

## **Appendix E**

### **Guidelines for Trustee Communications**

#### **1.0 Purpose**

The Thames Valley District School Board recognizes that communications are an integral part of the role of its elected Trustees. Effective communications enhance the ability of Trustees to represent their constituency, encourage public participation, build understanding and consensus in the community, to relay information, and to promote student achievement and well-being. The intent of this guideline is to promote innovative, consistent, and appropriate communications between Trustees and their constituents. This guideline addresses written communication, verbal communication, communication tools and resources, appropriate communication protocol, and inappropriate communications.

#### **2.0 Trustee Communications – Written**

Trustee written communications may take place in a variety of forms including, but not limited to, trustee newsletters, mailed letters, email, and social media.

##### **2.1 Trustee Newsletters**

Trustee Newsletter can be an effective tool for sharing information with constituents regarding the role of Trustees, Board policies, decisions made by the Board, Ministry of Education initiatives, Board events, recognition of student achievement, and resources that are beneficial to student well-being. Newsletters shall promote the vision and mission of the Thames Valley District School Board and should never reflect negatively on the Board, its staff, schools, or other Trustees. The communication must be presented as reflecting only the personal opinion of the individual Trustee and not an official Board document.

The content of newsletters are to be subject to editorial review by the Chair's committee prior to distribution and any expense associated with the newsletter is the responsibility of the Trustee and ineligible for reimbursement. Once approved for distribution, a copy of the newsletter shall be provided as information to the rest of the Trustees, the Director of Education, the Communications Department, relevant superintendents, and relevant principals.

##### **2.2 Letters**

From time-to-time a letter may be deemed an appropriate form of communication with constituents. Trustees may use Board letterhead to send congratulations, to provide special recognition of student achievement, or to thank a community member for a significant contribution that directly benefits student achievement and well-being. Any correspondence produced by a

Trustee on Board-issued letterhead must be approved by the Chair of the Board prior to distribution.

### **2.3 Email**

Email is the preferred form of communication with constituents, staff, and trustees. Expected procedures to be followed by a Trustee receiving a communication via email or by some other electronic means are:

- When an email is addressed to all Trustees, the Chair of the Board shall address the matter, and a courtesy copy (cc) of the response shall be provided to the other Trustees.
- When an email has been addressed to a member of staff, and copied to one or more Trustees, staff shall respond to the email and provide a courtesy copy (cc) of the response to each Trustee copied in the correspondence.
- Trustees should not respond to email correspondence on which they have been copied (cc'd) and should only respond to email correspondence sent directly to their attention. It is up to the trustee to touch base with the trustee secretary to ensure the email is directed to them.
- If an email comes to a Trustee from a constituent not from their area, then it is to be forwarded to the Trustee(s) representing that area.
- Recognizing that email is not a secure vehicle of communication, Trustees shall never use email to communicate sensitive or confidential information.
- If a different form of contact other than email was used to communicate with a Trustee, then it is appropriate for the Trustee to correspond with that means of communication while also relaying information via email to fellow Trustees and the appropriate Board Administrators

### **2.4 Social Media**

Social media refers to online technology tools that enable people and organizations to communicate, collaborate, and share information and resources over the internet. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, X, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, and websites.

- Board authorization is not required for a Trustee to open a personal or professional social media account.
- Trustees should use social media with the same level of professionalism and responsibility as they would when officially representing the Board.
- Online postings should remain positive - do not engage in negative or critical conversations online.

- Retweets, likes, and favourites could be perceived as endorsements - always check before sharing.
- Search hashtags (#) before using them to ensure they are appropriate and positive.
- Photos are a great way to highlight what is happening at the Board, but identifiable photos should only be used if those students in the photograph, or parents of those students, have given informed written consent.
- Accounts should be updated and monitored regularly, and offensive material must be removed within 24 hours of notice.
- Be mindful of the TVDSB policy on equity and inclusive education and the Ontario Human Rights Code when posting content and all Board policies and other regulations.
- Gathering information for social media use should not be disruptive in any public meeting or event.
- In accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Trustees shall not divulge personal information related to the Board's students or staff.

