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## MUSD Community Newspaper **Case Study**

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**CalSPRA Awards of Excellence**  
We Believe Newspaper  
2021 · 2023 · 2024



## CASE STUDY: Building a School District Newspaper from the Ground Up



## From Fragmented Messaging to a Full-Scale Editorial Engine WE BELIEVE News

**Transparency,  
Accountability,  
& Community  
Awareness**

In 2018, we were brought in by a California school district to help make sense of an ongoing but inconsistent effort to produce a district-wide magazine. The district's goal was to enhance public accountability as part of its Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) by regularly and clearly communicating its progress, priorities, and programs to all its stakeholders.

But what began as a publishing rescue mission evolved into something far more substantial: the creation of a quarterly, full-format print newspaper, distributed to every household and business in the district. For seven years—until its conclusion in spring 2024—Workingarts served as the design, editorial, and publishing engine behind this award-winning public communication effort.

# The Purpose

**The newspaper was conceived as a public-facing record of district progress, designed to:**

- Explain school board decisions and policy shifts
- Document student achievement and academic growth
- Illustrate long-term initiatives, such as construction projects and strategic goals
- Showcase enrichment programs and department initiatives
- Demystify educational priorities for a general public audience

While deeply aligned with LCAP accountability goals, the newspaper quickly grew into something broader: a trusted, community-centered storytelling platform that made complex institutional activity visible and accessible.

## Execution: High Stakes, High Volume, High Complexity

Executing this project every quarter was an intensive, multifaceted operation. With no standing editorial staff in the district, and many contributors “voluntold” to submit stories, the effort relied on a mix of persistence, editorial care, and strategic diplomacy.

**Every quarter required us to:**

- Extract content from reluctant or overloaded staff
- Conduct interviews and ghostwrite content that reflected each department’s voice
- Edit for quality and consistency across dozens of contributors
- Coordinate visual content, working with the communications team for photos and assets
- Design the full print product, balancing clarity with visual engagement
- Manage all backend logistics, including printing, mailing, and web archiving

In the early years, Workingarts wrote the majority of the content ourselves, working closely with principals, department heads, and staff to identify stories and articulate them clearly. Over time, we successfully helped build internal capacity, mentoring district staff in how to think editorially and write for a broader audience.

Operational Oversight

# Cost-Saving Logistics & Vendor Negotiation

Beyond writing, editing, and design, we handled all production, printing, web hosting, and USPS distribution logistics on the district's behalf.



## We negotiated directly with:

- Printers to optimize turnaround times and quality
- Web hosting providers for cost-effective, fast-loading access to article archives
- Mailing service vendors and USPS to execute mass distribution every quarter

One of our most impactful contributions was spearheading a successful transition from standard postage to nonprofit USPS rates. By working with the district's education foundation, we were able to reclassify the newspaper's mailings under nonprofit status—cutting distribution costs dramatically.

## This single change created enough cost savings to fund:

- All printing and production costs
- All mailing and fulfillment
- Our design, editorial, and project management services

This financial strategy allowed the district to maintain a professional-grade communications product without increasing its communications budget—a major win for long-term sustainability.



**Every quarter, 35,000 printed newspapers** were delivered using USPS's Every Door Direct Mail program—blanketing the district with high-visibility, high-retention content.



- Local families saw their schools' progress front and center
- Educators and classified staff had their work publicly recognized
- Local businesses stayed informed about the district's priorities and performance

The newspaper's tabloid format allowed for substantial editorial depth, unlike most promotional formats. It wasn't slick PR—it was genuine public storytelling, supported by facts, plans, and lived progress.

We also built, managed, and maintained a companion website hosting hundreds of published articles—creating a digital archive of district communication, student achievement, and project evolution.



# Adaptability During Crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the newspaper became an essential communications lifeline. While in-person meetings and events disappeared, the quarterly print edition kept the community connected to its schools—offering clarity, reassurance, and accountability in a time of uncertainty.

# Recognition and Sunset

Over its lifespan, the newspaper received three Awards of Excellence from the California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA), affirming its impact and quality.

## CalSPRA Awards of Excellence We Believe Newspaper 2021 · 2023 · 2024

**Statewide Recognition** – Over the course of five years, the We Believe News publication earned multiple honors from the California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA), including Communication Tactics Awards in 2020 and 2021. The February 2020 edition received the 2020–2021 Award for Best Communications Document, and the June 2023 edition was honored with a CalSPRA Award of Excellence. In 2024, the series again received CalSPRA's Award of Excellence, recognizing its continued impact and design innovation.



In 2024, following changes in the district's communications leadership, the newspaper was replaced by a lighter, magazine-style format. While visually polished, the new format sacrificed the editorial capacity and public accountability that had made the newspaper unique.

## Conclusion

# A Blueprint for Community-First School Communication

This project was a bold and rare thing: a district publication that blended transparency, design excellence, and operational rigor into a single, trusted product.



## Workingarts didn't just build a newspaper. We:

- Created systems that worked—editorially and logistically
- Built internal skills across multiple departments
- Saved the district money through smart, strategic logistics
- Raised the standard for what districtwide communication can be

For seven years, this project proved that with the right team, even large-scale public communication can feel personal, purposeful, and powerful.

- Distributed via USPS Every Door Direct Mail to all local households and businesses
- Website archive with hundreds of articles documenting strategic initiatives and student success
- Three-time CalSPRA Award of Excellence winner



# What We Delivered

- **Editorial leadership:** Planned, wrote, and edited content with and for department heads, administrators, and educators
- **Design and production:** Built a clean, engaging tabloid format prioritizing clarity and public transparency
- **Capacity building:** Trained internal teams to become consistent contributors
- **Full operations:** Managed printing, USPS mailing, and web hosting
- **Cost savings strategy:** Negotiated nonprofit mailing status through the district foundation—substantially reducing distribution costs and funding the project end-to-end

**7 YEARS**  
**35,000 Print Run**  
**3 Awards** **3 CORE TEAM STAFF**  
**456 Articles Published**

## Strategic Impact

- Greatly improved internal and external information flow
- Made board decisions, project timelines, and academic initiatives transparent to the community
- Became a critical communications lifeline during COVID-19 disruptions
- Established a long-lasting public archive of district accountability and achievement

# Why It Matterred

The newspaper became more than a communications product — it was a trust-building tool, giving families, staff, and stakeholders a clear, regular view into district priorities, progress, and people.



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