

ひのきインターナショナル・スクールSM

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

**コミュニケーション強化の取り組み**

**Version 1.0**

**Drafted Fall 2012**

Hinoki International School Communications Plan

ひのきインターナショナル・スクール・コミュニケーション強化の取り組み

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**School Mission 学校の使命と将来ビジョン**

**Mission Statement**Hinoki International School will provide students with opportunities to become bilingual, bicultural, globally-minded individuals.

**Vision Statement**Hinoki International School seeks to:

1. Create a two-way-immersion learning environment that combines the best practices of both Japanese and American schools, using collaborative teams of teachers from Japan and the U.S.
2. Foster deep cross-cultural understanding and ability to function effectively in multiple cultures, by providing authentic educational experiences from U.S. and Japanese educational paradigms.
3. Encourage Japanese and American families to interact and build an international “extended family” of globally-minded individuals in southeast Michigan who can contribute toward more peaceful cross-cultural interaction around the world.
4. Develop a comprehensive (pre-Kindergarten through Grade 16) bilateral educational program that promotes bilingual fluency, literacy, and subject-area understanding, through Japanese and U.S. educational systems.

(Abridged and adapted from JASSEM/Hinoki 2011-2012 School Improvement Plan, p. 5, and Board Policy section 2105.)

**Purpose and Goals of Communications Plan コミュニケーション強化の目的**

**Purpose**

This communications plan was designed to establish a comprehensive process for effective communication with all of Hinoki’s stakeholders (i.e., charter authorizer, sponsoring foundation, school board, Academic Advisory Committee, administration, faculty, staff, student families, and other community members).

This plan aligns with the school’s goals, board policy, and School Improvement Plan (SIP). It is intended to provide a framework for two-way communication between the school and its key audiences, as well as for accountability, budgetary, and resource considerations.

This plan is a working document to be reviewed and updated on a periodic basis by the Communications Committee. The Communication Committee, comprised of parents, staff, and board members, advises the Hinoki International School Board about facilitating efficient and effective communication among Hinoki’s various stakeholders in Japanese and English.

**Goals**

The Hinoki International School Communications Plan is intended to:

1. Create a system that encourages a two-way flow of information between the school and its stakeholders (see Section 0144.2-D of Hinoki School Board Policy, 2012).
2. Clarify who is responsible for communicating which types of information to which audiences using which methods and languages.
3. Provide focus and direction to encourage effective and efficient communication of accurate, comprehensible, and timely messages.
4. Foster strong relationships with varied groups of stakeholders, through various initiatives such as a “parental support system in English and Japanese” (Goal #2 of 2011-2012 School Improvement Plan, p. 23-27; see also Board Policy section 2112).

**Audiences / Stakeholders 対象**

**Audiences**

Hinoki International School seeks to improve communication with and among its various groups of stakeholders, or audiences, including:

* Students (current and potential)
* Parents/families (including Parent-Teacher Organization, PTO)
* Administrators
* Teachers/instructional staff
* Support staff
* School board (volunteers appointed by charter authorizer)
* Charter authorizer (Livonia Public Schools)
* Sponsoring foundation (Michigan Japanese Bilingual Education Foundation, or MJBEF)
* Partner/feeder preschool sponsored by MJBEF (Himawari Preschool)
* Academic Advisory Committee (in association with Eastern Michigan University)
* Government agencies (Wayne County RESA, Michigan Department of Education, etc.)
* Community members/groups
* Media outlets

Members of these stakeholder groups, or audiences, have greater or lesser proficiency in Japanese and English, with some stakeholders roughly equally comfortable in both languages. Hinoki is a public school located in Michigan, and governed by its laws, so there are practical limitations on the feasibility of providing all communication in Japanese as well as English. Hinoki Board Policy indicates that:

*“The School’s legal documents, including its policies, administrative guidelines, board meeting minutes, and staff meeting minutes shall be documented in the English language, with Japanese translation available where practical…. Where written or oral communication is provided in only English or Japanese, a translation (written or oral) shall be provided, if so requested by a staff member or parent within a reasonable timeframe”* (Hinoki International School Board, 2012, section 3000).

