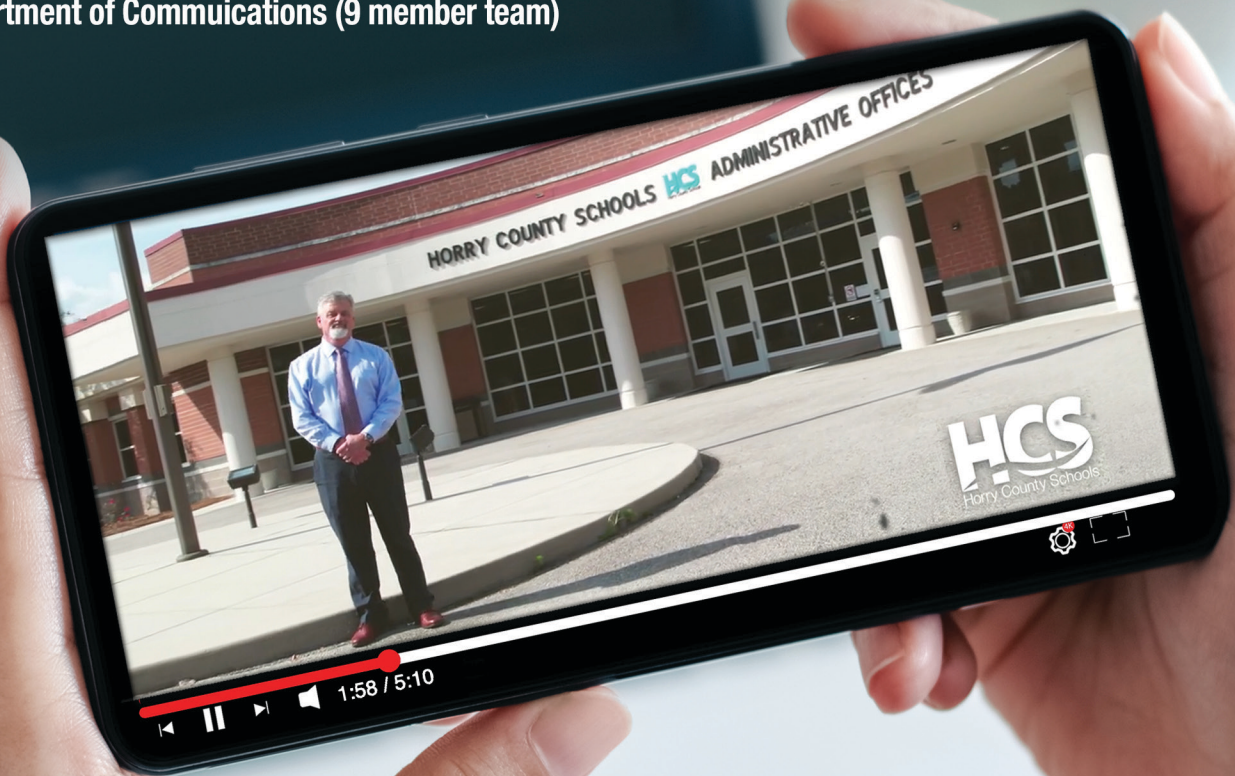


THE PERSON BEHIND THE TITLE

Featuring Leaders of Horry County Schools

2023 National School Public Relations
Communication Awards

Gold Medallion Entry – Special communications project/campaign
Horry County Schools – Horry County, South Carolina
Pre K-12 Public School District | 46,000+ Students
Department of Communications (9 member team)



335 Four Mile Road
Conway, South Carolina 29526
Phone: 843-488-6700

Email: hcsinfo@horrycountyschools.net

HCS INSPIRING
Horry County Schools POSSIBILITIES

SYNOPSIS

Over the course of the COVID crisis, Horry County Schools (HCS), like many other school districts across the country, experienced a number of administrative retirements and changes. The time spent in virtual and hybrid education also took a toll on our stakeholders' relationships with our schools and their administrators. As a result, HCS felt that opportunities for stakeholders to get to know individual administrators of the school system on a professional and personal level would foster a more welcoming environment and begin to rebuild the relationships and community that our schools had before COVID. Therefore, we developed a video series titled *The Person Behind the Title*.

The video series gives an in-depth look into the lives of our school administrators—both inside and outside of school—and a glimpse of the true person behind the title of “principal.” This video series would also allow students new to a school or community members new to the area to feel they knew someone in their school. We aimed to create a more welcoming perception of our school district through increased positive social media engagement.

We planned questions to ask administrators in interviews and then made a rough storyboard for external shots and b-roll to accompany and supplement the interview. We also planned diversity in the creation and release schedule of the videos regarding the race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, and attendance area of the principals featured.

Based on our planned order, we contacted administrators to establish filming dates on a rolling basis. Then, at least a week before their filming date, we sent the administrator our list of questions in a Google form where they could preview and draft answers in preparation.

We have maintained a roughly weekly schedule of recording and releasing videos during the weeks that school is in session.

We regularly shared the videos on social media, faculty/staff emails, and our HCS-TV channel. The video series has yielded some of the highest community engagement on social media compared to other HCS posts.

This is an ongoing campaign that will eventually include other district leadership.

[Horry County Schools](#) (HCS) has 56 schools. After the 2019-2020 school year, four schools had a change in principal, and the 2020-2021 school year saw another four schools change principals. Four of those eight were high school principals, of which HCS only has 13.

This change represented 14% of the district's principals and 31% of our high school principals changing in only two years—the highest rate of change HCS had seen in a long time. During the same time frame, many other leadership positions around the district also changed hands.

