COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN
FOR
DOWNERS GROVE GRADE SCHOOL DISTRICT 58

Submitted By:

UNICOM•ARC, Inc.
505 South Ewing
St. Louis, MO 63103
Office: 314-535-4900
Fax: 314-535-9013

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July 29, 2019

To: Kevin Russell
Todd Drafall

Fr: Rod Wright

Re: Proposal for Community Engagement

On behalf of everyone at UNICOM•ARC, thank you for giving us the opportunity to submit a proposal for assistance in the design and implementation of a community engagement program for Downers Grove Grade School District 58. We know of no other firm with our experience or expertise in doing this kind of work.

In many ways, we wrote the book on best practices in community engagement for school districts. When we began doing this kind of work many years ago, there were few if any models or approaches to study or replicate with respect to best practices. We learned community engagement the hard way — by doing it. And yes, we did make mistakes over the years and learning from those mistakes, in large part, has resulted in the discussion you will read in this proposal.

This coming January, our agency will enter its 50th year of business. Few firms, such as ours, manage to stay open this long. Our success is built on three basic commitments. First is a commitment to cutting edge technology and approaches. Second is a commitment to not only working hard, but also working smart. And third is an unswerving commitment to client service.

In recent years, we have completed community engagement programs for many school districts in Illinois — an award-winning program for Naperville CUSD 203, Paxton-Buckley-Loda School District, Elmhurst CUSD 205, Wheaton Warrenville CUSD 200, Lisle CUSD 202, Township High School District 211, Benjamin School District 25 and Community Consolidated School District 89. We welcome you to contact any of these recent clients to discuss the quality of our work.

Below you will find an approach for coordinating a community engagement program for Downers Grove Grade School District 58 (the District). Please regard this as a starting point. After discussing this, we can make whatever changes needed.
This proposal assumes a 12-month period for the actual engagement program (August 2019 through July 2020). Should this lead to some kind of ballot proposal, this calendar will allow for a November 2020 election date. There is a lot of flexibility in the calendar and we can use survey data, plus input from the engagement program, to make a decision about the best possible election date (should that be an outcome).

If the District is interested in a March 2020 referendum, though, it will require a completely different approach than the one outlined in this proposal. Should that be the case, while notions about best practices remain constant across our proposal, the actions steps will be much different.

When conducting a community engagement program, time is an important factor. The more “soak time” for community engagement, the more likely a positive outcome. Your District is to be commended for giving itself enough “time” to do this program right.

It is important to take the approach outlined in this document, including some thoughts about calendar, and run them past your architectural firm. That firm will do a considerable portion of the heavy lifting in this program so it is important for that firm to weigh-in on the overall approach.

The RFP asked for team members assigned to this project. Jennifer Volk and myself will take joint responsibility for overall management of the project. One of us will be present at all facilitating team meetings — the key meetings in our process. Jenna Engler will have primary responsibility for production of materials — agenda, powerpoint presentations, meeting materials, communications, etc. Cindy Gibson will serve as backup to the entire team. Support material for team members is included in our proposal. Since community engagement is one of the core strengths of our agency, all team members have worked on multiple engagement programs over the past 12 months. Many of those projects were listed earlier in this cover memorandum.

One final note — I felt good about our discussion over the phone. It is important for the chemistry to be right and both the professionals at your District and UNICOM•ARC will have a better sense of that after in-person meetings. There are lots of decisions to be made and trust and good working relationships are essential ingredients for smart decision making.

Before getting into action steps, I’d like to present some information about our approach to community engagement. Following that, we will discuss a possible approach that might be used for a program in your District.
Introduction to Community Engagement

Whatever the quality of a school district’s plan, its ultimate value depends on whether the community is willing to support that plan — what we call obtaining community permission to improve the school district. In many cases, “top-down” planning by officials and others (including so-called “blue-ribbon” committees) means that the organization must convince the public — after the fact — that it has created a plan that reflects the community’s priorities. Along with trying to determine the needs of the community, then, an organization is faced with the necessity of “selling” such a plan after its development, something which is, in our view, difficult and backwards.

By contrast, the community engagement process outlined in this proposal leads to a plan that is developed through the input, cooperation and collective decisions of community participants. As a result, the process yields a plan that is both responsive to community needs and supported at the grassroots level. If large numbers of community members are involved in discovering challenges and solutions, those community members will be much more inclined to support those solutions. Much as in the classroom, discovery is more powerful and effective than is persuasion.

Downers Grove Grade School District 58 should be commended for understanding the values and effectiveness of community engagement. We understand that much work has already been done with respect to developing a Master Facility Plan. We are certain, at the end of our program, the District will benefit for many years to come from the two-way communication between the community and District, and the robust connections created as a result of community engagement. After an initial program, many of our clients continue to engage their community via the “branding” (see below) defined by our program.

Community engagement is a highly effective way for dealing with complex, and often divisive, issues that can plague a facility planning program — attendance boundaries, inequities from one building to another, the need to repurpose or replace historically significant buildings and location of new construction, to name just a few. When the community collaboratively reaches consensus on these tough issues, it lessens the possibility that there will be a community perception that the board or administration is “forcing” an unwanted solution or proposal on the community.

In this proposal, we will outline a community engagement process that addresses a typical set of issues related to the needs of a school district. However, two things are important to stress about this document. First, the logic of the process and the concepts on which it relies are consistent across all of our community engagement efforts. Our experience has taught us that the structure of the engagement process is essential to its success, and this structure is flexible enough to address any planning issues with which an organization might be faced.
Second, each of our community engagement programs is **customized** to the specific needs of the District. The various programs on which we have worked have considerably varied regarding the “issues” or “topics” on the table. Some projects have involved developing broad parameters for a long-range plan involving both facilities and curriculum and instruction, while others have focused on more narrowly defined topics. In general, the broader the “charge” or scope of topics, the longer the process and the more community meetings that are needed.

Because this program involves facility planning, it will require the very active participation of the District’s architectural firm. We are delighted you are working with Wight & Co. We know that firm is committed to community engagement and will be a great partner in planning and implementing this program.

**Summary of Program**

In our view, when a school district faces the challenge of providing optimal programs and services for its constituents, success in addressing that challenge is more likely when conducting a facility planning study utilizing a community engagement model.

