SCHOOL DISTRICT No.69 (QUALICUM)

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Prepared for the Board of Education
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at the request of Dr. Keven Elder, Superintendent of Schools
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We would like to acknowledge that School District 69 exists within the territories of Coast Salish People and within the shared traditional territories of Qualicum and Snaw-Naw-As First Nations.

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Objective of this plan

The purpose of the SD69 External Communications Plan is to provide clear and concise guidance for communications with our district community and the public. This updated plan provides background information and guidelines to inform staff communication activities.

Goals of the external communications plan

1.   Implement ongoing communication strategies that are focused on consistent, inclusive, open, and transparent communications.

2.   Build trust and garner support in the district and school communities by ensuring stakeholders and the public have timely access to information about district initiatives, issues, programs, and activities.

3.   Foster strong relationships by providing opportunities for stakeholder engagement in public education.

4.   Enhance and appropriately represent the district's identity/brand.

Audiences

There are many potential external audiences that need to be considered within a district communications plan. Highlighting that students are at the centre of our district strategic priorities, the following target audiences inform public-facing communications and strategies within the plan.

Primary audience

- Students
- Parents, guardians, families
- Staff

Secondary audience

- Community partners, including:
    o Parent Advisory Councils
    o Union partners
    o Residents
    o Businesses
    o Municipalities
    o Non-profit agencies
    o Media
    o Prospective residents and parents considering a move to the region
    o Prospective employees and teacher-candidates currently in Faculties of Education
    o Post-Secondary institutions
    o Provincial and federal government agencies and officials
    o Global community
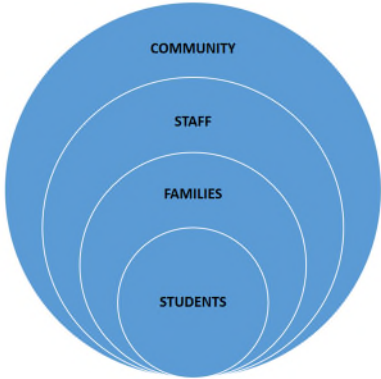
Key messages

The following key messages synthesize our district's Strategic Plan, represent who we are as a district and what we value, and inform communications about our district.

- SD69 Vision Statement: Preparing today's learners for tomorrow's world. *Intruisons nos jeunes pour la monde demain.*
- Student-centred learning (encompassing the heart, body, mind, and spirit) is the primary focus of what we do.
- The health and well-being of all in our district community is foundational to a sense of belonging and continued growth.
- Parents and the broader community are our partners in education.
- People are the most valuable asset in our organization; supporting their continued learning in deep and purposeful ways makes a difference to student learning and educational innovation.
- Meaningful, focussed collaboration fosters quality teaching and leadership.
- Innovation, professional growth and system improvement are constant drivers of practice in our district.
- Everyone has a role to play in social responsibility and environmental sustainability.
- Our district community values sense of place and community.

Implementation of the External Communications Plan

Both school-based and district staff play an important role in implementing an external communications plan. Principals/vice principals and teachers are influential sources of information to students and parent/guardians, and are usually the first point of contact with this audience. As such, ensuring that employees are both aware of and know how to support the district's external communications plan is a critical implementation strategy. For example, if school-based staff know what key messages need to be highlighted in our district's external communications, they will be better able to target and share student learning stories for public-facing communication opportunities. Similarly, district staff tasked with implementing external communication strategies need to align their efforts with the district's key messages and with the targeted audiences in mind.

In our district, everything we do starts with our students - their sense of belonging and their learning growth. We know that relationships and collaboration are key to our learners' ongoing success, so we take the time to grow and sustain meaningful connections with families and community partners, and foster strong school communities with our students and staff. For example, at my school…

External communications strategies

1. District website - Optimize our virtual public facing presence

We are committed to continuous renewal and improvement of our district's public facing website. This action is an ongoing opportunity to enhance communications with our stakeholders and the public about our district community.

The design and content of an organization's public facing website can communicate its identity in a clear and user-friendly way. By taking stock of what is important to our district community (including who we are, what we do, for whom do we do it, and what we are accomplishing), we can inform the development and design of the website so that it conveys our district's identity as well as becomes an enhanced and beneficial communication tool.

Branding communicates our district's identity in a readily accessible way to the public. Our current district tagline, "Preparing today's learners for tomorrow's world" continues to be contemporary and applicable as a general identity statement. It may be time to review the district's present-day values and assets to assess the currency of the logo as the district's identity representation, and to ascertain what information and initiatives to showcase on the refreshed public facing website. For example, the Board may want to consider updating the current logo to one that represents some of the key values that have been recently spotlighted in the district, including environmental stewardship and social justice.

