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Board Development visit
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Effective Communications and Public Relations for Boards of Education

Module 14

Participate in this seminar to learn more about effective school system communications and public relations. Module 14 workshop and resource materials include these important topics:

- The value of effective communications and public relations;
- Ideas for dealing with difficult people;
- Ideas for developing a communications plan;
- Advocating for education and children; and,
- Ideas for communicating achievement information.

STEWARDSHIP

RELATIONSHIP

LEADERSHIP

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Introduction

A school division needs to examine whether its communication with the public is helping ensure a positive image. A positive image leads to public support for and confidence in its schools and in the school board.

School division public relations used to be about getting positive messages out; it was a one-way communication street designed to showcase the best of a school or district to gain community support. Today, school public relations is less about conveying information than it is about establishing and promoting partnerships within the community. Effective public relations means school divisions ask for and receive information just as much as they transmit it.

Because today's public demands accountability, school divisions have to provide ever more detailed information about their operations, policies and schools. School divisions must seek outsiders' input in areas that used to be the sole province of the board and its administrators.

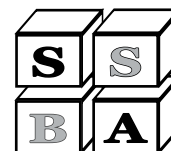
Children are the main interest of the various publics; especially the parents. In all policies, procedures and action plans, the needs of the children is always the primary reason for proceeding. Effective school boards continually advocate for better education as well as the physical and social needs of children. They adopt policies and protocol to assure the safety of students and prepare for crisis situations that might arise. They do this with acquired skill and confidence.

Similarly, school boards must gain the support of the community and decision makers. Education is not the only show in town and competition for adequate financing comes from numerous sectors of society. Board member skill in public relations is critical in these undertakings.

The essential part of gaining support for the school division is communicating the achievement of its students. Knowing what is to be conveyed and how to provide appropriate information is an important factor in gaining support.

Building Board Knowledge

1. How is the public image of your school division?



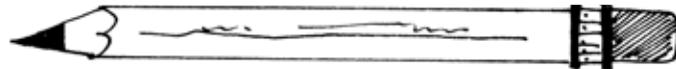
Public Relations

In an educational environment public relations has been defined as: “A planned and systematic, two-way process of communication intended to encourage public involvement [in schools and the school division] and to earn public understanding and support [for them].” (The National School Public Relations Association) Yet, Public Relations is more than communications in that it is more about relationships with students, staff, parents, non-parent members of the community than it is about provision of information.

Public relations includes a 4-step process to better insure the effectiveness of the work done:

- **Research** – Data gathering and listening.
- **Planning** – Timelines, responsibilities, and resources.
- **Communicating** – The action step that gets the word out.
- **Evaluating** – Determining the success of the initiative.

Notes



Importance of Public Relations

People will form opinions of what organizations do whether or not those organizations try to interpret their own activity. If school divisions don't speak up for themselves, other will—and public opinion will be out of control. So it makes sense for school divisions to get involved in interpreting their own activity to influence public opinion.

Today's educational system is much more complex than it was a few decades ago and it faces obstacles that were unheard of then, such as:

- **News Media Scrutiny** – Report disappointing academic performance to acts of violence by a few students.
- **Increased Competition** – The growing demands of other sectors of society that look to government for a greater proportion of funds.
- **Demographics** – Declining enrolments due to decreased population and birth rate, urbanization and the resulting decline in the number of school age children have resulted in an increased number of people who see themselves as having no personal stake in the success of education.
- **Rampant Cynicism** – Growing concern about the national and provincial economy, the integrity of business and government and organizational leadership have eroded trust in public institutions.

It is ironic that while schools have improved their educational services to better respond to an increasing demand of complex student needs in a knowledge economy, the perceptions lag behind the reality. Education is an issue that absorbs many public anxieties about values, cultures, race, crime, taxes, and jobs.

National support for increased public education funding is growing with an increase of support by almost 25% since 1986. Support in Saskatchewan parallels national support and is at nearly 80%.

The public feel they are receiving good value for their education dollar perhaps reflective of the consistently positive public reaction to the way education budgets were utilized. The results suggest that there is no significant public perception that current budgets could be cut or used more efficiently. In fact, increased funding for public education is supported by the vast majority and 80% of the population would be prepared to pay more taxes to support education.

Source: Bill Quine, STF Communications Consultant, Analysis of Research

Our Publics

Publics is plural in that different groups of people have different interests in what happens in schools and there is no one effective way of reaching all people the same way. When it comes to public relations and communications, it is helpful to think of grouping people into those with common needs and interests so that the messages and communications vehicles can be tailored to them.

Internal Publics

Those groups of people directly associated with the school system:

- Board members
- Administrators
- Principals
- Teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Secretaries
- Inter-agencies
- Support personnel
- Bus Drivers
- Maintenance workers
- Cafeteria workers
- Students

External Publics

Those people who are outside of the school family or who have an indirect relationship with the school or school system.

- Parents
- Businesses
- Civic groups
- Elected officials
- Media
- Gov't agencies
- Professionals
- Seniors
- Non-Parents

Effective communication with the various publics can be through mass communication or interpersonal contact. **Mass communication** is through the printed word (newsletters, memos, questionnaires, media). It is best used for providing information and creating interest. **Interpersonal communication** that is face-to-face or direct, is generally considered to be best for changing attitudes.

Communication Tips

- Know your audience (Who do you need to reach?);
- Know what message you want to convey;
- Keep the message simple for better understanding;
- Make your schools open and receptive to the public;
- Take time to listen;
- Provide opportunity to contribute to education by conveying goals, achievements, activities, and operations information;
- Recognize the achievements and contribution of staff, students, parents and the community;
- Inform concerned persons of their rights, privileges and responsibilities;
- Recognize the need for privacy in certain situations; and,
- Develop a communications plan.

Communications Plan

A communications plan is one that provides the means by which resources and information can be accessed, mobilized, managed, and coordinated in both normal and adverse situations. The educational communications system must, therefore, employ sufficient communications paths and operational capabilities among all participants to facilitate functional school division, school and public communications.

Communications Responsibilities of School Boards

Legislative enactments require Boards of Education to have the obligation to provide the following.

