

School District No. 71 Comox Valley
607 Cumberland Rd.
Courtenay, British Columbia
V9N 7G5

www.comoxvalleyschools.ca

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

COMOX VALLEY SCHOOL (SD71)

2017 - 2018

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

District Overview

Comox Valley Schools (formally and legally known as School District No. 71) is one of 60 school districts in British Columbia serving the communities of the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland, including Black Creek, Merville, Royston, Hornby and Denman Islands. It is the second largest employer in the Comox Valley after Canadian Forces Base Comox (19 Wing). With 15 elementary schools, two middle/junior secondary schools, three secondary schools, two alternate schools, and a distance education school, Comox Valley Schools employs 1,300 headcount employees (teachers, administrators and support staff including on call and exempt staff) and educates approximately 18,300 students. Comox Valley Schools is renowned for educational excellence, innovation and providing a supportive student learning environment.

SITUATION

Financial Overview

For the past 15 years leading into the 2016/17 school year, Comox Valley Schools faced declining enrollment in its standard Kindergarten – Grade 12 (K-12) student population and other major challenges including funding protection; declining operating surplus and local capital reserve; and cost and funding pressures.

Today, the district is in a growth phase. Student enrollment in the standard K-12 and in Distributed Learning (DL) is up which generates additional revenue for the district. Additionally, during the 2016/17 school year there were numerous unanticipated funding announcements including the Ministry of Education release of the Priority Measures for Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruling that reduces classroom size, restores the Collective Agreement for teachers and increases funding for school districts across the province. For Comox Valley Schools, that allowed funding for approximately 60 new teacher hires. While these significant changes are having a positive impact for students and teachers, restoring trust and rebuilding relationships with the district and re-instilling confidence in public education will take time and effort.

Community Perspectives

Community members in the district care about their schools, students and communities. In an effort to continue to develop positive working relations between the Board of Education, staff and community stakeholders, a dialogue about how Comox Valley Schools can best engage the community was hosted in

¹ Student enrolment for 2016/17 based on headcount. Student funding based on 7,802fte (fulltime equivalent) students.

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January 2017. Discussions from the forum revealed that community stakeholders seek clear and transparent feedback loops where information is shared with the community and received from the community through a variety of mediums. Preferred modes of “push and pull” modes of communication included social media, simple opinion surveys, bulletins and newsletters. Community stakeholders expressed a strong interest in receiving information that is accessible, accurate and concise. To this end, it was noted that developing a communication strategy that outlines what will be communicated, when and to what level of detail would be useful to the community. A key aspect of this strategy addresses how community stakeholders can access board minutes, as well as to receive information-on the board decision making processes.

In June 2017, the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) underwent a short anonymous survey to address school-to-parent communication. Results were presented to the District Leadership Team (DLT) in October. A total of 581 submissions representing an even mix of parents/guardians of primary and secondary students from various schools with varying levels of engagement were received. Findings of the survey reveal parents/guardians are satisfied with communication coming from the schools, with the parents/guardians of primary-aged students having a greater level of satisfaction. Parents/guardians generally want to receive information digitally (mobile device and desktop) with email communication being the most valued. Parents/guardians are generally satisfied with school/district websites and Facebook. The significant take-away was the desire for consistent communication across all grades and schools, with more cohesion within the school system.

Scope of Plan

Effective communication between children, parents, teachers, and administrators is critical to ensure students and their families are supported. Meaningful school communication is very much the essential catalyst to getting the kind of parental and community engagement students need to succeed. Through transparency of the district school system, this plan aims to build trust, honesty and respect with all educational partners within our school communities.

Activities identified in this plan are diverse with a focus on preferred communication tools for the community and respond directly to the expressed interests and concerns of public education stakeholders.

The communication objectives are tied directly to the Comox Valley Schools Board of Education Strategic Plan for student and school success. This document is used to guide communication activities as well as provide a framework for community engagement efforts as were expressed in forums with stakeholders and by our PAC communities.

