



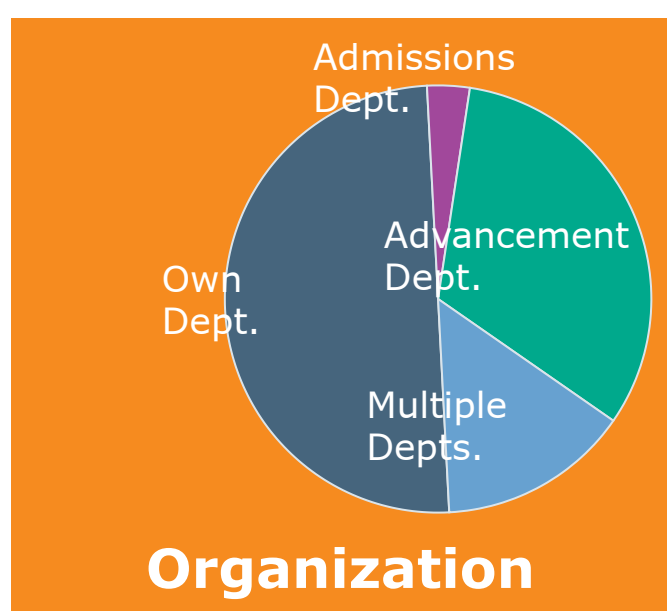
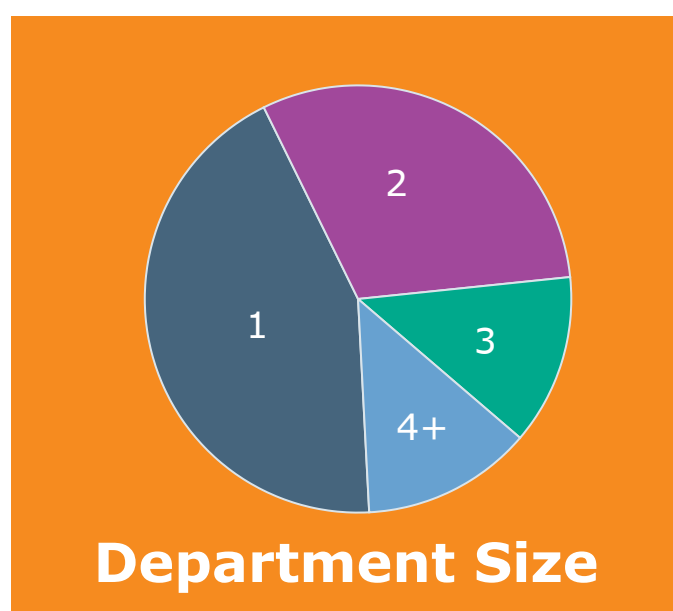
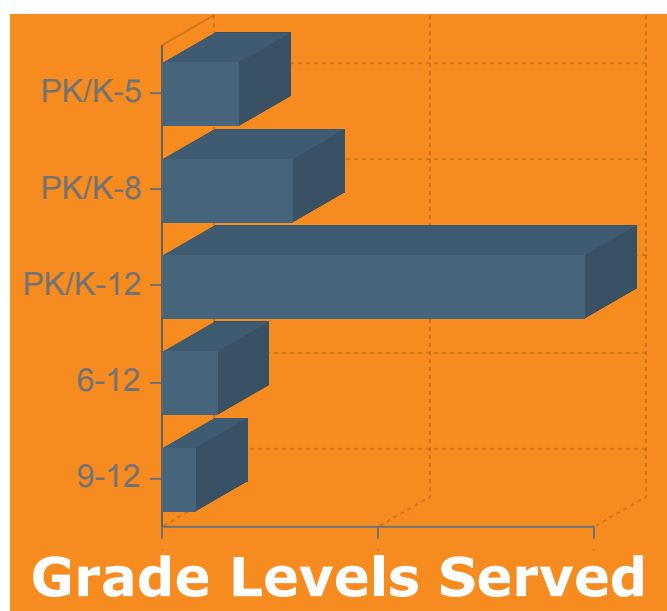
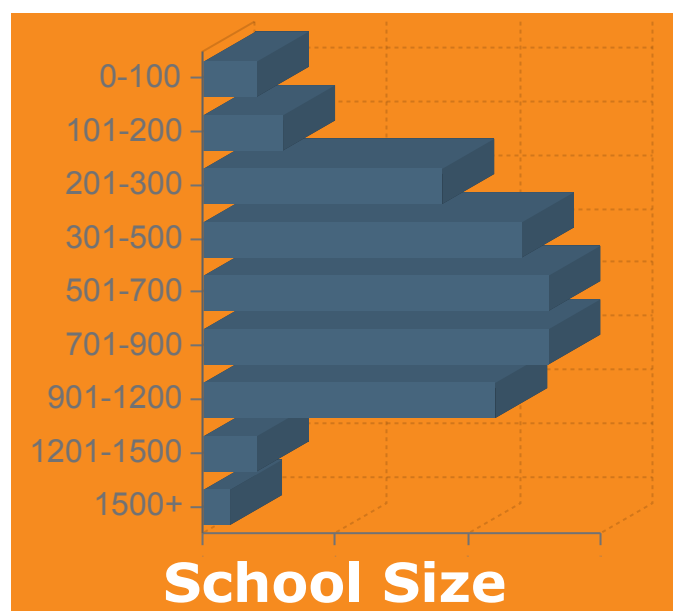
**SERVING & ACCREDITING  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