The Education Act, 1995 requires boards to:

- Have a policy manual;
- Make minutes of board meetings available;
- Have a policy that includes provisions for the expeditious investigation and treatment of problems arising in the relationships between a pupil and the school; and,
- Have an annual meeting of electors.

Occupational Health & Safety requires that boards have:

- A violence prevention policy; and,
- A harassment prevention policy.

The *Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* requires divulging:

- All information that is requested (subject to certain limitations)

While these requirements are minimums only, it is important for school boards to move beyond these and to undertake initiatives that will garner support for education and the students and engage parents and the community in the education of their children.

“The learning culture must be built on the assumption that communication and information are central to organizational well-being and must therefore create a multi-channel communication system that allows everyone to connect to everyone else. Leaders who want open, learning organizations create conditions permitting them to listen fully and accurately to all voices, both positive and negative.”

- School Public Relations Journal

Communications Plan Components

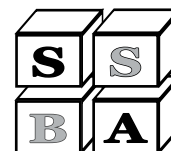
The definition of communications includes public relations, community relations, government advocacy and media relations.

Effective communications is proactive. Plans need to be in place before a crisis. The plan is not a one-time event. It should be implemented on a regular basis. The goal is to make the school division a credible, reliable and regular source of information.

A communications plan provides direction to the public relations initiative. It answers the questions: who?, what?, why?, how?, when?, with what resources? and with what success?

Building Board Knowledge

- 1. Does your school board have public relations and communications policies and plans?*



Developing a Communications Plan

Who needs to know?	What do they need to know?	Who will tell them?	How will they be informed?	By when?

The National School Public Relations Association suggest that the following components are critical to any communications project:

Target group: _____

1. **State the message** – What message do you wish to deliver?
2. **State the purposes for the project** – Why are you doing this? What do you hope to accomplish?
3. **List the procedures** – What are the tasks that need to be assigned? How are you going to accomplish this?
4. **Identify the resources needed** – What will you need to accomplish this?
5. **Develop a time line for the project** – When will you do it?
6. **Develop evaluation/assessment procedures** – How will you know whether your project had the desired effect/produced the desired results?

Communications Plan

Goal: To better inform the various publics of the _____ School Division.

Objectives

- To inform school staffs (principals, teachers, teacher associates, secretaries, janitors, and bus drivers);
- To inform Local Boards, Boards of Trustees or PTAs;
- To inform students, parents and the community;
- To be in contact with media to promote good programs; and,
- To meet with MLAs to inform and to influence policy.

Audiences

The school division recognizes the following audiences:

- School staffs including principals, teachers, teacher associates, janitors, and bus drivers.
- Local Boards, Boards of Trustees or PTAs
- Students, parents and the general public and community.
- The media
- MLAs

Messages

- Messages will vary depending on the audience and the objective.
- A prevailing message will be confidence in the board and the administration.
- At budget time, the board will convey the message of fiscal responsibility.
- In the time of a crisis, the board will reassure it is doing everything it can to ensure the safety of the students and staff, and to ensure such an incident will not happen again.

Means of Communicating (examples)

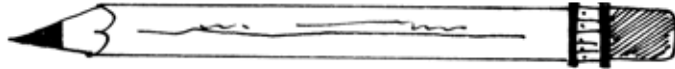
- Minutes of the division board meetings or a summary of the meeting can be distributed to many audiences;
- Media requests are to come through the board office;
- The board chairperson is the official spokesperson;
- The sub-division board member will prepare a regular report to the Board of Trustees;
- School newsletters to parents and the general public;
- Brochures may be done for special purposes;
- Website or email; and,
- Interpersonal communication – through local boards, etc.

The differences between information and communication underscore differences between managers and leaders. Managers push; leaders pull. Managers try to light a fire under people; leaders stoke the fire within. Managers focus on facts; leaders focus on feelings. Management is intellectual; leadership is emotional. Managers inform; leaders communicate.

Information	Communications
• Speaks to the head	• Engages the heart
• Monologue	• Dialogue
• Facts and results	• Stories and values
• Mostly written	• Mostly verbal
• Quantity	• Quality
• Provides updates	• Builds communion

Source: Jim Clemmer

Notes



A Model Public Relations/Communications Plan

Target Group: Senior Citizens

1. BRIEFLY STATE THE MESSAGE

- ◆ Seniors are valuable partners in education and are welcome in our schools.

2. PURPOSE(S) OF THE PROJECT

- ◆ To involve these valuable community resources in an active school role to help them share their talents and also, to provide services to them.
- ◆ To obtain feedback from these community residents about their views of the school program.

3. PROCEDURES

- ◆ Compile a list of senior citizens living in the immediate school neighbourhood. This can be done in several ways:
 - ◆ Parent/Student volunteers canvas neighbourhood
 - ◆ Contact local churches
 - ◆ Contact organized senior citizen clubs or groups
 - ◆ Contact senior citizen residences
- ◆ Send a letter to the senior citizens you have been able to identify with a survey about ways they actively participate in school:
 - ◆ Sharing their skills on crafts, photography, travel films, music, etc.
 - ◆ Serving as volunteers to help students with reading, math, etc.
 - ◆ Serving as volunteers to help produce the school newsletter
- ◆ Help identify those “at home” who need special attention (welcome cards and visits from students)
- ◆ Compile information and responses and set up meetings for those willing to work at the school. Invite them to a morning coffee or luncheon and show them the school. Explain the programs and activities and assign a special teacher or teachers with whom they will be working. Develop schedules and calendars for activities and see if one of the senior volunteers will take on the assignment of coordinator of senior citizens.

4. RESOURCES

- ◆ Postage for mailing
- ◆ Funds for breakfast or luncheon meeting
- ◆ Selection of teachers/assignments to work with senior citizens
- ◆ Selection of teacher/parent/volunteers to work with senior citizens at home

5. TIMING

- ◆ Project will begin on _____ and run for _____ weeks.
- ◆ Schedules for senior citizen activities will be developed by _____ and will run for _____ weeks.

6. ASSESSMENT

- ◆ Each senior citizen will be asked to complete an anonymous “reaction” form and leave it in the school office at the end of the first month of activities and again at the end of the first year of the program.