HCS transitioned to remote learning because of the coronavirus in March 2020, shortly before the first wave of principal changes. We began the 2020-2021 school year in hybrid learning, with half of our students meeting in-person two days a week, working independently on assignments at home another two days a week, and meeting remotely via Google Meets one day a week. We shifted to socially-distanced, in-person learning during the second semester. The second wave of principal changes followed.

During remote and hybrid learning, our teachers and administrators reported declining student engagement and increased hostility from students and their families, likely due to the lack of direct interaction. In the communications department, we noticed a similar shift in our social media engagement during this time frame, where, regardless of the content of our posts, the comment sections were often filled with criticisms of the way HCS handled the COVID crisis. Some of this negativity even came from our own faculty and staff.

In the summer of 2021, HCS completed a [new building](#) for our alternative school, SOAR Academy. The district renamed and rebranded the school as it developed a new approach to preparing its students for reintegration into their base schools. To assist with this, our communications department created a video of the new and former principals discussing the school, its purpose, and the transition in leadership. [Our video](#) received a lot of positive feedback from district staff, leadership, and—more importantly—the community. It was also successful in terms of media analytics: response, likes, shares, comments, etc.

In a brainstorming session about ways to repair HCS's relationship with the community and its own employees, we reflected on the success of the SOAR Academy video. We felt that we could use a similar approach to introduce the public—and even our staff who didn't know the new principals—to the leadership in their local schools. We also felt that having a face and a story to associate with those schools would begin to restore trust and reduce hostility. Thus, our *The Person Behind the Title* video series was born.

PLANNING

Having settled on creating a video series targeting HCS students, parents of HCS students, Horry County community members, and HCS faculty and staff, our communications team set to work planning. The project was almost exclusively handled by three of our team members: our digital communication coordinator handled the logistics and communication with principals; our web manager served as project videographer and handled the video recording, editing, and publication; and our broadcast specialist operated the drone (discussed further in the Videography section below). The rest of the team provided feedback on drafts of the videos before they were released.

Timeline

It was initially suggested that we could complete the series in one year. However, we quickly realized that, given the sheer number of principals in HCS and the time it would take to complete the recording and editing of each video, on top of our regular duties, one year was not enough time. We planned to complete the series in two years, and then circumstances outside our control and the reassignment of principals after the 2021-2022 school year increased our plan to encompass three years. After spotlighting all the principals, we plan to shift our attention to a still-undetermined group of HCS employees in the 2024-2025 school year and continue to share about newly hired principals as they are assigned.

Scheduling

We also planned the timing of the recordings. We knew we did not want to record during December and January because outdoor footage would look dreary, and the indoor shots would likely have holiday decorations that would date the recordings. We realized after the first year that we also didn't want to record after spring break because it was difficult to schedule around end-of-year testing and other end-of-year activities. To finish the project within our planned time frame, we set a goal to release one video a week while school was in session. Given the need to film while school was in session and the constraints mentioned above, we expected to primarily release the videos weekly from October through March, with some videos released at other times as they were ready.

We knew some principals would be hesitant to be featured in the videos, so we planned to create a video about the superintendent first and release a teaser video with some footage of the first few videos. The goal of the teaser trailer would be to get principals excited to participate and the audience excited to watch the video series. We created a list of all the current principals and selected a few with whom we had a good working relationship and who were well-respected in the district. We decided that, after an initial video about our superintendent, we would start with these principals.

We created a rough order from there of which principals to feature. We took our list of principals and attempted to vary it based on several factors: the principal's gender, their ethnicity, and whether they were at an elementary, middle, or high school. We didn't want several videos with similar subjects back-to-back. We also tried to record principals who would retire soon earlier on so that we could include them in the series and use parts of the footage at their retirement celebrations. Finally, we attempted to intersperse principals who were well-known in their communities and around the district; the hope was that this periodic inclusion of a popular figure would reignite interest in the series if it had begun to wane.

PLANNING

(continued)

We planned exceptions to this diversity for a few specific videos. HCS has four program schools that students must apply to attend. The application window for these schools is in January and the beginning of February. We planned to record the videos of three of the program school principals so that we could release their videos during this window to showcase these options for students. We planned to record the fourth principal much earlier since she was new to her school. As part of that recruitment effort, we planned to re-release her video during the application window.

Coordinating

Before we contacted the principals, we created [a brief questionnaire](#). We planned to share this questionnaire with each of the principals at least a week before we went out to record their interviews so that they would have an idea of what questions we would ask and could prepare their responses. We didn't initially include the questions about their status as HCS and Coastal Carolina University alumni; however, we realized after a few videos that many of them shared that information in the interviews, and it was good to know and plan to share that information in order to build a stronger tie to the community.

To keep track of the status of our principals, our communications with them, editing work done on their recordings, etc., we turned our list of principals into a [Principal Interview Status spreadsheet](#). As we realized more useful things to keep track of, such as whether the principals were HCS graduates, first-generation college graduates, etc., we added columns to the list for them.

Videography

We also planned out some video elements that we would use to create consistency across the series. We would begin and end with establishing shots of the school, the principal, and the surrounding area. We planned to have the principal give us a tour of the school, interact with students and faculty, and show off aspects of the school that they are proud of or that they mention within their interview. We would record this and use these “talent shots” as b-roll over portions of the recorded interview, in addition to other b-roll such as photos of the principal's family, mementos and decorations in the principal's office, etc.

For the beginning and end of the video, we planned to use establishing shots of the school, principal, and surrounding area. We wanted to take these shots with a drone, and we planned to vary them using three different shot types: the “orbit,” where the drone orbits around the subject at various angles; the “dronie,” where the drone flies away from the subject while keeping its focus on the subject; and the “pan,” where the drone flies parallel to the subject as the subject moves.