**MOST COMFORTABLE IN JAPANESE**  
Some students / Families  
Japanese teachers  
Some support staff  
Himawari Preschool  
Japanese ex-patriate community members

**MOST COMFORTABLE IN ENGLISH**  
Some students / Families  
Administrators / some board members  
English teachers/Parent liaison  
Charter authorizer (LPS)  
Custodian/Fellow tenants  
Government agencies (WRESA, MDE)  
Media outlets and external consultants  
Livonia-area community members

Some students / Families  
Bilingual teachers  
Some support staff  
Some school board members  
Sponsoring foundation (MJBEF)   
Academic Adv. Cmte. (EMU)

**Communication Strategies and Guidelines コミュニケーションの基本概念**

**Strategies for Effective Communication よいコミュニケーションのキー・ポイント**According to recent research, such as Porterfield & Carnes’ (2008) Why School Communication Matters, and Gunther, McGowan, & Donegan’s (2011) *Strategic Communications for School Leaders,* the following strategies can help improve the effectiveness of school-stakeholder communication:

* Give stakeholders “more information than the minimum required” (Gunther, McGowan, & Donegan, 2011, p. 74)
* Communicate competence by “delivering concrete messages” that are simple, clear, and relevant to the audience’s needs (Porterfield & Carnes, 2008, p. 31)
* Use facts to support broad assertions, and illustrate them with stories and images to “drive the point home” (Gunther, McGowan, & Donegan, 2011, p. 72-74)
* Communicate respect by “anticipating stakeholder needs,” paying attention to details, being available and prompt, and promoting transparency (Porterfield & Carnes, 2008, p. 28-30, 36-37)
* Use a balance of technology-enhanced broadcasts and person-to-person communication (Porterfield & Carnes, 2008, p. 37-39), and of highly-detailed messages and concise summaries (Gunther, McGowan, & Donegan, 2011, p. 70-71), depending on the audience’s needs and levels of involvement

**Methods of Delivery コミュニケーションの手法**

So far, Hinoki International School has used the following methods of communicating with its stakeholders:

1. Newsletters (from the principal, teachers, PTO), usually 1-2 pages long, in English & Japanese, sent home in students’ folders/backpacks
2. Typed notes/reminders (from teachers or administrators), usually 1-3 paragraphs long, in English &/or Japanese, about upcoming events, homework/projects, library books, school lunch, fundraisers, etc., sent home in students’ folders/backpacks
3. Email messages (usually from the principal and/or dean of students), usually 1-2 paragraphs long, in English & Japanese, about upcoming events, homework/projects, library books, school lunch, fundraisers, etc., sent to a listserv ([hinoki@freelists.org](mailto:hinoki@freelists.org)) that preserves confidentiality of each parent’s email address; email messages are also commonly sent between staff and administrators, using hinoki-school.org addresses via an open-source email service (see [Board Policy](http://nationalcharterschools.sharepointspace.com/hinokiinternationalschool/SitePages/Home.aspx) sections 0167.5, 1613, 3112, 3213, 5136, 7540.05, & 7545 regarding electronic communications)
4. Handwritten notes (between teachers and parents) about student behavior, daily incidents, etc. on the back of a monthly calendar specific to each class, sent home in students’ folders/backpacks
5. Phone calls/voice mails (usually from the dean of students to potential and current parents, to confirm enrollment/attendance, report illness/problems with child at school, etc.); see [Board Policy](http://nationalcharterschools.sharepointspace.com/hinokiinternationalschool/SitePages/Home.aspx) section 9111 on phones
6. Website (currently shifting from marketing-focused “about us” set of [webpages](http://www.hinoki-school.org/) (English and Japanese) managed by an external consultant to a more “internal-stakeholder” (student/family/classroom)-focused [website](https://sites.google.com/site/hinokiinternational/?pli=1) managed internally and using both languages on each page
7. Online portfolios of student work, password-accessible by parents/family members anywhere in the world with internet access (managed by the dean of students and classroom teachers); currently shifting from [Wikispaces](http://library.hinokischool.wikispaces.net/Teacher+Appreciation+Week+2012) to a more comprehensive Google platform that should allow for posting of school calendar, notifications about events, exchange of information about carpooling or other collaborative initiatives, etc. as well
8. School board meeting agendas and minutes, including information on school budget, audit, board policy, etc. (formerly distributed via email attachment; now posted on accessible Google Sites page)
9. Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/hinokischool?ref=ts&fref=ts>) for sharing information and images about festivals and other school events, for both internal/current stakeholders and external/potential stakeholders (managed by administrators, board members, and parent volunteers); see [Board Policy](http://nationalcharterschools.sharepointspace.com/hinokiinternationalschool/SitePages/Home.aspx) sections 1613, 3213, & 7540 on social media
10. Handbooks (employee handbook, parent handbook, student handbook, etc.) printed in English and Japanese and distributed to staff, families, etc.
11. Face-to-face meetings, including staff meetings and grade-level teacher meetings every other week, board meetings and PTO meetings once a month, and periodic “family literacy events,” open house events, and “curriculum nights”