Dealing with Differing Opinions

For every organization there are people who are difficult to work with because of differing perspectives and issues with plans, operations or personalities. Similarly, pressure groups can create problems for school divisions because they have differing agendas. Effective school divisions and leaders are aware of these people and groups and avoid conflict by building rapport with them and by taking action to know their concerns. Concerns are addressed before they reach the school division formally.

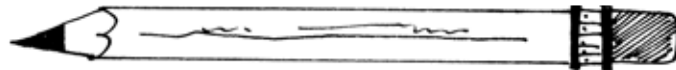
People have sufficient examples about credible leadership in the larger society to make them cynical about the leadership of most organizations. They know that institutions and governments respond when people stand up and make enough noise. Yet, the best way to work with these people is to be credible. To be immersed in truth, leadership must engage in the most difficult issues. Tell the truth about the facts as you know them and the feelings you experience. When dealing with an angry person, try to listen behind the anger and shouting to hear the pain and the fear. How you are perceived is more important than what you actually do.

Resolving Disputes

There is no enterprise more personal, nor involving of more human interaction than education. School divisions are well-served when they recognize that the human part of the educative process, the daily face-to-face contact with myriad players, reflects the way results may be achieved. The participants in the enterprise perceive their value to an organization, and their perceptions of the way they themselves are valued by others..

Human interaction sometimes leads to conflict. If that is viewed as a normal part of life, as a natural, predictable product of the interaction of people who have different perspectives, values, opinions, beliefs and interest, it can then be seen as a challenge and an opportunity. Conflict does not need to damage relationships; it can bring people together to work collaboratively on common problems.

Notes



It is valuable to view conflict as follows:

- Conflict is a disagreement between people;
- Conflict is natural, inevitable, unavoidable;
- Conflict is an interference or a frustration of needs, desires, fears, concerns, values;
- Conflict usually signals that a change is needed; and,
- Conflict can be an opportunity for growth.

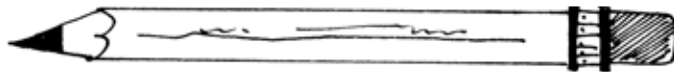
Those in conflict will more likely choose a constructive approach to resolving conflict which can have many positive effects:

- Expose underlying causes of conflict;
- Promote communication;
- Facilitate needed change and growth;
- Challenge imagination and creativity;
- Forge stronger partnerships;
- Provide mutually satisfactory and durable solutions; and,
- Develop skills and abilities for dealing with conflict.

Source: *Resolving Conflict Constructively*, Saskatchewan Justice

The basic approaches to conflict resolution are an adversarial approach or a collaborative approach. Adversarial problem solvers seek to win at any cost. Collaborative problem solvers believe that they are responsible for their conduct and hope that everyone wins.

Notes



School board members might be best served to promote leadership and school administration that is consistent with a Community School philosophy, that:

- Seeks to be collaborative, rather than adversarial;
- Seeks to promote the development of staff, rather than merely exercising control;
- Seek to share power and value team work;
- Possesses negotiation and mediation skills;’
- Seeks to the common interest base in an attempt to resolve conflict;
- Values morale and organizational climate;
- Finds ways to meaningfully consult student opinion, and attempts to adapt the school program in light of this input;
- Values parents as partners in education of children; and
- Sees the community as a resource, and seeks ways to incorporate these resources in the life of the school.

Listening as a Board of Education

Communication involves listening as well as speaking. A good leader listens to what people are saying; to what people are not saying; and, to what people want to say but don’t know how to say it. Avoid the “tree falling in the woods” conundrum.

In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Dr. Ruby K. Payne delivers a message consistent with her goal to educate people about the differences that separate economic classes and then teaches skills to bridge those gulfs. Payne’s thesis for the framework is simple: Individuals accustomed to personal poverty think and act differently than people in the middle and upper economic classes. Most teachers today come from middle-class backgrounds, and economic class differences in an educational setting often make both teaching and learning challenging. Teachers often don’t understand why a student from poverty chronically acts out or fails to grasp a concept even after repeated explanations. At the same time, the student may not understand what he or she is expected to produce and why.

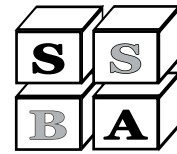
- Listening is not the same as hearing;
- Successful oral communication depends as much on the listener as the speaker;
- Concentration in listening is difficult because of the differential in speed between thinking and speaking;
- It has been said that people are the only creatures that can talk themselves into trouble, can people listen their way out of trouble; and,
- What the listener perceives is being said is as important as what is actually said.

When listening to others:

- Stop talking;
- Empathize with the person speaking;
- Ask questions when you don't understand;
- Don't get up too soon and don't interrupt the other person;
- Concentrate on what is being said;
- Smile appropriately, but don't overdo it;
- Leave your emotions behind, if you can;
- Control your anger;
- Get rid of distractions;
- Get the main points;
- Share responsibility for communication by listening;
- React to the ideas, not to the person;
- Don't argue mentally;
- Use the difference in rate as we listen faster than we talk;
- Listen for what is not said;
- Listen to the way something is said;
- Learn to tolerate silence;
- Don't antagonize the speaker;
- Listen for personality;
- Avoid making assumptions; and,
- Avoid classifying the speaker.

Source: Ed Brown, Georgia Southern University

Building Board Knowledge



1. *What listening strategies has your school board established concerning the publics?*

2. *What is one way in which your board is an effective communicator?*

3. *What are the audiences of your board of education?*

4. *How can your board improve its communications with the publics?*

Advocating for Children's Education

Education of children must be the nation's top priority. As such school boards and school divisions are committed to ensuring that the local school board voice is heard in every public policy forum in which education decisions are made or influenced. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association represents the school boards in many of these forums but the assistance of local school boards is required.

Our education structure places local school boards at the center of the governance process. Their unique role in overseeing education and representing lay involvement, enables them to provide a structure for public accountability and a way for parents and the community to influence vital policy issues affecting schools. Effective school boards involve the community in their deliberations, policy-making and management to reflect the community's concerns, values, and expectations of quality education for its children. School boards play a unique and far-reaching role in bridging understanding between the schools and the larger community.

