

NSPRA GOLDEN ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

NEW SUPERINTENDENT STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Cherokee County School District holds a rare distinction among large metro school districts nationwide: only two Superintendents of Schools served our community over the 25 years from 1999 to 2024.

The decision by our then-Superintendent to retire in the spring of 2024 after eight years of service in that role (and nearly 40 years of serving in the school district in roles of advancing leadership), meant a significant project lay ahead for our communications team.

With the School Board's decision in March 2024 to hire a Superintendent of Schools who had not previously served as an educator in our community, that project's importance grew exponentially.

We knew that it would be critically important for our new Superintendent's success, and for the success of our school district overall, to develop a strategic communications and engagement plan to support her entry into our community.

In order to ensure the campaign would be as effective as possible, the Office of Communications began with research. Thanks to the depth of our small but experienced team, we had first-hand knowledge of the way the entry plan was developed and implemented for both the immediate past Superintendent in 2016 and his predecessor in 1999. We closely reviewed the tactics implemented for both entry plans and evaluated anew the success of those plans.

We reviewed tactics used in other school districts, with a close look at other school districts of our size and in our area. We also reviewed how our new Superintendent of Schools was introduced to the county where she most recently served in the same role.

A framework for the implementation came to us with our new Superintendent, as she had drafted a 100-day entry plan for the School Board to consider during their interview and hiring process. While this plan, as an application component, was created by the Superintendent without full knowledge of our community's complexities or our team's tactics and talents, we benefitted from the research she put into developing this plan. This plan also was a critically valuable tool for our research into the Superintendent's core beliefs about public education and her role as a Superintendent, which would strongly shape our strategic plan to support her entry.

This came full circle when, upon our first conversations with the Superintendent about this strategic communications and engagement plan, we learned that our surveys last school year of employees and families were primary research documents for developing her entry plan.

Based on our research, it was clear that a communications and engagement campaign would need to put listening to stakeholders first, in action and in messaging.

Beyond the expected need to introduce herself to stakeholders, our new Superintendent faced special challenges: teachers feeling a loss of autonomy and support, a lack of alignment and collaboration among central office divisions, the imminent loss of federal pandemic funding, and a misinformation campaign about her experience and views led by supporters of a candidate who did not win the School Board's appointment.

We determined our outcome goal would be measured by stakeholder engagement through both in-person meetings with the Superintendent, a community survey, and responses to communications (including newsletter readership, social media post engagement, response emails to the Superintendent's messages).

To achieve that goal, we collaborated with school principals, central office division leaders and community organizations to develop a thorough schedule of school visits and stakeholder meetings.

We worked hand in hand with the Superintendent to develop intentional activities during those meetings, designed to both introduce stakeholders to the Superintendent and to gather their feedback to two overarching questions: what are the practices that our school district must keep, what are the practices that we should shed. While those questions seem simple, in order to encourage stakeholders to share responsive information, we developed a series of questions and engagement activities that would draw these answers out from them.

At the same time, as we knew it would be impossible to engage with 42,000 students and their families, all 6,000 employees and our community at large, which is home to more than 280,000 residents, we determined communications such as email messages, video messages, social media posts and interviews with local media would be valuable tactics to engage more stakeholders.

With a goal of not only introducing the Superintendent to stakeholders, but also building trust through engagement and listening, we determined that a community survey would be another critically important tactic to deploy.

Once these tactics were implemented, we continuously evaluated the campaign's success to adjust as needed, such as beginning one-on-one engagement meetings with more influential stakeholders (both community members in leadership roles and those who spread their influence through social media posts, including scheduling meetings with those sharing misinformation).

Another mid-campaign change was the determination we needed to wrap up this initial communications and engagement plan prior to the end of the school year ... the actual 100th day would occur during summer break, which would decrease the reach for reporting out to the community about her entry plan's success.

Throughout the campaign, we supported the Superintendent with the development of a public website documenting the work and reports and presentations to the community delivered at School Board meetings to keep stakeholders informed "along her journey."

A final report presented to the School Board and community in May highlighted the campaign's success. Even more importantly, it served as a platform for the Superintendent to share her analysis of stakeholder input and introduce how that valuable feedback would shape the next 18 months of her leadership.

This final Summative Analysis and Key Priorities report presents data on her engagement including the impressive statistics of 2,000-plus stakeholders met, 4,500-plus meeting feedback comments gathered, 3,077 surveys completed, and 110 classrooms visited (including at least one visit to each of our 40 schools and centers).

