



Mobile County Public Schools is hosting a rebranding contest among its Academy students to include the developing of a new district-wide slogan and a written marketing plan.

The winning slogan may replace “It Starts With Us,” which is the slogan that the district adopted in 2013. This is not a total rebranding, as the district is keeping its logo and color scheme.

The contest will provide students a chance to interact with local public relations and marketing professionals, opportunities to exercise their critical thinking skills and creativity, and the experience of writing a marketing plan.

To participate, students must submit **by December 3** a marketing plan and at least one of the following:

- Video: A 30-second video
- Print: A print advertisement for either a banner or poster to be hung at schools or for a local newspaper
- Social media: A social media marketing plan for the launch including three social media posts that can be placed on Facebook, Instagram and/or Twitter.

The Marketing Plan should include:

- The name of your marketing firm, the name of your school and teacher, and the names of all of the students who participated on your team.
- Results of a SWOT analysis conducted by the student(s).
- A reveal of the slogan, including how the student(s) came up with it and an explanation of what the new slogan means to Mobile County Public Schools and the community. The slogan should be presented in a font that would be used consistently throughout the rebranding. For example, **It Starts With Us** is done in Adobe Garamond Pro.
- An explanation of your slogan.

Please share the information included in this packet with your students as part of the learning process.

It Starts With Us

In 2013, Mobile County Public Schools leaders recognized that the district needed to improve its image in the community. Alabama’s oldest and largest school system had an outdated logo and no slogan to unite its 90 schools. It suffered from poor public perception. Cities were splitting from Mobile County to form their own school districts. Families were moving across the bay to Baldwin County. And students

were leaving public schools for private schools. Media coverage of MCPSS was mostly negative, and the district needed to take a more proactive approach to telling its own stories.

The district hired a marketing firm and the new slogan, It Starts With Us, was born.

From the 2013 Marketing Plan:

The “It Starts With Us” campaign is formed out of the idea of personal responsibility for the education of the students within our sphere of influence. “Us,” of course, is the community. It is the teachers, the students, the parents, the businesses, the non-profits and the politicians. It is all-encompassing. “It Starts With” is a call to action. It means do something; do something that is remarkable. If you are a student, spend extra time on your homework; go the extra mile; get that extra credit. If you are a teacher, make teaching more than a job; do something different that takes your students’ engagement to the next level. If you are a business, invest not just with money, but with time, resources and training. Offer tours of your workplace. Get students involved early in your business expertise. After all, this is your future workforce. The same goes for everyone else: Stand out; start something.

The marketing plan included some strategies that MCPSS officials spent the year rolling out as part of the rebranding process. Among other activities, the district redesigned its website, enhanced its social media presence (mostly on Facebook as that fit the target demographic), asked supporting businesses to purchase billboards promoting the school system and its new slogan, and ran video advertisements of MCPSS alumni talking about how their successes started at their respective high school. (“For me, it started at XXX High School...”). The district printed large banners that are still on display at many schools with the words “It Starts With Us.” It printed out banners with the slogan and asked students to write in Sharpie markers what “It Starts With Us” means to them. It recognized students who were making a difference in their communities with It Starts With Me awards. And it began hosting its annual It Starts With Us Awards Ceremony recognizing top students, teachers and business and community partners who exemplified the slogan.

The district was recognized by the National School Public Relations Association for its work with a Golden Achievement award.

Why is Mobile County Public Schools rebranding?

It Starts With Us is a very good slogan, but we feel it has run its course. It is time to take the system to the next level with a new slogan. And we want some of the most brilliant minds in the county – YOURS! – to help us develop it.

In July, Mobile County Public Schools welcomed a new superintendent, Mr. Chresal Threadgill. It is a new day for MCPSS, as he has challenged everyone – our students, our teachers, our principals, and every other employee – to give it 110 percent this year. Even as he faces challenges of improving our academics and financial situation, Mr. Threadgill asked all employees at a Teacher Institute this summer to STAND UP for MCPSS by being cheerleaders for the district.

A new slogan will help build excitement and will serve as a rallying cry for all of our schools.

First steps

The first step is to decide whether students will be working as individuals or in groups of up to four people on the contest. The student(s) should come up with a name for their new marketing firm.