In doing so, it is incumbent on the school district to educate the public about the benefits of possible solutions. If additional funding is necessary for construction and/or renovation, success will require a broad base of citizen consensus, involvement and support. And while the school district has things about which to educate or inform the community, community members have things about which they would like to educate or inform their school district. Effective two-way communication is imperative.

One useful way of thinking about many unsuccessful planning initiatives by school districts is the phrase, **“no voice, no choice, no commitment.”** Clearly, a community has an enormous voice in shaping the future of its school district, but the question remains as to **how and when** that voice will be heard.

Being pro-active and making the voice of the community a part of the planning process can — and will — increase the probability of support for any initiative, ballot or otherwise, that might emerge from this process. Because people have a voice, they have an opportunity to make a choice **and** a commitment to a solution or initiative for improving the District.

The best way to create the necessary community understanding and support for a plan that meets the organization’s needs is through an effective community engagement program. **Community engagement achieves successful results through participatory, community-based planning and grassroots involvement.**

Community engagement also helps to identify and bring together major stakeholders in the community. These individuals can help to develop a plan and eventually work to build community support for key elements of a strategic or long-term plan.
Given these conditions and because today's citizens tend to be skeptical of government, we are recommending that districts consider creating a plan through a participatory process that will foster citizen understanding of challenges and issues. This process will help to create a broad base of community consensus and support for implementation by including several critical elements:

- Large number of participants
- Internal “buy-in” and support
- True, two-way communication
- Data driven process that drives collective agreement and wise decision-making
- Citizen leadership
- Clear mission and agenda
- Action and accountability
- Vision of excellence

U•A has built these components into a plan that engages local communities and helps them to understand the challenges faced by public entities while, at the same time, making them a part of the solution. This document offers a description of such a process, which typically involves:

- Formation of a Citizens Group (what we call a Facilitating Team) to oversee development and implementation of the program and resulting plan;
- Implementation of workshop-like public sessions;
- Production of effective two-way communication between residents and the district;
- Creation of community understanding and buy-in of the plan; and
- The establishment of a volunteer network within the community that will lay the foundation of support to implement the plan including work on a possible referendum.

Creating and implementing such a community engagement program is one of the strengths of the U•A team. Our staff includes a unique group of experts who specialize in public sector-related communications and public affairs. Using our combined experience, we can successfully execute a program that promotes a better understanding of the district's needs and invites the community to help produce a solution to those needs.

Our team can also help the Board of Education and administration clearly define what their options are communications-wise, in developing and promoting a plan, and how best to execute those options. In addition, we can help officials better understand what their decisions
will mean from a public relations standpoint as they begin the process of educating the public about the needs and possible solutions.

Following is an example of a typical community engagement program that supports the development and public approval of a community-wide plan. This process consists of seven parts involving ongoing and effective communications. They are:

1. Selecting a Facilitating Team;
2. Involving broad-based citizen participation;
3. Conducting public opinion research;
4. Holding topical district-wide, or building site-level, engagement sessions;
5. Developing the plan;
6. Assisting with outreach strategies to the community leadership; and
7. Assisting with outreach strategies to the general public.

In most cases, a district staff member (administrative level person) is assigned as a liaison to work directly with U•A during the community engagement process. This person provides leadership to district support staff members in the production of the necessary materials and documents for each meeting as described by the Facilitating Team. There are also detailed arrangements that must be put in place for each session. This might include nametags for participants, worksheets, room arrangements, audiovisual equipment and materials, and session agendas, along with the gathering and assembling of materials/documents in folders or notebooks, as well as other duties.

The liaison would also serve as an internal champion of this process. This individual must be respected by both internal and external audiences. He or she would give the program a high profile with both District staff and the community and would work directly with our assigned staff to make sure program details are dealt with efficiently and professionally.

We must also note that, although this is a community engagement program, it is imperative that the U•A team has the enthusiastic participation and support of the District’s governing board, administration and staff to succeed in this venture. Only with that internal cooperation can we succeed in showcasing an organization’s needs and lay the groundwork for support that ensures the organization can continue to provide first-class programs and services for the 21st Century.
Plan Overview

Next we offer an example of U•A’s approach to conducting a school district community engagement program to support the development of a long-range plan. This process is a participatory one that fosters staff and citizen understanding of important issues and works to create community consensus in support of the plan.

It is possible that, following initial meetings with District leadership, that this approach will need adjustment. Also, we strongly recommend that the Facilitating Team (see below) have some role in making adjustments to the overall approach. The program, in its final form, should be the Team’s program, not UNICOM•ARC’s.

Introduction

Given the fact that today’s citizens tend to be skeptical of government, top down planning is not recommended for this program. Our experience has shown that when the public is fully engaged in the planning process, many creative ideas emerge, volunteerism increases, and the community takes on an esprit de corps that can be positively channeled into support for a plan. When implemented correctly, community engagement results in sentiments like this one: “This plan was crafted by the people, for the people. It is time for the people to back the work of their own.”

It may sound easy, but it is indeed a challenging process. To be fully effective, it must be highly structured and guided by specialized professionals.

An outline of the process is as follows:

- A Facilitating Team (of anywhere from 15 to 25 participants) is selected that is ultimately responsible for all decisions with respect to strategy and communications.

- A broad-base of citizen participation, with representatives from the district and members from every segment of the community is imperative. In some programs on which we have recently worked, participation has exceeded 500 community volunteers. (A topic to be addressed at Facilitating Team meetings is how to reach out to the various organizations and types of individuals often not “at the table” in strategic planning programs. We have often found Facilitating Team members know their community and effectively brainstorm, along with our advice and consultation, effective methods to reach diverse and often hard-to-reach organizations and individuals.)

- Participatory workshops are conducted, and a variety of creative approaches are used to maximize turnout and participation.

- A public opinion survey is conducted to learn about community issues and attitudes relevant to the project.

1 Northwest Herald, editorial section, October 25, 2000.
• Participating citizens then work with appropriate officials, special experts and advisors to develop a plan or plan options.

• Once a plan or plan options are developed, we work with district officials to communicate the plan/plan options to community leadership. It is important that these parties understand the plan, the problems it addresses, and how it affects the entire community.

• And finally, we communicate details of the plan/plan options and what it means to the general public.

