



## **Development of a New Policy - Communications – Phase 2**

**To:** Governance and Policy Committee

**Date:** 8 September, 2021

**Report No.:** 09-21-4144

### **Strategic Directions**

- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Policy Development Work Plan, as presented in this report, be approved.

### **Context**

On October 30, 2019, the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution for the development of a Communications Policy, as follows:

- a. That the Director develop a draft communications policy, including consideration of the following principles:
  - i) develop, promote and maintain accessible, effective, transparent, timely and consistent communication with all internal and external public, including parents/guardians, students, community, and members of the media,
  - ii) support the TDSB commitment to equity, A Vision for Learning and the mission, values and goals of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan,
  - iii) provide clear expectations for the Director, Chair, senior administrators, school administrators and the Communication Department with respect to all internal and external communications on matters impacting students, parents/guardians, schools, staff and the community;
- b. That careful review and consideration be given to all TDSB policies, procedures, and practices – whether they directly or indirectly include communications with internal and external public as above – to support this communications policy;

- c. That communication policies from other school boards/school authorities, publicly funded agencies etc. be part of this policy development process; and,
- d. To convene a working group of trustees, the Communication Department, the Public Engagement Department, with a report back on the Policy Development Work Plan to the Governance and Policy Committee prior to the 2020-21 school year.

Work on this policy was among others that were put on hold during the Board's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the spring 2021 staff resumed work on this policy. As noted in Part D above, a Communications Policy Working Group of Trustees, staff from Government, Public and Community Relations, Policy Services, Parent and Community Engagement Departments was formed and met twice to develop a work plan for the development of a Communications Policy. The work group recommended the attached Communications Policy Work Plan be forwarded to the Governance and Policy Committee and having completed its task, the work group has now been disbanded.

The attached draft Policy Development Work Plan (Appendix A) is presented for the Governance and Policy Committee's approval. As part of development of the Policy Development Work Plan, the Communications Policy Working Group considered legislative requirements, Board decisions, current policies and operational requirements. The Working Group reviewed examples of comparative policies from other school boards and municipalities.

#### Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Subject to the Governance and Policy Committee's directions, a draft Communications Policy will be developed in accordance with the Policy Development Work Plan. Following public consultations, the draft policy will then be presented to the Governance and Policy Committee for consideration and approval.

### **Resource Implications**

No additional resources will be required for implementation of the Policy at this time.

### **Communications Considerations**

Following Board approval, the Policy will be communicated to the system and posted on the Board's public website.

### **Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)**

- Election Activities and Use of Board Resources Procedure (PR533)
- Information Flow Protocol (PR733)
- Open Data Policy (P091)
- Parent and Community Engagement Policy (P023)

- Trustee Constituency Communications Policy (P018)

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A: Policy Development Work Plan
- Appendix B: Scan of Selected School Boards: Communications Policy

## **From**

Ryan Bird, Acting Executive Officer, Government, Public and Community Relations at [ryan.bird@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:ryan.bird@tdsb.on.ca) or at 416-397-3951

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK PLAN**

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Date: August 26, 2021

All policies will be developed to ensure consistency with the TDSB's Mission, Values and Goals Policy (P002), the Equity Policy (P037) and the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

**POLICY INFORMATION**

Proposed Policy Title: **Communications Policy**

Director's Council member responsible for development of the new Policy:

Executive Officer, Government, Public and Community Relations

**Phase I. APPROVAL OF POLICY RATIONALE**

The rationale for the new Policy:

A Board decision on October 30, 2019 related to the development of a Communications Policy, as follows:

- a. That the Director develop a draft communication policy, including consideration of the following principles:
  - i. develop, promote and maintain accessible, effective, transparent, timely and consistent communication with all internal and external public, including parents/guardians, students, community, and members of the media,
  - ii. support the TDSB commitment to equity, A Vision for Learning and the

- mission, values and goals of the Multi-year Strategic Plan,
- iii. provide clear expectations for the Director, Chair, senior administrators, school administrators and the Communication Department with respect to all internal and external communications on matters impacting students, parents/guardians, schools, staff and the community;
  - b. That careful review and consideration be given to all TDSB policies, procedures, and practices – whether they directly or indirectly include communications with internal and external public as above – to support this communication policy;
  - c. That communication policies from other school boards/school authorities, publicly funded agencies etc. be part of this policy development process;
  - d. To convene a working group of trustees, the Communications Department, the Public Engagement Department, with a report back on the Policy Development Work Plan to the Governance and Policy Committee prior to the 2020-21 school year.

