Background
Through the Omaha Public Schools (OPS) Strategic Plan of Action, staff spent more than a year building a new district website. The new website, launched on Oct. 1, 2021, would be the OPS’ first website update since 2012 and 2014. While stakeholders almost universally disliked the former site, they were very familiar with it. Change can be difficult. The debut of a new staff intranet was also a first. On the former site, even internal documents were posted externally for all stakeholders to see. With 9,000 staff serving 54,000 students and families, District Communications knew a comprehensive launch plan was essential for the new site’s successful adoption by both internal and external stakeholders.

Research
District Communications staff turned to several primary and secondary sources when completing research for this communications plan. Those sources included:

- 2018 and 2020 family technology surveys
- 2017 districtwide NSPRA Communications Audit
- data on the previous website including
  - 2020-21 usage statistics
  - most frequently-visited pages
- district newsletter and social media statistics, including open rates, top-performing posts and feedback surveys rating content usefulness
- staff and family focus groups previewing the new district website

Planning
Research revealed the key themes and benefits of OPS’ new site that a communications plan should highlight. Focus groups found the new site to be clean and easy to navigate. Highlighting the intranet’s single sign-on (SSO) feature would be essential for staff with limited technology proficiency since essential documents would be moving behind a password-protected wall. Target audiences included the Board of Education, district leadership and school principals/program directors, all Omaha Public Schools staff, all Omaha Public Schools families, middle and high school students in Omaha Public Schools and community visitors to OPS.org. The campaign’s goal was: The new Omaha Public Schools district website is seen by target audiences as the premiere school district website in the Omaha metro area and a trusted, primary source for news and information about our district.

Objectives included:
1. By Oct. 15, 2021, 20% of Omaha Public Schools staff will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the new district intranet (by creating an intranet account).
2. By Oct. 15, 2021, 60% of visitors to ops.org who complete a feedback survey will agree or strongly agree that the new district website is a trusted, reliable source for information about Omaha Public Schools.
3. By Oct. 29, 2021, visits to OPS.org will increase 15% when compared to visits between Oct. 1 and Oct. 29, 2019 (throwing out 2020 due to pandemic abnormalities). Staff identified evaluation measures in the planning stage to directly align with objectives.

Staff budgeted $3,900 for paid banner ads targeting adults with school-aged children in our district zip codes during Oct. 2021. All other work was completed with existing department resources.

Implementation
The communications plan ran from Sept. through Oct. 2021. Strategies included paid digital advertising, printed collateral, virtual and in-person meetings, staff/family thought-leader activation, video and social media. To achieve objective three, collateral revealed only portions of the website (identified based on research) in advance of the launch. Printed collateral targeted break rooms and time clocks to reach staff with limited technology proficiency across the large district. To build excitement and reflect the new site’s clean, crisp design, campaign collateral used a space launch theme and moved from night tones to daylight tones as launch day approached. Echoing our district’s mission, video collateral included student voices. Though external media was not a strategy in the plan, the interest generated by district-owned channels earned a positive, accurate placement in Omaha’s largest newspaper.

Evaluation
As of Oct. 31, 2021, measures outlined in the planning stage showed the campaign far exceeded benchmarks set in objectives one and three. 377 staff submitted a suggestion for the intranet naming contest and nearly 50% of district staff successfully logged into the intranet. Oct. 2021 page views increased by 34% over 2019. For objective 2, 32% of survey completers agreed or strongly agreed with the identified question, while 40% responded neutrally.