Policy-making is a crucial school board role for policies establish directions for the district; they set the goals, assign authority, and establish controls that make school governance and management possible. Policies are the means by which educators are accountable to the public.

The goal is to have each school division advocate for the needs of education and of all school divisions, as well as lobbying for local needs to the benefit of all Saskatchewan students. They want to make sure that "falling trees" are heard.

The role of school boards and school divisions in effectively advocating for education, therefore, is to:

- Maintain awareness of provincial policy and legislative issues affecting education;
- Establishing relationships. Get to know individuals and groups that impact education;
- Serve as an advocate for all school boards and their association and local issues
- Report to the Saskatchewan School Boards Association of local issues affecting education.
- Present reliable and timely information, know the issue, communicate the facts and viewpoints, make personal contacts, and be patient and persistent; and,
- Follow up at appropriate intervals on local concerns.

Leading Advocacy Efforts for Children

Several initiatives were undertaken to better ensure the well-being and educational success of Saskatchewan's children. The reports of these investigations led the provincial government to define schools as having two functions:

- To educate children and youth; and,
- To support service delivery.

To do this, strong parent and community partnerships were identified as critical components with schools becoming open, welcoming and inclusive. Research indicates that such partnerships are strongly linked to school effectiveness and student success.

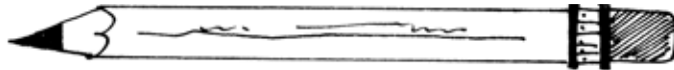
The level of involvement can be in the home and community in support of students and learning or participation in education planning, problem solving and governance.

In order for children to grow and learn, their basic physical, emotional and psychological needs must be met. In some families, the help of the school and the community are required to achieve this.

School boards can lead in advocating for children through:

- **Awareness:** Parents and the community want to be heard and involved in decisions. Provide input opportunities..
- **Policy:** Involve publics in developing policy.
- **Communication:** Sharing information to form and maintain partnerships.

Notes



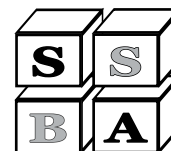
The Education Act, 1995 outlines the roles and responsibilities for boards of education, trustees and local advisory committees. However, they can pursue other initiatives to strengthen parent and community partnerships:

- Ensure inservice opportunities for principals, teachers and other school staff;
- Recognize that parent and community partnerships are critical to the success of students and responsiveness in the learning program;
- Develop system-wide policies and supports, promoting and facilitating parent and community involvement and partnerships;
- Develop policy and guidelines for parent and community involvement activities and structures, including clearly defined statements of purpose, roles, responsibilities and authority; and,
- When necessary, negotiate with parent and community organizations and district board or conseil d'ecoles to permit shared responsibilities and authorities beyond advisory functions.

Source: *Working Together Toward School^{PLUS}*

Building Board Knowledge

1. What advocacy initiatives has your board taken?



Crisis Management

Schools have always been seen as safe havens in which children and staff can work and learn. Unfortunately, some school tragedies have tarnished that image and have shown that the pathology of society is truly reflected in the school.

Similarly, unforeseen events can lead to crisis in communities and in schools. While they can not always be anticipated, safety plans can be made. The time to prepare for a crisis situation is not when it occurs, but long before when there is time to assess, plan and evaluate appropriate action steps. A crisis management plan is necessary because news and information travels faster than ever. School divisions must be able to quickly answer questions and allegations about looming crisis. The school divisions reputation and the safety of children is at stake.

A number of steps need to be taken in developing a crisis and violence prevention plan.

Step 1: Starting With an Approach

- Develop a corporate statement outlining the school division's crisis management plan. This plan will guide all behaviour and decisions for all corporate actions.
- The statement should summarize all of the school division's philosophies, ethics and plans to protect.
- The school division should list the most probable events to affect it.

Step 2: Building a Strong Reputation

- An organization will survive a crisis better if it has a good reputation.
- A good reputation is built over the life of an organization.
- The historical behaviour of the school division will influence how others view it.

It's important to remember the "4 R's" when managing a crisis:

- **Regret** what happened, but you are not guilty or even responsible. The school division needs to watch its words because they can come back to haunt the division in court if it claims responsibility. If the school division doesn't regret the incident, no one will listen to anything else the division says;
- State what the school division will do to **Resolve** the issue;
- Assure customers that the school division will **Reform** so that this will never happen again; and,
- Offer **Restitution** if and where necessary.

Step 3: Create a Crisis Management Team

- First select someone from top management to head the crisis team.
- Select representatives from key policy and operational areas to bring expertise and management together.
- Candidates for the team include: Corporate communications, legal, human resources, medical, research, operations, safety, security, transportation and government affairs.

Step 4: Establish a Crisis Center

A crisis center is where the crisis management will take place. The room can be an already established conference room where communications technology is pre-installed.

Step 5: The Network Alert System

Crisis management has three sequential objectives:

1. Prevent a crisis. If a crisis does arise then the crisis management team must begin by answering two questions: What is the crisis, and when did it start?
2. Modify the negative effects of the school division.
3. School division actions provide a platform for its future.

Step 6: Prepare Materials In Advance

If crisis happens today, the school division needs to respond immediately. Honesty and forthright representation are two key ethical standards to be followed.

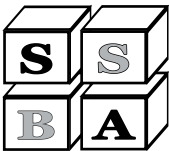
Prepared materials should communicate:

- A press response stating that you have incomplete knowledge of the crisis details, but describe the school division's conceptual approach to the crisis and give the promise to inform when there is new information.
- Give the school division's best answer and information about why the crisis happened.
- Give the press some generic but positive information about the school division. The information should have some bearing on the crisis without speculating what happened.
- This is the importance of a crisis plan. During the early stages of a crisis there is an early vacuum of information. Don't let the media speculate what happened. Background information about the school division can be used to control the media's speculation. Don't be afraid to say something good about the school division at this time. If you don't no one will.