**Tactics and Timeline コミュニケーションの方法とスケジュール**

So far, Hinoki International School has used the following “tactics” or methods of communicating with its stakeholders, listed here in increasing order of frequency through the school year. The recommended frequency and methods for each is included in the Communications Procedures Matrix on page 17.

**Annual**

* Welcome newsletter and farewell newsletter from Principal/Lead Administrator (at start and end of school year)
* Email and phone messages to parents confirming enrollment, start date of new school year, etc.
* Welcome Potluck (sponsored by PTO) for all stakeholders
* Kindergarten/new family orientation for parents new to our school
* Curriculum night event (led by Academic Advisory Committee and administrators) to acquaint families with our school’s dual-language immersion curriculum
* Parent-Teacher Conferences (held during 2nd trimester)
* Open House event – to kick off open enrollment season and educate potential families about our school
* Advertisement in *MiDokoro Map* publication
* Graduation/commencement event at end of school year
* Publication of School Improvement Plan, financial audit results, etc.
* Distribution of handbooks
* Breakfast with the Board event – for teachers and board members to get to know each other informally
* Survey questionnaire to families regarding school experience/feedback, evaluation of Lead Administrator, etc.

**Quarterly/Several Times Per Year**

* “Family literacy” events, led by teachers, to help parents better assist children in learning specific subject areas
* PTO meetings (held every other month) and their minutes (circulated by email to all parents, teachers, & administrators)
* Strategic planning meetings, involving board members, administrators, and external consultant
* Advertisement in *Jangle* publication

**Monthly**

* School board meetings and their minutes (circulated by email to all stakeholders and posted online)
* Monthly calendar of events/newsletter, sent home with students by classroom teachers
* Newsletter from the principal to families, sent home in students’ folders/backpacks
* Newsletter from the PTO, sent via email to all families with a hard copy sent to all PTO members
* Advertisement in *Metro Parent* publication

**Biweekly**

* Staff meeting (all teachers and principal), to discuss upcoming events, report & resolve issues, etc.
* Grade-level and Japanese/English teacher meetings, to discuss curriculum and articulation, etc.

**Weekly**

* Weekly school assembly, led by principal and attended by all students and teachers, with updates, reminders, pep talks
* Weekly calendar of events/newsletter, sent home with students by classroom teachers

**Daily**

* Daily feedback on behavior chart, completed homework, etc. for each student, sent home with students by teachers

**Occasionally/As Needed**

* Updates/points of interest on school’s Facebook page, *Japan News Club*, Kuchikomi website, etc.
* Updates to the school calendar posted on school website (external section is for parents; internal sections are for board, staff, marketing/community events, and reporting to government agencies)
* Committee meetings and reports to the board, administration, etc.
* Meetings and emails among school board, administration, sponsoring foundation, and charter authorizer (LPS)
* Brochures about the school distributed to local Asian grocery stores, retailers, schools, etc. frequented by those interested in Japan

**Evaluation and Accountability 成果の評価** Since effective communication is so critical to so many aspects of the successful operation of our school, any feedback sought from stakeholders about Hinoki International School is likely to yield important insights about the effectiveness of our communication systems. So far, student families have been formally surveyed once each year since the school was founded in 2010. First, parents were asked to respond to an online questionnaire regarding their school experience, and next, parents, staff, and board members were asked to participate in an evaluation of our Lead Administrator’s performance, on an Excel spreadsheet to be completed in either Japanese or English and returned via email. Results from both yielded feedback about communication.