Since we planned to use the drone for video shots, we had to ensure we complied with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) drone guidelines. In particular, we had to make sure one of our team was a Certified Remote Pilot with the FAA, check weather conditions for the planned days of filming, and request permission to fly on those days through the FAA's app if the school was near an airport.

What the FAA guidelines didn't tell us about drone flight that we had to learn the hard way is that some birds will attack the drone and force it to land. They also didn't tell us that it sounds so much like bees

PLANNING

(continued)

that a principal unknowingly standing near a beehive might assume the buzzing sound they're hearing is just the drone until it's too late. Oops. Lessons learned for future videos.

Distribution

Finally, we planned how we were going to share these videos. We have accounts on [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#). Our largest following is on Facebook, with roughly 40,000 followers, compared to approximately 10,400 on Twitter, 6,000 on Instagram, and 2,000 on YouTube. We primarily use YouTube as a video hosting and archival site. Twitter has restrictions on video upload that make it more challenging to post our videos directly to the site. Instagram only recently implemented more robust scheduling capabilities and extended video length requirements that would make posting there convenient. As a result, we planned to measure our success primarily through Facebook. We also planned to share the videos in our staff update emails, on our in-school TVs, and on our HCS-TV channel, which is available to most local cable TV subscribers. However, we did not have an easy way to measure the success of the videos shared via those methods. In February 2023, we purchased a license for [Smore](#), an online newsletter creation and distribution platform that will allow us to monitor some statistics for videos shared that way moving forward. Regardless of the distribution method, we planned to include closed captions for the videos to ensure they were ADA-compliant.

IMPLEMENTATION

As planned, we filmed an initial video of our superintendent and several principals. We used this footage to create a promotional trailer for the video series, which we released on October 13th, 2021. Our [Principal Interview Status List spreadsheet](#) includes a log of when we recorded the videos and when each was released, with the superintendent's video as the first release on October 21st. We routinely released the videos on Thursdays to create consistency in timing.

The status list spreadsheet shows that we met our goal in 2021-2022 of releasing one per week while school was in session, with allowances made for returning from long breaks. We completed 27 videos that year out of the 31 we contacted (87% completion of planned videos for the year).

We got a late start on interviews in the fall of 2022, so we didn't begin releasing videos in the series until November; however, we resumed our previous release pace after that and completed 13 videos. We had contacted 22 principals to work on their video, giving us only a 46.4% completion rate on videos we had planned to release this year.

Including additional changes in leadership since the project began (9.6% of schools have had new principals in the building since the project started), we plan to complete a combined total of 63 videos about principals by the end of the 2023-2024 school year. We have already completed 63.4% of these, meaning we are on track to complete the video series—or at least the initially planned portion focusing on principals—within the planned timeline. We will need to be diligent about recording as soon as school is back in session in August, but we intend to complete the remaining videos in 2023-2024.

Our digital communications coordinator would routinely send emails to the next set of principals we wanted to feature to schedule dates to record them; then, she would send follow-up emails closer to time to confirm the date. After the recording, our project videographer would share the completed video with the principal for their approval before release, and the digital communications coordinator would send the principal a note of thanks.

The project videographer would use [Final Cut Pro](#) to edit each recorded interview into a logical progression, removing and rearranging elements as needed. He would also add b-roll over the audio recording to cover sections where two videos were spliced together and to showcase the subject matter the principal was discussing, such as family photos. He used consistent fonts, color branding, and consistent recording angles to create a visual throughline for the video series. The color branding was consistent with the color palette used for all [HCS branding](#).

Once the video editing was completed and the videos received approval from the team and the principal, the project videographer would write a short blurb about the principal to use as a description for the YouTube and Facebook uploads. We did not consistently post the videos to Instagram because they initially did not allow the scheduling of posts ahead of time. We are working to be more consistent about posting the videos to Instagram because we know that social media platform is more likely to reach the younger members of our audience. As mentioned in the Planning section above, we did not post videos to Twitter due to restrictions on video uploads on that site. In the future, we are considering posting links to our YouTube videos on Twitter instead of posting the videos directly on Twitter.

EVALUATION

The *Person Behind the Title* video series has proven to yield some of the highest numbers of community engagement on social media, specifically Facebook. We evaluated the campaign's success using the metrics below, many of which are elaborated on in [this spreadsheet](#).