Objective

The purpose of the Comox Valley Schools Communication Plan is to present a clear and concise framework for communicating with our school community.

To increase and improve internal and external communication systems by creating open, two-way communication between the School Board, administrators, staff, students, parents/guardians, employee unions, and the greater public audience.

GOALS

- Implement communication programs that are focused on consistent, inclusive, open and transparent two-way communication.
- Build trust and garner support in the district, board and schools by ensuring stakeholders have timely access to information about district initiatives, issues, programs and activities.
- Foster strong relationships by providing opportunities for stakeholder engagement in public education.
- Enhance and protect the district's brand.

Stakeholders and Target Audiences

INTERNAL AUDIENCE

PRIMARY

- The Board of Education
- District and School Administrators
- Staff (teachers and support)
- Students
- Parents

SECONDARY (defined as the second most important)

- Unions
 - Comox District Teachers' Association (CDTA);
 - Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Local 439)
- Professional education affiliated associations and organization, ex. British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), Comox Valley Principals and Vice Principals Association (CVPVPA).
- Ministry of Education

EXTERNAL AUDIENCE

PRIMARY

- District/Parent Advisory Council
- Chamber of Commerce and Business Leaders
- Elected Officials – all three levels of government
- Media (a conduit to reach target audiences)

SECONDARY

- Civic Groups
- Non-profit organizations
- Faith-based Groups
- Community Service Clubs
- Prospective employees
- Prospective residents
- Residents in and around a school community without enrolled Comox Valley Schools children
- Post-Secondary institutions – i.e. trade and community colleges, universities, Job Markets.

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Key Messages

- Our kids come first.
- Everyone in the community contributes to child's education success. Together, we will raise our students to their highest potential.
- We remain responsive to our students' needs by evolving with the changing educational environment and by embracing advances in technology so that our programs remain relevant and engaging.
- We strive to maintain the right balance of resources so that a child's education is never compromised.
- Comox Valley Schools is focused on making our schools unique, valuable and attractive to students and families and to employees.
- We value and believe in:
 - Trusting relationships based on respect, integrity and ethical behaviour.
 - An environment that motivates and actively engages learners.
 - Innovation and creativity.
 - Strong partnerships, especially between home and school.
 - Accountability and shared responsibility.
 - Individual, professional and organizational growth.
 - Celebration of accomplishments.

Vision Statement: A learning community that embraces diversity, honours relationship and prepares all learners for a changing world.

Mission Statement: To work with our educational partners to develop responsible, compassionate citizens and successful, lifelong learners.

SUPPORTING MESSAGES

Comox Valley Schools strives for educational excellence by creating and maintaining a learning community that embraces diversity, honours relationship and prepares all learners for a changing world.

Comox Valley Schools will provide a safe, supportive environment for our students to receive a diverse education in order to develop into responsible, compassionate citizens and successful, lifelong learners.

The district is joined by a team of parents and the community to assist our students in developing skills to become independent and self-sufficient adults able to succeed and contribute responsibly in a global community.

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Execution

Support, participation and involvement in this plan is vital – particularly teachers and school administrators who are highly influential sources of information to students and parents/guardians, and often the first point of contact with the primary external audience. The entire primary internal audience carries the message and the image of the school district to their families and friends who, in turn, form opinions about the schools and the programs and services being delivered in those schools. In essence, the primary internal audience are Comox Valley Schools’ ambassadors.

The process of communicating information to stakeholders is an integral component of effective decision-making. The communications framework is focused on stakeholder involvement, which is separated into five levels on a sliding scale of engagement moving across the spectrum from *Inform* to *Empower*

- Inform: Provide timely information about board and administrative decisions made, and activities and events across the district.
- 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 Comox Valley Schools and the communities it serves.

