

Marketing & Communications Plan

DEVELOPED BY



VAAST



Summary, Mission, & Vision

SUMMARY

The Virtual Academy of Agriculture, Science, and Technology (VAAST) will be a charter school for students grades 3-8 in the Sharon Joint School District #11. VAAST will offer a project-based learning environment with an agriscience and technology focus delivered in a virtual or optional face-to-face setting per family preference. Officially opening in Fall 2022, 50 students will enroll in VAAST.

Upon completion of 8th grade at VAAST, students may attend Big Foot Area High School, with the opportunity to enroll in the nationally recognized program, Future Farmers of American (FFA). Through the high school and FFA, students will be on track to pursue careers such as Food Science, Animal Systems, Natural Resources, Biotechnology, and Plant Systems.

VAAST will collaborate with school districts, and other organizations to provide learning opportunities and foster achievement for all learners.

MISSION

"To provide equitable and free education for students in Walworth county and beyond with hands-on learning experiences in agriculture and science."

As a school, VAAST's goal is to provide an education for students. What makes VAAST unique is its charter school status, which allows a unique take on curriculum and classes, all while providing free tuition for Wisconsin residents. As such, its focus of making sure every student's success is easier to obtain and build from the ground up compared to changing an institutional practice at established schools. The other unique part of VAAST is the focus on agriscience and hands-on learning. This a key reason for the school to exist. Parents understand what the school intends to teach their children and how VAAST provides for their educational wellbeing.

VISION

"Inspire generations of youths to be experts and leaders in agriculture, science, and technology."

A vision is meant to dream big and focus on success. When serving a disadvantaged community, it can be hard to find a way to success and build the foundation towards a path of fulfilling career opportunities. With VAAST, the attitude of staff and class should be one of unlimited optimism for the future and to inspire children to dream big about a great future. Agriculture, science, and technology are growing fields, and expanding skills in these areas will make an equitable education and future success all the more achievable. Even if VAAST students eventually do not pursue a career in agriculture or related fields, the leadership and hands-on experiences will contribute to a strong career.



Marketing Goals & Objectives



ENROLLMENT

As with most schools, a healthy enrollment is an important objective, especially with the goal to overcome the achievement gap. As determined by the Sharon school district, the goal would be to reach the estimated enrollment of 50 students for the first school year (2022-2023). The estimated enrollment for the five-year planning period is 200 students by the 2026-2027 school year.

The primary ways to gather these potential registrants:

1. Registration via the website form
2. Contact through social channels
3. Names gathered through in-person events and networking or communication through electronic means

As registration begins in February 2022, it's important to gather names for parents who have children younger than grade 3 or for a waitlist when registration for the year reaches capacity.

AWARENESS & REACH

VAAST will require awareness and reach to become a recognized name in Wisconsin households. Having the key words "VAAST", "charter school", and "agriscience" are important to bring up in promotion and general conversation to reinforce recognition. Primary ways to accomplish this will be:

1. Banners, promotional materials, and presentations at public events and gatherings
2. Sharable social media posts and emails
3. Press releases and media appearances
4. Organizations and partners of VAAST sharing on their channels
5. Promotion through Sharon District and statewide avenues

Progress will be calculated through enrollment numbers, surveys, and growth of social and email lists.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

As a part of reach, it will be important to build a plethora of promotional materials to distribute. Below are a few suggestions of materials to strengthen the VAAST name and mission:

- Banners
- Business Cards
- "About Us" Catalog
- Envelopes
- Flyers
- Folders
- Giveaways (pens, cups, etc.)
- Letterhead
- Outdoor Signs (for outside on lawns)
- Posters
- Shirts & Apparel
- Slide Deck
- Stickers
- Videos

Some may be developed by CESA 2, but other items will be made in-house by VAAST or other designers.