Particularly since Michigan’s Public Act 102 now requires annual evaluations of administrators as well as teachers beginning in Fall 2013, it is recommended that Hinoki continue to invite feedback in a formal manner like this, at least once a year. Of course, there are also ample opportunities for informal feedback, with parents/families invited to visit the school and/or observe classes at any time, and welcome to communicate with the administrators via email, phone, or in person. All stakeholders are invited to attend our monthly board meetings (with “public comment” a mandatory part of every agenda), and at least one board member often attends the bimonthly staff meetings and quarterly PTO meetings.   
 Efforts to invite and gather feedback from relevant stakeholder groups throughout the year, and use it to constantly improve this communication plan, will be a primary focus of the Communications Committee formed in Fall 2012. Comprised of four parents, two teachers, and two board members (including one native speaker of Japanese, and five native speakers of English), this committee was created to advise the Hinoki International School Board and Lead Administrator about facilitating efficient and effective communication among Hinoki’s various stakeholders in Japanese and English. To help focus our efforts in such a big task, the Communications Committee decided this fall to conduct a sort of “needs assessment,” using the rollout of the 2011-2012 School Improvement Plan (SIP) as a test case, so that lessons learned could be applied to distribution of future SIPs and other major documents, such as the Parent Handbook being finalized this fall.

Using an admittedly less-than-ideal convenience sample comprised of the six committee members, the group responded to a survey about the rollout of the SIP, the final version of which (a 52-page document filled with educational jargon) was approved by the board on August 29, 2012. The survey consisted of 10 clusters of questions related to the 10 aspects of a communication plan posited by Porterfield & Carnes (2008, p. 63-65): delivery systems, mission, research, assumptions, audiences, messages, timeliness, responsible person(s), available resources, and evaluation. The results were fairly consistent among the different groups represented, and led to the following recommendations, to be shared at the December 2012 school board meeting:

1. Important documents, such as the SIP, should be made available as a downloadable PDF (via website link) and in print (a limited number of copies, available upon request).
2. For lengthy documents, such as the SIP, an executive summary should be written, in Japanese and English, for non-educators (with little or no jargon), mentioning the founding principles and extensive research done in the process of founding the school.
3. The purpose of a document such as the SIP should be communicated early, in both Japanese and English, particularly for new hires and new families.
4. The development of a document such as the SIP should be staggered in stages/drafts, for periodic review and input throughout the school year by members of relevant stakeholder groups, whose participation should be acknowledged in the document.
5. To explain, invite participation in, and disseminate results of, a process like the one documented in the SIP, at least one “town hall” type meeting should be held, open to all interested stakeholders, in English and Japanese.
6. As part of the delivery system, an individual(s) should be designated as the key person to field questions about the document (e.g., for the Parent Handbook, the parent liaison or Dean of Students).

Once implemented, there will be ongoing efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies, and to continue to refine and improve overall communication procedures and strategies at Hinoki.

**Communications Procedures Matrix コミュニケーション一覧表**

KEY: = handout ✉ = email/listserv  = U.S. mail https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538= website posting  = downloadable PDF https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525= phone call/text

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Message /**  **Audience**  **(frequency)** | **Principal Newsletters**  **(monthly)** | **Teacher Newsletters  (weekly)** | **Board Meeting Minutes  (monthly)** | **Major Documents (SIP, etc.)** | **Major School Event Info (ex.: festivals)** | **Student Recruitment Events/Info** | **School Closure / Bus Delay** |
| Parents/Families of Current Students | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525✉ |
| Administrative staff | ✉ | &/or ✉ | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525✉  (as relevant) |
| Teachers/instructional staff | &/or ✉ | ✉  (as relevant) | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525✉  (as relevant) |
| Support staff | &/or ✉ | ✉  (as relevant) | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525✉ |
| Board Members | ✉ |  | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |
| Academic Advisory Committee | ✉ | ✉  (as relevant) | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |
| Himawari Preschool | &/or ✉ | ✉  (as relevant) | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/525✉  (as relevant) |
| Charter authorizer (LPS) Superintendent | ✉ |  | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |
| Sponsor (MJBEF) | ✉ |  | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |
| Community groups (JSD, JBSD, Consulate) | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 |  | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |
| Media outlets (e.g., *JNC, Kuchikomi, LivO.*) |  |  |  |  | ✉ https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538 | https://mail.google.com/mail/e/538✉ |  |

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