

Running head: WEBSITES

Website Reviews

Shawn M. Weisser

Longwood University

PEDU 628

Dr. Roy Walton

WEBSITE REVIEWS

The three districts I have chosen for website review are Richmond Public Schools, Henrico County Public Schools, and Tacoma Public Schools. One note to consider before moving on is that RPS is transferring platforms from Blackboard to FinalSite and will go live on August 1st. I chose Henrico because Judy Deichman, Instructional Specialist for Library Services at RPS, and I reviewed their Library Services page for inspiration last year. We were looking to redesign the RPS site to be more dynamic and user-friendly. Finally, I chose Tacoma because they currently use the FinalSite platform that RPS will be using to contrast the two as they now stand.

Richmond Public Schools

Two years ago, the Office of Advocacy and Outreach took over the web development department of RPS. Matthew Stanley heads the department. As one of the school webmasters, I am privy to the training required for each school to maintain its sites. Matthew and his team conduct monthly training sessions to introduce the commonalities of the district and school sites. In addition, all of the schools had to comply with the district's new design and include specific data.

The homepage is relatively easy to manage, and all of the schools appear the same. No more than five pictures of students, faculty, and community are displayed in a carousel and must be changed regularly to stay fresh and relevant. There are a couple of advocacy tools immediately apparent on the main page. First, at the top of the page, a Translate button allows the user to translate the page into one of 108 languages using Google Translate. A little further down on the page, there is a stick figure icon, and when clicked, the user can change the contrast

and font, use Text to Speech, and view navigation and settings. I believe these tools to be the best part of the previous redesign. Across the top of the main page, you are given a few options: About, Offices, Leadership, Employment, and Calendar. A Search box allows the user to search the district's and all RPS schools' websites. Although this can be beneficial, it is also a detriment. At times, the results are too plentiful and not what is needed.

The Employment page is pretty rudimentary and reminds me of a blog (Richmond Public Schools, n.d.). Along the left side of the page are navigation links to all of the main employment sites. The central portion of the page is dedicated to school profiles, with links to job postings, benefits and compensation, and a featured job. The page is not very professional, in my opinion, and could use a complete revamp. At the bottom of the page, there are three links for recruitment purposes. The first is for joining the leadership team (aka principals), the second for becoming a school bus driver, and the third is a link for prospective teacher information. Below these three is a link to Featured Job Openings. The main focus of the teacher link is RPS school culture and the Richmond culture with links to activities and resources. RPS uses Talent Ed for its job posting platform.

Henrico County Public Schools

The HCPS Careers page is pretty easy to find by Googleing HCPS and Jobs together. Right off the bat, I have a criticism regarding the landing page (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.). There is a large banner covering the lower 25% of the page. It felt like a pop-up advertisement and annoyed me immediately. That aside, I did like the layout of the employment page. The top right-hand side of the navigation menu had the three items I would go to if I were looking for a position in Henrico; job openings, benefits, and new employee orientation. Below

that information is a link to the new teacher mentoring program and contact information. The site is concise and uncluttered. It was a much more professional-looking site than RPS' job page. Closer to the bottom of the page links videos about teaching and living in the Henrico area, including Richmond.

Another criticism is regarding the length of their pages. I am not a fan of scrolling too much further than the original opening screen, and HCPS seems to go on forever. Instead, I found the links to the salary information, administrative applications, instructional assistant information and programs, substitute information, and transportation. That was in the center portion of the page. Below these links were eight large link icons to back to school for 21-22, graduation, virtual education, Yay of the Day!, the HCPS strategic improvement plan and goal (SIP), and three additional links. One links to the Henrico Education Foundation, a community-based program. Another link is to last year's back-to-school plan. The previous link is to Henrico Bridge Builders Academy, "HCPS' Bridge Builders Academy features virtual gatherings and discussions with experts on a host of topics, designed to connect you, our families, with information you need (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.). HCPS uses the iRecruitment platform for job postings. Both Talent Ed and iRecruitment are common platforms for school districts to use, although iRecruitment was initially intended for government postings.