Then, as any good marketer or public relations practitioner would do: Begin researching Mobile County Public Schools. Here is some information to get you started:

MCPSS was founded in 1836 and was the first public school system in Alabama. It remains the largest with 55,000 students in 88 schools. About 7,300 people work for Mobile County Public Schools, making it the largest employer in Mobile County and one of the largest in the state of Alabama.

The district operates on a \$720 million annual budget; has 603 bus routes; and serves 48,000 lunches daily. MCPSS leads Alabama in school choice, with programs such as its Signature Academies, available in all 12 high schools. The school system has 13 National Blue Ribbon Schools.

Yet there are challenges, including limited funding, aging facilities on some campuses, its nine schools that are labeled as “failing,” and school security, which is a hot topic nationally.

The mission of Mobile County Public Schools is to graduate prepared and productive citizens.

The district’s vision is that Mobile County Public Schools will become a premier educational system where students engage in multiple pathways leading to success in a global society.

In its strategic plan, MCPSS has set six goals:

- Engaged Learners. Goal: To graduate college and career ready students.
- Quality Professionals. Goal: To recruit, employ, develop and retain professionals who are effective in achieving our mission.
- Emerging Technologies. Goal: To use emerging technologies to support teaching, learning and work.
- Operational & Support Systems. Goal: To provide safe, supportive and equitable environments.
- Sound Fiscal Management. Goal: To manage financial resources responsibly and transparently.
- Community Partnerships. Goal: To communicate with employees and the community to inform, engage and ensure accountability.

You can find out more about the school system, and see more of the Strategic Plan, via mcpss.com, mcpsssthewire.com, by visiting the Mobile County Public Schools Facebook page and youtube.com/mcpssTV, and by following us on Twitter @MobilePublicSch

SWOT Analysis

Next, gather some of your classmates, a teacher or two and, if you can, a parent and/or a community member and conduct a SWOT analysis.

A SWOT analysis is an effective way to gauge where your client – in this case, Mobile County Public Schools – is in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

You can use large pieces of paper, a white board in your classroom, or you can take dubious notes as your participants are asked a series of questions to determine, in this order, the district's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Here are some sample questions you can ask to lead your discussion in each of the four areas. (Source: The Public Relations Practitioner's Playbook for all Strategic Communicators: "48 Questions to Ask in your SWOT Analysis" at Score.com,). Consider these from your own point of view as well as from the point of view of other people you know:

Strengths

- What advantages does Mobile County Public Schools currently have?
- What does Mobile County Public Schools do well?
- What do other people see as the strengths of MCPSS?
- Do we have a well-known brand?
- Do our employees have skills or expertise that our competitors' employees lack?

Weaknesses:

- What could MCPSS improve?
- What does the school system do badly?
- What should MCPSS avoid?
- What do our competitors do better than us?
- What complaints do we frequently hear from customers? And prospective families?
- Are schools adequately staffed?
- Do employees lack any skills or need expertise to compete with other school systems?

Opportunities:

- Where or what are the good/positive opportunities facing MCPSS?
- Are there any interesting trends in education, in the community, in your school, etc.? (That may include changing technology; changing government policies; changing social patterns, populations, lifestyle changes, etc.)
- Do competitors have any weaknesses that MCPSS could benefit from?
- Is there a potential niche market MCPSS is currently ignoring?

Threats:

- What obstacles does Mobile County Public Schools face?
- What are our competitors doing?
- Are the required specifications for the services that MCPSS offers changing?
- Is changing technology threatening the school system?
- Are there financial problems? Academic problems, etc.?
- Is our target market shrinking?

Encourage all participants to be open and honest in their answers to these questions. If someone is taking over the entire conversation, ask someone else for their opinion, too, so you can include different voices.

Write a summary of your SWOT analysis including who all participated and where it took place. In bold letters, use the headings “Strengths” “Weaknesses” “Opportunities” and “Threats” and write a couple of paragraphs under each of those headings describing the input you received from your participants.

There are many resources available online to help you conduct your SWOT analysis, including sample questions to ask, formats to publish your results, sample SWOT analyses conducted by agencies, etc.

Get creative!

Using the results of your research (your SWOT analysis), start thinking of a new slogan. What are the positives that should be emphasized and the negatives that should be avoided? Brainstorm and come up with many ideas and then narrow it down to your best idea.

Once you and/or your group has decided on a slogan, pick out a color and a font for the slogan.