Following the completion of the report, and our efforts to share its results with the community, we evaluated its overall success, and the data continues to inform our work.

In the fall and through the winter, our Superintendent embarked on more stakeholder meetings using our most successful tactics ... fulfilling the promise she made, much to the appreciation of our community, that while her first 100 days has passed, "the listening will never stop."

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



The First 100 Days

Cherokee County Community,

On Thursday, March 7, I will officially begin my service to you and our community as your next Superintendent of Schools.

As I shared with you last month, my first priority is to engage with our community – with our students and their families, our educators and support staff, and our community partners.



Mary Elizabeth Davis, Superintendent

Last week, I began that engagement by meeting with our Principals, district leadership and parent leaders. On Saturday, I attended the CCSD teacher job fair, where I met more school administrators and teacher leaders, as well as potential future CCSD teachers.

Through these experiences, my excitement about joining the CCSD family has only grown. The pride everyone feels in our schools and community is contagious, and I'm incredibly thankful for the warm welcome that has been extended to me already.

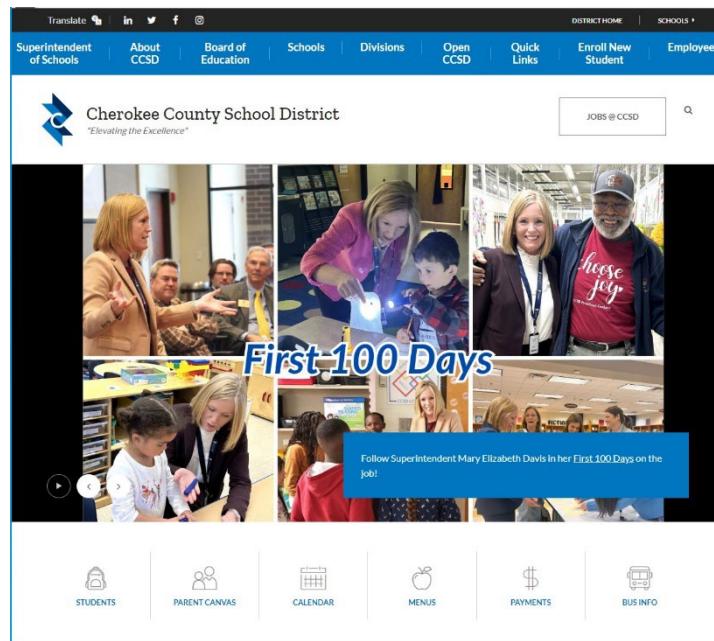
I am dedicated to a process of active listening, learning from the community and leading with a strategic vision that enhances our district's legacy of excellence. My leadership approach is centered on collaborative engagement, innovation in education and fostering a culture where every member of our community can succeed.

My goal for my first 100 days that begins Thursday is to "Listen to understand, Lean-in to remember, and Learn to Lead." I'll start that journey by visiting all of our schools this month to see teaching and learning in action and to begin getting to know as many of our students and teachers as I can. At the same time, I'll be meeting with parents and community partners to listen and learn from them as well.

The First 100 Days website: <https://www.cherokeek12.net/superintendent-of-schools/first-100-days> ... we've archived this page, which served as a one-stop shop for stakeholders to read her entry plan, update reports and summative analysis, watch videos of messages from the Superintendent and from School Board meetings, see photos from her school visits and stakeholder meetings and see the scope of these visits represented in map infographics.

This page contains supplementary materials including the Superintendent's Entry Plan: 100 Days in the CCSD Community, 100 Day Entry Plan Status Reports to Community, 2024 CCSD Community Survey – Executive Summary, Summative Analysis and Key Priorities Report.

In addition to having a designated tab at the top of our website to improve access, we also maintained a centerpiece "slider" on our website homepage to increase engagement with the page and its contents:



A sampling of Superintendent messages included in our monthly newsletter distributed to all stakeholders (average readership upwards of 100K-plus) as part of strategic plan:



CCSD Connections

A Monthly Parent Newsletter - March 2024

Superintendent's Message

Dear CCSD Family,

Today, I began my service to our community as your Superintendent of Schools and spent the day in my favorite place: school.


School is where I heard my calling as a young child. I was inspired by my amazing teachers and by my grandmother, the first Mary Elizabeth. She earned a chemistry degree, a rarity among women of her generation, and instilled in me the critical importance of education. Like her, I also earned a chemistry degree and, like her, I am dedicated to instilling in others the importance of education.

