

**School Committee Community Engagement Approach:
Short-, Mid, and Long-range Strategies**

*Prepared by Theresa Whitman based on conversation
with Tom Zuppa of John Guilfoil & Associates*

Short-range Strategy: Letters to the editor

It was suggested that we coordinate an effort for regular submissions as Letters to the Editor in The Cricket and the Gloucester Daily Times. This can be an effective tool for quick response to current issues as well as for educating the public about pertinent issues we face. The letters, as official communication from the Committee, could then be read into meetings, at which point they become part of the SC record. The message we are always coming back to should be that we want our community members to be fully-informed, and that we value honest, accessible sharing of information.

Notes: The writing itself could be done by assignment based on interest, availability, and the need it meets. Running every submission through the entire group would be cumbersome and defeat the purpose of this tool as a fast, flexible means of communicating, but since it is official communication on behalf of the Committee, the chairperson and superintendent should approve them before submission. The Committee should receive the letter by email once submitted (before publication).

Preparation for Tuesday's conversation:

- Put ideas of topics you think would be valuable to cover in the provided spreadsheet, and be prepared to discuss on Tuesday whether you are interested in writing for any/all of them. Please note that there is no judgment here if you like the idea but don't have time to commit to writing. This is fine; just share your ideas on what you would like to see covered.

Mid-range Strategy: Personal Engagement

To help community members individually and as small groups become more connected to our work, it was suggested that we set up and execute a plan for engagement in two ways:

1. **Meeting invitations:** Meeting invitations should go out every time there is an opportunity, particularly for budget-related discussions. The format for this is up for discussion, but the point is to make sure we are not just letting people know a meeting will take place, but inviting them to attend.
2. **Listening sessions:** Take the show on the road, and set up sessions for listening to community member's input and concerns in-person. This could be done both by invitation and by request (i.e., we could reach out to specific groups to offer a listening session, but also accept invitations from groups to do so).

Notes: We will need to be mindful of quorum/OML concerns when it comes to the listening sessions, but the purpose is to listen more than speak, so there shouldn't be an issue of deliberation. We will want to have a landing spot for points brought forth so we can watch for trends/emerging concerns.

Tasks for Tuesday's conversation:

- Think about potential format/process for the meeting invitations, considering the different kinds of meetings and what types of communication would be most effective to extend an invitation. This is probably the least-developed bit of this plan, so let's talk it through together.
- Put ideas of groups/locations that might be good fit for listening sessions in the provided spreadsheet. It is not expected that you will take ownership for the outreach or the event by making a suggestion.
- Consider the idea of "office hours" from 5:15-5:45 on meeting days. I've done this in the past and am usually here that early anyway. All members would be welcome to attend but not required; it's basically a standing listening session.

Long-range Strategy: Sustained Social Media Campaign

The District has done a lot of work this year to merge social media engagement across departments, classes, etc. into a unified effort to highlight the great things students and teachers are experiencing throughout MERSD and keep the community aware of happenings and issues. School Committee members can amplify the District's voice and extend the reach of this campaign by sharing these messages in a "*Did you know ... ?*" effort.

Notes: I know that not every SC member is active on social media, and that's fine. I think accomplishing this support can be as simple as creating a sharing schedule for those who are able and willing to participate across platforms.

Tasks for Tuesday's conversation:

- I will ask for a list of MERSD accounts so we can plan accurately.
- Consider whether you are willing to assist in this effort by sharing official MERSD accounts' published messages on a regular schedule, and on which platforms you are able/willing to do so.

Final Note: Coordination of Efforts

As we move forward, there are a number of pieces here that require administrative coordination (e.g., schedules for letters to the editor and social media schedule; coordinating and/or keeping track of listening sessions). I am glad to take this on and offer a brief updates during Chairperson's Report, as it is administrative only - decisions about assignments will be made by the group. I am open to other ideas but recognize that the work itself will be an add for anyone able to assist, and members each have a lot on our plates already. Looking forward to a productive discussion.