

## RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR TRUSTEE COMMUNICATIONS

The Halton Catholic District School Board recognizes that communication is an integral part of the role of its elected Trustees. Effective communication will not only enhance a Trustee's ability to represent constituents, but will also help to encourage public participation, build understanding and consensus in the community, and build support for publicly funded Catholic education.

These guidelines are intended to provide some guiding principles and strategies that will support and facilitate appropriate and consistent forms of communication between Trustees and their constituents.

### SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Effective Trustee communications, written or verbal, must reflect the Vision, Mission, and Governing Values of the Board.
- Trustees may seek the advice and assistance of the Director of Education to ensure that communications are in keeping with the Board's philosophy and positions.
- Individual Trustees have no legal authority outside the meeting of the Board to bind the Board or act on behalf of the Board, to manage the day to day operations. Therefore, communication with Board and school staff shall be made through the Director of Education.
- The aim of effective Trustee communications, written or verbal, should be to promote Catholic Education, the Halton Catholic District School Board and its schools.
- Trustee communications, written or verbal, should always be timely, accurate, honest, clear, and professional.
- Trustee communications, written or verbal, should never reflect negatively upon the Halton Catholic District School Board, its schools, its students, its staff, or fellow trustees.
- In accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, Trustees shall not divulge, either in their written or verbal communications, personal information related to the Board's students or staff.
- Trustees shall, on all matters, abide by the Board's *Operating Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy* and the *Trustee Code of Conduct*.

For the purposes of these guidelines, communications will be categorized as either written or verbal, and will be further classified as either formal or informal. These guidelines will also address *Media Relations, Communication Tools and Resources, and Appropriate Communication Protocol*.

## TRUSTEE COMMUNICATION - WRITTEN

Trustee correspondence or written communication may take place in various forms: newsletters, letters, emails, blogs, and social media posts, etc. Written correspondence or communication is either classified as formal, or informal.

### FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE:

#### I. Trustee Newsletters

A Trustee Newsletter can provide the Halton Catholic District School Board with an effective tool for sharing information with parents, staff, and constituents regarding Board policies, decisions made at the Board level, Ministry of Education initiatives or directives, school events and initiatives, and the role of the Board and the Trustee.

- The intent of the Trustee Newsletter is to promote Catholic Education, the Halton Catholic District School Board and its schools.
- The Trustee Newsletter should never reflect negatively upon the Halton Catholic District School Board, its schools, its staff, or other trustees.

For the purposes of Trustee communication with parents, students, staff, and/or other constituents, two types of Trustee newsletters or communiqués are proposed:

##### 1) **Scheduled Newsletters**

Scheduled newsletters will be crafted through Strategic Communications Services, and will address specific and timely matters related to the Board's operation. While the content will be consistent for all newsletters, a space will be allocated in the newsletter for each trustee to provide a personalized message or column in their given jurisdiction.

- Four (4) scheduled newsletters per school year: two (2) newsletters for parents of elementary students; and two (2) newsletters for parents of secondary students.
- Scheduled newsletters will be distributed, either in print or electronically to parents through Strategic Communications Services.
- All costs associated with the production and dissemination of scheduled newsletters will be charged to the Board's Strategic Communications budget.
- Prior to production, the proposed newsletter must be submitted to the Chair of the Board for editorial review.
- A copy of the Scheduled Newsletter shall be provided as information to Trustees, to the Director of Education, to Strategic Communications Services, to the School Superintendent(s) and to the School Principal(s), as appropriate.
- Trustees will be provided with additional copies of the newsletter, as requested. Additional copies will be charged to the Trustee's expenses.

##### 2) **Optional Communication**

A Trustee may decide, at his or her discretion, to prepare and circulate optional communications, such as, unscheduled newsletters, seasonal/holiday messages, graduation messages, etc., to his/her constituents.

- Optional communications must clearly be presented as reflecting only the personal expression of opinion of the individual Trustee. Individual Trustees shall not present

an opinion as the position of the Board, unless the opinion is supported by the Board by resolution. Individual Trustees shall not present an opinion contrary to, or critical of a position supported by Board resolution.