**Action Steps**

Perhaps the most important aspect of a community engagement program is making sure that every piece of the puzzle fits together in an efficient, effective manner. The following set of steps represents a typical community engagement program that we would administer.

1. Selecting a Facilitating Team/Developing a “Charge”/Branding

While the process for developing a plan/plan options must be participatory, the process for directing this program must not. We must approach this process, from beginning to end, with military precision. We recommend creating a small (15-25 people) Facilitating Team that is ultimately responsible for all decisions with respect to strategy and communications.

More specifically, the Facilitating Team must plan and monitor the implementation of the engagement process, act as a sounding board for strategy/approaches and plan the agendas for sessions held as part of the program.

In addition to the U•A team, this Facilitating Team should be comprised of District leadership (superintendent or a senior designee) one or two members of the Board of Education, one internal-to-the-organization facilitator (the person who will make things happen internally), a representative of the organization employee union(s), citizen leadership (these should be members of the community and not employees) and other selected experts (including District architects) and advisors.

*Since the scope of work for this program involves facility improvement, it will require the very active involvement of the District’s architects. We should emphasize, we are not architects. The facility improvement professionals will be called on to prepare the “facts and figures” that support the development of options or scenarios for facility improvements. That work is outside of the scope of our services discussed in this proposal.*

One of the first tasks for UNICOM•ARC in this program is to sit down with administrative and Board of Education leadership and brainstorm the right mix of citizen leadership for this effort.
It is a critically important first step to assure success of the overall program. Oftentimes our clients underestimate the importance of this very critical first step.

We have often divided the Facilitating Team into three subcommittees: (1) a communications subcommittee that provides citizen input on all materials; (2) a canvassing committee that delivers “door-to-door” material about the status of facility planning and invites citizen input on options; and (3) a community outreach subcommittee that primarily organizes a “Listener’s Bureau” for outreach to community organizations and encourages organization members to have input to the process. This subcommittee could also host some kind of open house (perhaps offered at multiple times and locations) perhaps highlighting (by a tour of the buildings) facility challenges and obtaining citizen input on the options including possible next steps for implementation of the best of the options.

This group, evaluating models, processes and best practices provided by UNICOM•ARC, will craft a community engagement program uniquely designed for Downers Grove Grade School District 58. This process involves selection of a name and defining activities and schedule for those activities.

UNICOM•ARC will work with the administration and/or Board of Education in developing a “charge” or set of directions for this group — what it should explore and examine, the subject matter or scope for recommendations and date by when those recommendations are anticipated. There are lots of controversial issues facing school districts in Illinois, with issues such as common core, funding, pensions, etc., so it is imperative to establish parameters (what to study and what not to study) and goals for this engagement program.

**Presented below is a tentative timeline that can be adjusted following preliminary discussions with District officials and feedback from the Facilitating Team.** It is emphasized that this is only presented for purposes of a starting point for putting together a calendar. Once the “charge” is finalized, a more specific calendar can be completed.

**Calendar**

Again this is just a typical calendar — which allows for a November 2020 referendum — that can be adjusted following initial meetings with District officials, other team members (the architects, for example) and the Facilitating Team. We offer this only for illustration.

**Aug 2019 – Sep 2019:** Creation of Facilitating Team/Development of Board of Education Charge/Branding. We will work with District leadership in developing a “charge” for this process — the specific areas in which the Board is seeking recommendations from the community engagement program, and how previous work on the Master Facility Plan should be integrated into this process. We understand that we are not starting from scratch — previous
work has been done that should be valued and integrated into this program. That fact should be part of the “charge” given to this engagement program.

Also during this period, we will work with District leadership in the selection of the Facilitating Team. This team will be responsible for the final design and implementation of the community engagement program. It will include six to ten community members (two or three of whom will be the community chairs), two Board of Education liaisons, administrative leadership, perhaps a teacher representative, UNICOM•ARC staff assigned to the process, and staff from the District’s architectural firm and financial advisors (if appropriate).

Issues to be discussed during this time include calendar, topics of engagement sessions, fine-tuning the engagement process, branding/marketing and other organizational issues.

We always “brand” our programs with a name (examples are provided following this proposal). That name is representative of the District’s commitment to community engagement. Many districts, following completion of the program, continue to use that name when seeking community input on important subjects. Naperville CUSD 203 is an example of successfully branding “Future Focus” for its ongoing commitment to community engagement.

Oct 2019 – May 2020 Five or six (or possibly more) community engagement sessions devoted to: (1) some “big picture” facility issues — what 21st century education looks like both with respect to curriculum and instruction and how that relates to facilities, educational adequacy indices and how district facilities rate, a conditional assessment of current facilities, replacement versus renovations costs, etc.; and (2) evaluation of specific plans addressing the criteria for a Master Facility Plan resulting from earlier meetings. We recommend that workshop invitations be sent by mail and other communication channels such as social media. We also strongly recommend that a door-to-door canvass (something that has been extremely effective in generation attendance at community engagement meetings) be conducted as part of this effort to invite participants. These sessions should lead to the development of a “final” or “best” option for building improvements
Given the difficulty in attracting attendance between Thanksgiving and the end of the year, thought should be given to having two sessions during the fall — taking the holiday period off — then hosting three or four sessions following the beginning of the 2020 year.

Tentatively — we could use the fall meetings to reach consensus on some big picture issues regarding the facility plan. Then, during the holiday break, the architects could develop options, or scenarios, for facility improvements consistent with those big picture decisions. Financial advisors could help by providing information regarding how those could be financed. Then during the winter and early spring, community engagement sessions would be devoted to reaching consensus on a specific facility improvement plan and steps to take to implement that plan (we may need to address the issue of phasing, for example).

Jun 2020 – Jul 2020
Results of the engagement program will be reported to the Board of Education.

Jul 2020 – Aug 2020
Board review of report and consideration of next steps including a possible November referendum. The certification deadline is likely to be sometime in late August, but that date should be confirmed by the District’s attorney.

As an option, rather than conducting community engagement work sessions, it is possible to host a series of open houses to present options for facility improvement and then receive input from those in attendance. These would be “walk-through” open houses, not theater style presentations. We could supplement this approach with other methods of receiving input from the community — an interactive website, door-to-door work, and invitations via social media. This approach can be coordinated in a shorter period of time and involves less overall planning work. We don’t think, though, it is as impactful in terms of providing a solid foundation for a referendum campaign.