²ENGAGEMENT 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, social media feeds and blogs, mainstream media	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

² Board Policy Manual, Board Operation 1-12 *Framework for Communications and Community Engagement*, Adopted June 2017.

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TASKS

Successful strategies in school communication requires a myriad of tasks to be executed simultaneously – from core program areas (i.e., effective communication plans, research and evaluation strategies, media relations, marketing, internal communication, public engagement, and parent involvement, etc.) to crisis management, emerging issues planning and response, social media communication technologies, and education advocacy.

Crisis management is addressed in a separate document to support the District’s Emergency Response Plan.

Specific tasks will achieve more than one goal at one time. The table identifies what tasks are needed to meet the Communication Objectives of the district. Outcomes are measured in a number of ways from quantitative results such as an increase in media coverage and social media impressions to qualitative results, indicated by changes in attitudes improved relationships with stakeholder groups, increasing involvement in district initiatives such as community engagement.

TASKS	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
<p>Associated goal: Implement a Communications Program that is focused on consistent, inclusive, open and transparent two-way communication.</p> <p><i>Harness the power of student, teacher and school stories to engage both internal and external audiences.</i></p>	
<p>Media Relations - The news media are an important vehicle through which the district keeps the electorate accurately informed and increases public awareness of education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased mainstream media interest and coverage (Print, Digital, Radio). • Media monitoring and analysis: positive coverage increases within one year. • Minimum of one unique initiative, achievement from every school featured in a school year. • Establish media distribution service for ease in news submissions outside local region.
<p>Continuous use of Social Media -Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube posts that support and enforce the district’s mission, vision and values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number and frequency of postings highlights, achievements and human-interest stories and school/student successes. • Post insights and analysis continue upward trend in views, reach and engagement. • DPAC/PAC feedback indicates greater use of and appreciation for these media platforms. • Increase the use of video coverage on YouTube channel to highlight district achievements through video story telling.

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TASKS	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
Develop a district-wide Social Media Guideline for schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark participation rate of schools within first year.
Implement a “ issues framing process ” to identify topics of concern for which succinct, clear messages are required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early detection of emerging issues established when senior leadership and/or board’s confidence in communication objectives increased. Creation of a library of Talking Points and Media Response Lines (MRLS) and, as applicable Factsheets, Backgrounders in advance of community engagement and media interest. Ex.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FSA LRFP Education Program Review Budget Calendar Applicable internal audience be the first informed always on an issue action plan. Identify and train spokespersons how to message and use MRLs to address topic/issue beginning in Jan 18 and ongoing.
Create Superintendent’s (District) Blog – Regular posts of 2-3 stories and District News accompanied by engaging pictures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly posts. Increase blog readership continuously throughout year and benchmark follower rate. Share “vetted” comments on blog and benchmark commenters’ rate after one year.
Include paid advertising (online, print and radio) in the media mix for targeted communication campaigns to achieve specific marketing objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate resources allocated to marketing and advertising annually, identified at start of each school year.

Associated goal: Build trust and garner support in the district, board and schools by ensuring stakeholders have timely access to information about education initiatives, issues, programs and activities in our schools.