As I shared with you earlier this week, I'm embarking on a 100-day plan to "Listen to understand, Lean-in to remember, and Learn to Lead" that begins with visiting each of our schools this month and meeting with our community.

I invite you to follow along as I share my journey with you. I'll share updates with you regularly [on our website here](#). There you can see a slideshow of photos and videos from my visits today.

Thank you,

Mary Elizabeth Davis
Superintendent of Schools



CCSD Connections

A Monthly Parent Newsletter - April 2024

Superintendent's Message

Dear CCSD Family,


Today marks one month since I officially began in my role as your Superintendent of Schools and it's been an inspiring experience for me each day.

As I've leaned in to listen and learn, I've heard from students, parents and families, teachers, support staff and school and district leaders, volunteers, business and community partners. A consistent theme has echoed in each of these conversations: how proud you are of our school district and the opportunities you see for us to improve it together.

Over the next month, I will continue to visit schools and meet with our community as I prepare a summative reflection and strategic priorities report to present to the School Board in May. As I committed to as part of my 100 day entry plan, I shared a progress report with the School Board at its March meeting ([which you can read and watch online here](#)), and I will share a second report at its April meeting, which also will be posted on the same webpage.

The opportunity to take this time to hear your feedback and thoroughly review our school district's operations is incredibly important to ensure we construct the best solutions possible to better prepare our students for future success.

Coming soon, we will be sharing a brief survey with you to gain even more of your feedback ... whether you're a parent, employee, business or community partner, taxpayer or embody a combination of these valuable perspectives. Please consider sharing a few minutes of your time to participate when you receive this email.



A sampling of social media posts showing Superintendent implementing strategic plan activities:

Cherokee County GA School District
March 7 · 🌐

Mary Elizabeth Davis today began her service to Cherokee County as our new Superintendent of Schools.

True to her 100-day plan's mission -- "Listen to understand, Lean-in to remember, and Learn to Lead" -- Mary Elizabeth spent her first day visiting schools and meeting students, teachers and support staff, families and business and community partners.

Over the course of the day, she visited a school in every one of CCSD's six Innovation Zones and saw students learning in 1... [See more](#)



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👍❤️ Bonny Gray Spears, Ambrea Bufford Holman and 248 others 28 comments 7 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment 📄 Copy ➦ Share

Cherokee County GA School District
Published by Barbara Perry Jacoby
May 14 · 🌐

Mary Elizabeth Davis over the past month has continued her ongoing meetings with students, parents, teachers, support staff and community partners to listen and learn more about CCSD's strengths to further nurture and invest in, as well as for opportunities for continuous improvement. This feedback, coupled with responses from the recent community survey, will inform her key priorities for action that she will share with the School Board this month. If you missed the survey... [See more](#)



+9

A sampling of stakeholder social media posts about her strategic plan activities:

Audrey Legrand is with Brandi Glasgow and 17 others.
May 1 · 🌐

Beyond thrilled to have had the opportunity to host and sit down with our new superintendent, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis yesterday evening! It was such a pleasure to engage in meaningful conversations about the future of our schools and how we can work together to create the best possible learning environment for our children. I have full faith that she is going to be an outstanding leader for Cherokee County!



You, Anne Policky Reed, Kyla Oswald Cromer and 94 others · 10 comments · 1 share

Nick Carberry
March 19 · 🌐

I'm grateful for the opportunity given to have lunch with CCSD's new superintendent, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis. We've got bright days ahead of us! Thank you [Brian Hightower](#) for stewarding us well!!!



Karen Butler McClellan, Kyla Oswald Cromer and 116 others · 29 comments

Canton First Methodist Church
March 15 · 🌐

Yesterday, CFMC's Julie Little and Kayla DeSimone had the opportunity to meet the newly appointed Superintendent of Cherokee Co. School District, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis. They had the privilege of hearing her plan to partner with faith-based communities and area churches as we grow the next generation. We're looking forward to a collaboration between our thriving Cherokee Co. Schools and the local church as we lead, teach, love on, and support our young people and their families.

Sharing Life | Sharing Christ | For Others

[CFMC Student Ministry](#) - [LEaD CFMC Children's Ministry](#) - [Kids Connect Canton FMC Preschool](#)

You, Kayla DeSimone, Bonny Gray Spears and 39 others · 5 comments · 4 shares