Again, this is only an “example” of a schedule that could be considerably adjusted. Before putting together a more specific timeline, we need to be more fully informed of issues, deadlines, dates, goals, etc., regarding the District.

UNICOM•ARC will also work with the District in communicating this program and its schedule to the media and community. This may involve the development of flyers, mailers (both electronic and printed), press releases and other types of communication vehicles such as social media. We also recommend in-person press briefings and briefings of key community leadership.
The Facilitating Team will meet regularly throughout this program to monitor, coordinate and adjust all aspects of this program.

2. Community-wide Participation in Workshop Sessions

Should this approach be selected as part of developing a plan supported by the entire community, community workshop sessions should include participants from throughout the community to ensure that one area or group does not perceive that others are receiving preferential treatment. Typically, we help to form a “Citizens Group for Planning” that is a microcosm of the community, representing the range of demographic and geographic categories.

The mission will be to evaluate the conditions necessitating a facility improvement plan and then determine which option is the most cost effective to take to the community. **It is important to note that participation in this process is open to anyone in the community who wishes to participate.**

Recent efforts with which we have been involved have seen hundreds of community members attending these community-wide planning sessions. One of the keys for success in a program such as this is implementing best practices for both recruiting participation as well as assuring that the sessions are held in a manner to prompt ongoing participation. We learned a long time ago that one poorly planned or implemented community session has the potential of drastically lowering attendance for subsequent meetings.

There are some specifics regarding conducting the workshop sessions that are important to note:

First, each of the community engagement sessions should follow a specific timed agenda that is developed by the Facilitating Team. The session is ‘facilitated’ by the program citizen chairs as they follow a detailed PowerPoint script that has been written by a UNICOM•ARC staff member. The citizen chairs are trained and continually coached by UNICOM•ARC to lead/moderate the sessions. As consultants we are practically never ‘in front’ leading a session—again, a best practice learned through conducting numerous engagement programs.

Second, it is important to note that these sessions are not to be conducive to the format of an open forum or debate. They are work sessions, focused on results and reaching consensus or collective decisions as a group.

Third, we plan a very tight agenda for the sessions. We usually have a lot to cover in a very short period of time (all sessions are planned for a strict two hour time frame). As such, we do not allow participants to interrupt the presenter with questions. This is communicated to participants at the beginning of each session.
Yes, participants do have questions. We ask participants to jot down their questions during the presentation and then during small group work time (about a 40 minute section of the session following the informational/data presentation) participants can raise their hand and members of the Facilitating Team get the correct individual to the table where the question is being raised. Thus answering the question of one individual or one group does not take time from the productive work of the other small groups.

Several copies of ‘I Have A Question/Comment’ forms are on each small group table that individuals may complete and leave on the table. At the end of the session these are collected and the appropriate person responds to the question within about a 48-hour period of time. Also, the question/comment on the form may, or may not, be related to the session topic.

Fourth, any conflict that may arise during the session typically happens and is resolved at the small group level. A typical small group will range from 4 to 6 participants. Participants are randomly assigned to a small group as they enter the room for the session. One of the norms we follow, for all group decision-making at all levels in the process, is that it is okay to disagree, but that should be done in an agreeable manner.

Fifth, work at each of the sessions is well documented. Following the conclusion of each session a Verbatim Document is created that contains verbatim comments recorded and turned in on a specially designed worksheet (each small group is required to submit the worksheet). Then, UNICOM•ARC staff members conduct an analysis of the data from all the worksheets and create an Executive Summary Document that summarizes the collective decision of all the groups.

We want to stress that the decisions in this process must be data-driven. If there are issues or decisions regarding facilities, it will be the responsibility of the District’s architects to develop scenarios or options and help participants understand both first and long-range costs of those programs.

The District’s architects will be able to index and model both educational adequacy scores with short and long-range costs of facility improvements including, for example, 30-year operational costs (and savings of certain plans or options). While options for improvements often have various types of emotional responses from participants, this statistical modeling process has the benefit of turning an emotional decision into a more data-driven decision. And the more data/fact driven the process, the more likely it creates consensus for a proposed solution.

3. Conducting Research

We rarely conduct a program such as this without implementing public opinion research of some type. Without question, public opinion research is one of the core strengths of UNICOM•ARC (the
“ARC” in our name stands for Attitude Research Company. We know of no other firm that has conducted as many public opinion studies for school districts as has our firm.

Without question, an important step in any successful community engagement or communications program is solid research. Typically, we conduct a telephone survey of local residents to gain a sense of public opinion toward important issues affecting a school district. We often supplement this telephone research with a set of focus groups consisting of organization staff, specific service recipients, community leaders and members of the general public. Completing this research and understanding the results are essential to the subsequent stages of the community engagement process.

Oftentimes public opinion research by telephone is prohibitively expensive for a school district, or the district is so small that reliable sampling is difficult. We will work with District leadership in deciding upon the most cost-effective manner in which to conduct this research.

4. Sponsoring Participatory Workshop Sessions

Because this process asks residents for a significant commitment of time and energy, some community members interested in the process might not have the opportunity to participate as extensively as they might wish.

In order to expand the grass-roots base of the community engagement process, there may be other venues available to community members—additional workshop or open house sessions could be scheduled in at the current building and at times more convenient for selected community members.

For this facility improvement process, the additional meetings could be building-based including, for example, asking participants to “grade” their building on various indices of educational adequacy (after an orientation and training session by the District's architects).

The participatory workshop sessions have two major purposes. First, they can provide an opportunity for even greater levels of participation from community members. At the same time, the sessions provide forums in which participants can introduce new ideas and priorities to the process. The results of these meetings are then incorporated into the overall process.

A key to the success of these community workshops is the communications program that underlies the process.

5. Communications for All Community Sessions

Generally, we recommend the following activities with respect to communications:

- Invitations to the workshops that would be mailed to all community members. In addition to mailed invitations, recent clients have conducted a Saturday morning blitz,
or canvass, with volunteers going door-to-door with a personal invitation to attend the engagement meetings.

- Production of an informational video or video clips for use at the workshops, but which would also be available on the District’s website and available through other venues such as social media. Our agency has made extensive utilization of videos supporting community engagement programs and would be happy to share examples.