Tacoma Public Schools

Tacoma Public Schools uses a platform called FinalSite, which is what RPS is moving to this fall. The Careers page of TPS was as easy to find as was the pages on the RPS and HCPS websites. The page banner was brief and had the basic information a jobseeker might look for, such as Application Help, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), Benefits, Bargaining and Salary

Schedules, and a link to Whole Educator. At first glance, I do not see a link to job openings. However, I found contact information on the first third of the page, another link to Benefits, and a link to Professional Development. I also quickly found the stick figure RPS uses for accessibility support and a language translation link, which are definite pluses for this site. About halfway down the page are links to Community Partnerships and Professional Support. Under Whole Educator, I found interesting in the bottom quarter are two things I liked (Tacoma Public Schools, n.d.). One is a statement: “Balance Maintaining work/life balance enables each person to be the best one can be for the benefit of the students. Balance includes social, emotional, financial, environmental, occupational, physical and intellectual health” and a video from Katherine Davis at Blix Elementary School titled *The Unforgettables* (Tacoma Public Schools, n.d.).

Within the first quarter of the page, the Jobs site linked to all job openings and application help. Below those two links were clickable icons for teaching, hourly, administrative, and coaching & support. Under those icons is a tabs section where you can find out more information regarding the positions listed above. The tabs also included a link to substitute information. Finally, at the bottom of the page is a link to a Relocation Guide, two videos, and a link to the Employee Hub, an employee-only site. Although this page had a lot of information, it did not feel never-ending as HCPS’ career site or as truncated as RPS’ Talent Acquisition site.

Of the three sites, I liked the feel of the Tacoma jobs page as it met all the needs of a job seeker, including the administrative positions. RPS was vague at best when it came to administration positions. Unlike HCPS, the Tacoma jobs site did not cause me to jump from one page to another for information. All of the links were readily available and easily accessible;

although the Basic Requirements link was broken, I could quickly get to other data. I did send them an email regarding the 404 Page not found error.

What I Learned

As I have managed school websites over the last twenty years, I did not learn anything new. I know that districts use a mixture of trained web developers and stipend paid volunteers to manage websites. Larger districts use a volunteer from each school to maintain the schools' websites, while a trained web development team usually manages the district pages. It is generally run by a group of people who program from the developer, back-end, side, and not from the users' side. This practice leads to problems with usability and accessibility. RPS needs to revamp its Talent website to be more user-friendly and more attractive. We are a large school system. The addition of the outreach team as a pertinent and driving force to the district and school website has made positive changes for usability and accessibility. However, the Talent page has not been modified to fit the standards of others. Henrico has also been upgrading and revising, but their pages have too much information, and the user needs to scroll too much to find what they are looking for.

Tacoma's Career site was much more user-friendly because all of the necessary information was on one page. In addition, the pages were much more concise, making it the more user-friendly of the three sites. Since RPS is moving to FinalSite this year, I have high expectations of the new Talent site.

Bibliography

Henrico County Public Schools. (n.d.). *Bridge Builders Academy*. Bridge Builders Academy.

Retrieved July 11, 2021, from <https://henricoschools.us/bridgebuildersacademy/>

Henrico County Public Schools. (n.d.). *Careers*. Careers. Retrieved July 2, 2021, from

<https://henricoschools.us/careers/>

Richmond Public Schools. (n.d.). *RPS Careers*. Talent Acquisition. Retrieved July 2, 2021, from

<https://www.rvaschools.net/Page/1303>

Tacoma Public Schools. (n.d.). *Careers*. Careers. Retrieved July 11, 2021, from

<https://www.tacomaschools.org/jobs>

Tacoma Public Schools. (n.d.). *Whole Educator*. Whole Educator. Retrieved July 11, 2021, from

<https://www.tacomaschools.org/jobs/whole-educator>

“I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.”

Shawn M. Weisser

13 June 2021