Violence Prevention at School

- Conduct a safety assessment at each school facility.
- Involve all community resources at your disposal to address prevention efforts.
- Update and revise district and school crisis communication plans.
- Establish and train a crisis intervention team.
- Inservice all staff on the crisis plan and procedures.
- Review related district policies and school discipline/behaviour codes; make changes where appropriate to support safety efforts.
- Include discipline policies and behaviour codes, etc., in parent/student handbooks.
- Review all policies and discipline codes with staff.
- Prepare fact sheets on each district building site to give to media in the event of a crisis.
- Establish procedures for students to report suspicious behaviour, conversations or activities.
- Collaborate with local media on a public service campaign to prevent youth violence.
- Seek business and civic group support for sponsoring mentorship and /or extended day programs for students.
- Inservice all staff on behavioural signs that indicate a child is at risk of violent acts.

Building Board Knowledge

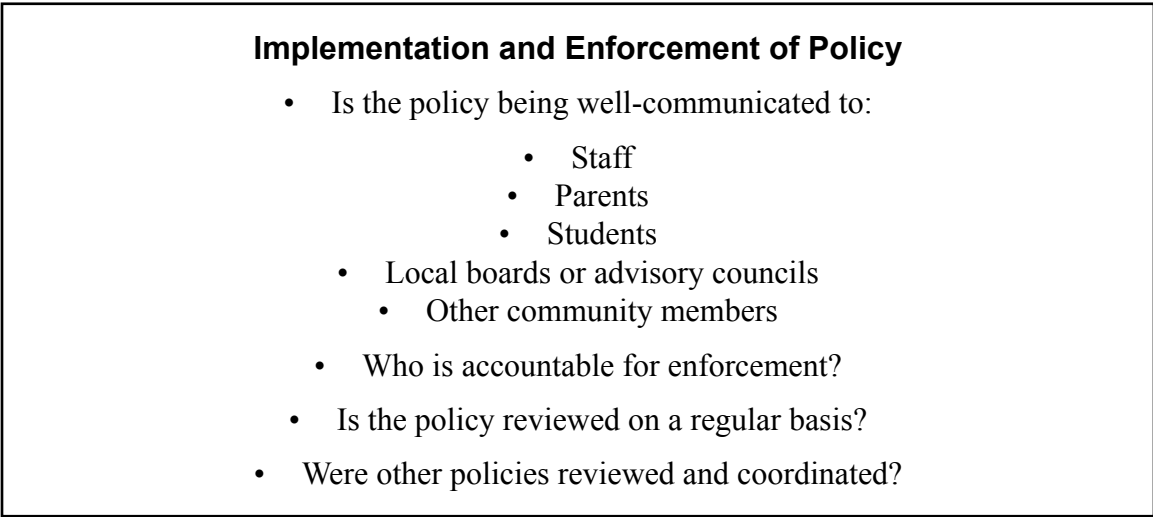
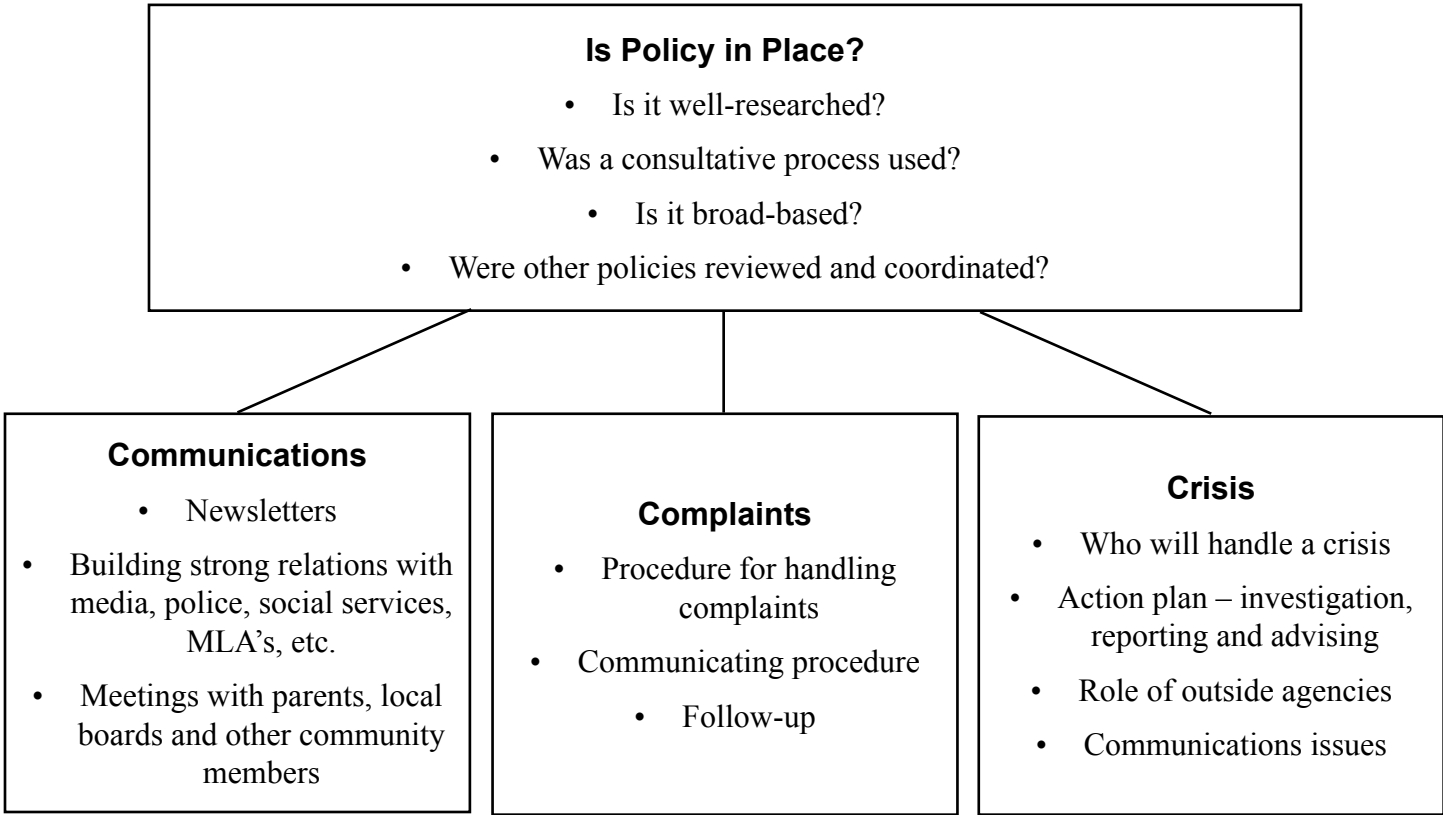


