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Terms of Reference for Community Engagement by School District 71 Staff and Trustees

March 7, 2017

Purpose of Terms of Reference

The shared vision of SD71 is "a learning community that embraces diversity, honours relationship and prepares all learners for a changing world." A core element of this vision is inclusive and responsive Community Engagement between the SD 71 Board of Trustees and public education stakeholders in the Comox Valley.

SD 71 Board of Trustees is committed to working with stakeholders and community members to establish and implement a Community Engagement Plan for the purpose of providing an excellent education system in the Comox Valley that is reflective of the interests of community stakeholders and aligned with the highest standards of education system delivery. These Terms of Reference express the strategic directions that SD 71 Board of Trustees will pursue in its ongoing work to develop and foster a culture of community engagement excellence.

Strategic Directions

Community Engagement (see definitions in Appendix A) is a process of communicating, consulting and collaborating in decision making that links together Comox Valley public education stakeholders, SD 71 Board of Trustees and staff in a common pursuit of educational excellence. To ensure effective Community Engagement practice is a central part of how School District 71 works with the community, two strategic directions will be pursued through a series of core activities. Strategic direction 1 is intended to encourage immediate (within 6-12 months) follow up response to many of the main interests noted at the Community Engagement Forum, whereas the pursuit of Strategic Direction 2 is a medium term project (12-24 months).

Strategic Direction 1: SD 71 Board of Trustees and Staff will Use Responsive Communication Tools that Provide Public Education Stakeholders with Information that is Relevant to their Interests

Core Activity 1.1: Develop and implement diverse communications strategies that focus on preferred communications of the community and respond directly to the expressed interests and concerns of public education stakeholders.

Core Activity 1.2: Evaluate the efficacy of communication efforts and apply learning about successes and challenges to future efforts to improve the communications work.

Strategic Direction 2: SD 71 Board of Trustees and Staff will Re-Structure its Commitment to how it Works with the Community and Makes Decisions in Collaboration with them

Core Activity 2.1: Develop a Community Engagement and Planning (CEP) Task Force that can assist in the creation of a School District 71 Community Engagement Plan, with the understanding that the CEP Task Force will include Trustees, Staff, students and community stakeholders. A Terms of Reference for the CEP Task Force will be developed and include, at a minimum, the following:

   a. A purpose statement for the CEP Task Force that can include a commitment to developing and fostering a culture of community engagement excellence within School District 71;
   b. A description of the specific types of activities it is charged to complete and the specific deliverables it will produce;
   c. A set of guiding principles that can include a commitment to evidence based practice, community voice, transparency in decision making, openness, diversity of representation and trust;
   d. A description of the relationship between the Board of Trustee's legislated decision making duties, the role of SD staff in decision making and supporting decision making, and the advisory support that the CEP Task Force will provide in service of staff and the Board's deliberations. In other words, the line that separates Board decision making authority from staff, advisory support and community input must be clearly drawn;

e. An initial term of service for the CEP Task Force of 12 months (with possibility of renewal) based on Board approval.

Core Activity 2.1: Based on the Community Engagement Forum Summary Report and under the leadership of the CEP Task Force, develop the School District 71 Community Engagement Plan. The Plan will include, at a minimum:

a. An illustrated diagram that explains the scope of possible involvement of a community stakeholder in receiving information, and participating in dialogue and decision making on priority issues affecting the local public education system.

b. A description and rationale for a limited number of 3-5 priority public education issues around which community engagement and planning activities need to take place in the short and medium term.

c. A process model that explains how community input can be developed into future education system directions. The process model should attend to best practices in translating community voice into educational directions, which includes: option modelling that involves evidence review, cost benefit analysis, and feasibility assessments. Any educational direction that reaches the Board should go through such a process and be capped with a Board recommendation report from staff.

d. A detailed implementation strategy that outlines how community engagement and planning will happen in an ongoing way, during specified time frames, with required resources (to be determined) and in relation to a limited number of 3-5 priority public education issues.

Core Activity 2.3: Provide regular and relevant information to stakeholders on the work of developing the Community Engagement Plan and its implementation to show the commitment of the District Trustees and its Staff.

Living Nature of these Terms of Reference

This living document seeks to provide pathways for inclusive and responsive community engagement between the SD 71 Board of Trustees and public education stakeholders. As such, changes to this document may be needed from time to time in order to reflect community engagement priorities in the Comox Valley. To this end, the SD 71 Board of Trustees is committed to reviewing and revising these Terms of Reference as needed.

Appendix A: Definitions of Community Engagement

There are many ways to define community engagement. Below, are three general types of community engagement that can relate to the activities of a School District.

Communication

Communication is the thread that ties together all types of community engagement. It is not possible to consult with or involve the public in decision-making processes unless they are first adequately informed about the matter at hand. Communications are fundamentally important because they serve as the first point of contact for the public and enable members of the public to gain an understanding of the services, issue and/ or prospective development in question.

In School Districts, communication efforts aim to transfer relevant information from the School District to the public. The goal is to reach as many citizens as possible with as much of the information as possible, particularly those who are most likely to be affected. This is the most common form of engagement for School Districts. Examples of common communication methods include: cable TV, radio, websites, email, newspaper ads, newsletters, hotlines, etc.

Consultation

Consultation is the process by which School Districts seek the opinions, criticisms and suggestions of the community. Common consultation processes include communicative aspects and have as their focus bringing information from the public into the internal decision-making processes of the organization leading the consultation process. Common consultation processes include: focus groups, public meetings without voting, public hearings, public input sessions during council meetings, surveys, workshops, etc.

Consultation provides the means to test assumptions, invite new ideas, and give a broader view of an issue than planning and policy teams might otherwise be able to offer. The consultation process encourages thorough project planning, early input by stakeholders, and careful consideration of all available options. Consultation is also effective in improving accountability of officials to the public, while encouraging public ownership over direction of School District activities and developments that involve or impact them. This is because consultation builds public understanding and encourages public ownership of policies.

Direct participation of public in decision-making

Public participation in decision-making is an important mode of engagement and
can lead to better decisions and outcomes. Some common examples of public participation in
School District decision-making include: Deliberative Polling Participatory Budgeting, and
Advisory Committees. The popular rationale for sharing decision-making power with the public
is both pragmatic and normative.

The pragmatic rationale for public participation in decision-making recognizes that
involving the public in decisions serves as a means to legitimate final decisions and improves
public confidence and support for the decisions that are made. It also leads to mutual
accountability, and awareness and understanding among and between decision makers and the
public.

The normative argument suggests that public participation in School District decision making
processes fosters pluralism and encourages an examination of issues from as many different
perspectives as possible in order to find the best solution for everyone involved. Public
participation also fosters important democratic principles such as freedom of expression by
providing local residents a space for sharing their ideas on matters that concern their lives.