708K
VIEWS
TO DATE



632K
PEOPLE
REACHED



OVER
1.7K
SHARES



3.4K
HOURS VIEWED

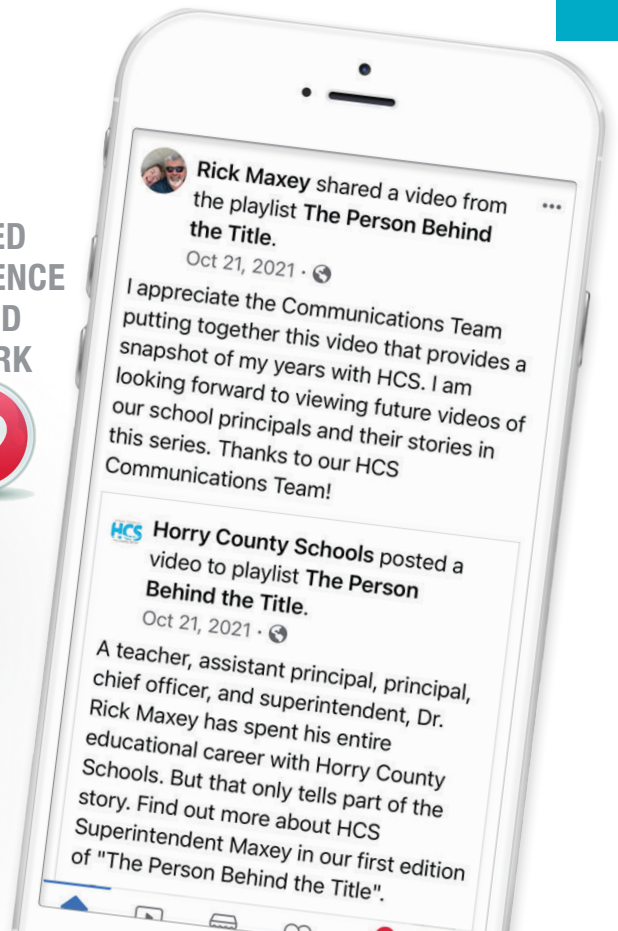


18K
LIKES



94%

OF ADMINISTRATORS COVERED HAVE REPLIED TO FOLLOW-UP "THANK YOU" CORRESPONDENCE TO INDICATE HOW MUCH THEY HAVE ENJOYED THE PROCESS OR TO THANK US FOR THE WORK



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 14:03:52 Eastern Standard Time

Subject: RE: Thank you
Date: Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at 12:58:24 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Regina Treadwell Pertell
To: Ashley Gasperson
Attachments: image001.png

Ashley,

I really enjoyed our time together today and our conversation. Thanks for making it easier for me!
Regina

From: Ashley Gasperson <AGasperson@horrycountyschools.net>
Sent: Tuesday, October 25, 2022 10:53 AM
To: Regina Treadwell Pertell <RTreadwellPertell@horrycountyschools.net>
Subject: Thank you

Regina,
Thank you again for your time this morning. It was so good to spend time with you and learn more about your story. Let me know if you ever decide to sing with your girls one night; I would love to hear you.

Keep doing what you do, and thanks again for sharing!

Ashley

Ashley Gasperson
Digital Communications Coordinator
335 Four Mile Road
Conway, SC 29526
843.488.6554
agasperson@horrycountyschools.net



Sample emails from principals after their videos were shared and one email from a school secretary asking our broadcast specialist to have their principal video playing while school board members tour the building, all of which show the positive reception our videos have had.

Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 14:01:57 Eastern Standard Time

Subject: Re: Thank you
Date: Monday, December 5, 2022 at 2:15:29 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Jimmy McCullough
To: Ashley Gasperson
Attachments: image001.png, Outlook-t0o32tnl.png

Thank you so much. I really enjoyed you all so much. I can't explain how much it means to me, that you always take your time to make me feel so special. You all do an amazing job. Thank you. Jimmy

Jimmy McCullough
Loris High School
Principal
jmccullough@horrycountyschools.net



It's a great day to be a Lion!!!

From: Ashley Gasperson <AGasperson@horrycountyschools.net>
Sent: Monday, December 5, 2022 2:08 PM
To: Jimmy McCullough <JMccullough@horrycountyschools.net>
Subject: Thank you

Jimmy,
Thank you for your time last week as we recorded for the Person Behind the Title video. We enjoyed spending time with you and learning more about your path to where you are. You have a great story, and we are honored to share a glimpse of it with others.

As soon as we have the video together, we will share it with you, which will be sometime after the first of the year.

If you need anything from us, ever, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you,
Ashley

From: Thomasena McCray <TBrown002@horrycountyschools.net>
Sent: Wednesday, March 15, 2023 8:33 AM
To: Lucas Richardson <LRichardson002@horrycountyschools.net>
Subject: Video

Morning Lucas,

How can I get a copy of the video with Mr. McCullough that's on the district website, so that I may display it on our carousel for the school? Or if you can upload it to our video feed it would be greatly appreciated. We have the board coming tomorrow around 9:ish, if we could get that video added to the three that's looping it would be great...

Thanks
Thomasena

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

Text messages from Norman McQueen, principal of Scholars Academy, after his video was shared, showing a widespread positive impact.



“
It has been overwhelming. I heard from my favorite teacher in high school!!! Kids who I taught over 20 years ago and people I went to high school with 45 years ago!!

~ Norman McQueen, Principal

”