- Newspaper ads which highlight the schedule for the workshops.

- Mail pieces and newspaper advertisements promoting the availability of the program.

- Planning with principals to develop building-level strategies for securing attendance at the workshops.

- A speakers bureau to communicate the needs that would be addressed by the plan/plan options and the planning process to various groups around the community.

- Outreach to local media.

- Effective utilization of the District’s website or special project website.

- A very aggressive utilization of social media. We have found that very few school districts truly understand how to effectively use social media as a strategic communications tool or understand how to penetrate the market with its use.

6. Development Recommendations

Following the workshops, a roll-up of results is produced based on the collective decision points developed at each of the community sessions plus input from other engagement activities. This roll-up could include descriptions of various facility improvement options and projected costs (both long and short term) and considers the various alternatives that may be available.

For this program, as stated before, we envision that the “report” will in the form of “findings” from the community engagement program and possible specific recommendations for a facility improvement program along with a suggested dates for a possible referendum.

7. Leadership Outreach

Once a plan is developed, we work closely with the District officials to organize an intensive outreach program to community leadership. The goal of this activity is to make sure that all community leaders understand the condition of existing school facilities and the manner in which the plan addresses those issues. Also, by first communicating with community leadership, the two-step flow of information will assure that this knowledge better spreads to the general public.
8. Public Outreach

During the citizens group formation and plan development stages of this program, we assist the organization with an informational campaign that works to better showcase the needs and to highlight the ongoing development of the plan within the community. Then, immediately after the plan has been finalized, its details must be communicated to the general public.

The following elements are usually part of our public outreach effort:

- **Speakers/Listeners Bureau**
  U•A works with program citizen leadership to establish a Speakers/Listeners Bureau, which acts as an outreach arm of the district at media events to share experiences with and answer questions about the district and the plan to business groups, civic associations and others.

- **Media Briefings**
  To help obtain media coverage of this process, we recommend holding regular media briefings at which the Superintendent or a district board representative and a citizen leader of the Facilitating Team would meet with reporters and news editors who deal with public sector entities in the area, including area daily and weekly newspapers.

  Besides discussing current news and issues about the district, its needs, and the implementation of the engagement program, these briefings would also provide a unique opportunity for media professionals to become better acquainted with district officials in an informal setting.

- **Informational Video**
  We can also assist the district or Facilitating Team in the production of an informational video that focuses on the process and issues it is addressing. This video would be made available throughout the community via multiple copies of a DVD, the District website and other opportunities.

- **District Web and Social Media**
  We will also help the district to use its website and social media site as a conduit for information about the community engagement process. Through a link on the site’s main page, a plethora of information can be relayed, including meeting schedules, PowerPoint presentations, videos and consensus points. This effort will provide yet another avenue by which local residents can participate in every aspect of the process, even if they are unable to attend every meeting. Social media, when utilized correctly (and few school districts understand how to use social media) can be a very powerful communications tool.
9. Ballot Certification/Informational Outreach

Following the Facilitating Team report to the Board, and following Board deliberation on that report, the Board of Education will consider placing a proposal on the November 2020 ballot. Assuming that decision is made, the District should implement an aggressive informational communications program, utilizing the types of communications mentioned above, to announce this decision and explain the benefits of the proposal.

UNICOM•ARC would be delighted to help during this informational communications period and can include language, in our professional services agreement, creating an option for retaining our services for that purpose. Since the District does not have a full-time communication person on staff, our work in helping with informational communications is important.

Fee for Services

For the vast majority of our community engagement programs, following a discussion with District officials regarding our scope of work vis-à-vis what capacity the District has for completing tasks required for successful completion of the program, we estimate the number of hours we anticipate working on the program, multiply that by an hourly rate for professional services, and propose a flat fee for service that is paid on a monthly basis during the implementation of the program. That monthly fee, over the past four or five years, has ranged from $4,000 to $6,000 for a program such as this — usually on the lower side for a District that has a communication professional on staff.

Excluded from the fee are out-of-pocket expenses for things such as polling, printing, postage, other consultants, and items such as travel and graphic design. We will obtain upfront approval for all out-of-pocket expenses (other than routine things like travel) and will bill those expenses at-cost with no markup. In the production of materials, we will make every effort to utilize internal resources. The fee does not include the cost of conducting a public opinion survey, the hiring of additional consultants, meeting accommodations such as room setup or refreshments, or printing and mailing of materials, brochures, invitations, etc.

We have a high level of confidence, based on previous experience, that we will reach an agreement suitable for both Downers Grove Grade School District 58 and our agency. As noted, we most often recommend a flat fee for service with a monthly payment. There are a number of advantages, from our perspective, to this approach.

- In terms of overall cost, there is no surprise to the client. Oftentimes, when a firm such as ours bills by the hour, it creates contentiousness regarding the level of staffing, hours devoted to the project when not on site, hours billed for travel, and multiple staff members attending meetings or working on projects and materials.
For example, in the early stages of a project, we assign multiple staff to meetings who often view an issue from different and complimentary perspectives. When billing by the hour, we sometimes get push-back from clients for “double-covering” meetings.

- When working on a community engagement program, we are providing more than time, we are also providing a product. A flat fee for service more accurately reflects this type of professional service.
- It has been our experience, that when we are billing by the hour, clients, in a desire to be frugal, are hesitant to call or involve our staff when we want to be involved and when we need to be involved. Thus projects do not go as well as desired or needed, yet our agency and its reputation is linked to the project.
- From a cash flow perspective, a flat fee for service seems to work best for us and for the client.

For this program, we have tentatively estimated a total fee of $50,400 for the August 2019 through July 2020 period. That comes to $4,200 per month during that period. Should we stay on board to help with informational communications until election day in March, that would add another $12,600 ($4,200 for three months) to our total fee.

Following discussions with District officials and a better understanding of our scope of work vis-à-vis the District’s activities, we can further refine this proposed fee.

Conclusion

In order to help Downers Grove Grade School District 58 develop and implement a facility improvement plan that has the best chance of long and short-term success, we hope that you will consider conducting a community engagement process similar to the one outlined in this document. If so, we would look forward to working with you and are prepared to begin discussing the particulars of that process immediately.

On the following pages we have provided a couple of community engagement models that have been successful in other districts; some sample logos of community engagement projects in other school districts/community colleges; and, pictures of a typical community engagement session.