- Optional communications will be crafted by the individual Trustee and shall be forwarded to Strategic Communications for review to ensure accuracy and consistency with [Policy V-16 Copyright, Visual Identity, and Intellectual Property Protection](#) and the Board's Brand and Visual Identity Guidelines
- Prior to production, the proposed communication must be submitted to the Chair of the Board for editorial review.
- Trustees shall, on all matters, abide by the Board's Operating [Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy](#), and the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#).
- A copy of the optional communication shall be provided to Trustees, to the Director of Education, to Strategic Communications Services, to the School Superintendent (where applicable) and to the School Principal (where applicable), prior to its distribution.
- Printing of optional communications will be facilitated through the Board's Print Services, whenever possible.
- Trustees are responsible for the distribution of optional communication to parents and constituents.
- All costs associated with the production and dissemination of optional communications shall be charged to the Trustee's annual budgetary allowance, in accordance with [Policy I-34, Reimbursement of Board Business Expenses](#).

**NOTE: In the year of a municipal election, no production or distribution of Trustee newsletters or communiqués (scheduled or optional) that are financed through Board funds shall be undertaken between July 1<sup>st</sup> and the Inaugural Board Meeting in December.**

## **II. Letters**

While it is typically not the most common form of communication today, from time to time, a formal letter may be the most appropriate vehicle for communicating with parents, students, staff and/or constituents.

- When a letter has been addressed to all Trustees, the Chair of the Board shall respond to the correspondence, providing a copy of the response to the other Trustees
- When a letter has been addressed to a member of staff, and copied to one or more Trustees, staff shall respond to the correspondence, and provide a copy of the response to each Trustee copied in the correspondence.
- As a general rule, and in keeping with widely accepted etiquette standards, Trustees should not respond to correspondence on which they have been copied, and should only respond to correspondence sent directly to their attention.
- Trustees may wish to use Board-issued letterhead\* for the purposes of formal written communication with parents, students, staff, and/or constituents.
- Trustees shall on all matters abide by the Board's Operating [Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy](#), and the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#).

\*See Board-Issued Letterhead under *Communication Tools and Resources*.

### **III. Individual Sponsorship and Promotional Advertisement/Miscellaneous**

These may include: parish bulletin messages, messages or ads that are purchased for inclusion in programmes such as the Bishop's Dinner Fundraiser, etc.

- Messages will be crafted by the individual Trustee, and should be forwarded to Strategic Communications for review to ensure accuracy and consistency with [Policy V-16 Copyright, Visual Identity, and Intellectual Property Protection](#) and the Board's Visual Identity Guidelines.
- Trustees shall, on all matters, abide by the Board's Operating [Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy](#) and the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#).
- A copy of the message shall be provided to the Chair of the Board, to the Director of Education, to Strategic Communications Services, to the School Superintendent (where applicable) and to the School Principal (where applicable), prior to its distribution.
- Trustees are responsible for the distribution of miscellaneous messages.
- All costs associated with the production and dissemination of miscellaneous messages will be considered as personal expenses. Costs associated with miscellaneous messages are not eligible for reimbursement from the Trustee's annual budgetary allowance.

### **INFORMAL CORRESPONDENCE:**

#### **I. Email**

Email is a popular and effective way to share information, and may often be the most appropriate means for communicating with parents, students, staff and/or constituents.

- When an email is addressed to all Trustees, the Chair of the Board shall respond, and provide a courtesy copy (cc) of the response 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.
- As a general rule, and in keeping with widely accepted email etiquette standards, Trustees should not respond to emailed correspondence on which they have been copied (cc'd), and should only respond to emailed correspondence sent directly to their attention.
- Recognizing that email is not a secure vehicle of communication, Trustees shall never use email to communicate sensitive or confidential information.
- Trustees shall, on all matters, abide by the Board's Operating [Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy](#) and the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#).

#### **II. Social Media**

The use of social media, blogs, and websites is the preferred vehicle of communication not only for students, but also for many parents.