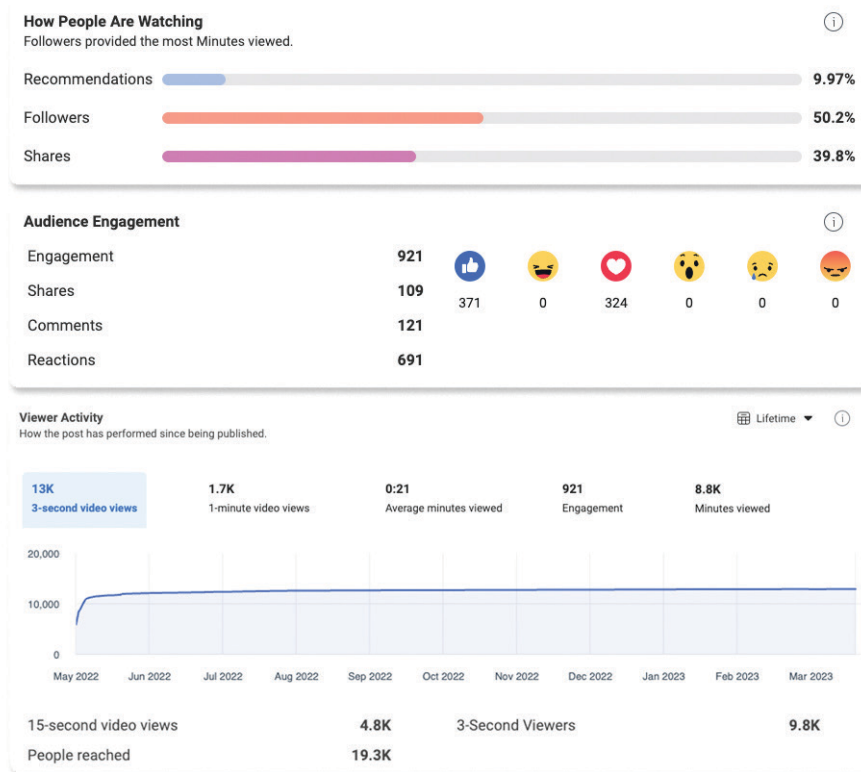
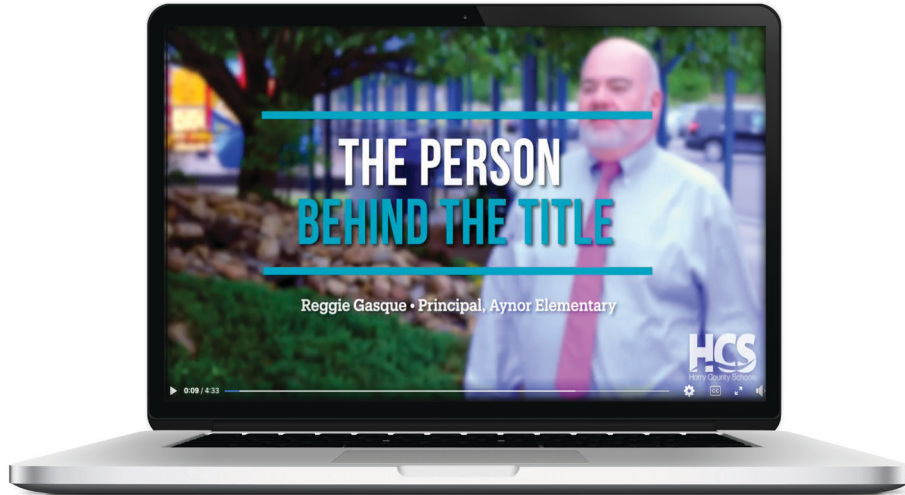
“
It has been crazy!!! People contacting me all the time!! Y'all did a great job!! Everybody asking who did it and LOTS of compliments.

~ Norman McQueen, Principal

”

Reggie Gasque - The Person Behind the Title (May 26, 2022)

An alumni of both Horry County Schools and Aynor Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, principal Reggie Gasque has seen his career come full-circle. As Mr. Gasque is approaching retirement from a long and rewarding career, discover how his love of education has impacted Aynor Elementary and the community around him in the [final edition of this school-year's *The Person Behind the Title*](#).

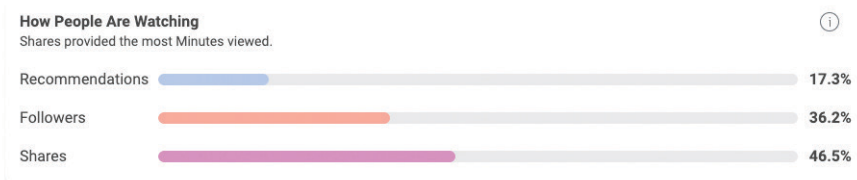
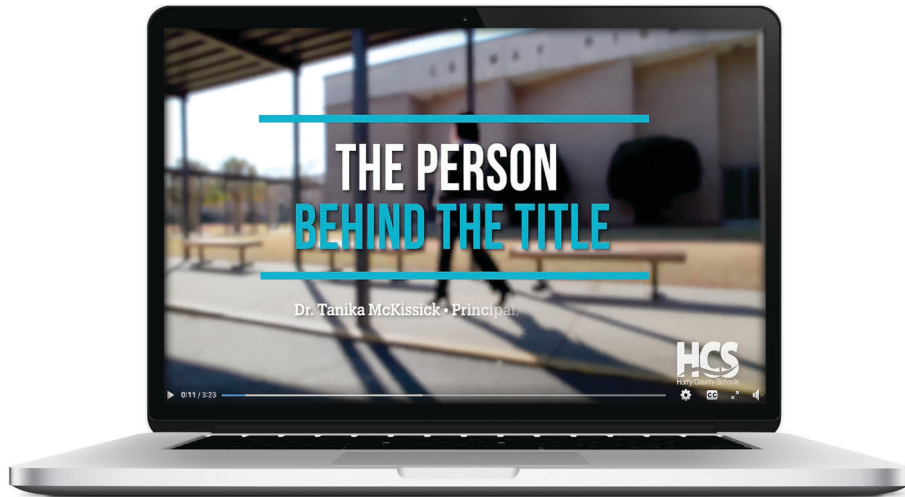


ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

(continued)

Dr. Tanika McKissick - The Person Behind the Title (March 27, 2022)

“There’s absolutely no experience like serving the community that raised you...” Dr. Tanika McKissick, alumna and principal of Conway High School has a deep and rich history in the Conway community providing her a unique perspective and opportunity at her school. [Meet Dr. McKissick in this edition of *The Person Behind the Title*.](#)