We are eager to assist the District on this project. We are ready to get to work.
SAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Best Practices/Data/Information
Sample Topics
Student Performance, Finance, Facilities, Technology, Communications, Safety/Security, Demographics, Staffing, Public Opinion Research

Building Level Meetings
Summary Report of Building Level Meetings Provided At Community Engagement Session In Preparation For Development of Recommendations

REPORT PRESENTED

Final Recommendations Presented To Board

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

CHARGE FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD

Facilitating Team
Develop Options
Communications Group
Outreach Group
Canvass Group

COMMUNITY INPUT

Forums
Electronic
Clip and Mail
Other

Action On Vision

UNICOM/ARC
SAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LOGOS

Sample Names & Logos
SAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ROOM SET UP
SAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ROOM SET UP
CLIENT INFORMATION

Provided below is a list of a few recent or current clients for your reference.

Barrington Community Unit School District 220, Illinois
310 East James Street, Barrington, Illinois 60010
Dr. Brian Harris, Superintendent of Schools
Phone: 847-381-6300 email: bharris@barrington220.org

Parkway School District, Missouri
455 N. Woods Mill Road, Chesterfield, Missouri 63017
Paul Tandy, Director of Communications
Phone: 314-415-8100 email: ptandy@pkwy.k12.mo.us

School District of Clayton, Missouri
#2 Mark Twain Circle, Clayton, MO 63105
Chris Tennill, Director of Communications
Phone: 314-854-6015 email: Chris_Tennill@clayton.k12.mo.us

Township High School District 211
1750 S. Roselle Road, Palatine, IL 60067-7336
Tom Petersen, Director of Community Relations
Phone:-847-755-6631 email: tpetersen@d211.org

Naperville Community Unit School District 203, Illinois
203 West Hillside Road, Naperville, IL 60540
Dan Bridges, Superintendent
Phone: 630-420-6311 email: dbridges@naperville203.org
Julie Carlsen, Director of Community Relations
Phone: 630.420.6815 email: jcarlsen@naperville203.org
Mark Trembacki, Community Chair
Phone: 630.399.1486 email: marktrembacki@aol.com

Lisle Community Unit School District 202, Illinois
5211 Center Avenue, Lisle, Illinois 60532
Keith Filipiak, Superintendent
Phone: 630.493.8001 email: kfilipiak@lisle202.org
Community Consolidated School District 89, Illinois  
22W600 Butterfield Road, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137
Dr. Emily K. Tammaru, Superintendent  
Phone: 630-469-8900, ext. 3503  
email: etammaru@ccsd89.org

Decatur School District 61, Illinois  
101 W. Cerro Gordo Street, Decatur, IL 62523
Dr. Paul Fregeau, Superintendent  
Phone: 217-362-3010  
email: PFregeau@dps61.org

Champaign Community Unit School District 4, Illinois  
703 South New Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820  
Phone: 217-351-3800
Stephanie Stuart  
Former Director of Communications & Community Relations  
Current, Director Marketing and Public Relations - Parkland College  
Phone: 217-353-2683  
email: sstuart@parkland.edu  
Address: Parkland College, 2400 Bradley Avenue, Champaign, IL 61821

Community High School District 94, Illinois  
157 W. Washington Street, West Chicago, IL 60185
Dr. Doug Domeracki, Superintendent  
Phone: 630-876-6210  
email: ddomeracki@d94.org

East Prairie School District #73, Illinois  
7634 East Prairie Road, Skokie, IL 60076
Theresa Alberico-Madl, Ed.D., Superintendent  
Phone: 847-673-1141  
email: tmadl@eps73.net

Richland County Community Unit School District #1, Illinois  
1100 E. Laurel Street, Olney, Illinois 62450
Larry Bussard, Superintendent  
Phone 618-395-2324  
email: lbussard@rccu1.net

Benjamin School District 25, Illinois  
28W250 St. Charles Road, West Chicago, Illinois 60185
Dr. Philip Ehrhardt, Ed.D, Superintendent  
Phone: 630-876-7800  
email: perhardt@bendist25.org
Elmhurst Community Unit School District 205
162 S. York, Elmhurst, IL 60126

David Moyer, Superintendent of Schools
Phone: 630-834-4530
email: dmoyer@elmhurst205.org

Paxton-Buckley-Loda, Illinois
700 W. Orleans Street, Paxton, Illinois 60957
Cliff McClure, Superintendent
Phone: 217-379-3314
email: cmcclure@pblpanthers.org

Wheaton Community Unit School District 200, Illinois
130 West Park Avenue, Wheaton, IL 60189
Dr. Brian Harris, Former Superintendent
(Dr. Harris was the superintendent who initiated the project at District 200. Near the end of the program he was recruited to be the superintendent at Barrington CUSD 220, Illinois. His contact information at Barrington 220 is as follows:
Phone: 847-842-3588
email: bharris@barrington220.org

Faith Dahlquist, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services
Phone: 630-682-2002
email: faith.dahlquist@cusd200.org

Erica Loiacono, Director of Communications
Phone: 630-682-2469
email: Erica.loiacono@cusd200.org

Brad Paulsen, AIA, Member - Board of Education
Vice President - Business Development, Wight & Company
Phone: 630-969-7000 • 630-739-6705
email: BPaulsen@wightco.com

Iowa City Community School District, Iowa
1725 N. Dodge Street, Iowa City, Iowa 52245
David Dude, Chief Operating Officer
Phone: 319-688-1289
email: dude.david@iowacityschools.org

Bedford Central School District
Fox Lane Campus, P.O. Box 180, Mt. Kisco, NY 10549
Jere Hochman, Former Superintendent
Phone: 914-241-6011
email: jhockman2785@bcdny.org
**Affton School District, Missouri**
8701 Mackenzie Road, St. Louis, MO 63123

Erica Chandler, Community Relations Director  
Phone: 314-633-5904  
email: echandler@afftonschools.net

Dr. Steve Brotherton, Superintendent  
Phone: 314-638-8770  
email: sbrotherton@afftonschools.net

**Ritenour School District, Missouri**
2420 Woodson Road, St. Louis, MO 63114
Phone: 314-493-6010

**Doug Bray**, Director of Communications and Community Services  
Phone: 314-493-6080  
email: brayd@ritenourschools.org