# Communications in Our Schools

In August of 2021, we heard from more than 60 communications professionals in SAIS schools about their current responsibilities and workflow. We asked how the pandemic has changed their work and its influence going forward. We asked about their greatest challenges, where they were celebrating success, and where they were seeing the most community engagement.

# Participating Schools

As expected, communications departments are most often found in our mid to large sized K-12 schools, being its own department or often under the Advancement/Development umbrella. About half have marketing included in their title. The following charts will describe the schools represented in the responses.



# Responsibilities of the Role



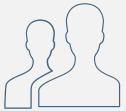
**77%** post news and events to Facebook and Instagram, **55%** to Twitter.



**87%** send weekly communications to parents, **61%** send monthly communications to parents.



**95%** are responsible for emergency and crisis communications.



**56%** communicate regularly with alumni and **35%** with students.

**56%** prepare communication for the board of trustees.



**40%** include athletics' communications in their duties.



**85%** are charged with updating the school's website.



**81%** create fundraising and development communications.

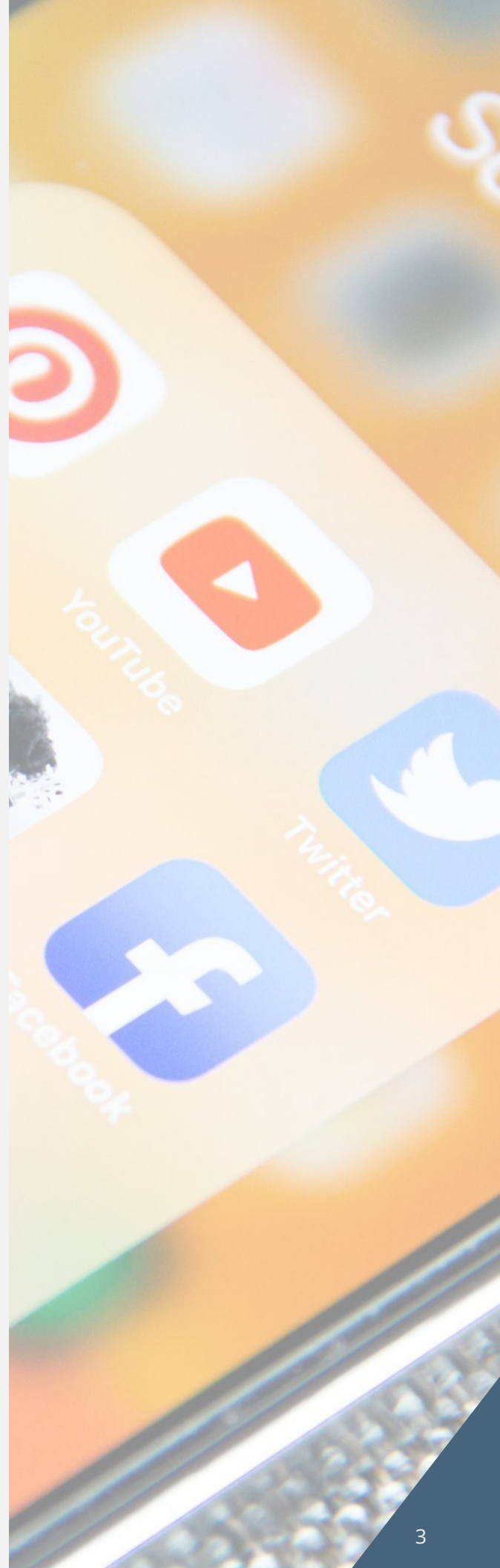
**68%** develop materials for admissions.



**90%** edit materials for other departments in the school and **50%** create slides and presentations for others to present.