1. How current is your board's crisis management plan?

2. How current is your board's violence prevention plan?

3. Is your school board prepared to handle any tragedy or crisis that might occur?

Crisis Prevention



Crisis Management

Incident Occurs

Immediate Emergency Responses – Ensure Safety

Crisis Management Committee Convenes

Implement Action Plan

Initial Communication by Designated Spokesperson

- Incident has occurred supplemented with facts
 - Students and staff are safe
- Board is taking the necessary steps to do what needs to be done

Investigate

- Who, what, where, when, why and how
- Consult experts whether insurance, legal, etc.

Report and Recommend

- For the board to use
- For other concerned stakeholders

Carry-out Decision

Review and Assess

- Incident
- Process

Stakeholders

- Board members
 - Local boards and advisory councils
 - Staff
 - Parents
 - Students
 - Media
 - Other community members
-

Communications

- Fact sheets
- News releases
- Newsletters
- Meetings
- Media interviews
- News conference

Communicate to:

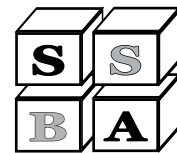
By Means of:

Board Members Influence on Other Governing Bodies

Board members are in a unique position to advocate for the needs of education and for children and to lobby for local needs

- Board members have tremendous value and influence as a members of the constituency to which elected officials are accountable.
- Board members carry an understanding of the issues surrounding the public education system and have a forum within the MLA' s riding.
- Board members can give candidates and politicians a chance to discuss education issues in their schools or community.
- Board members are empowered constituents with influence and insight who can be a vital resource in decision making.
- Successful advocacy strategies for school board members include knowledge of the issues; communication of the facts and viewpoints; personal contacts; patience, persistence and timing.
- Build a positive relationship with area politicians.
- Make education allies of the candidates and politicians in your constituency. Keep them informed.
- Be organized, get to the point, be concise and clear about your viewpoints, be accurate and get your facts straight.
- Organize, or get involved in, candidates' forums. Help them understand that education is a priority.
- Establish a positive relationship with the media.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *What are issues Saskatchewan boards of education facing?*
2. *What issues are your school board facing locally?*
3. *What strategies do you consider to be most effective in your constituency at this point in time?*

Media Relations

Developing a good working relationship with the media is a key step in increasing the community's understanding and support for public education.

The news media has the responsibility to tell the public what is happening in their community. It needs your information to inform the public and make money. You need the media to transmit your information and to gain public approval and credibility. Both can be achieved.

Education is news and will be reported either with or without the assistance of the school division. Helping a reporter obtain news about the school division increases understanding.

Newspapers, radio, and television can be effective communication channels:

- To increase awareness of district programs, services and accomplishments;
- To reinforce the importance of the contributions of various partners in education;
- To win public support for educational causes or issues;
- To build the division's public image; and,
- To foster pride in staff, students and their families.

Proactive Initiative

School divisions cannot assume that the media will come to them for news that they consider important. Positive media coverage requires a proactive school division approach.

- Identify the newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television stations which operate in your area;
- Establish a personal relationship with their managers and editors and learn what they are interested in reporting;
- Consult with school division staff to establish a list of story ideas relating to the school division – programs, schools, achievements, issues;
- Meet their deadlines because timing is critical in the media;
- Assure availability of someone available to answer questions from the media;
- Be honest in order to gain trust; and,
- Make sure your news is newsworthy.

Information tools for informing the media include:

news releases; public service announcements; feature stories; media conferences; personal contact; and newsletters.

Roles and Responsibilities

Board Chairperson:

- Official spokesperson on all sensitive matters;
- Deputy Chairperson acts as spokesperson if chairperson is absent;
- Press Release/Media Conference should be composed collectively by board members and/or senior administration; and,
- From time to time, the Chairperson of the Board may request the Director to respond to the media.

Director of Education:

- In the occurrence of a sensitive matter, all media is referred to the Director of Education by senior administration. The Director, in turn, refers the matter to the Board Chairperson.
- The Director may appoint superintendent to act as spokesperson to media on sensitive matters when deemed appropriate.

Principals:

- Spokespersons for their school and are responsible for school information going to the media.
- Sensitive matters are referred to the superintendent and/or the Director.

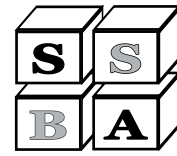
Staff:

- All system staff should refer sensitive matters to their immediate supervisor for further action.

Media Policy

Every school division should have an explicit media communications policy, with common guidelines for all spokespersons on what to communicate and what to avoid. It guides and protects them.

Building Board Knowledge



1. Does your board have a media policy?

2. Are lines of communications clear?

3. Do you know that reporters always get the last word? Do you understand the difference between columnists and reporters?

Sample

Media Policy

The _____ School Division believes in providing accurate information to the public in a timely manner that is not disruptive to students or to the learning environment.

Crisis

The Chairperson of the Board of Education will serve as the spokesperson.

In a crisis, a committee consisting of Chairman of the Board, the Director of Education, the Secretary-Treasurer, the Sub-division Member of the area, and the Principal (or designate) of the school handles all communications aspects of the crisis, including preparing the spokesperson, the information flow, and possibly a phone-in-line.

Fact sheets will be prepared and sent to all members of the Board of Education and Boards of Trustees, all school staffs, parents and the media. It is important to have the channels of communication established before a crisis.

Other means of communications that the crisis committee may consider using include: Letters to parents, teachers and non-teaching staff; advertisements or public service announcements; press releases, newsletters; staff meetings or public meetings (to provide for questions); a communications centre or hotline in the time of crisis; and Websites and email.

