures and less text, using bullets to highlight, for example, the number of National Merit Scholars from the District, achievements of athletic teams, number of AP classes, where students are getting into college, arts, performing arts or robotics.

Ms. Patterson suggested highlighting some of the same activities and information that were presented at the recent Governor and Council meeting at CHS.

Ms. Poinier stated that she felt the Committee needed to find ways to support staff in relation to communication with news media and the community. She remarked that positive news does not frequently go out of the District office, and that a regular newsletter would be a good idea.

The Committee voted 3-0 to adjourn (motioned by Ms. Wicks, seconded by Ms. Smith).

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liza Poinier, Chair
Linden Jackett, Recorder