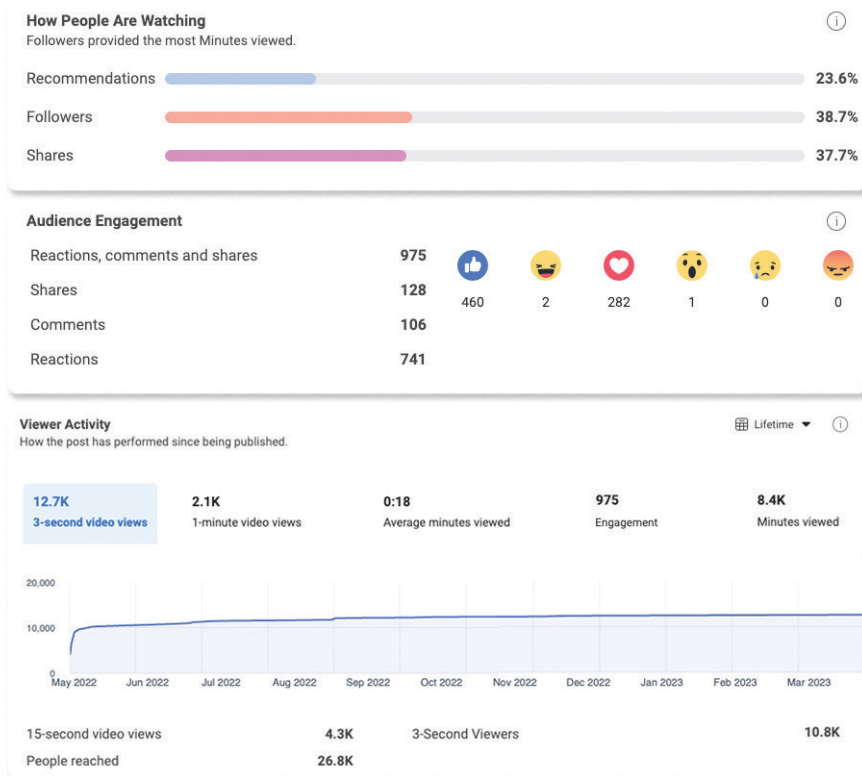


ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

(continued)

Vann Pennell - The Person Behind the Title (December 2, 2021)

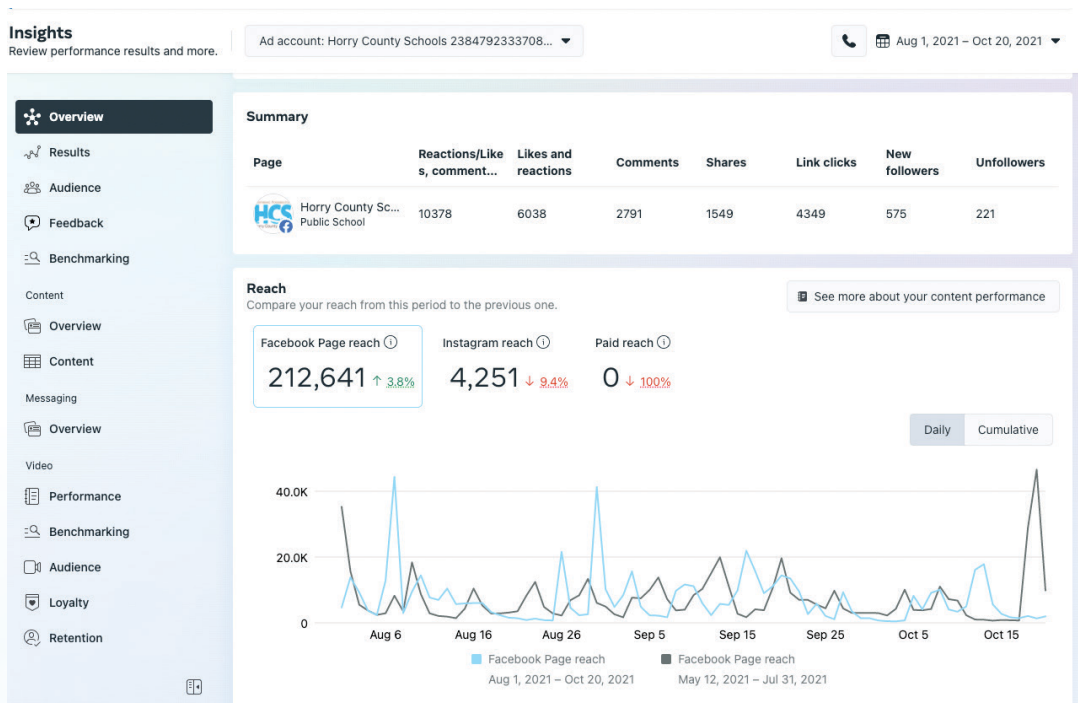
Meet Vann Pennell, a veteran educator of 42 years, and the principal at St. James High (SJHS Info). Find out what has motivated his educational career, what keeps him feeling young, and his favorite spots around the school in [today's edition of The Person Behind the Title](#).



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

(continued)

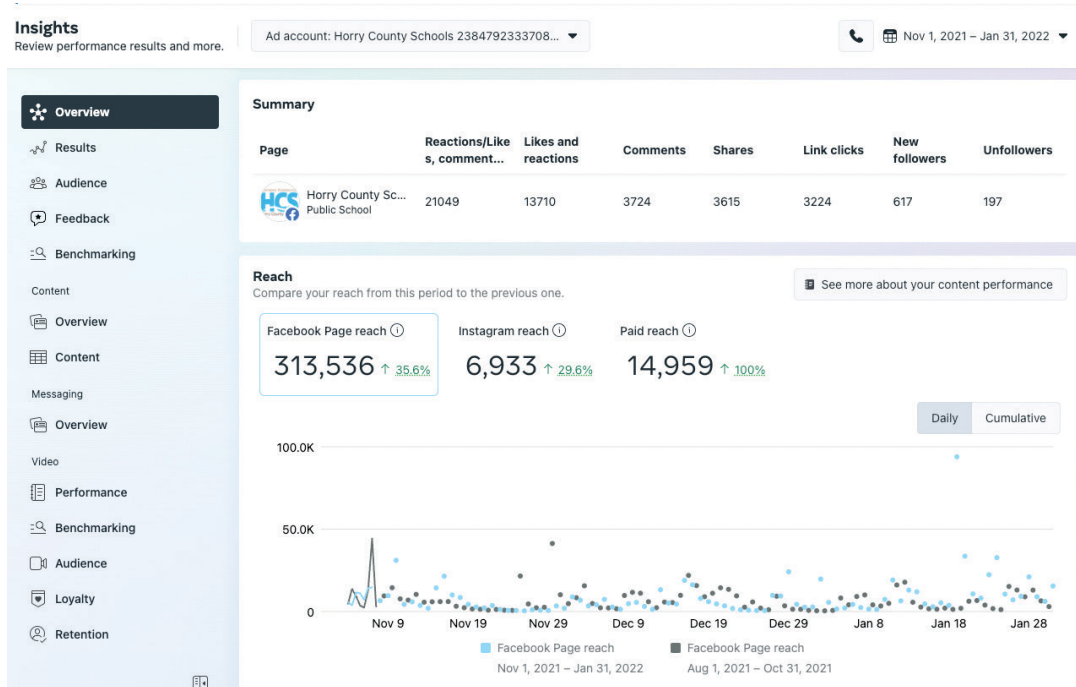
The following screenshots of Meta (Facebook and Instagram) Insights demonstrate an increase in Page Reach from the launch of *The Person Behind the Title* series through the present. The first item shows Page Reach during the 3 months just before the launch of the first edition. The subsequent 3-month glimpses into our page's insights show how, as video releases were regular the reach increased. As video releases decreased in numbers (during the 2022-2023 year), the page reach decreased moderately. We feel this correlation, alongside analytics of videos specific to the project, demonstrates a successful, positive response overall from the individuals, families, and community members who follow our social media.



