

Simi Valley Unified School District - From Here to Anywhere

Supplemental campaign materials:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B2b4P76BjgFqYzV6VDh1dTg5UkE?usp=sharing>

For years, our K-12 district (17,500 students) experienced declining enrollment. Major industry closures caused much of the decline, but we also bled students to neighboring districts from a misperception that our schools were not as strong as others. We fielded unending negative press from the closures of three elementary schools, a contentious school board and a recall effort (unsuccessful). I was hired to help change the public's perception of our district. Our biggest problem was our lack of communication within our community. In the absence of our voice, other voices spoke for us. After a leadership change 6 months into my job, we hired a marketing consultant to help create tools to establish and carry out our plan to rebuild our community's trust and support. Zeste Consulting launched a survey to parents and staff to pinpoint our problems.

Armed with that information, we worked with Zeste to develop a new district logo, Promise statement, motto and colors. We created a promotional video, which plays in local movie theaters, community events and on our website. We publish many different print ads to saturate our community with our message. I redesigned our entire website and have started redoing our schools' websites to reflect a similar style. All of our messaging now reflects a cohesive look and feel. The rebranding was just the start, because without the substance, a facelift can't hold the message together. We looked at all of our programs and started filling needs. We expanded our independent study school, STEAM, STEM, visual and performing arts, medical academies, world language, preschool, CTE Pathways and International Baccalaureate offerings. We actively recruit special population high schoolers into our higher-level classes, no matter their grades, and then give them the support to succeed in those classes. We offer more and better PD to our teachers. We changed our A-G requirements to make our students more competitive. We monitor social media and answer concerns openly and immediately. Three years ago, we had less than 500 FB followers. Now we have more than 5,000. We also have Facebook pages for every campus, with clear rules and procedures for staff to help promote their schools. We've made enrollment gains and families are returning to us. Is our improved enrollment the result of the marketing campaign? Sure, in part. But if we didn't have the programs and supports in place to back up our messaging and provide the best educational options to our families, the marketing campaign would fail. What the campaign did, for staff, students and parents, was revitalize and reenergize our community, and bring pride back into our schools.

Most importantly, our Promise statement, motto and logo speak our truth. We provide the best educational experience to every single child passing through our schools. In Simi Valley Schools, our students will go "From here to anywhere." Website: simivalleyusd.org Video: <https://youtu.be/aXSdYUj6IRQ>

Our marketing consultant, Zeste Consulting, worked with us to create a survey to isolate the primary issues our community had with our school district and to also get a sense of how they wanted to see our district and schools. We launched the survey to our parents and staff through our normal

communications channels. We are a city of about 130,000 people, but many think of Simi Valley as a small town. Our parents and staff resented that image, preferring instead to see us as modern, innovative and diverse. We worked with those images in creating our materials and tools. After the survey, we turned to the logo, Promise statement and our motto. Zeste did an excellent job of nailing our "feel." They created a logo based on an old Chumash Indian cave painting found in a popular park in our area. This "sun" painting immediately spoke to our roots, as well as our future. With the start of any endeavor comes a new day, our superintendent said. As a team, we selected the colors and tweaked the logos. This, and our motto, "From here to anywhere," were our main starting points. We knew we wanted to inspire a high level of excitement within our community. We created branding products-- lanyards, enamel pins, tote bags, etc...--and on the return from Winter Break, we launched a huge rebranding event involving all staff. Every staff member received a tote bag with his or her gifts inside. This was an important part of the effort. We held an assembly and streamed it to our school sites to talk about our new look and how it better reflected our philosophy and goals. The response was amazing. Then we launched to the public by sending emails to all of our parents, posting on the website and social media (the new website was also launched at this time), and visiting community groups to talk about what we were doing and why. In the months that followed, we completed the Guide to Simi Schools and the video, "What's Great About Simi Valley School," which we placed in movie theaters. We also launched a huge print ad campaign in our two newspapers with different ads running every week, each representing a different school or program. The ads were full page and color and many people said they were drawn to an event or school because they had seen the ads.

Staff, because they are our best representatives and morale had been down for so long; parents, because we need their support and they were seeking educational options elsewhere; the community at-large, because they were losing faith in our schools and teachers and were creating a lot of gossip and miscommunication fueling our problems; and our students, who needed to feel proud of our schools and their efforts, and be confident in the knowledge that we were there for them, before anyone else.

Enrollment is the easiest to measure. Since we launched the marketing campaign halfway through the school year, we can say that our change in leadership, along with the early retirement of a good deal of our staff, helped to transform some of the culture around the district. With these moves, we were already sensing some excitement and saw an uptick in enrollment. Where we had planned for a loss of 500 students in 2015-2016, we ended with a loss of 300 and we maintained that throughout the school year, which had not happened for many years. (In the past, we'd lose several hundred more students throughout the year.) In 2016-2017, we again planned for 500 lost students and ended with about 200. For us, those are major gains. Anecdotally, we know we've brought back families who were going to neighboring districts. We know that our independent study/homeschool, Monte Vista School, more than doubled its enrollment in one year, a move helped by relocating the school to one of our now close elementary schools (we repurposed the property), expanding its grades and bringing in an amazing principal from one of our high schools who is dynamic and dedicated to his students. Our public events have seen a huge increase in parent and community participation. Our recent Pathways Expo drew more than 600 people in its second year. We are seeing greater community support in both funding and partnerships with other organizations.

This campaign was more about changing the public's perception of our schools. Our district stands at either largest or second-largest in our county, but we are not as affluent as our nearest competitors. We knew that we had great schools and students who excelled and thrived in our classrooms. But the general community believed a damaging perception that our students were not safe; that diversity was a problem; and that our students were not successful in going on to college and university. As stated earlier, we needed to provide a backdrop of professionalism and elegance in our tools, we needed to improve our offerings, and we needed to tell our story. Our campaign has and continues to facilitate our best conversations, and provides a framework around which all of our wins and successes are best supported.