

Title: Communications Procedure

Adopted: November 8, 1976

Effective: November 8, 1976

Amended/Reviewed: January 19, 2026

This procedure must be interpreted, applied, and implemented in ways that uphold Indigenous rights and human rights and responsibilities, promote accessibility, and prevent and address (and do not reinforce) discrimination/discriminatory barriers.

1.0 RATIONALE

Effective communication is essential to the Durham District School Board's (DDSB) ability to support student achievement and well-being, foster trust and confidence in public education, and maintain strong relationships with staff, students, families, trustees, partners, and the broader community. This procedure reflects current legislative requirements, governance structures, and best practices, including commitments to equity, accessibility, Indigenous rights and human rights, privacy, and transparency. This procedure supports the District's commitment to accessible communications and the identification, prevention, and removal of communication-related accessibility barriers, consistent with the DDSB Accessibility Policy. It is intended to support consistent, professional, and effective communications that advance DDSB's strategic priorities and strengthen public trust.

The Communications Procedure establishes a clear, consistent, and coordinated approach to internal and external communications across the DDSB. It provides operational direction to support the implementation of the Communications Policy by clarifying roles, responsibilities, processes, and expectations for communications at the system, school, and departmental levels.

As a large, complex, and growing school board, DDSB requires communication practices that are timely, accurate, accessible, and aligned with DDSB priorities. Consistent processes help ensure that information is shared appropriately, audiences receive clear and relevant messages, and communications are planned, sequenced, and coordinated to reduce duplication, confusion, and information overload. Consistent and coordinated communications support a coherent DDSB brand and help reinforce trust, clarity, and confidence across DDSB communities.

This procedure recognizes the important role of schools, leaders, and staff in communicating with their communities, while reinforcing the need for coordination, planning, and escalation for high-impact, sensitive, or system-wide communications. It establishes clear expectations for engagement with the Communications

Department to support alignment, consistency, and effective communication practices across the organization.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 Communications

Refers to the planning, creation, and dissemination of information, messages, or materials intended for internal or external audiences where such communications are undertaken on behalf of, represent, or may reasonably be perceived as representing the DDSB.

2.2 Communications Department

Refers to the DDSB department responsible for providing strategic communications advice, coordination, and support.

2.3 Brand

The consistent expression of the DDSB's identity, values, voice, and reputation through communications, as articulated in the DDSB Communications Framework.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is responsible for:

- Establishing governance direction through the Communications Policy
- Upholding public trust through transparent, accountable governance and communications practices

3.2 Director of Education

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- Acting as the spokesperson for the District, in accordance with the Communications Policy and Media Relations Procedure
- Providing leadership to support coordinated, effective communications across the organization
- Ensuring that appropriate structures and resources are in place to support the implementation of this procedure

3.3 Senior Leadership and Superintendents

Senior leadership and superintendents are responsible for:

- Supporting and modelling effective communication practices within their

- areas of responsibility
- Ensuring that communications related to system priorities, initiatives, or issues are planned, coordinated, and appropriately sequenced
- Supporting escalation and coordination with the Communications Department where communications may have broader organizational implications
- Supporting school leaders, management teams, and staff in meeting communications expectations outlined in this procedure

3.4 School Leaders, System Leads and Management Teams

Principals and managers are responsible for:

- Leading communications within their schools or departments in a manner that is timely, accurate, accessible, and aligned with DDSB priorities
- Exercising professional judgment in routine communications with their communities
- Coordinating with the Communications Department where communications may extend beyond their school or department, or require broader awareness, alignment, or support
- Supporting staff in understanding and applying this procedure in their day-to-day work

3.5 All Employees

All employees are responsible for:

- Communicating both internally and externally in a professional, respectful, non-partisan and responsible manner when undertaking communications on behalf of the DDSB
- Adhering to this procedure and related policies and procedures when communicating in the course of their duties as required
- Seeking guidance or support where uncertainty exists regarding communications expectations or processes

3.6 Communications Department

The Communications Department is responsible for:

- Providing strategic advice, coordination, and support for communications across the DDSB
- Supporting planning, alignment, and sequencing of communications related to Board priorities, initiatives, and issues
- Supporting alignment with the DDSB Communications Framework to ensure communications reflect a consistent DDSB brand.

- Supporting schools, departments, and leaders with messaging, accessibility considerations, and communications best practices
- Coordinating system-level communications and supporting consistent, accurate, and accessible information sharing
- Supporting communications during incidents, issues, or crises, in alignment with established protocols and procedures

4.0 APPLICATION AND SCOPE

Application

This procedure applies to all DDSB employees and governs communications undertaken in the course of their duties on behalf of the DDSB. This includes communications initiated or delivered at the system, school, and departmental levels.

This procedure applies to communications intended for internal and external audiences, including staff, students, families, trustees, partners, media, and the broader community, where such communications represent, reference, or may reasonably be perceived as representing the DDSB.

Scope

This procedure applies to the planning, coordination, development, and dissemination of communications that support DDSB operations, programs, initiatives, services, decisions, and priorities. It is intended to support clear, consistent, accessible, and well-coordinated communications across the organization.

The procedure applies to, but is not limited to:

- System-wide or District-wide communications
- School-based communications with students, families, and communities
- Communications related to DDSB programs, initiatives, policies, procedures, and services
- Communications that may have reputational, legal, equity, accessibility, or operational implications at a system level, or that may reasonably require awareness or coordination beyond a single school or department.
 - This does not include routine, case-specific matters that are appropriately managed within schools or departments with advice from Legal Services.
- High-impact, sensitive, or time-sensitive communications with potential system-wide implications that require coordination or escalation.