Here are the official MCPSS colors to choose from:

PRIMARY COLORS



Dark Blue

C: 99
M: 78
Y: 35
K: 22

R: 20
G: 64
B: 103



Light Blue

C: 81
M: 60
Y: 7
K: 0

R: 66
G: 106
B: 169



Warm Gray

C: 46
M: 40
Y: 34
K: 2

R: 145
G: 142
B: 149

SECONDARY COLORS



Lunch Tray Green

C: 33
M: 1
Y: 38
K: 0

R: 175
G: 214
B: 176



Eraser

C: 26
M: 94
Y: 98
K: 22

R: 155
G: 42
B: 34

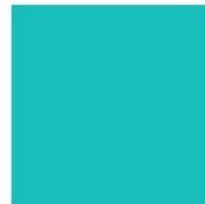
TERTIARY COLORS



Backpack Orange

C: 14
M: 63
Y: 90
K: 3

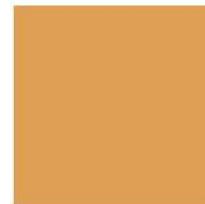
R: 208
G: 116
B: 54



Guide Blue

C: 71
M: 0
Y: 33
K: 0

R: 23
G: 190
B: 187



Pencil

C: 12
M: 40
Y: 76
K: 0

R: 223
G: 160
B: 86



Here are the HEX numbers:

- Dark Blue: #00416A
- Light Blue: #446BA8
- Warm Gray: #8E8F90
- Lunch Tray Green: #A0D8B3
- Eraser: #9F3122
- Backpack Orange: #CA7C30

- Guide Blue: #25CAD3
- Pencil: #D8A460

Write a couple of paragraphs explaining how you and/or your group came up with the slogan and what it means. (See pages 1-2 to see what was said about “It Starts With Us” in its official marketing plan). Include the slogan in its official font and color, write the name of the font and color, and write why that font and color were chosen.

Make sure all of this is included in your Marketing Plan:

- The name of your marketing firm, the name of your school and teacher, and the names of all of the students who participated on your team.
- Results of the SWOT analysis.
- Your slogan in its font and color.
- An explanation of your slogan.

Please check, re-check and triple check your grammar and spelling and present your Marketing Plan in a neat and professional way.

Create a sample marketing product

Next, decide as a team whether you are doing a video, print ad or social media plan to show off your slogan. This will be a sample that would be used as part of the official launch. Only one of these is required, but you are welcome to complete more than one if you would like.

Video: Create a high-quality, 30-second video that would be used on the district’s Facebook page and on its 24-hour mcpsTV channel. The video would be used to launch your new slogan, so make it catchy and include the words of your slogan on the screen. You can use the video program of your choice. If you have never used a program, i-Movie or Adobe Spark work well. Adobe Spark allows you to add words to your video and you can also use photos to make a video. Save your video as an mp4 and follow the instructions in the next section for submitting your work.

Print advertisement: Use your graphic design skills to create a banner that would hang in MCPSS schools, a poster that would hang in the schools, or an advertisement that would run in the Press-Register, Call News or Lagniappe promoting the school system and your new slogan. Use high-quality photos and images and the official MCPSS colors. Canva.com has some good, free templates that allow you to either use free or cheap photos or to upload your own. Canva.com also allows you to change colors in the templates to the district’s official colors using the HEX numbers included in this document. Save your banner, poster or ad as a PDF.

Social media: One of the most effective marketing tools in use today is social media, due to its wide-reaching audience and its ability to share photos, videos, graphics and more. For this project, you can write a social media plan for your client, Mobile County Public Schools, to use as part of the launch of the new slogan. This would include your recommendation of what social media platform(s) to use (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), when to post, how often to post and three samples of what to post.

Keep in mind that posts with photos and/or graphics perform better than posts with just words, and posts with videos perform better than photos. But most people don't turn up the sound to watch the videos, so if you do a video, words on the screen are useful in getting your message across. If you are doing a sample post of a video or photo, include the text that would go along with the post. Also include when they should be posted. For example: The day before the launch, launch day (or if you want to be more specific: launch day morning, launch day afternoon, launch day evening), the day after launch, two days after launch, a week after launch, etc.

Canva.com has a library of sample graphics (some with photos and some without) that can be used on social media. And i-movie and Adobe Spark are good for making videos.

Submit your work:

Share your entry through Office365 with academycompetition@mcpss.com.