### **3.0 Trustee Communication – Verbal**

Trustee verbal communications may take place in a variety of forms including, but not limited to, individual communications and public speaking, video messaging, and media relations.

#### **3.1 Individual Communications and Public Speaking**

Trustees will communicate in one-on-one conversations with individual constituents, through interviews with the media, and to public gatherings at school and community events. These communications can be an effective way to promote the Thames Valley District School Board mission and vision to others and to promote student achievement and well-being. Requests for official communications should come through the Chair.

- When speaking, Trustees should communicate as clearly, and as accurately as possible.
- As a general rule, the Chair of the Board, will speak for the Board unless delegated by the Chair to a fellow Trustee.
- Consistent with the *Education Act*, individual trustees shall uphold decisions of the Board even if they personally disagree and must be able to explain the rationale for the decision.
- When conveying a personal statement, the Trustee must identify it as a personal opinion and not the opinion of the Board.
- Trustees shall not communicate as individuals about student or staff discipline or matters of negotiation unless designated by the Chair to do so.

- In accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information* and the protection of *Privacy Act*, Trustees shall not divulge personal information related to the Board's students or staff.
- Any public statement should aim to promote student achievement and well-being in the Board. Public statements should avoid criticism of the intentions or actions of other Trustees, staff, parents, or students. Public statements should be consistent with the Board's mission and vision.

### 3.2 Video Messages

A Trustee video message can be an effective tool for sharing information with constituents regarding the role of Trustees, Board policies, decisions made by the Board, Ministry of Education initiatives, Board events, recognition of student achievement, and resources that are beneficial to student well-being. The video message shall promote the vision and mission of the Thames Valley District School Board and should never reflect negatively on the Board, its staff, schools, the Ministry of Education, or other Trustees. The communication must be presented as reflecting only the personal opinion of the individual Trustee.

The content of a video message is subject to editorial review by the Chair's committee prior to distribution. The expense is the responsibility of the Trustee making the video message and is ineligible for reimbursement. Once approved, a copy of the video message shall be provided as information to Trustees, the Director of Education, the Communications Department, superintendents, and principals, as appropriate.

### 3.3 Media Relations

Trustees may be contacted by media officials. The following should be kept in mind when responding to media requests:

- Only the Chair of the Board or their designate will act as the official spokesperson for the Board although this does not bar Trustees from speaking to the media.
- When speaking or corresponding with the media, individual Trustees shall not present an opinion as the position of the Board, unless they have been authorized to speak on the subject by the Chair of the Board.
- When speaking or corresponding with the media, individual Trustees shall uphold the decision of the Board and the implementation of any Board resolution once it has been passed.
- When speaking with the media, individual Trustees should clearly identify as personal opinions any statement or positions that are not necessarily those of the Board.

- At a minimum, a Trustee contacted by the media should inform the Chair, the Trustee Secretary, and Director's Secretary, of an interview, if the Trustee will be commenting on system-wide issues.

#### **4.0 Communication Tools and Resources**

Recognizing that communication is an essential component of a Trustee's role and responsibilities Board-issued letterhead, and business cards will be made available to each Trustee to assist them in this regard.

##### **4.1 Board-Issued Letterhead**

Upon request, each Trustee will be provided with Board-issued letterhead.

##### **4.2 Board-Issued Business Cards**

A supply of business cards will be issued to each Trustee. Board-issued business cards are to be used for the purpose of identifying the individual Trustee as a member of the Board, and as such, any contact information identified on the business card shall be consistent with the Trustee's Board contact information and should not correspond with a Trustee's business contact information.

#### **5.0 Appropriate Communication Protocol**

Trustees are often contacted by parents with concerns about their child's education. Trustees must always encourage parents to follow the appropriate communication protocol. Refer to the Public Concerns Policy and Resolving Public Concerns Procedure.

#### **6.0 Inappropriate Communications**

Inappropriate communications or social media posts will be subject to review by the Chair's Committee. Trustees may be subject to feedback, warning, or discipline, as recommended by the Chair's Committee to the Board under the current Trustee Code of Conduct procedures found in the Bylaws.