

Alumni Engagement Supports Continuous Improvement for the Pewaukee School District

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As a winner of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for institutional excellence, Wisconsin’s Pewaukee School District is focused on leveraging every resource it can to drive continuous improvement.

Every action the district takes is done with a purpose that supports its ultimate mission: helping each student reach his or her full potential. One of the key strategies that Pewaukee has implemented in pursuit of this goal is alumni and community engagement.

“Our sense of community is strong,” said Superintendent JoAnn Sternke. “All four of the district’s schools are located on a single campus, which leads to an ‘esprit de corps’ among faculty and a strong sense of Pirate Pride.”

Sternke and her staff were looking for a way to tap into this pride to build “a cadre of supporters” who could help advance the district’s mission. They found the perfect solution in Alumni Nations, a company with extensive experience in alumni outreach and community engagement.

With help from Alumni Nations, Pewaukee has grown its alumni and community network and has taken steps to engage these supporters more deeply. These efforts created a rise in volunteerism that led to richer student experiences—and district leaders expect they will pay off in financial support down the road.

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Maximizing impact with alumni

Alumni Nations put together a customized implementation guide with action steps and engagement strategies for connecting with Pewaukee High School alumni and building strong relationships with them. Alumni Nations also provided personalized, one-on-one training and support for district staff.

The process kicked off with a survey of alumni and community members, so Pewaukee administrators would know how these stakeholders prefer to be reached, which activities they’re most interested in, and which factors most strongly influence their opinions of the district.

Alumni Nations also tracked down the names and contact information of alumni to populate the district’s alumni database, bringing the total number of people in this database to more than 12,000 and counting. Using a template and content management system provided by Alumni Nations, the district launched a “Pewaukee Pirate Nation” website with news, alumni events, job listings, and ways to get involved.

Fast Facts

District profile	Pewaukee School District in Wisconsin has four schools and about 2,800 students in grades K-12.
The challenge	District officials were looking for ways to build on the strong sense of Pirate Pride to help with strategic improvement.
The solution	Pewaukee partnered with Alumni Nations to develop and engage an extensive network of alumni and community supporters.
The results	Pewaukee’s “Pirate Nation” website has more than 1,800 active followers, who already have donated thousands of hours in student mentoring and other volunteer activities.



The survey revealed that alumni were interested in learning more about local job opportunities, so Pewaukee officials have been talking with employers about sending their job listings for posting to the Pirate Nation website. The district also has engaged alumni with a steady stream of news and information delivered in a monthly email newsletter.

“I was sending out information to alumni before, but I didn’t have a system that made this easy to do. Our Alumni Nations content management system is user-friendly and includes powerful tools that make this process easier and more effective,” said Wendy Wong, communications director for the Pewaukee School District.

She added: “Alumni Nations is very easy to work with and provides great ideas for maximizing our impact with alumni.”

For instance, the company suggested that Pewaukee create an “Alumni of the Year” program to recognize a different Pewaukee High School graduate every year. District staff sent postcards to alumni and community members, asking them to sign up for membership in Pirate Nation and to nominate someone for consideration in the program.

This tactic generated an impressive response, Wong said, which led to a spike in the number of people who registered on the Pirate Nation site. It also resulted in several nominations for the award. “That was really helpful,” Wong said, “because now we have a number of leads for people we can profile in our alumni newsletter as well.”

Connecting students with opportunities

When alumni and community supporters join as active members of Pirate Nation, they are asked if they’d like to volunteer by hosting an alumni event, making phone calls to fellow alumni, or even mentoring a student or young alum. So far, supporters already have given several thousands of hours of their time—while delivering powerful learning experiences to Pewaukee students.

“If we do a good job of connecting kids to opportunities, I see that as a great way to support these activities down the road as students pay (the service) forward,” Sternke said. “That’s what I’m hopeful for in the long run.”

Pewaukee hasn’t relied on its alumni and community network for fundraising yet, because the district wanted to forge strong relationships with its supporters first. “It would be disingenuous of us to ask for money before building these relationships,” she said.

But when district officials are ready to begin leveraging the network as a fundraising tool, they will be well positioned for success.

“We’re looking at how alumni were connected to the high school while they were here, so we can ultimately target our asks more effectively,” Sternke said. “That’s a strategy that came directly from Alumni Nations.”

District officials are tagging each person in the database according to his or her interests, and they have started doing this with current students as well. If an alumnus was a member of the robotics club, for instance, he might be more receptive to mentoring, volunteering, or donating money for science-related initiatives.

Pewaukee’s involvement with Alumni Nations has enabled the district to be more thoughtful in how it engages alumni and the community to support its continuous improvement efforts.

“We are looking at strategic ways to make ourselves more marketable,” Sternke concluded. “That’s something we hadn’t been doing before.”

Alumni Nations is “very personable, responsive to our needs, and invested in our success,” Nicol added. “I see this as a model that can pay dividends in a number of ways.”