Create a Speaker’s Bureau Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key spokesperson from Board and senior management to represent district at business and community events. Create official COMOX VALLEY SCHOOLS “<i>Who we Are, What We Do, Why We Do It</i>” slide deck for stakeholder outreach opportunities within local community. Purchase a Chamber of Commerce membership to have ease in access to stakeholder groups to whom Comox Valley Schools can present.
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TASKS	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
Identify and empower School Communication Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize <i>Media Reps</i> group with representatives from each district school; implement a system to report up to district Communications Consultant of events, stories, initiative deserving of public and media attention – Jan/Feb 2018.
Provide increased opportunities for face-to-face communication with Comox Valley Schools district leaders and Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased attendance from stakeholders and community at regular and education meetings with board – benchmark after a year.
<p align="center">Associated goal: Foster strong relationships by providing opportunities for stakeholder engagement in public education.</p>	
<p>Community Engagement –Acceptance of responsibility of public education success by community is essential to provide an excellent educational program to all students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct regular research to invite feedback and promote two-way, open communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop public consultation and feedback sessions supported by a robust social media marketing to garner awareness, interest and participation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> LRFP Education Program Review Budget Calendar
Establish standards and practices regarding communications for school administrators to implement for school-home communication practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark or audit what is currently used - newsletters, email, Synervoice, website - against a new standardized system for consistency within schools and across the district. Standards implemented by administrators within 12 months. Standards created and shared with DPAC/PACs.
Establish standards and practices regarding communications for trustees to implement for trustee - Community communication practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark or audit what is currently used. Standards implemented by trustees within 12 months. Standards created and shared with DPAC/PACs
Strengthen internal communications . Establish a culture of team commitment and understanding staff, employees, educators and administrators are district ambassadors. <i>“Supporting students by Empowering Employees”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal sharing of timely, relevant open and two-way communication part of everyday operations – benchmark after a year. HR and Communications interact closely with messaging to internal staff and their respective unions. Benchmark relationships with unions after one year.

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TASKS	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
<p>Associated goal: Enhance and protect the district’s brand. <i>Ex: Our brand is public education; our strength is community</i></p>	
<p>Develop a new robust district website to ensure consistent branding and provision of COMOX VALLEY SCHOOLS information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of website navigation to find key information using the “two clicks away” principle – target implementation date start of 2018/19 school year • Standardize website template for consistency for all the district’s school websites
<p>Redesign district logo with new tagline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an ad-hoc committee with representation across district to in developing a logo with supporting tagline representative of the district and the region and students we serve - COMPLETE
<p>Review and Renewal of Strategic Priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide staff with many opportunities to participate in the review process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Face-to-face meetings; b. Surveys; and c. Anonymous input options <p>Earmarked for 2018/19 school year.</p>

Evaluation

Execution of effective communication activities in a timely and relevant manner is important in achieving communication objectives. Often overlooked yet equally important is evaluating the communication activities. This plan will incorporate a continuous evaluation cycle that will assess the information needs of each target audience, examine how well information is reaching target audiences, measure desirable outcomes or impact of the information, and integrate those observations into subsequent communication activities.

Communication evaluation should not solely focus on output: measuring communication performance (e.g. number of press releases issued, social media impressions, etc.). More important is to measure outcomes: did communication activities result in any opinion, attitude change from a target audience(s)? Increase participation and collaboration from community engagement activities? Foster stronger relationships with audiences? Enhance the district's brand reputation and reach throughout the Comox Valley?

Key Spokespersons

One or more of the following spokespersons are identified as appropriate subject matter expert (SME) to speak on matters pertaining to the district and will vary depending on the communication outcome expected to be achieved, and the topic or nature of the media request or speaking engagement. Spokesperson needs to be properly briefed in advance on the matter being discussed, addressed or queried with the necessary accompanying Talking Points (TPs) or Media Response Lines (MRLs) that shall be prepared by the Manager of Communications and Community Engagement in collaboration with SMEs.

1. Superintendent of Schools;
2. Assistant Superintendent;
3. Director of Operations;
4. Secretary-Treasurer;
5. Board Chair or delegated representative;
6. Director of Instructional Services (K-12);
7. Director of Instruction (Student Services);
8. Director of Human Resources
9. Manager of Health & Safety;
10. Respective school principals or delegated representative; and
11. Others (i.e. staff or student, if appropriate and applicable).

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Coordination and Budget

The execution of the Communication Plan will be managed by the Manger of Communication and Community Engagement as directed by the superintendent with approved funding as required to support the communications tasks and activities identified in this plan.

Contact Information

School District No. 71 Comox Valley
607 Cumberland Rd.
Courtenay, British Columbia
V9N 7G5
Tel 250-334-5500