**Dr. Chris Kilbride**, Superintendent  
Phone: 314-493-6050  
email: kilbridec@ritenourschools.org

**Jefferson City Public Schools, Missouri**
313 East Dunklin Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101

Amy Berendzen, Director, School-Community Relations  
Phone: 573-659-3018  
email: amy.berendzen@jcschools.us

Larry Linthacum, Superintendent  
Phone: 573.659.3000  
email: larry.linthacum@jcschools.us

**Normandy Schools Collaborative, Missouri**
3855 Lucas and Hunt Road, St. Louis, MO 63121
Phone: 314-493-0400

Sharifah Sims-Williams, Director of Communications  
Phone: 314-493-0438  
email: sswilliams@normandysc.org

**Pattonville School District, Missouri**
11097 St. Charles Rock Road, St. Ann, MO 63074

Mickey Schoonover, Director-School/Community Relations  
Phone: 314-213-8025  
email: mschoonover@psdr3.org
UNICOM•ARC & STAFF CREDENTIALS

UNICOM•ARC has nearly 50 years of experience in working with state and local government, and corporate clients. We know of no other full-service communications agency in the country that can rival our experience with public school and community college districts. Projects on which we have worked have won multiple awards from the National School Public Relations Association, two Golden Paragon Awards from the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations and two Magna Awards from the American School Boards Journal.

From conducting public opinion research, engaging the community in two-way conversations to plan a district’s future, recreating brands, recruiting students, producing communication materials, and winning referenda, the professional staff at U•A brings together a diverse background to meet the needs of each client.

Our efforts have included:

- Implementing successful community engagement programs for dozens of school districts
- Assisting on tax increase and bond elections including referenda to support more than $4 billion in improved facilities
- Designing and implementing comprehensive community engagement programs for some of the nation’s largest community colleges
- Re-branding and image improvement work
- Production of new student recruitment materials
- Conducting communications audits and rebuilding and redesigning school district communications programs
- Developing innovative approaches for social networking and other forms of electronic communications
- Creating long range plans, including facility master plans, utilizing a community engagement program
- Assisting school and community college districts with crisis communications

Our firm is one of the few public relations firms to maintain membership in the National School Public Relations Association in addition to several state chapters of this organization. Professionals on our staff are regularly called upon to speak at regional and national conferences. Dan Burns and John Siemers, two senior members of our staff, won countless awards when serving as Director of Communications in large St. Louis metropolitan area school districts (Rockwood and Parkway School Districts).
UNICOM•ARC PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

Presented below are short resumes of our professional staff.

Rodney D. Wright, Ph.D., President

A nationally recognized expert in public opinion and market research, Dr. Rod Wright joined Attitude Research Company (ARC) as its president in 1986. When ARC merged with its parent company UNICOM Group to form UNICOM•ARC, Dr. Wright became president of the combined firm. Prior to joining ARC, Dr. Wright was vice-president and director of research with Public Response, Inc., a political and business consulting firm. He also served on the faculty at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Dr. Wright has directed a wide variety of public opinion, community engagement and communications projects for hundreds of corporate and political clients and school and community college districts throughout the United States. Under Dr. Wright’s direction, UNICOM•ARC’s educational clients—when including both elementary and secondary education and institutions of higher education—span the country and range in size from under 1,000 students to more than 140,000 students. Under Dr. Wright’s leadership, UNICOM•ARC has twice won the Magna Award from the American School Boards Journal and numerous other awards for engagement and communication programs.

In 1995, Dr. Wright directed a public engagement program for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) related to the development and approval of Missouri’s Show-Me Standards for student performance. In Education Week’s 1997 nationwide study of elementary and secondary education entitled Quality Counts, this effort was praised as helping Missouri “to avoid the debates that have characterized standards-setting in many other states where reform opponents have branded standards as ‘vague” and intrusive.'” Dr. Wright is currently part of the team coordinating DESE’s efforts to improve educational performance in Missouri making it a “top ten” state.

Dr. Wright is a sought-after speaker at national and regional conferences. He has spoken or conducted workshops for the National School Public Relations Association, the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations, the Annual Management Symposium of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, the Annual Leadership Forum of the American Bar Association and the State Education Improvement Partnership (a collaborate effort of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the National Governors’ Association).

Dr. Wright holds a Ph.D. in political science from Washington University, where he specialized in public opinion research. He also holds a master’s degree from Washington University and a bachelor’s degree from William Jewell College.
Dan Burns, Senior Associate

Dan Burns joined the St. Louis based UNICOM•ARC communications and opinion research agency in 1999. As Executive Director of the agency’s Education Division Dan designed and managed numerous community engagement long-range planning projects for school districts, community colleges and other organizations. In doing so he has worked directly with small core teams to insure the program was customized for the objectives of that organization. He has organized and facilitated stakeholder sessions of up to 600 participants. Dan knows how to integrate appropriate communications throughout a planning timeline to inform the broader public of the planning effort and build a foundation to support a spirit for implementation at the conclusion of the planning process. He has led planning initiatives that have included everything from goal setting/visioning for districts and Boards to pre-referendum work for operations or capital improvements.

Dan began his career as a classroom teacher at the middle school and high school level before spending 28 years as Director of Communications, Planning and Development for the Rockwood School District. He was widely regarded as one of the top school communicators in the nation. During his tenure at Rockwood, the District passed 13 bond proposals totaling $240 million (including the largest school bond proposal ever passed in the St. Louis County area at that time) and three successful operating levy increases. Dan has received numerous awards from both the National and Missouri School Public Relations Associations for his outstanding work in the educational communications field. Most recently he was named recipient of the Missouri School Public Relations Association’s Distinguished Service Award.

Rockwood was labeled the fastest growing (average annual growth of 1,000 students in the decade of the 80’s) district in Missouri during much of Dan’s time in the role of planning and development. Dan coordinated the development of demographic studies used to recommend the timing and location of new schools in Rockwood, as well as additions to existing schools. He also facilitated a variety of community engagement activities that led to the development of strategic and long-range planning documents, including the need and site selection for nine new schools. As part of this role, Dan also completed building utilization studies and attendance area adjustments to balance school enrollments with building capacities.