Considerations

Audiences
- External (incl. primary and secondary audiences)
- Internal (incl. students, staff, union partners, leadership; how public-facing messaging communicates our district's collective identity)

Content
- Highlight district features and stories that
  - showcase student learning activities, accomplishments, and artwork
  - attract interest and support from our external audiences
  - enhance shared understanding, and foster sense of common purpose and pride for our internal audiences
- Publish district information that clarifies responsibility areas and contact details for accessibility
- Provide background information that encourages community understanding and support for changes in learning at our schools

Design
- Incorporate images that represent who we are and what we value as a district community
- Timely updates to sustain interest in and support for educational directions
- User-friendly (see Appendix A on page 10)

Framework for the district's public facing website presence

A framework can be a useful tool to inform the design and content of the district's public facing website for staff. This framework captures School District 69's identity features in a clear and concise format, and addresses the following questions:
- What matters most?
- What needs to be profiled?

Guiding question	District Identity Features	Website Structure/Strategy

What matters most in our district?	• Strategic plan priorities:
	  ○ Student-Centered Learning
	  ○ Quality Teaching and Leadership
	  ○ Social-Emotional Learning
	• Indigenous lens, incl. First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Enhancement Agreement 2015-2020 goals (Note: A new agreement is in progress at this time and will be added to this plan once completed.)
	• Environmental stewardship and Climate Action
	• Equity and social justice
		Determined by staff in relationship to features listed on the left:
		e.g.
		Landing page that articulates priorities, incl. background image that aligns with identity
		• An "about" page for Board of Education, incl. photos and descriptor (and other related items as link from there)
		• Page listing district staff responsibilities and contact info
		• Strategy to manage immediate updates, like news releases?
		• Accessibility to information and contacts
		• Way to display current events in the district
		• Banner, incl. links to read more

What needs to be profiled on our website?	• Student learning stories, accomplishments, artwork, etc. • School stories that relate to the above identity features, etc. • Green initiatives • Reconciliation activities • Upcoming district meetings and events • Specialty programs • Innovative learning initiatives • District departments • Community partenrships? • Other?	e.g. • Showcase student stories and artwork as design feature wherever appropriate (i.e. as scrolling images on landing pages) • Pages to elaborate information, ongoing work, and/or accomplishments in identity feature areas • Accessible calendars showing committee meetings and events, etc. • Leverage social media for regular immediate updates- Twitter feed? • Regular news releases related to identity features • Other?

Strategies:
- ➢ Ensure district website is appropriately staffed to build and maintain an effective external website presence, including webpage design. Current status requires staff to create webpages as extra tasks beyond their regular duties and/or time and/or capacity.
- ➢ Create means by which district staff can populate content to their pages on an ongoing basis.

   NOTE: Framework for the district's internal website presence

2. Publicity – Enhancing media communications

Media relations
The media provide an important vehicle through which the district can keep the public informed about what the district is doing related to the key messages, as well as increase public awareness about current directions in education.
Strategy:
- ➢ Leverage our district's positive relationship with the staff at Parksville Qualicum Beach News to regularly publishing articles about district activities and school stories.
- ➢ Increase frequency of broadcasting information and learning stories through local radio stations.

Social media
Currently our district has a Twitter handle @SD69Qualicum as our primary social media tool. Frequency of use is variable at this time. Targeting key messages from the district external communications plan and following related school-based and district initiatives to post to our Twitter account on a regular basis and in real time will enhance and reinforce our district identity and values. Twitter is a popular social media platform in the education sector, and the more interesting and valuable content we post, including retweeting relevant school-based tweets, the more likely the district will increase its followers, from both internal and external audiences. Posting our Twitter feed to the public facing website can provide an additional way to share with the public in an immediate fashion.
Strategies:
- ➢ Support schools with social media communications (such as Twitter) to highlight student learning and success stories, and highlight work related to key messages.
- ➢ Enhance district social media activity. Increase frequency of student learning stories related to district key messages in the media and social media. The Director of Instruction can liaise between schools and media, and post to Twitter on @SD69Qualicum, proactively seeking and sharing celebratory stories and innovations.

3. Promotions

Presentations to targeted audiences
In-person and virtual speaking engagements about education initiatives and activities can build awareness and garner support of stakeholders and community partners.

Community events
Community events are an opportunity for prospective students and families, as well as the general public, to learn about what is happening in our district and schools, and can open informal communication channels among staff, students and their parents, and the local community. They may be in-person or virtual.