This Policy Development Work Plan has been discussed with the Policy Coordinator:

Yes

No

## **Phase II. OBTAINING TRUSTEES' DIRECTIONS AND DRAFTING POLICY**

This Policy Development Work Plan will be discussed at the Governance and Policy Committee meeting held on: September 8, 2021

### **Creating the Draft Policy**

The draft Policy will be created and aligned with the current Policy Template (see Operational Procedure PR501, Policy Development and Management, Appendix A):

Yes

No

## **Provisions of the Proposed Communications Policy**

**The following includes, but is not limited to general provisions to be considered for inclusion in drafting the Communications Policy:**

- Outline important equity considerations, including AODA compliance (ways and means of communicating in an accessible manner) and translation provisions (based on PR503, Translation and Interpretation Procedure).
- Establish and clarify expectations for both internal and external communications, including the style of communications; frequency of communications; and target audiences for communications.
- Establish the importance of regular (at least once a month) communications of Board/system news and events to parents, employees and students.
- Establish the importance of communicating promptly after each Board meeting, decisions of the Board of Trustees and other relevant corporate news and events together with a link to the web broadcast of each Board meeting to parents, employees, students, community and City of Toronto stakeholders, including Toronto city council, provincial and federal government elected officials.
- Provide Principals and Trustees with relevant and timely information on news and events on a monthly basis that can be used in their communications to school communities and constituents.
- Provide system leaders, including Trustees, with a daily recap and summary of official TDSB responses to media requests for information or comment and a daily link to media coverage of the TDSB, its schools or staff.
- Direct that the TDSB will have media relations, crisis communications and employee use of social media protocols, and that they be reviewed/updated on a 4-year cycle,
- Establish the responsibility of the Government, Community and Public Relations department to oversee the TDSB's Board and Committee meeting webcasts, close caption services for webcasts, internal and external websites, social media channels and platforms and assist schools with their websites as needed.
- Use of School Messenger for school and system-wide communications including direct email, phone messages and where such enhanced services are available, text messaging.
- Adherence to the protection of privacy and personal information of students and employees.
- Align the Policy with the Information Flow Protocol (PR733), Parent Concern Protocol –(PR505), and Open Data Policy (P091)
- Provide general expectations for communication services such as service standards per the Service Excellence Program.
- Identify the frequency and the approach to obtaining feedback (annual client survey) from target audiences on communications, as well as public and community engagement opportunities.

- Consider merging the Communications Policy with the existing Trustee Constituency Communications Policy (P018) which would then be repealed.

A review of leading practices for similar policies across jurisdictions has been completed and is included with this Work Plan.

### **Phase III. INTERNAL REVIEWS AND SIGN-OFFS**

The draft Policy will include input from TDSB departments affected by the Policy:

- Business Operations and Service Excellence
- Equity, Well-Being and School Improvement
- Human Rights and Indigenous Education
- Leadership, Learning and School Improvement

In addition, the following departments will be required to sign-off on the proposed draft Policy:

- Legal Services
- Policy Services
- Government, Public and Community Relations

Following internal reviews and TDSB departments' sign-offs, the draft Policy will be submitted to Executive Council on: November - December 2021

A sign-off from the Director of Education will be obtained before proceeding with external consultations and/or Committee/Board approval.

Director of Education

#### **Phase IV. EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS**

Are external consultations applicable to this Policy?

Yes

No (*Ministry of Education mandated policy or corporate policy without external stakeholders*)

Mandatory external consultations will include, at minimum:

1. Posting of the working draft Policy on the TDSB website for public feedback

(45 days minimum): January – March 2022

2. Extending invitations for consultation to:

Student Senate

and

all Community Advisory Committees of the Board and conducting consultations with the Community Advisory Committees that expressed interest (either individually with each interested committee or collectively with representatives of all interested committees):



- Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee
- Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee
- Community Use of Schools Community Advisory Committee
- Early Years Community Advisory Committee
- Environmental Sustainability Community Advisory Committee
- Equity Policy Community Advisory Committee
- French-as-a-Second-Language Community Advisory Committee
- Inner City Community Advisory Committee
- 2SLGBTQ+ Community Advisory Committee
- Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC)
- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
- Urban Indigenous Community Advisory Committee

In addition to mandatory consultations, other external participants and projected dates of consultation(s) include:

- School Councils
- Professional Associations and Unions
- Other:

The following methods will be applied in the external consultations:

- Public meeting
- Facilitated focus group

- Call for public delegations
- Expert panel discussion
- Survey
- Posting on the TDSB website
- Other: E-mail notifications / correspondence

## **Phase V. COMMITTEE/BOARD APPROVALS**

Following external consultations and revisions, the working draft Policy will be presented to the Governance and Policy Committee on the following date: March - May 2022

Following recommendation by the Governance and Policy Committee, the new Policy will be presented to the Board on the following date: May – June 2022

Once approved, the new Policy will be added to the TDSB website.