Media Regulations

Media requests must come through the board office to the Director of Education. The Chairperson is the spokesperson for the Board.

Requests for interviews with students:

Interviews with students may not take place on school property. The school division does not have permission from parents or guardians for in-school interviews.

Requests for interviews with staff:

Requests for interviews with staff must come through the Director of Education (**see above**). If the principal receives a request, it must be directed to the Director of Education. Interviews with cameras are allowed in the school only with the permission of the Director.

Requests to film students:

The school and school division do not have permission from any parent for media to film/tape/photograph the images of students and therefore no permission shall be given by school personnel to do so.

Requests to enter the school:

Media who wish to enter a building and who are given permission by the Director to do so shall be given an appointment with the Principal or designate. School administration will escort the media during the time within the building to prevent disruptions to the teaching/learning environment.

Communicating Student Achievement

Boards of education today are more frequently asked about student achievement. Communities want to know that their schools are providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to become active participants in the world of the 21st century. Providing the community and the parents with the answer to these questions is a priority task for those involved in the education enterprise and of boards of education.

Saskatchewan's goals of education outline a number of areas with the primary area being that of student academic achievement. Monitoring the achievement of those goals in a school division is an essential task of the board of education. It is the responsibility of the board of education to ensure there is adequate evidence of student achievement and of plans to improve achievement where there is evidence of need.

Certainly every community expects that their board of education will ensure that resources are used efficiently, that all schools operate effectively and that a safe environment for learning is maintained. In the past, the work of boards was focused primarily on overseeing and managing these inputs.

Today, boards of education are also called upon to ensure results. The board of education must ensure that students are achieving at the desired level. This understanding is important to how a board of education views itself and its work.

Boards of education receive reports on the progress of students and progress made by the school division in addressing the goals and objectives established for the school year. Student achievement information is received on a global basis and makes reference to trends, successes and areas requiring improvement. Other information which addresses resources and resource allocation is analyzed to assure support for student achievement and accountability.

Effective boards of education inform their publics of the achievements through the various communication channels. They also provide mechanisms for feedback from their publics. Face to face contact in which key areas are discussed are important to the process. The data provided and the feedback received guides new policy and direction.

Student Achievement

Achievement is the heart and centre of board of education work. Achievement is focused on student achievement. It also includes achieving a safe orderly school environment that is conducive to learning, and achieving equality of opportunity and of outcome for all students. Another aspect of achievement is achieving the vision and goals that the board has created for the school division.

A school board has approved an appropriate school program. Processes are established to define what students need to know, be like and be able to do. Processes are established for the board to monitor the effectiveness of programs and changes in achievement over time.

Effective boards:

- Govern responsibly and effectively to ensure that things get done to improve student learning and make best use of available resources;
- Work to strengthen their capacity to implement policy and manage affairs effectively, and maintain appropriate facilities and operations;
- Govern by defining desired results;
- Ensure that the mission and goals are achieved;
- Prudently apportion human and material resources; and,
- Engage their publics in communication and dialogue about educational goals, school division objectives and student achievement.

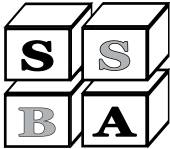
The board has the information necessary to govern the school system. It receives monitoring reports on policies and priorities on a regular basis. Quality information enables boards to ascertain whether they are making progress in each area of board focus and whether the system is working as a whole. It enables boards to respond to an ever-increasing public demand for accountability for the outcomes of education expenditures.

Information is available to the board in three forms.

- **Quantitative** – Raw numbers, statistics, charts
- **Qualitative** – Surveys, focus groups, ratings
- **Intuitive** – Observations, impressions

Data of both a quantitative and qualitative nature is now needed more than ever by the board.

Study of the information available about student achievement and the operations of the school division as it pertains to student achievement brings together the learning community in the unique task of celebrating achievements as well as planning for improvement where necessary.

<p>Building Board Knowledge</p> <p><i>1. Do monitoring reports adequately inform and guide board of education decision-making?</i></p>	
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What we say:	Evidence we have:	Evidence we need:

The information or data needed by a school division to assess its effectiveness and respond to questions of accountability will be determined by the goals established by the school division. The goals are often a reflection of the communities served and the needs of the education stakeholders in the division.

Possible Indicators of Student Achievement

- *Measures of Student Reading Achievement*
- *Measures of Student Writing Achievement*
- *Student Achievement in Mathematics*
- *Student Use of Technology*
- *Percentage of Students Attending Post-Secondary Institutions*
- *Percentage of Students Successfully Employed 6 Months after graduation*
- *Successful Completion of Post-secondary Studies*
- *Percentage of Students achieving in the Upper Stanines of Standardized Tests*
- *Percentage of Students completing High School Requirements in 3 years*
- *Percentage of Grade 12's Completing Requirements for Graduation*
- *Average Number of Credits attained by Grade Level Annually and by Graduates*
- *Percentage of High School Students in a Regular Program, Modified Program and Alternative Program*
- *Percentage of Graduates Receiving Outside Scholarship and Awards*
- *Gender Differences in Student Achievement in various subject areas*
- *Percentage of Students Completing Credit Courses*
- *Student School Attendance Retention Rates*
- *Number and Diversity of Opportunities for Students to Attain Employability Skills*

Source: Conference Board of Canada, 2000

Some of the indicators listed above are readily available from existing sources. Other indicators, such as achievement in various subject areas, are dependent on various forms of student assessments. The use of standardized tests, system standards determined by rubrics, and system benchmarks are tools which board members might wish to be a part of the assessment of school division progress in student achievement.

Still other student performance indicators that influence academic achievement include school safety, such as discipline reports and incidents of school violence; student participation in community service and extracurricular activities; graduate satisfaction; and parent satisfaction with academic course offerings. Also critical are data measuring student job skills and preparation, citizenship, arts appreciation, and the development of character and value.

The school division goals and priorities will assist a board of education in deciding what areas of achievement they wish to monitor. Determination of the indicators of success should be a collaborative activity undertaken in collaboration with other stakeholders in the learning community.

