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The Madison Central School District Distance Education Program Policy

Introduction

The Madison Central School District, in Madison, South Dakota, has decided to expand its distance education program by offering four new courses that students may take for credit toward graduation. A committee has been formed to discuss marketing strategies and put together a marketing plan. The committee is made up of board members, community members, teachers, and parents. The four new courses are all being offered as alternative courses to the business courses offered in the classroom. These four courses will be offered exclusively via the internet using Blackboard as the course management tool. The school already uses Blackboard as a course management tool for many of its face-to-face courses. A full-time adjunct instructor has been hired to teach the four courses. He has experience teaching distance education courses and has already developed the four business courses. The district must now decide how to market this new program to the students, parents, and community members of the district. In order for the program to succeed, each course must enroll at least 6 students. Although the district has received grant money from the state to fund the program, the grant money will not be renewed unless the program can prove itself successful.

Marketing Plan

The committee decided that the first step of the marketing plan was to identify the target audience. After some discussion, the target audience was identified as: students, faculty, parents, community members, and district stakeholders (such as local business owners). The committee came up with some questions which helped focus the plan on the target audience. The focus questions were:

1. Which students are the potential students for these courses?
2. What are their needs and interests?
3. How can the families of the students be informed of the benefits of the courses?
4. What potential benefits do the new courses offer that the old courses do not?
5. How can community members be informed about the additions to the curriculum?
6. How can local businesses either contribute to or benefit from the additional business courses?
7. Will the courses count for college credit?

8. How much will a marketing campaign cost the district?
9. What is the timeline for putting together this campaign?
10. How often should marketing occur?
11. Which marketing techniques would be most effective in reaching the target audience?

The second step of the plan was for the committee to try and answer each of the target questions. The committee met once a week for the next month to try and research and answer each of the questions. After a month of meetings, the committee decided to bring a marketing plan forward to the board of education for approval. The plan was presented to and approved by the board as follows:

1. Contact local media to inform them of new courses and provide a summary of the courses and their benefits to the students. Include interviews with the instructor of the courses and administrators. Schedule radio ads for peak listening times for the month before spring scheduling. Ask the local papers to run stories in the weeks before spring scheduling.
2. Print an article in the district newsletter containing all of the information about the new courses.
3. Update the district website with a link to the information about each of the new courses including registration information, course schedule, credit information, syllabi, and frequently asked questions.
4. Print brochures for the new courses to be handed out to parents and students during parent-teacher conferences. Brochures will include all pertinent information as well as Frequently Asked Questions.
5. Organize a student assembly to inform students about the benefits of the courses and ask local business owners to speak to students about the benefits of business courses and what businesses look for in potential employees.
6. Schedule a staff meeting to inform all staff of the new courses so that they are able to answer questions from students, parents, and community members.
7. Schedule a phone message from the School Outreach System to inform district families of the new courses.
8. Schedule a town-hall meeting to discuss the curriculum changes and invite community members and parents to attend.

The marketing plan will go into effect this February so that the most of the campaign is in full swing by the time spring registration for the following year occurs. This will give guidance counselors ample time to put class schedules together and to try and fill the six slots per course.