Omaha Public Schools Website Redesign

Overview
A school district’s website is often the first place for current and prospective families to look for information. It needs to be clean, user-friendly and straightforward. Before 2021, the Omaha Public Schools website had not been updated in 10-15 years. Families and staff regularly shared their frustration with the site’s navigation and the overwhelming amount of content.

As technology has shifted in the last 10-15 years, how individuals connect with a website has also shifted. More and more families access our website through a mobile format. Although we had a responsive site, it wasn’t designed with mobile in mind. As more people access our website in a mobile format, it is essential to understand that a website can’t answer every question. It is necessary to have the most critical information available to stakeholders in easy-to-find locations and details on where to get additional insight.

The district communications team spent years planning for a new website, researching best practices, looking at what features families wanted and getting support from key leaders within our district. In 2020, they were able to select a vendor, and in Oct. 2021, Omaha Public Schools launched a new district website. With the new website also came the first-ever intranet—this brought information from a variety of sources to one place for our staff.

Our district is now working toward moving more than 100 schools and program websites to the new web platform. Our high school and middle school sites have launched with elementary coming in the fall of 2022.

Qualitative feedback from families, students and staff have been positive. However, a recent communication survey also offered insight into how we may be able to reach families/staff who are still hesitant to use the new site. We continue to review our accessibility scores and analytics to ensure the content is accurate, up-to-date, what parents are looking for, and accessible.

Research
Omaha Public Schools conducted communication audits in 2013 and 2016. Both audits made recommendations for a website redesign and navigation overhaul. Feedback from surveys and qualitative research echoed that families, students, staff and our community found the website cumbersome and challenging to navigate.

The communications team researched website best practices and features important to families and schools. The team used this research to get buy-in and support from the Board of Education and District Leadership Team.

Once the team had support to start the process, they sent a Request for Proposal to vendors. A committee of principals, technology staff and communications team members narrowed the list to two companies brought in for an interview and demonstration.
The Director of Communications and our Chief of Staff presented the findings and made a recommendation to the Board, which the Board approved in Oct. 2020. The communications team continued reading articles and learning more about website best practices over the next several months.

Planning
In January 2021, our communications team began working with our vendor to develop our new district website’s design, navigation and content migration plan. This design and navigation also set the footprint for future school websites. Research gathered on best practices, analytics on the site and more informed the planning phase.

The technology department oversaw the previous website. The new website was to be managed by the district communications team with technical support from colleagues in technology. Each department would be responsible for maintaining and updating its relevant content. The communications and technology teams had to work closely together to plan for the transition of content and management responsibilities.

The District Communications team mapped out a timeline for when each website would launch. With nearly 100 schools and programs, it would have been difficult to launch all of them at one time. The team decided that our district site would launch in October 2021, high schools would launch in December 2021, middle schools would launch in April 2022 and elementary schools would launch in the fall of 2022 (in five phases).

The District Communications team worked collaboratively with other departments to determine the most appropriate content for the website based on analytics and best practices. The District Communications team identified all content that needed to be moved over by the vendor. Concurrently, our district communications team and vendor trained district-level staff from each department so they could review the content moved over and manage it moving forward.

Implementation
Once the content was moved over, staff from each department reviewed content for accuracy. A district communications team member met with each department weekly to talk through content, best practices and what was most important to families.

Key Features that are present on our new district website include:

- Mobile responsive with multiple breakpoints
- Accessibility features
- Ability to use more photos and videos
- Integrated calendar
- Shared content across sites- content is managed in one place and shared in multiple locations.
  - Example: Content created at the district level and shared on school sites. Content looks native to subsite: Student Assignment Plan (district site vs. school site)
- District News – To be shared across 100+ school and program sites. Shares stores that reinforce our “one district” philosophy.
- Translation capability into over 65 languages
- The majority of the content is within one or two clicks
- Integration with a mobile app (launching in winter 2022)

Leading up to the launch, the district communications team held a campaign to get people excited and know what was coming. As part of the campaign with staff, we had a naming contest to name our new intranet. We received more than 500 submissions! We chose OneOPS as our winner. It speaks to our values as a large district. We are more than 100 school communities, but we are all proud to be a part of Omaha Public Schools.

Our [district site](#) launched on Oct. 1, 2021, in an almost flawless fashion. The team was prepared and ran into very few hiccups on launch day.
High school websites were launched on Dec. 17, 2021, and middle schools on April 1, 2022. Elementary schools and any remaining programs will be launched in five phases in the fall of 2022. This helps to spread out the launches and for our district communications team to provide support to all schools.

**Evaluation**

Qualitative feedback from our community has been very positive. Many have expressed that they like that we now highlight photos of our students, that navigation is easy to follow, and it is cleaner than the previous version. Even though the new site has less content than before, more people visit the site than ever. From Oct. 1, 2021, to Jan. 26, 2022, the Omaha Public Schools site had 68,000 more page views than it did during the same timeframe in 2020-21.

We recently conducted a communication survey with families and staff. Nearly 50% of the families said the site was good or excellent. One of the most significant changes we made with our new site was an enhanced focus on accessibility. Displaying content in a more accessible fashion helps everyone, not just those that need assistive devices. However, it is a change of practice and different than what people are used to. Much of the less than positive feedback collected pertained to changing how information was displayed to be more accessible.

One of the most significant complaints we received on the previous site was that individuals couldn't find what they were looking for. In a recent community survey, nearly 80% of our families said they found what they were looking for. Of those that didn't find what they were looking for, only 40% used the search function.

Overall, the feedback has been positive. The community survey helped identify what additional education we need for our families and what opportunities we have to provide further guidance on where to access information.

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*See next page for photos of the previous site.*
Omaha Public Schools Website Before Oct. 2021

Below is a picture of the home page and a subpage (public-facing) from Aug. 2021.