SWOT Analysis



SWOT ANALYSIS

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STRENGTHS

- First blended agriculture-based charter school in Wisconsin
- Overwhelming district & community support¹
- Grant funds and space already available - don't have to spend time locating income in immediate future
- Charter school advantages - agricultural site visits, educators eating with students, less restrictive health, physical education, art and music education²

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WEAKNESSES

- Public engagement has been minimal, so name and brand recognition is currently non-existent
- Staffing is currently limited to a few people, so marketing, communication, and reach won't be at peak efficiency
- Facilities limited to a separate wing in the school may limit enrollment

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OPPORTUNITIES

- Create a strong foothold as the leading agricultural school in Wisconsin and even the Midwest
- Potential mission focus of assisting children in a disadvantaged community is a compelling objective for partners to support
- Community integration - student projects can assist the community, such as helping the farmers' market
- "Friends of VAAST" network can become a great word-of-mouth marketing tool, as organizations and individuals talk about VAAST

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THREATS

- Starting a new school can be difficult to manage, ensuring leaders, parents, and other's problems are properly addressed
- Other charter schools & virtual schools can pull families away, so emphasizing VAAST benefits is important
- Teacher shortage may cause problems with finding educators and providing strong education for students in the immediate future



Target Market & Persona

TARGET MARKET

With the given initial grade levels being 3-8 for VAAST, the parents are the target to reach and persuade to enroll their children. With the focus of VAAST being on the community and the agriculture in the area, parents sending their children in-person are a priority to build relationships within the community. As branding and reach increases, enrolling virtual students from across Wisconsin will become a larger focus.

COMMON TRAITS IN SHARON¹

54% With
Household Income
Under \$50K

43% Aged
Between 20 -
49

Average 2.5
Persons per
Household

20.1% Below the
Poverty Line

7.7% With a
Bachelor's Degree
or Higher

10.3% Population
Foreign-Born

EXAMPLE PERSONA



Jim & Jackie

AGE

46 & 42

HOME

Sharon, WI

KIDS

Boy - Age 12 (grade 6)
Girl - Age 8 (grade 3)

Jim and Jackie live with their two children in a household of around \$70k annually after taxes. They both work in the area, but never graduated college. As their children get older, they want to ensure their children's success and that they make a decent living for themselves, especially since they'll be paying for higher education on their own. From their observations, they see their kids learn best when working hands-on and experiencing things in real life. With in-person vs. virtual classes on their minds and seeing how their children responded in the pandemic, they want to make sure the school they attend can teach effectively no matter which way their kids need to learn. As they want what's best for their children, they are making decisions on their children's schooling months in advance.



Marketing & Communications Strategy



UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

Providing blended agriscience and hands-on learning to ensure a successful future.

When interacting with parents of potential students, it's important to explicitly state why to attend your school compared to any other. For VAAST, the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) covers these specific benefits, in order of most appealing:

1. Comforting parents of their children's successful futures through the unique offerings of VAAST
2. Using field and on-site learning as part of the curriculum, which is of especially great value to kinesthetic learners
3. Offering learning both in-person and virtually, so anyone in the state can attend

Describing the USP when interacting with parents will move them from just being aware of VAAST to considering enrollment.

COMMUNICATION & TALKING POINTS

As this is a new charter school, it's important to have similar talking points across all conversations. In these interactions, be sure to include these topics in your pitch to potential prospects:

- VAAST, the Virtual Academy of Agriculture, Science, and Technology, is a new charter school based in Sharon, WI
- We offer a blended offering of in-person and virtual learning, so you can attend anywhere in Wisconsin
- Our mission is to provide every learner with an engaging and inspirational educational experience, no matter their background
- Every child will participate in field experiences, workshops, and incorporate their personal interests to make learning at VAAST unique and engaging
- Through the "Friends of VAAST" network, students will interact with industry-leading organizations and volunteers to learn all about the agriculture industry
- Every teacher goes through trainings and workshops to fully engage our students
- As a public charter school, tuition is absolutely free for Wisconsin residents
- As Sharon and Walworth county are deeply embedded in agriculture and dairy industries, VAAST will be able to offer a learning environment that would be very hard to replicate elsewhere
- When you head to our website (www.sharon.k12.wi.us/page/vaast-charter-school) you can register for updates on when we begin enrolling in February 2022.
- You can also subscribe for email updates or see everything we're up to on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@vaastcharterschool or @vaastcharter).