**19%** facilitate a student club or activity and **10%** teach a course for students.



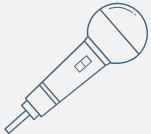
# Responsibilities of the Role



**55%** conduct market research and tap into local demographics.



**89%** manage brand development for the school.



**92%** handle media and press relations, releases, and inquiries.



**73%** produce a print or digital school magazine



**82%** include photographer and editor in their duties.



**68%** are charged with video production.



**74%** have graphic design for print or digital resources on their list of responsibilities.



**86%** inform their work with social media and website analytics.



# Responsibilities Beyond the Communications Office

**65%** of SAIS communications professionals responding report duties outside of the communications department.

Most of these commitments are with the advancement department, the admissions department, or in some other administrative capacity.

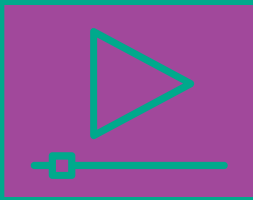


Others reported interesting responsibilities like leading the parents association, coaching, managing the school calendar, accreditation coordinator, student advisor, club sponsor, and running the online spirit store.



# What would you like to delegate or outsource?

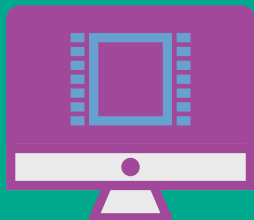
We asked respondents what responsibility they would like to outsource or delegate. The top four are highlighted below. In addition to these, also mentioned were the weekly communication piece with parents, photography, and alumni communication. A few would just like a little extra help or someone with a different skillset than their own. Communications professionals are pulled in many directions. With time consuming projects like school magazines, they often feel like they are not able to fully address day-to-day tasks.



**Videography  
and Video  
Production**



**Digital  
Marketing**

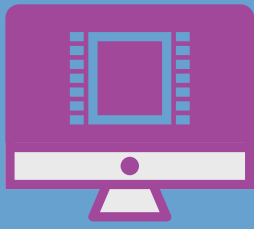


**Graphic Design**



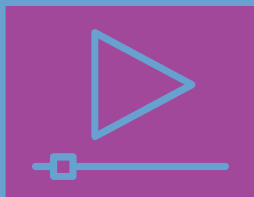
**Social Media  
Management**





## Graphic Design

# What does your school outsource to a third party?



## Videography and Video Production

As expected, most schools outsource printing of materials and some special use photography. Graphic design, videography, and video production were the most common tasks to be sent out to a third party. While most do regular website updates in-house, several outsource website development, maintenance, security, and search engine optimization. Schools turn to outside professionals for less frequent projects like a brand refresh or logo design and specific projects like a geofenced marketing campaign.



## Website Design and Maintenance



**Most Creative Outsource**  
**"Instagram posts have been outsourced to an honors internship class."**

# The Printed Word

We asked communications professionals what, if any, materials they continue to print monthly, quarterly, or annually.



43%

More than 40% of schools surveyed print an annual or biannual magazine



36% print an annual report.



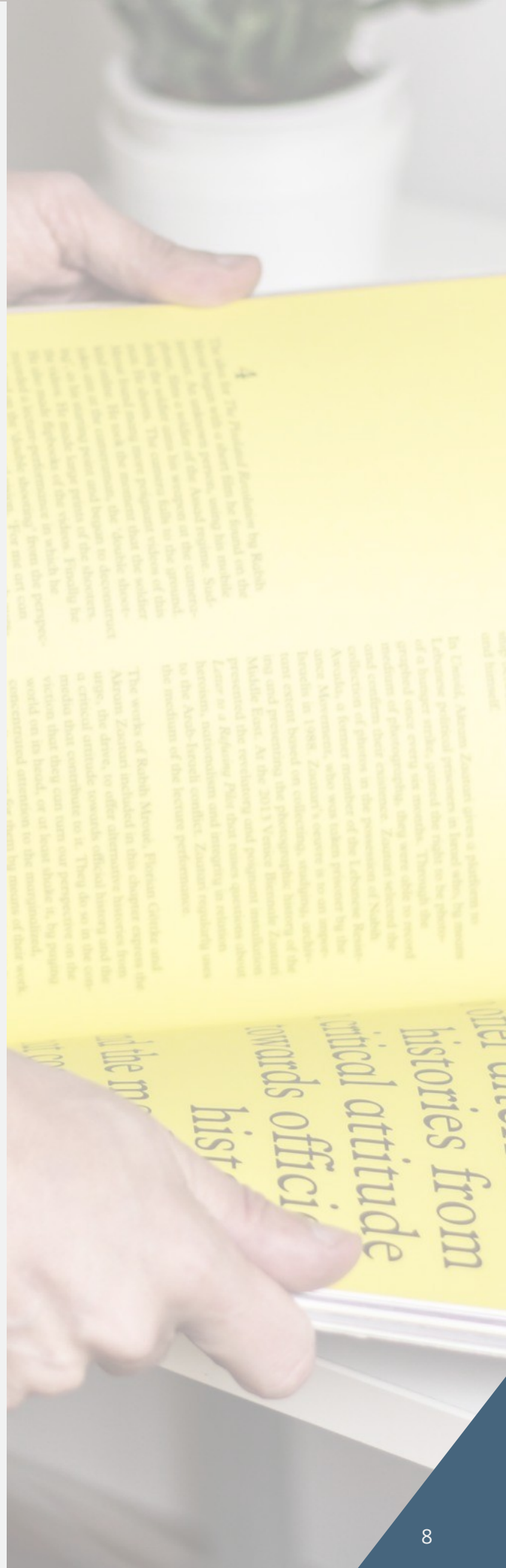
24% print at least some admissions materials.