August 2021 - Mid October 2021: Page Reach of 212,641

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

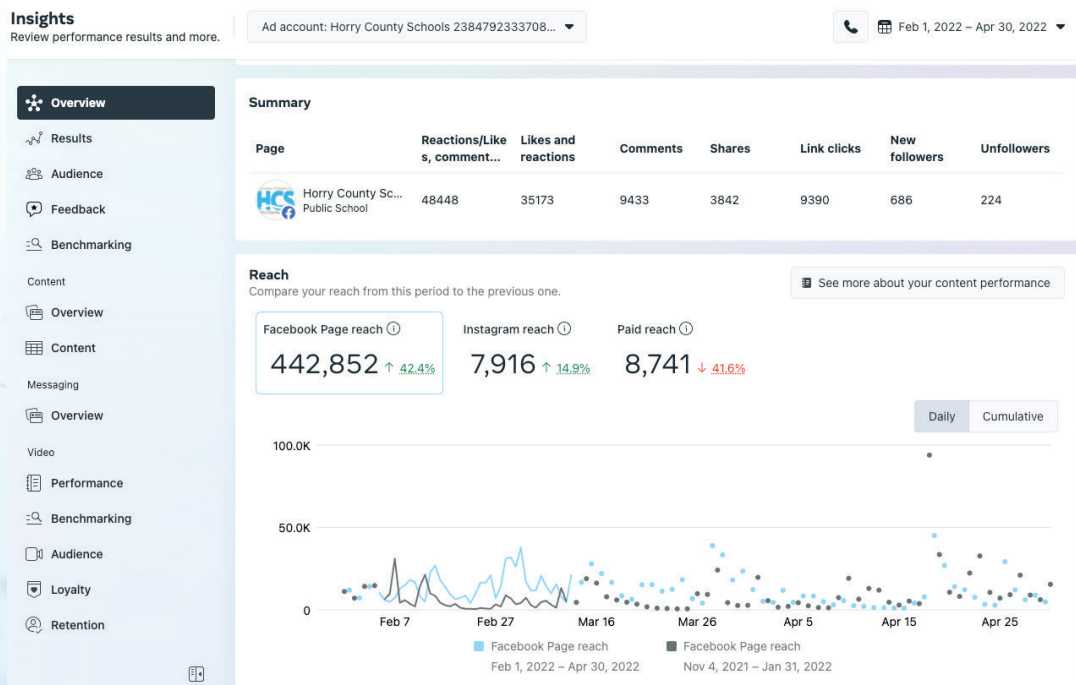
(continued)



November 2021 - January 2022: Page Reach of 313,536

Demonstrating an increase of about 47% in reach in the three months directly after the launch of *"The Person Behind the Title"*.