Be sure to ask parents where they live, what schools their children attend, and the plans they have for their learning. Develop that connection and understand the parents' current mindset so they can see your care for their kids' futures.

EMAILS

Emails will act as a main vehicle to move parents from interested in VAAST to enrolling their child. Beyond regular updates with enrolled students and parents, VAAST will want to develop a database to send emails for community members, parents, and partners to stay updated on the school's progress. When writing copy, the voice should appear friendly, yet confident that this is one of the best schools for their child. Some email campaigns will include:

- Monthly or Quarterly Updates
- Spotlighting School Projects
- Announcing Partnerships with Organizations
- When Enrollment Begins
- Important Hires
- Feel-Good Stories
- Events to Attend

Email contacts should be sorted by interested parent, enrolled parent, business, etc. to have targeted messaging. Google forms and email sign-up links will be placed on the website and social. A recommended email client is **Constant Contact** or **Mailchimp**, but there are other options for an email client.

SOCIAL CHANNELS

The social channels will work on building a community and move followers and parents of enrolled children to become advocates for VAAST's work and mission. All social channels will maintain a similar voice of friendliness as mentioned in the previous emails section, but will have their own purpose. These include:

Facebook (@vaastcharterschool): Offer updates similar to the email campaigns, but keep posts under 500 characters where possible. Best platform as the primary updates for parents outside of website and emails.

Twitter (@vaastcharter): Useful for short, quick posts about events and fun images from teachers. Interact with organization partners to spread brand awareness and congratulate schools on their successes. Retweet posts from other accounts where applicable.

Instagram (@vaastcharterschool): Pictures and videos should tell the entire story with minimum text. Students and teachers in action is preferred.

LinkedIn (linkedin.com/company/vaastcharterschool): For teachers and organizations. Meant for promoting important updates from VAAST and materials from partnered organizations.

YouTube: Acts as the video hosting site. Not needed to promote by itself, but holds the videos for promotion.

For any image or story with children, it's important to obtain permission for students to appear in promotional materials. Whether it is the role of the social media manager or educators, be sure to have pictures of all major events for future promotion and sharing on social media.

FEATURED REOCCURRING CONTENT

To ensure regular content throughout the year, consider making regular posts regarding some of the following topics. Each would include some sort of text and either accompanying pictures or videos:

- Day in the life of (student, educator, agriculture worker)
- Testimonials from parents or partners
- Interviews with students, staff, partners, or companies
- Collaboration projects

SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR SUGGESTIONS

AS THEY HAPPEN

Registration open, public events, new staff hire, announcements

Congratulations to a student or VAAST educator who won an award or accomplished something impressive

VAAST educators presenting at a show or conference, or VAAST presence at an event, parade, etc.

A new "Friend of VAAST" partner is announced

Articles written by news outlets

When apparel is available for purchase

Project or collaboration between VAAST students and organizations in the community

Posting about a holiday. Examples:

- National Ag Day (late March)
- International Seeds day (April 26)
- World Milk Day (June 1)

REGULARLY

Unique learning experience in the classroom or in the field

Student projects and accomplishments

Comment from an educator, student, parent, or organization emphasizing the importance of VAAST

Agriculture, technology, or science-based article

Update messages from VAAST leadership

MONTHLY

Deep-dive into a classroom experience or how an educator makes learning exciting

Delving into a student's project or hopes for the future

Long-form interview with an organization sharing how important agriscience learning is to Wisconsin and beyond

INTERACTIONS

Asking followers a question, such as favorite part about VAAST or sharing a memory

Respond to mentions with a "like" and a comment

"Follow" other social pages and occasionally comment on their posts

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The ability to make posts will depend on the availability of the social managers. Not all of these are needed for a successful social account, but any combination of these topics will help make social content worth engaging.

If budget allows, consider making a paid ad or post. This will give you ability to reach families based on geographical and other data.

WEBSITE & SEO

In addition to the web pages, the buttons and links for enrolling and signing up for emails should be prevalent. Parents of potential students will want an easy path to learn more or enroll their student. A separate page for videos and resources made by the school will be helpful for parents wanting to learn more and move to consider enrollment.

To improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the website should include these phrases in multiple places: Walworth County Schools, Online Wisconsin Schools, Wisconsin Charter Schools, Sharon School District, project-based & hands-on learning, agriscience.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) may be considered if there is a focus on recruiting students from across the state. This will allow those searching for terms such as "Wisconsin Charter Schools" to appear at the top of search engines. However, this can be decided in the future after establishing an online budget.

OTHER MARKETING

VAAST may consider these marketing avenues in the future as time and resources allow:

Exhibit booths at conferences and events: Appearing at events and talking to people will be a key focus to gather attention, especially early on in marketing efforts. Refer to Communication & Talking Points (p. 10) for a topic list. Offer giveaways or other promotions to gather names and emails.

Blog: A blog can be a great way to give a voice to the educators who make it all happen. Consider letting VAAST and Sharon readers write on a regular basis about industry and education-related topics.

Podcasts: As a way to host conversations with partners and leaders in the "Friends of VAAST" network, consider a podcast as a way to give a voice to those supporters. Topics can change based on the featured guest to give thoughts on agriculture, science, and technology.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)

To measure success and present statistics to investors and boards, suggested ways to track these indicators will be:

General Indicators

- Number of students enrolled/on waitlist
- Number of promotional material distributed
- Survey results of current parents of students and general public
- In-person tours and open houses
- 3rd-person articles and interviews

Website (through Google Analytics)

- Number of visitors
- Click-through rates through links
- Survey feedback from users

Email & Social Media

- Email list and follower growth
- Engagement per email/post
- Comments and suggestions



Brand Style Guide



LOGO

PRIMARY LOGO



VAAST

LOGO VARIATIONS



VAAST

GRAYSCALE LOGOS



VAAST



VAAST

TYPOGRAPHY

PRIMARY HEADING FONT

Inter Bold

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz
1234567890
!@#\$%^&*()

SECONDARY HEADING FONT

KoHo Bold

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz
1234567890
!@#\$%^&*()

BODY COPY FONT

KoHo Regular

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo
Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz
1234567890
!@#\$%^&*()

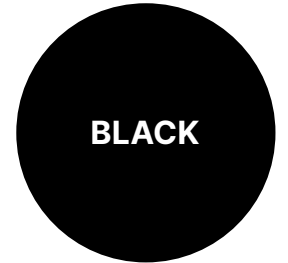
COLOR PALETTE

PRIMARY COLORS



HONEY

HEX: E2AC25



BLACK

HEX: 000000

SECONDARY COLORS



VANILLA

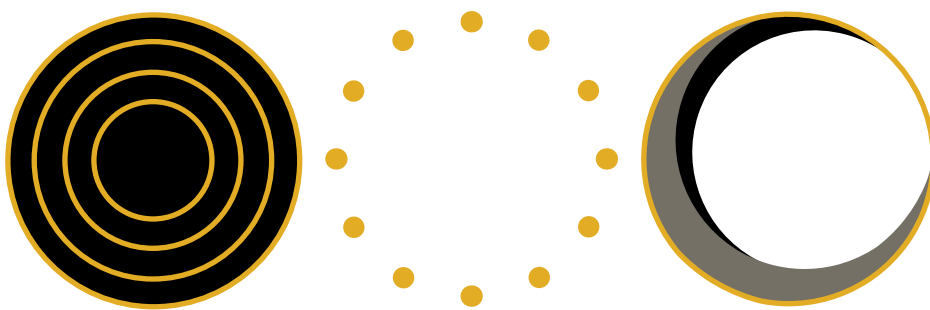
HEX: E5BF6A



GRAY

HEX: 757066

SUPPORTING DESIGN ELEMENTS



MARKETING MATERIALS



MEET THE MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The CESA 2 Marketing Team serves school districts throughout Dane, Green, Jefferson, Kenosha, Racine, Rock, and Walworth counties in southern Wisconsin. Their diverse team offers a variety of services, including creating content and stunning visuals through videos, flyers, social media posts, newsletters, brochures, and more. The team can also support you with email marketing efforts, website design, and other communications projects.

Learn more at cesa2.org or email our team to get started!



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