## **Phase VI. IMPLEMENTATION**

Following Board approval, the new Policy will be communicated through:

- Posting of the new Policy on the TDSB website through the Policy Coordinator
- Sharing with staff through the System Leaders' Bulletin
- Informing departments at staff meetings and channeling information to the school principals through respective superintendents
- Implementation of a broad communication plan for internal and external audiences, include summary of policy provisions and expected outcomes

Policy implementation will include:

- Conducting information/training sessions to TDSB staff affected by the Policy

The projected time period for conducting information/training sessions to staff will be:

- Initiate development of new procedures or review of associated procedures:  
June – September 2022

## Scan of Selected School Boards: Communications Policy

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### Policy Summary:

While the TDSB does not have a general Communications Policy, the TDSB currently has the following documents in place which relate to communications topics:

- **Trustee Constituency Communications Policy (P018):** To establish guidelines for trustee communications, such as newsletters that have mass distribution and are paid for with Board funds.
- **Student Trustee and SuperCouncil (Student Senate) Communications Policy (P053):** To provide guidelines for written and electronic communications sent by student trustees and SuperCouncil members to all secondary school students, student councils, or any other mass distribution.
- **Media Relations Procedure (PR555):** To prepare and assist employees when responding to and soliciting media involvement.
- **Crisis and Incident Reporting Procedure (PR569):** To ensure system understanding of the crisis notification procedures.
- **Accessibility Policy (P069):** To establish the framework for the Board's compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation. Certain sections focus on information and communication as part of accessible customer service.
- **Parent and Community Involvement Policy (P023):** To establish a framework for building and supporting parent and community involvement in the Toronto District School Board.
- **TDSB Brand Guidelines (August 2016):** To establish standards for Toronto District School Board's visual communications.
- **Open Data Policy (P091):** To establish rules for maximizing access to the TDSB data for the general public, subject to privacy, security and confidentiality restrictions as outlined in existing legislation and policies. The Policy supports the Board's commitment to openness, transparency and accessibility of information.
- **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Policy (P094):** To establish the framework for the Board's compliance with the MFIPPA and other applicable legislation; and to demonstrate the Board's commitment to protection of personal information while recognizing and supporting the public's right of access to information in the custody and control of the

Board and its third party providers.

Through a scan and subsequent review of nine (9) organizations, similar provisions were found in most policies, procedures and/or protocols. Key themes included: communication standards, roles and responsibilities, primary or designated spokespersons, media relations and communication during crisis or emergency situations. Within the policy themes, some organizations (i.e., Toronto Catholic DSB, York Region DSB) also developed detailed handbooks or protocols which act as a resource for administrators in planning individual communication strategies for their schools/departments, and in responding to issues that rise unexpectedly. Topics within these documents range from key messages, good news stories, crisis/stress stories, and how to promote a local school.

### **Key Themes of Other Jurisdictional Policies:**

#### 1. Corporate Communications/Department & General Communication Principles

In all organizations scanned, a corporate communications department manages and provides expertise and support related to both internal and external communications. The department generally develops and implements plans, briefing notes and strategies on a proactive basis to promote awareness in support of board programs and priorities, addresses potential issues, issues news releases/statements, handles media inquiries, and oversees all other communications activities.

General principles for effective communication as outlined in various policies (e.g., Hastings and Prince Edward DSB, Toronto Catholic DSB, York Region DSB) include:

- Clear, concise and timely communication, and access to relevant information;
- Effective communication as being fundamental to establishing and maintaining strong relationships and partnerships with its stakeholder communities;
- Director of Education responsible for maintaining effective and consistent

- channels of communication with all stakeholders;
- Compliance to legislative requirements for communication, including online web posting of agendas, reports and minutes of public Board/Committee meetings; and
- Handling of constituency communications and the role of a parent-student concern protocol when addressing the concerns of stakeholders.

