

## Policy 2 Role of the Board Appendix D

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### BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place”  
George Bernard Shaw*

The Board and Superintendent form one of the most important teams in Northland School Division and as such the communication between them needs to be very strong and effective. This appendix is designed to help enhance communication and is not intended in any way to interfere with the roles and responsibilities, or authority of either.

These guidelines are in addition to the guidelines about communication in policies:

- Policy 2 Role of the Board;
- Policy 3 Role of Trustee, Policy 3 Appendix B Trustee Working Relationships
- Policy 5 Role of Chair
- Policy 12 Role of Superintendent

#### **GUIDELINES**

##### **A. GOLDEN RULES OF COMMUNICATION**

- a. Model Policy 1 Foundational Statements at all times (*see also Policy 2 Role of Board, Policy 3 Role of Trustee*)
- b. Remember to deposit into other’s emotional bank accounts with the words you choose and the way you say them.
- c. Keep confidential information, confidential – no exceptions.
- d. Before sharing information from a conversation ensure the person who provided you the information is okay with you sharing it.
- e. Confirm understanding of communication:
  - i. Email follow up to phone conversations to ensure understanding and a record of information shared and actions to occur where feasible. Generally administration will follow up with email however trustee too has a responsibility to ensure there is understanding.
- f. Remember decision-making is made up of an education perspective and political (community) perspective.
- g. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

##### **B. EDUCATION PROGRAMS/INITIATIVES** (*see also Policy 12 Role of Superintendent*).

- a. Engage the Board with regard to the structure and community engagement process of significant, or potentially controversial, education initiatives/programs. When determining what items involve significant change, or have the potential to be controversial, the following factors are for consideration:
  - i. Traditions, cultures and practices vary extensively by community;
  - ii. Potential for it to be controversial - the larger the change being proposed, the higher the chance for controversy.
  - iii. Using the services of an elder, expert or consultant outside of the division.

- b. Engage the Board to provide input and/or approval as required into major education initiatives such as, but not limited to:
  - i. Approval and implementation of locally developed courses;
  - ii. Major program initiatives: Flexible learning, family wellness workers program, 5 year investment funding;
  - iii. Attendance;
  - iv. Land based learning framework;
  - v. Pilot projects;
  - vi. School year calendar concept.

C. **HUMAN RESOURCES** (see also *Policy 16 Recruitment & Selection of Personnel*)

- a. Through various processes, practices and communication the Board should become certain that Northland has strong human resources policies and procedures so they can confidently say “we have good, lawful and fair processes and they are being followed in all instances”.

D. **INFORMATION SHARING** (see also *Policy 12 Role of Superintendent*)

- a. Superintendent shall keep the Board informed about what is going on in the division ahead of the public knowing:
  - i. To enable them to fulfill their role effectively;
  - ii. Ensure they have the information they need so they can answer questions in a professional, informed manner, for example:
    - 1. If there is something that has a possible political implication that may cause a trustee to have to respond to the community;
    - 2. Major staff changes (i.e. teacher transfers, appt. of senior staff, principals, staff termination);
    - 3. A critical incident in the division.
  - iii. Division initiatives that might result in questions to trustees from their communities:
    - 1. Purpose of professional development, especially a session involving a lot of Northland (Why is everyone going to Edmonton; What is the purpose of the session(s))
    - 2. Northland Games – where they are; how they work; who goes, etc.
- b. Trustees shall keep the Superintendent informed about communities to help ensure he/she can fulfill their role effectively.
  - i. Equipping him/her with all information to help make great decisions or handle issues/concerns effectively.
- c. Superintendent shall keep the Board will be informed of division media releases 1-2 hours prior to their release with the exception of media releases by schools about school events. Notwithstanding this exception:
  - i. The chair will receive all media releases prior to their release, with time to provide input;
  - ii. Social media releases related to things that could be politically sensitive will be approved by the superintendent and perhaps the chair based on the item;
  - iii. Questions about any media release are to be directed to the superintendent.

E. **ISSUES** (see also Policy 12 Role of Superintendent)

- a. Trustees need to be informed as soon as possible when a critical incident occurs so they are not “blind-sided” and also so they are prepared to answer questions.
- b. If Associate or Superintendent sends out information about an incident, trustees should provide them with any additional information they have about the incident. Even if not sure if the information is accurate it should be shared, it will be considered and researched before using it in any way.
- c. There is understanding that Superintendent cannot always share complete/exact details with trustees due to privacy and/or process rules.
  - i. Example: An incident occurred between 2 staff members, you may hear about it, if you do please let me know what you hear right away; appropriate action is being taken, will keep you informed as quickly as I can.
- d. Board needs to be confident something is being dealt with, maybe not exactly what is being done (if confidential) but that something (process) is occurring. This is part of their governance monitoring role but also helps prepare them answer questions within the community. Might not have political implication but important for the board to know.
- e. Inform board what incident has happened;
  - i. Include information about what is being done process wise;
  - ii. Keep them up to date on process as move forward, including some information about what is occurring not just that something is occurring;
  - iii. If sensitive, include information about what can and cannot be shared;
  - iv. Include suggestions on how to answer possible answers, especially if it is a sensitive issue.
- f. Communication of decisions shall generally be shared with the Board prior to the decision going public:
  - i. Let the board know about principal or key position hires, promotions or any other substantial change 1-2 hours prior to it going public;
  - ii. Inform board of substantive staff discipline type incidents with as much information as allowable;
  - iii. The Board shall not hear about the transfers of a teacher prior to the public as transfers are appealable to the Board.

F. **CONCERNS** (see also Policy 3 Role of Trustee Appendix B Trustee Working Relationships Guidelines)

- a. Trustee is to advise the Associate Superintendent immediately when hear a concern:
  - i. If advise via email, cc to Superintendent;
  - ii. If speak with the Associate on the phone follow up with an email re-outlining the concern with a cc to the Superintendent;
  - iii. Associate will acknowledge the information and give an idea of a timeline for resolving;
  - iv. Trustee will follow up with an email to the Associate (cc to Superintendent) if do not hear back within timeline;
  - v. Associate (cc to Superintendent) shall advise the trustee when the concern is resolved, providing as much information as allowable.

- b. Trustees should always follow up with the person regarding the concern to ensure it is resolved.
- c. Trustees are responsible to communicate a concern directly with the Associate/Superintendent and not ask or assume the Chair will take it forward.

**G. TRUSTEES ROLE IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION** (see also Policy 3 Role of a Trustee)

- a. Keep confidential information, confidential – no exceptions.
- b. Check emails, text and voicemails and answer in a timely manner.
- c. Respond to requests with regard to travel ASAP, don't make staff chase you or feel like "nags". Try to keep changes to a minimum.
  - i. If you don't respond do not assume arrangements will be made for you.
- d. Ask the Associate/Superintendent to provide you with an "answer" to what is being said, a way to "lay the issue to rest".
- e. Don't immediately assume what you hear is true, work with Associate and/or Superintendent to get down to facts.
  - i. When told something negative about Northland, acknowledge the information and indicate you will look into it and get back to them;
    - 1. Ask questions to get details on where the information came from to help get down to facts.
  - ii. Always "challenge" negative comments (in a polite way) if you know they are not correct:
    - 1. Ask the person about the comment, where did it come from, share what you know, try to dispel the comment.
- f. If you aren't sure – ask.