24% print some sort of advancement materials for annual fund, capital campaign, or alumni relations.

While some schools have gone completely digital, there are a few that continue to print items such as course catalogs, school directories, newspapers, and back to school packets.

Two schools noted success with their recent combination of the annual report and the school magazine into one publication.





# How has the pandemic changed your job?

"Essentially, COVID has become a second full-time communications job."

**Urgency and frequency of communications**

"Navigating the public health and racial justice response, in addition to existing responsibilities and managing a team remotely has been almost overwhelming."

**Live streamed or virtual events**

"We've taken the vast majority of community building to virtual events. I am now a Zoom event producer, video producer, and COVID-19 "expert" within our community."

**Policy updates**

"It has made storytelling and uplifting the goings-on inside the school building all the more critical, particularly during the time when parents were not able to visit campus at all."

**Increased reliance and need for video**

"The pandemic has also prompted a shift towards more text communication, the creation of a school app, and a rethinking of email as the primary means of communication."

**Time dedicated to COVID related communications**

**Increased need for clarity**

**Working remotely**

# Did you discover new strategies during the pandemic that were successful and will continue post-pandemic?

"Last year, we made Grandparents' Day a week - all virtual on a dedicated webpage. We got rave reviews, especially from grandparents who live far away and can never make it to our campus on this special day."

"Our annual auction will be hybrid this year after a successful all-online auction."

"We have built a trust within our community. An expectation of transparency and direct communications when it comes to a crisis. That will continue."

"Shorter, nimbler staff meetings."

"We really increased our head of school communications last school year given all of the uncertainty around Covid. Our school needed more transparency, more connection with leadership, and more of the why behind decisions. This has greatly changed (for the better) the way we communicate to our school community - from faculty and staff to parents."

Increased use of video

Live streamed or virtual coverage of events

Transparent and direct communication

Virtual parent-teacher conferences

New ways to celebrate seniors

Connecting with far away grandparents or alumni

Option to work remotely



# Where are you currently seeing the greatest success?

"We have really developed a team approach across multiple departments that is helping us capture the skill sets of multiple people and use them for the advancement of the school."

Enrollment and retention

"We received great accolades last year for our organization, transparency, and parent communication. The increase in trust has resulted in more word-of-mouth marketing."

Social media engagement

"We continue to get compliments on the quality and effectiveness of our communication."

Digital marketing efforts

"Engagement with our school community - we are seeing more of a "family" feel than ever and increased satisfaction for our efforts to safely keep school in person and better engage our students."

Fundraising

"Healthy parent engagement through communications and social media are two current successes. Enrollment is strong, and this past school year we had an excellent year of fundraising."

Head of school videos

Virtual events

Weekly communications

# What are your biggest challenges?

- Information overload, finding a balance in how much communication is sent
- The need to have a contingency plan for every event
- Encouraging families to use online resources and read communications
- Maintaining community when large in-person events are not possible
- Lack of time to think strategically
- Workload, finding time to get it all done
- Being a department of one
- Social media management
- Prioritizing self-care
- Student wellness
- Budgetary constraints
- Time management



# Where or how are you able to find the greatest school community engagement?

## Social Media

The power of community building comes through shared stories and connections.

Each day, there are endless opportunities for community engagement, from classroom discussion to dining to athletics and fine arts. It's the small moments that help bridge this time where large gatherings are not permitted.

Surprisingly, engagement with our latest print magazine has been overwhelming.

Athletics are a big source of connection and engagement.

Parent meetings on Zoom have opened that opportunity up to parents who previously could not attend in person - attendance has been great.

When we are able to hold in-person events, they are full.

We also have the benefit of having all of our divisions based on one campus - creating a connection to the school culture from an early age that lasts through graduation.

Facebook continues to be the top choice among our current and alumni parents for communication.