

Board Operation 1-12

Framework for Communications and Community Engagement

The Board of Education recognizes the importance associated with effectively communicating and engaging with a diverse audience and has undertaken to develop a new communications and community engagement framework.

The purpose of the *Communications Framework* is to present a clear and concise direction for communicating with the school district's community. The plan primarily addresses two types of school district audiences: internal (students, teachers, staff, unions, administration and School Board) and external (parents, businesses, civic groups, and other members of the district's community) and considers the processes to be used to reach these audiences.

Through the development and implementation of a communications framework, the school district will:

- *Inform*: Provide timely information about board and administrative decisions made, and activities and events across the division.
- *Consult*: Increase the involvement of staff and community through consultative practices to obtain feedback on issues or decisions.
- *Collaborate*: Partner with staff and or community in arriving at a solution.
- *Foster* the exchange of information between the school district and the communities it serves.

Guiding Principles

The Board of Education believes that:

1. Meaningful decision-making and consultation processes are respectful of and use different ways to engage with our diverse educational partners.
2. District decision-making information should be accessible, understandable, relevant and responsive to the needs of the community.
3. District-wide community engagement should be authentic and meaningful.

4. Staff briefings to the board will include communication ideas and or recommendations (where appropriate).
5. The board will, as part of its deliberation process, consider if, when or how they will communicate or engage with the educational partners.

Engagement and Communications Continuum

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Provide internal and or external public with information.	Obtain public feedback on a future decision coming to the board and or planning for the board.	Work directly with members of the public (internal and or external) throughout the entire process that culminates with a board decision.	Work with the public from the inception of a project to the final decision by the board.	Places final decision-making in the hands of the public.
e.g. newsletters, web-pages, blogs	e.g. public meetings, focus groups, surveys	e.g. advisory groups, public forums, public hearings	e.g. Workshops, design charrettes	e.g. Plebiscite, working committee

Identifying the Appropriate Engagement along the Continuum

1. As you move from left to right in the chart above, the communication process becomes increasingly participative and increases the engagement level of the public in the process.
2. As policy and operational issues arise, consideration will be given as to whether it is most appropriate to consult, involve, or collaborate and a formalized engagement process will be developed in consultation with the board.
3. Briefings to the board will incorporate a communications plan recommendation as to the most effective manner to engage the public based on a balance between time and importance of gaining public feedback on the topic.
4. Data and or other information collected through the engagement process will be shared by placing it on the district webpage.
5. The data will be analyzed by staff and will be shared with the board as part of the decision-making process.
6. The board’s eventual decision will be made public through the public school board meeting process.

Framework for Regular Engagement Activities

The Board of Education will:

1. Hold regular meetings of the board in an open manner before assembled public and press who shall have the benefit of a publicized schedule of meetings. In order to protect the legitimate interests of individuals and the community, "in camera" or closed meetings in private session shall be reserved to discuss matters such as reports dealing with land, labor, legal and matters pertaining to students where confidentiality is to be maintained.
2. Hold regular Education Committee Meetings of the board periodically in various locations in the district.
3. Hold public forums in the district on educational issues as the need arises.
4. Provide the public with an opportunity to address questions to the board at each regular meeting.
5. Welcome delegations of students, parents, teachers, and others at regular board meetings.
6. Post agendas of regular meetings to the school district webpage and send, where appropriate, agendas to the associations representing the board's employees, to parent organizations in the district, and to groups and individuals requesting such agendas.
7. Publicize the deliberation and decisions of board meetings by distributing, via the district webpage an approved report of meetings.
8. Develop and maintain a regular community relations and information program which informs the community of the district's activities.
9. Establish a regular means of assessing the publics', parents', and students' needs and concerns regarding the district.

Media Relations

Background

The Superintendent of Schools ensures positive external and internal communications are developed. The news media are an important vehicle through which the district keeps the electorate accurately informed and increases public awareness of education.

The following processes will be followed when the district or schools are involving the media:

1. Information releases from the board should accurately communicate the board's business to the public and may only be issued by persons authorized by the board, usually the board chair.
2. The superintendent shall approve all information released to the media from the School Board Office.

3. The principal shall approve all information released to the media from schools.
4. Representatives of the media may be permitted into the schools for legitimate reporting and promotional purposes. This is at the discretion of the principal. Particular care must be exercised in protecting the rights of students when media are present.
5. Appropriate district and school release forms are to be completed.
6. Media representatives may be asked by the principal or district staff to leave the premises or grounds where it is deemed to be in the best interests of the students and staff to do so.
7. In the event of emergency or crisis interactions, the Director of Instruction, Health and Safety or designate shall determine what information shall be given to the media, and by whom.

Social Media

The use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and other types media are encouraged providing the following practices are maintained:

1. All postings to social media support the mission, vision and values of the district.
2. Posting to district sites are moderated by the individuals posting to the site.
3. Any platforms that enable information to become dated (e.g. Facebook, webpages, etc) must be regularly reviewed and content updated.
4. Any alterations to district or school technology (e.g. adding software, etc) must be approved by the Director, Information Technology.
5. All postings must respect copyright laws and any other provincial or federal requirement.

Event Protocol

Background

The Superintendent of Schools is responsible for ensuring positive external and internal communications are developed. Maintaining healthy relationships with School District No. 71 (Comox Valley) stakeholders is important and that appropriate protocol is established for events organized by the district and schools.

Events organized by both individual schools and the district shall reflect the vision, mission, values and beliefs of School District No. 71 in both content and presentation. This requires the professional judgement of staff members and organizers to ensure that events meet the needs of all students and involves the school community, as appropriate. Defining a specific agenda and purpose for the event helps to ensure that such goals are met.

It is important for trustees to attend public events and celebrations as it strengthens the district's ties with its community. Being part of these events also provides trustees with an important opportunity to deliver key information and messages to a larger community audience.

Trustees will make every effort to attend significant community, organization and community events which may include annual meetings, open houses, business luncheons, fundraising events, holiday celebrations, etc. The board's interest in attending such events and celebrations will be communicated to all of its internal and external stakeholders.

At least one (1) trustee must be invited to attend or participate in significant district and school events (e.g. graduation ceremonies, awards nights, community open-houses, and orientation nights for parents). Event organizers may also extend an invitation to the superintendent or senior leadership to attend such events.

When a local organization has been involved in the project and is being recognized by an event, representatives from that group shall be formally invited by event organizers. Similarly, when local, provincial or federal politicians have been involved in a project, or their presence is desired at an event, the request is made through a formal letter.

In the planning for an event the order of introductions and speakers must be given special attention. Protocols will vary from one situation to another, depending on who is involved in the particular event.