In Dan’s role as public relations officer, he provided leadership in the design and production of brochures, flyers, newsletters and newspapers. He coordinated media relations and represented the District as a member of key community organizations. He also coordinated, planned and executed numerous special events — including the District’s awards program, the District’s employee orientation program, and groundbreaking ceremonies and dedication programs for new facilities.

Dan received his bachelor’s degree in education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He holds a master’s degree from Indiana University-Bloomington.
Cindy Gibson, Senior Associate

Cindy Gibson is a 30-year communications and public relations veteran with extensive experience in educational administration. Cindy brings a wide range of skills to UNICOM•ARC having worked in all areas of communications including journalism, advertising and marketing. As the assistant to the superintendent for communications and community services for a St. Louis suburban school district, her public relations programs, community engagement initiatives and election communication strategies earned national recognition from the National School Public Relations Association, the National School Boards Association and from national political election organizations.

In addition to public relations and communications, she is also considered a leader in school emergency and crisis planning. She was a member of a local school district that teamed with St. Louis County Department of Health and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to better protect the St. Louis area in the event of a bioterrorist attack or large-scale crisis.

Cindy continues to impact educational public relations by serving as a mentor for local professionals in the field and working with the National School Public Relations Association on special projects and emergency communication needs across the country including assisting the Moore Oklahoma School District following the tornado that devastated the community.

Gibson received her bachelor's degree in Public Relations and Communications from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas and has her master's degree in Corporate Public Relations from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. She earned her Accreditation in Public Relations, APR, (one of the highest certifications in the profession) in 2007.

John K. Siemers, Senior Associate

John joined UNICOM•ARC in 2007 after retiring as the Assistant Superintendent for District Operations (Facilities, Transportation, Food Service, Environmental Services, Material Management and Security) with Parkway School District, a 20,000-student school district in suburban St. Louis, MO. He also spent ten years at Parkway as the Director of Public Affairs and Communications, serving as president of the regional chapter of the Missouri School Public Relations Association and receiving numerous awards for excellence in school public relation work from the National School Public Relations Association. In addition, John trained with the Burke Institute in qualitative research and focus group facilitation during his tenure with Parkway.

His other accomplishments include the successful completion and authorship of numerous educational research projects including safety and security, demographics, food and nutrition, discipline, diversity and instructional space. Additionally, John led several community engagement programs for district planning purposes. The 2006 “Current Realities” program
developed by John was the recipient of a National School Public Relations Association Gold Medallion award. John has also been awarded the “Pillar of Parkway” award for exemplary leadership and integrity and the Superintendent’s Leadership Award.

Throughout his 30 plus year career, John has served in the public sector in a variety of leadership positions. He served eight years as the executive director of a non-profit, United Way organization and four years as an administrator of a municipal government in west St. Louis County. He completed his masters degree at Washington University in counseling psychology and participated in post graduate studies in social work at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work.

John works for UNICOM•ARC in a consulting role and with educational institutions, non-profits and municipal governments to facilitate community engagement programs, communication audits, public opinion research, facility study efforts and other communication-related issues.

**Jenna Engler, Associate**

Jenna Engler has 16 years of experience in the field of education as an educator in a K-12 school district, an adjunct professor and course writer at Benedictine University, and professional development presenter. While at Benedictine University she also served as the Learning Management System Coordinator at the National Moser Center for Adult Learning supporting both students and professors with online course management and maintaining the integrity of all online education master programs.

Recently, Jenna has worked as an educational consultant supporting school districts in the Chicagoland area. As a consultant her expertise includes educational leadership and communications, public relations, marketing, and social media design and development. She recently teamed with UNICOM•ARC on a highly successful community engagement program for Lisle Community Unit School District 205. Following completion of that program, she joined the UNICOM•ARC team to provide consultation and leadership on Chicagoland projects.

Mrs. Engler earned a Masters of Arts from Aurora University and Bachelors of Science from Northern Illinois University.

**Andrew J. Duttlinger, Research Consultant**

Andrew (Andy) Duttlinger joined UNICOM•ARC in July 2000. He is responsible for all aspects of public opinion research projects, including questionnaire design, statistical analysis, and interpretation of research results. Since joining UNICOM•ARC, he has worked on projects for a wide range of public and private entities. Public clients include Metro, St. Louis County, the O’Fallon (MO) Parks and Recreation Department, Manchester Corridor Revitalization Committee and dozens of school Councils and community colleges across Missouri and Illinois.
Mr. Duttlinger graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1992 with a B.A. in Political Science and holds a M.A. in political science from Washington University. Mr. Duttlinger has presented original research at a number of professional conferences, including the National School Public Relations Association, Missouri School Public Relations Association and Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association. He has taught several undergraduate courses at Washington University in the fields of electoral politics, comparative politics, and American politics.

Mr. Duttlinger is a member of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), Missouri School Public Relations Association (MOSPRA), the Illinois Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (INSPIRA) and the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR).

**Jennifer Volk, Account Executive**

Since 2002, Jennifer Rolwes Volk has worked with UNICOM-ARC clients to enhance communications, increase community involvement and raise awareness levels. Jennifer’s diverse background includes work in media relations, journalism, photography and graphic design. Before entering the public relations field, she worked as a television reporter for KOMU-TV, the NBC affiliate in Columbia, MO. Her experience on the other side of the camera brings clients a unique perspective to media relations.

In addition to project management on community engagement programs and election campaigns, Jennifer has worked with several clients to conduct communications audits and create strategic communications plans to increase the effectiveness of communications programs.

Prior to joining the UNICOM team Jennifer served as media relations assistant for the Rockwood School District, where she was involved in the research, production and media placement of stories involving various news and activities throughout the District. Jennifer’s responsibilities at Rockwood also included planning and writing the staff newsletter. Her reorganization of this publication increased readership and received a National School Public Relations Association Award of Excellence. She also served as the interim Executive Director for KidSmart – Tools For Learning, a St. Louis based organization that provides free school supplies to underprivileged students.

Jennifer’s skills include the development of media contact and media coverage tracking systems used to help create and monitor a successful media relations program. She also has organized special events and “Get Out The Vote” campaigns, and has experience in media buying, photography, graphic design and innovative uses of social media. Jennifer holds a bachelor of journalism degree with an emphasis in broadcast news from the University of Missouri School of Journalism.