Presence with community partners
The Oceanside community hosts numerous organizations and service groups with whom the district could liaise on a regular basis. Senior staff and trustees may be able to extend the connections that they already have with organizations such as the Parksville and Qualicum Beach Chambers of Commerce,

local Rotary clubs, and other agencies. Although the Superintendent is a frequent visitor and presenter, school district representatives could make more frequent presentations or at the least be sure to visit events hosted by those organizations on a more regular basis.

Strategies:
- ➢ Ensure continued presence at events and staying connected with community.
- ➢ Create a subset of the communications plan which speaks to these outreach options and the best ways to actuate such a plan to ensure successful implementation.
- ➢ Develop presentations about the district's education initiatives and activities related to key messages for stakeholder outreach opportunities in the local community. Showcase learning and educational programs as appropriate (e.g., district specialty programs during registration). The Director of Instruction and district staff can present to targeted groups and at community events to enhance awareness and share information, as well as coordinate and/or host events.
- ➢ Keep a record of promotional activities and highlights. Present bi-annual reports to the Board of Education about what activities have occurred and to which community audiences.

4. Ways for the Board of Education to interact with families, staff, and the community

Committees of the Whole

Allowing for a less formal exchange of ideas and views between regular board meetings, monthly committee meetings with Board members and district staff are open to stakeholders and the public. Discussions include presentations, dialogue, and opportunities to ask questions, and may, at times, lead to recommendations to the Board. These committees include: the Education Committee of the Whole, the Policy Committee of the Whole, and the Finance & Operations Committee of the Whole.

Strategy:
- ➢ Ensure that communication from each committee of the whole meeting to each subsequent public board meeting is framed in a way that, as the report becomes public, it is clear and public/media ready, both in terms of celebrating successes and attending to challenges.

Town hall meetings

Opportunities for the Board of Education to share information and hear from the community about topics of interest. For example, recent town hall meetings through Zoom webcasting have provided the forum for timely information sharing and answering questions about the BC K-12 Education Restart Plan and the safety guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and these meetings have been well-attended and well-received by families and the community.

Strategy:
- ➢ As emergent issues and the need to glean family perspectives arise, the Board of Education can continue to invite discussion and questions through town hall meetings, either in-person or virtual, depending on context (e.g., Who is the target audience and which format is more readily accessible for their participation?)

Assessment

A continuous assessment cycle to monitor the effectiveness of strategies within an external communications plan is essential to its effectiveness.

Strategy:
- ➢ Monitoring effectiveness may include:
  - o qualitative evidence - such as surveying users about their experiences on the website, and reviewing communication outcomes for shifts in awareness about district initiatives within targeted audiences;

- - - o quantitative data - such as frequency indicators (e.g., increase in Twitter posts or visits to the district website)
  - ➢ The Director of Instruction can provide reports to the Board on communication strategy assessments as required.

Resources

- ➢ Strength - Our district communications benefit from the leadership and support of our dedicated District Principal and Information Technology Team.
- ➢ Enhancement considerations:
  - o Additional staffing time would enable ongoing and immediate district website maintenance, including regularly checking for issues and keeping it updated and relevant.
  - o Budget allocation to contract for services, such as web design.

Framework for the district's internal website presence

The internal communications component (or back side) of the website, which is accessed by staff, will require redesign to ensure its representation is aligned with the public facing side. This redesign includes the need for consistency of messaging within all forms of digital communications, effective and efficient internal structures, and improved navigation and access to key resources. Student access to district email accounts, digital portfolios, and learning resources (such as ERAC classroom databases) occurs within the back side of the website as well. This access will also require modernization of its user interface.

APPENDIX A - Characteristics of user-friendly websites

- Less is more (i.e. not too wordy, to the point headers, make use of links to more information, etc.)
- A picture is worth a thousand words (i.e. images to represent concepts, infographics like charts and diagrams, images like arrows and buttons to guide users, etc.)
- Aesthetics matter (i.e. colours elicit emotional responses, importance of white space to avoid clutter, letter fonts, *rule of thirds*, etc.)
- Familiar conventions support navigation (i.e. menus at top, contact info. at bottom, clickable logo at top to return to home page, search bar at top, etc.)
- Consistency supports navigation (such as all of the above conventions on every page)
- Flow (information flows in a logical and easy to follow pattern, English readers tend to scan in E Format when online)
- Effective user experience (test for mobile-friendly, audience legibility and readability, intuitive, search engine, load time, accessibility on differing operating systems, etc.)
- Timely updates…needs to be staff-friendly to manage and maintain the site
- Maximizing Social Media (e.g., Twitter, blogs, etc.)