This procedure does not replace the professional judgment exercised by principals, managers, or leaders in routine school or departmental communications. Where

communications may have broader implications, coordination with the Communications Department is expected.

Media inquiries and interactions with the media are governed by the Media Relations Procedure and must be coordinated in accordance with that procedure.

Where uncertainty exists regarding the application of this procedure or appropriate processes, staff are expected to consult with the Communications Department for guidance.

5.0 PROCEDURES

5.1 Planning and Coordination of Communications

- Communications undertaken on behalf of the DDSB should be planned and coordinated in a manner that supports clarity, consistency, and shared understanding across the organization. Wherever possible, communications should be included early in the planning of programs, initiatives, decisions, and activities to ensure messages are timely, accurate, accessible, and aligned with DDSB priorities.
- Staff are expected to consider the intended audience, purpose, timing, and potential implications of communications before information is shared. This includes understanding how communications may intersect with or impact other schools, departments, or system-level initiatives, and whether coordination is needed to support appropriate sequencing and awareness.
- Planning and coordination are particularly important where communications:
 - Extend beyond a single school or department
 - Relate to District-wide initiatives, priorities, or decisions
 - May generate significant interest, concern, or inquiry from staff, families, partners, or the broader community
 - Require alignment across multiple audiences, channels, or timelinesIn these circumstances, early coordination helps develop consistent messaging, reduces the risk of confusion or duplication, and ensures that communications are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to community needs.
- Planning and coordination expectations outlined in this section are intended to support effective communication practices across the DDSB and do not limit the professional judgment of principals, managers, or leaders in routine communications within their areas of responsibility.

5.2 Engagement with the Communications Department

The Communications Department provides strategic advice, coordination, and support to assist schools, departments, and leaders in planning and delivering effective communications on behalf of the DDSB.

Staff are encouraged to engage the Communications Department early on when planning communications that may extend beyond a single school or department, require coordination across multiple audiences or channels, or benefit from strategic communications advice. Early engagement supports clarity, accessibility and effective planning, appropriate sequencing, and alignment with Board priorities.

Engagement with the Communications Department may include support with, but is not limited to:

- Communications planning and advice
- Message development and refinement
- Accessibility and inclusive communications considerations
- Identification of appropriate audiences, channels, and timing
- Coordination with related system-level communications or initiatives

This process does not replace professional judgment exercised by school leaders, management teams, or leaders in routine communications. Rather, it supports informed decision-making and coordinated approaches where broader awareness, alignment, or system-level considerations may be required.

Where communications are sensitive, time-sensitive, or may reasonably attract significant interest or inquiry, coordination with the Communications Department is expected to support accurate, timely, and appropriate information sharing.

5.3 Communications During Emergencies and Critical Incidents

During emergencies and critical incidents, communications shall be coordinated to support student and staff safety, protect privacy, ensure accuracy, and maintain public trust. Clear, timely, and coordinated communications are essential in these situations and require adherence to established escalation and coordination practices.

Where an emergency or critical incident occurs, schools and departments shall notify their supervisor and engage the Communications Department as early as possible. Early engagement supports coordinated planning, accurate information sharing, and alignment across internal and external audiences.

During emergencies and critical incidents, the Communications Department shall support the coordination of communications in collaboration with senior leadership, including the development of messaging, sequencing of communications, and identification of appropriate audiences and channels.

Communications during emergencies and critical incidents should strive to:

- Be accurate, factual, and based on verified information
- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and consent requirements

- Be sensitive to the needs and well-being of students, staff, and families
- Be accessible and responsive to diverse community needs
- Be coordinated to avoid conflicting, incomplete, or premature information

Communications during emergencies and critical incidents shall not be issued independently where coordination is required to support system awareness, consistency, or public accountability. Ongoing updates shall be coordinated as situations evolve, recognizing the need for clarity, reassurance, and transparency while responses or investigations are underway.

5.4 Distribution of Materials

The distribution of materials through DDSB schools, departments, or communication channels should strive to support student learning and well-being, inform or engage school communities, and align with DDSB values, priorities, and commitments. Distribution of materials is a courtesy provided by the District and does not constitute endorsement.

Materials proposed for distribution through DDSB schools or communication channels shall be reviewed and approved through a centralized process established by the District prior to distribution. Centralized review supports consistency, fairness, and alignment with DDSB policies, equity and accessibility commitments, legal and privacy requirements, and community standards.

In considering materials for distribution, the following criteria shall be applied, as appropriate:

- The material supports or complements student learning, well-being, or engagement with the school community
- The material is inclusive, accessible, and aligns with DDSB values
- respectful of the diversity of DDSB communities
- The material is non-commercial in nature and does not promote products, services, or fundraising for private interests
- The material is non-partisan and does not promote political parties, candidates, specific elected officials, or advocacy positions
- The material does not conflict with DDSB policies, procedures, or strategic priorities

Following central approval, principals retain professional discretion regarding whether and how approved materials are shared within their school communities, taking into account local context, timing, and community needs. Approval of materials for distribution does not obligate schools to distribute all materials in all circumstances.

5.5 Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Communications

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools may be used to support communications work undertaken on behalf of the DDSB, including activities such as drafting, editing, summarizing, or formatting content. The use of AI is intended to support efficiency and quality and does not replace professional judgment or accountability.

All communications supported by AI shall remain subject to human review and oversight to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, accessibility, and alignment with DDSB values, policies, and legal obligations. Staff remain accountable for the content and impact of communications, regardless of whether AI tools are used in their development.

The use of AI in communications shall be conducted responsibly and in alignment with the DDSB's Generative Artificial Intelligence Guidelines.

6.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- DDSB Communications Policy
- Media Relations Procedure
- DDSB Generative Artificial Intelligence Guidelines
- DDSB Accessibility Policy