The TDSB has a Government, Public and Community Relations department which manage several functions including but not limited to: strategic communications, media and issues, and corporate and social media relations. The department provides advice on communication matters and maintains responsibility for the development of strategies for effective communication with all stakeholders and implementation of brand standards (e.g., TDSB Brand Guidelines).

## 2. Organizational Roles/Responsibilities

Most of the organizations reviewed (e.g., City of Burlington, City of Sparwood, Durham DSB, National Gallery of Canada, Toronto Catholic DSB, York Region DSB) established lines of communication throughout the organization based on position or authority level.

As an example, outlined below are the organizational roles/responsibilities identified in the policy of the TDSB's coterminous board (i.e., Toronto Catholic DSB):

- **Chair of the Board** may address the media or public on matters pertaining to Board policy decisions or when a matter is deemed to be politically sensitive. When there is doubt as to interpretation of the policy, or where the policy is silent, the Chair will seek direction from the **Board of Trustees** regarding the substance and manner in which a matter is to be communicated to the public.
- **Trustees** may address the media on local issues specific to their ward, or as an individual trustee representing their own independent viewpoints on matters of public concern.
- The **Director of Education** or designate is the official spokesperson of the Board during crisis and on administration such as academic programs,

- human resources and educational (pedagogical) matters.
- The **Communications Executive** is the official spokesperson on daily school or Board related issues, or as assigned by the Director, and has overall responsibility for internal and external communications. For news releases and official statements to the media on behalf of the Board, the Director will be consulted when matters relate to Board policies or initiatives while Trustees will be consulted on news releases involving schools, programs or local issues in their ward.
  - **Designated Staff** who are asked to speak on behalf of the Board are required to confine their remarks to facts and should refrain from expressing personal opinions.
  - **Superintendents of Education** are required to maintain ongoing communication with Trustees and notify Trustees of school issues including but not limited to significant parental concerns, school related incidents, bereavements of staff, students or parents, and safe school (e.g., lockdown, bullying) or community concerns (e.g., busing, boundaries). For more details, the school board references its parent concern protocol.

At the TDSB, various documents such as the Media Relations Procedure (PR555) establish communication responsibility based on position/authority level, and when dealing with the media (similar to the above).

### 3. Managing the Flow of Information – Requests from the Board of Trustees/Trustees

In an effort to manage information flow throughout an organization, one school board (i.e., Toronto Catholic DSB) states in its policy that official communications of the Board and Trustees who wish to communicate with internal staff (e.g., whether to request reports or provide direction to administration) are to be requested through the Director of Education.

Trustee access to information under the custody and control of the TDSB has been discussed in the Integrity Commissioner's 2018 annual report, and consideration may be given to documenting the current practice at the TDSB where members of

the Board are requested to channel these types of requests through the Director of Education's Office or by way of Board/Committee motion.

#### 4. Media Relations and Primary or Designated Spokespersons

School boards across Ontario (e.g., Hastings and Prince Edward DSB, Toronto Catholic DSB, York Region DSB) recognize media and reporters as being providers of an important service which keeps the public informed about student achievement and well-being as well as board business. A coordinated approach is recommended when sharing information and responding to inquiries from media. As such, organizations will usually assign certain responsibilities and make it clear of their corporate communication standards. One school board (e.g., Toronto Catholic DSB) outlines the extent of which information can be shared with media and what information cannot. Restricted items, for example, include: items dealt with in private session at Board and Committee meetings; any matter that is currently before the courts; confidential personnel matters; personal information about students, parents or staff. Consistent across all organizational policies, the corporate communications department was identified as the first point of contact when in doubt or when stakeholders are contacted by the media. A communications department can provide support in many ways, including through development of a campaign strategy. Tactics may include press releases, conferences, briefing notes, background material, key messages, etc.

Most organizations (especially larger ones) also designate spokespersons regarding certain matters or requests. As one organization (i.e., Toronto Catholic DSB) states, a designated spokesperson is important because it helps to ensure that media receives consistent key messaging; media knows who they need to contact for assistance with their stories; and that the coverage is the most positive that it can be.

The TDSB's current Media Relations Procedure (PR555) outlines the procedure for responding to media inquiries at the school, individual, department and Board



levels, including spokespersons who speak on behalf of the Board (listed as an appendix to the Procedure).