The following chart shows a school division data on the percentage of registered Grade 12 students who gain their high school graduation certification over a three year period.

Graduation Rates

School Year	Registered Grade 12 Students (Sept 30th)	Grade 12 Graduates	Grade 12 Graduates as a % of Grade 12 Registered Students
1999-2000	197	141	71.6%
2000-2001	172	125	72.6%
2001-2002	176	132	75%

This school division has something to celebrate:

- Why has the percentage increased?
- Have any of the schools implemented some local changes that have affected the results?
- Are there things that can be done to further improve these results?
- How does one develop an annual indicators report?

School divisions establish a set of indicators of student and school division achievement by collecting appropriate data to support decision making, planning and policy development and to demonstrate public accountability by providing information about the education system to the staff and to the community at large. The indicators should promote the best possible learning environment of the school division students by providing information about the attainment of the system’s annual goals and objectives.

Preparation of an indicators report is an annual activity. It informs the board of progress made in relation to the annual goals and objectives established and directs its decision-making with facts and comparisons. Goals and objectives are confirmed or modified and new goals are established as a reflection of this information. Honesty and responsibility direct school division policy, programs and initiatives to gain public support and the resources needed to provide the best educational program possible. Linkages with the community is an essential component of school division governance and linkages need to be aggressively established by the board.

Step 1: Commit to the Indicators Report

An indicators report is a significant and major undertaking of a school division and should have a high priority. It uses a broad definition of achievement and contains important information about how the school division is progressing in meeting its mandate, responsibilities and student success. It identifies school division successes and challenges. Nevertheless, it ultimately leads to improvement and progress and better learning for students. The board of education needs to resolve that “it shall be done.”

Step 2: Assign Staff and Resources

School division budgets reflect where the heart, mind, and priorities of the school board are. Making the indicators report a priority means that staff and resources will be required to carry out the necessary work. Data gathering, process establishment, data analysis and preparation, and processing of the final document require significant manpower and resources.. The board must assure that both are in place so that the task is done with due diligence.

Step 3: Identify the Indicators Report Content

In consultation with the school division’s senior administration, identify the indicators which reflect the school divisions goals, student achievement and accountability and which are deemed to indicate the progress made. The board gathers qualitative and quantitative evidence of the owners’ concerns, needs, demands and fears.

Step 4: Establish Processes to be Followed

Direct senior administration and the project leader in the processes to be followed in collecting the required information. Include surveys, interviews, statistical data, and invitations for written submissions. Determine reporting schedules and time lines and presentation of initial report. Establish communication channels and processes.

Step 5: Review and Adopt Report

Receive and review the draft copy of the report to gain full understanding of the data and the implications of the information. Make recommendations for revision where required. Adopt final report as revised.

Step 6: Inform Publics

Follow the established processes for disseminating the information or the report itself. Use a variety of communication channels and focus the outcomes on the specific interests of the various audiences.

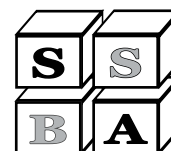
Step 7: Promote Report

Most of the indicators report information will be positive and will show that the school division and the students are making progress. Make sure that the community knows and understands the key findings. At this point make direct contact with the community not only corporately but also individually. Celebrate the achievements. Areas identified for improvement should be seen as school division and community challenges. Show a commitment to address these so that student achievement will improve. Remember that school division require community support and that the community will support what they understand.

Step 8: Listen

Feedback on the indicators is critical to school division direction. The various publics will provide insight and can help identify priorities from their perspective. Listen to their voices. Make sure that your dialogue and interaction with them is not a tree falling in the woods.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *What data or information has impacted on your board priorities?*
2. *Do you believe that the data available to you is adequate for you to fulfill your decision-making responsibilities?*
3. *What do you believe would be important measures of student achievement in your community?*
4. *What are some of the current goals or priorities of your school board that could positively affect student achievement?*
5. *Are there areas of student achievement that you as a board might want to learn more about?*

Communications and School^{PLUS}

School^{PLUS} is about the success of children in school and in life and working with the community to achieve it. This success does not come about by chance but requires an effective communication plan that informs the public about how the children in the community are doing and what is required to improve, and invites members of the community to participate in these initiatives. As advocates for education and for children, school boards need effective communication and public relations plans.

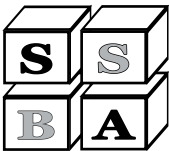
Educational issues are complex as are the issues that impact on the lives of the young people in the community. They require clarification for those who are uninitiated into the process so that they may understand the issues, become involved in the decision-making process and support school division action plans toward improvement. Clear two-way communication and effective use of the media to invite feedback and to build support are essential for this to occur.

School^{PLUS} is about relationships – public relationships that create positive images about what is happening in schools and what schools are doing to support all children in the community. The flow of information between the school division, school, educational community, parents, partners in human services provision and the larger community requires planning and attention.

School^{PLUS} is about the well-being of children and youth. Schools and communities are particularly challenged in this in an age when the pathology of society significantly impacts the school. Crisis management plans and tragic events response plans are essential for the safety and security of children. Schools should be safe places in which to live, work and learn—and they generally are—but preparation for crisis is a prerequisite for parents and students to feel that the school offers security and care. Awareness and security plans enable pre-emptive action.

School^{PLUS} school divisions advocate accountability. They believe that communication with parents and the various school division publics provides honest information about results. Leading with data creates understanding, especially when results support the high expectations for students and when they are accompanied by corresponding improvement plans. Communication that invites feedback helps to establish school division policy and direction and creates conditions for greater participation in the decision-making process. Listening is a major aspect of effective communication.

Building Board Knowledge



1. What School^{PLUS} components has your school board included in its communications and public relations plans?

2. How does your school board and schools listen to their publics?

Reflection

Three key ideas from this module are:

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-
-

My questions:

-
-
-

	Ideas I want to learn more about:	Ideas for my board to consider:
To be an effective trustee:		
To be an effective board:		

My Personal Plan of Action

In order to strengthen the governance of our board of education, I make a commitment to:

State the Area You Want to Improve	I Commit Myself to the Following	When Will I Do This?	How Will I Know I Have Been Successful