- Trustee posts, tweets, and comments must reflect the [Vision, Mission, and Values of the Board](#).
- Trustees should monitor personal sites to ensure accuracy and timeliness of posts.
- Trustee posts, tweets, and comments should never reflect negatively upon the Halton Catholic District School Board, its schools, its students, its staff, or fellow trustees.

- Trustees shall, on all matters, abide by the Board's [Policy I-7, Protection of Privacy](#), the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#), and [Policy I-43, Use of Technology and Digital Citizenship](#).

## TRUSTEE COMMUNICATION - VERBAL

Trustees will often be called upon to speak, whether informally in one-on-one conversations with individual constituents, or formally through requests for interviews with members of the media, or remarks in front of a gathering such as a school event or parish function. Verbal communication can be a very personal and effective tool of communication when utilized appropriately.

- When speaking, Trustees should communicate as clearly, and as accurately as possible.
- As a general rule, the Chair of the Board, or designate will speak for the Board.
- Consistent with the Trustee Code of Conduct, individual Trustees shall uphold the decision of the Board. 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.
- Public statements should aim to promote Catholic Education, the Halton Catholic District School Board, and its schools.
  - Public statements should avoid criticism of the intentions or actions of other Board members, of staff, of parents, or of students.
  - Public statements should be consistent with the Board's Vision, its Mission Statement, and its governing values.

## MEDIA RELATIONS

From time to time, Trustees may contact or be contacted by media officials. The following should be kept in mind when responding to media requests and contacting the media:

- All media inquiries and Trustee communication with the media should be facilitated through Strategic Communications Services to ensure that key messaging is appropriate and consistent with the position of the Board.
- Only the Chair of the Board or his/her designate will act as the spokesperson for all communications regarding matters under consideration by the Board, or for explanations of decisions and positions 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 or corresponding with the media, individual Trustees shall not present an opinion as the position of the Board, unless the opinion is supported by the Board by resolution, or they have been authorized to speak on the subject on behalf of the Board by the Board's Chair or designate.
- When speaking with the media, individual Trustees should clearly identify as personal opinions any statements or positions that are not necessarily those of the Board.

## COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Recognizing that communication is an essential and vital component of a Trustee's roles and responsibilities, the following tools and resources will be made available to each Trustee to assist him or her in this regard.

### **Board-Issued Letterhead:**

Upon request, each Trustee will be provided with Board-issued letterhead, to be charged to each Trustee's annual budgetary allowance.

- Any letter or communication prepared by an individual Trustee on Board-issued letterhead must only reflect the personal expression of opinion of the individual Trustee, and should not speak on behalf of the Board.
- Any correspondence produced by a Trustee on Board-issued letterhead must be approved by the Chair of the Board, prior to its distribution.

### **Business Cards:**

The Board recognizes that even in this digital era, the business card is still considered a valuable networking tool.

- A supply of business cards will be issued to each Trustee at the start of his/her term. Any requests for additional supplies will be charged to the Trustee's annual budgetary allowance, in accordance with Policy I-34.
- The business card shall be designed, and reproduced through Strategic Communications Services to ensure compliance with Policy V-17 Copyright, Visual Identity, and Intellectual Property and the Board's Visual Identity Guidelines.
- The Board-issued business card is to be used for the purposes of identifying the individual Trustee as a member of the Board, and as such, any contact information identified on the business card (e.g. email, phone number) shall be consistent with the Trustee's Board contact information, and should not correspond with a Trustee's business contact information.

## **APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL**

Trustees will often be contacted by parents with concerns about their child's education. Most issues can be resolved at the school level, and our teachers and school administrators value open communication with parents and the opportunity to address concerns at the school level. Trustees must always encourage parents to follow the appropriate communication protocol, and adhere to the requirements of [Policy V-9 Public Concerns Complaints Process](#).

- Parents who have concerns about their child's education should contact their child's school. Initially, the child's teacher should be approached.
- After speaking with the child's teacher, if the matter is not yet resolved, the parent should then contact the School Principal.
- After speaking with the School Principal, if the matter is not yet resolved, the parent should then contact the appropriate Superintendent of Education.
- After speaking with the Superintendent of Education, if the matter is not yet resolved, the parent should then contact the Director of Education.