### 5. Accessible Communications

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) requires all public-facing institutions to be fully accessible to the public by 2021. A component of AODA covers communication with the public, including digital compliance through corporate and school websites. The Act mandates that all public-facing organizations make digital information accessible to users with physical impairments and technological impairments (e.g., visual, cognitive, and/or auditory impairments).

Several organizations included in the scan (e.g., Durham College, National Gallery of Canada) highlight their legislated duty to provide accessible communication and employ a variety of ways and means to communicate—from traditional methods to new technologies—to reach and communicate with all stakeholders.

The TDSB has an Accessibility Policy (P069) which includes provisions related to accessible customer service, information and communication. Web Services Division of the Government, Public and Community Relations Department is currently working with all departments/TDSB users who generate and post content to ensure that TDSB corporate and school websites are digitally compliant with the AODA.

### 6. Crisis and Emergency Situations

An important piece of the communications policies and/or procedures included in this scan relate to the handling of crisis and emergency situations. While most organizations keep documentation internal (e.g., National Gallery of Canada), every organization listed the communications department as the immediate and lead contact for support during a crisis or emergency situation.

The TDSB follows a Crisis and Incident Reporting Procedure (PR569) in the event of an emergency situation, which explains crisis notification procedures, incident reporting and the various roles and responsibilities when an event is unfolding. The Communications and Public Affairs department is the primary contact.

### 7. Stakeholder Community and Public Relations

Most organizations acknowledge having a diverse stakeholder community (e.g., Hastings and Prince Edward DSB, York Region DSB) and focus on both internal and external stakeholder communications. One organization (e.g., Hastings and Prince Edward DSB), for example, defines its stakeholders as students, parents/guardians, employees, community and education partners, the broader public and media. Another school board (e.g., York Region DSB) identifies its entire community within its communications protocol as being either internal or external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include parent volunteers, secondary teachers, caretakers, CUPE, ETFO and OSST, while external stakeholders include parents and families, the coterminous Catholic board, Ministry of Education, police services, special interest groups and the general public.

The TDSB serves a large stakeholder community—both internal and external—and identifies approaches to its audiences within the Media Relations Procedure (PR555), Trustee Constituency Communications Policy (P018) and other departmental documents. The Communications and Public Affairs Department supports internal stakeholders with respect to external public relations.

### 8. Community Engagement

One organization (e.g., City of Sparwood) embeds community engagement as a central theme of its communications policy. The policy recognizes the importance of engagement with its stakeholders (ideally through a two-way dialogue) about the organization's policies, programs, services and initiatives. The policy is separated

into three themes a) public and community engagement; b) conducting the communication process; and c) keeping the public informed.

### *a) Public Communication and Engagement*

The methods used by the organization include:

- i) Public communication: enables the organization to get information out to the public. This is generally a one-way flow of information from the organization.
- ii) Public consultation: enables the organization to ask for public input on policy/program issues. This is generally a one-way flow of information for the public to the organization.
- iii) Public participation: based upon the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process. This is a two-way approach to communication and collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions.

### *b) Conducting the Communication Process*

The organization's policy explicitly states that communication with the public will begin at the earliest stages of the policy, planning, program or project. In addition, public consultation and public consultation will be incorporated in a timely manner as the policy, planning, program or project implemented. With respect to conducting the communication process, consideration is given to factors such as: involvement of those likely to be affected by a decision; a meaningful level of involvement; recognition/input from a broad and diverse audience; and reporting on how public input has been utilized in the decision-making process.

### *c) Keeping the Public Informed*

## Appendix B

In an effort to educate and improve overall awareness, the organization's policy focuses on several public communication initiatives, including but not limited to: radio and newspaper advertising, media releases, community newsletters, periodic publications (e.g., strategic plans), events calendars, online surveys and opportunities for the public to contribute questions or comments or initiatives; community meetings).

The TDSB, through its commitments as outlined in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and policies including the Parent and Community Engagement Policy (P023), utilize a wide range of communications strategies and offer several public engagement opportunities for the TDSB community. Board information and initiatives are posted widely on the Board's internal and external websites, System Leaders' Bulletin, social media channels and through use of other mediums. Engagement opportunities are offered to advisory groups (e.g., StudentSenate, community advisory committees, union partners) and members of the wider TDSB community through online surveys, policy consultations and focus group discussions.

**Organizations Reviewed (9):** City of Burlington, District of Sparwood B.C., Durham College, Durham DSB, Hastings and Prince Edward DSB, National Gallery of Canada, Toronto Catholic DSB, Toronto DSB, York Region DSB.