15

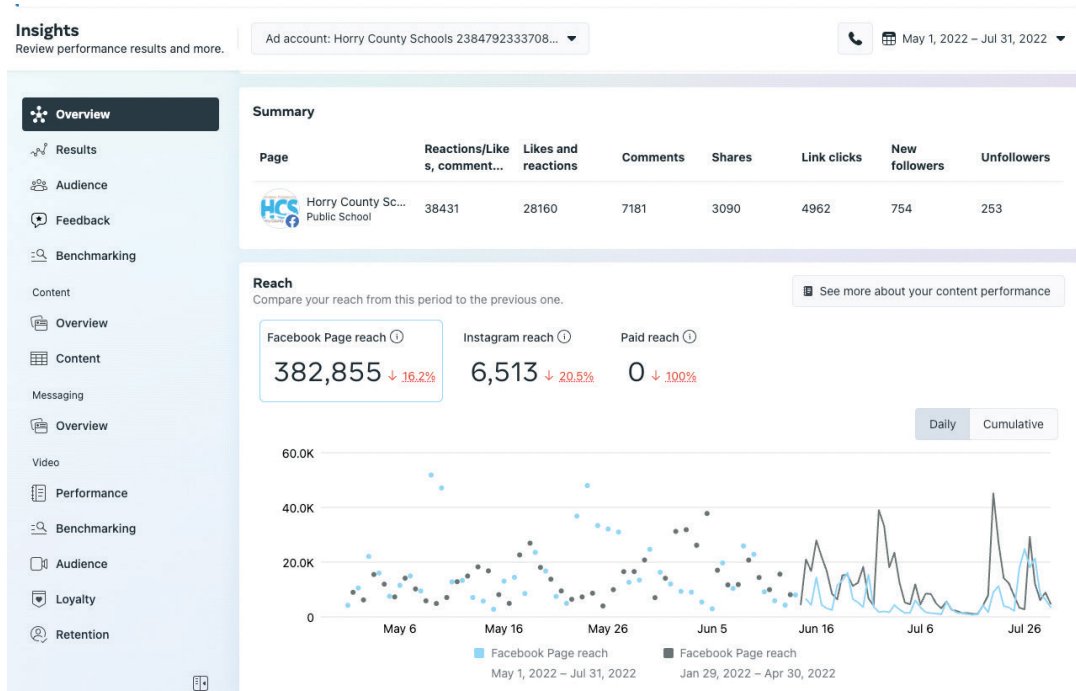


February through April of 2022

By this time the page reach had increased an additional 41% since the previous 3 months and 108% since the three months prior to the launch of the project.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

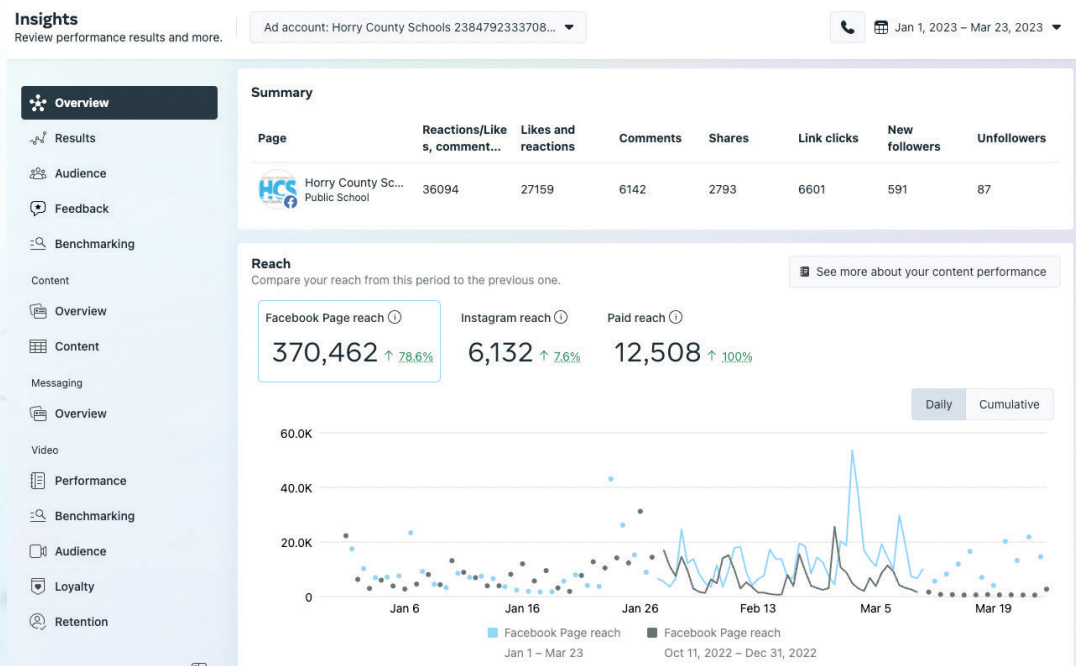
(continued)



June 2022

With the conclusion season 1 of *“The Person Behind the Title”* in June, our reach was still significantly higher than it was prior to launch, the summer month of July saw a decrease of around 13%.

16



The 2022-23 school year

As stated above, our release schedule decreased during the 2022-2023 school year. The most recent three months show a page reach still higher than pre-launch, but similar to the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MATERIAL

(continued)

View all the videos in our The Person Behind the Title playlist [here](#).

The screenshot shows the HCS website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'HCS', 'SCHOOLS', 'En Español', and 'TRANSLATE'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with 'Students', 'Families', 'Employees', 'New to HCS?', and 'Communities'. The main navigation bar includes 'HOME', 'ABOUT US', 'NEWS ROOM', 'ACADEMICS', 'EMPLOYMENT', 'BOARD OF EDUCATION', 'DEPARTMENTS & SERVICES', and 'COVID-19'. A search icon is located on the right side of the main navigation bar.

The left sidebar is titled 'ABOUT HCS' and contains a list of links: Welcome, Our Schools, Superintendent, School Administrators, **The Person Behind the Title Video Series**, Board of Education, Advisory Boards, Community Resources, School Improvement Council, HCS Calendars, Annual Report, HCS Parent Student Guide, Quick Facts 2023, District Strategic Plan, HCS Highlights, School Report Cards, Freedom of Information Request, Media Contacts, Internet Use Policy, Website Policies, Comments or Concerns, and Contact Us.

The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: HOME > ABOUT US > ABOUT HCS > THE PERSON BEHIND THE TITLE VIDEO SERIES. Below this is a large video player with the title 'THE PERSON BEHIND THE TITLE' and the subtitle 'Featuring Leaders of Horry County Schools'. A caption below the video reads: 'Video vignettes featuring an up-close-and-personal look at leaders within our school district.'

Below the video player is a section titled 'The Person Behind the Title Video Series Playlist'. It includes a caption: 'Click on the 3 line "hamburger box" in the upper right corner of the video player to view other videos in our Person Behind the Title video playlist.'

There are two video player thumbnails. The first one shows a woman, Lisa Melchione, with the title 'Lisa Melchione - The Person Behind the ...'. The second one is a smaller thumbnail of the main video player.

On the right side of the page, there are three social media statistics: '708K VIEWS TO DATE' with a surprised face emoji, '632K PEOPLE REACHED' with a group of people icon, and 'OVER 1.7K SHARES' with a share icon.