

Title: **System-Level Community Engagement Procedure**

Adopted: May 12, 2026

Effective: June 16, 2026

Amended/Reviewed: N/A

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

### 1.0 RATIONALE

This procedure provides operational guidance for planning, implementing, and communicating system-level community engagement in alignment with the Community Engagement Policy.

It supports consistent, purposeful, and proportionate engagement practices across central departments and senior administration by outlining expectations for each stage of the engagement process, from determining when engagement is appropriate through to closing the feedback loop.

### 2.0 DEFINITIONS

Terms used in this procedure are defined in the Community Engagement Policy, except where additional procedural context is provided below.

System-level engagement refers to structured engagement activities led by central departments or senior administration in support of Board-level decisions, initiatives, or priorities.

System-level engagement is distinct from routine operational interactions, day-to-day consultation, and school-level engagement. In some cases, engagement may occur alongside legislated consultation requirements, advisory structures, collective agreement obligations, or other established processes. Where this occurs, those requirements, mandates, terms of reference, or processes continue to apply and are not replaced or modified by this procedure.

#### 2.1 Designated Engagement Platform

The Board's designated engagement platform is the centrally supported digital tool used to support system-level engagement activities, including sharing information, gathering input, and documenting engagement processes, where appropriate.

Use of the platform shall be determined based on the nature, scope, audience, and privacy considerations of the engagement initiative.

### **3.0 RESPONSIBILITY**

#### **3.1 DDSB Chief Executive Officer**

The DDSB Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the overall implementation of this procedure in alignment with the Community Engagement Policy and for promoting system-wide consistency with the standards and expectations set out in the policy and related procedures.

#### **3.2 Senior Administration**

Senior administration is responsible for leading and overseeing system-level engagement within their areas of responsibility. This includes ensuring that engagement activities are purposeful, proportionate, aligned with the continuum of engagement, and planned in accordance with this procedure.

Senior administration is also responsible for ensuring that community input is considered, documented, and communicated in a manner appropriate to the engagement undertaken.

#### **3.3 Staff Supporting System-Level Engagement**

Staff supporting system-level engagement are responsible for carrying out engagement activities in alignment with this procedure. This includes supporting clear, accessible, inclusive, and respectful engagement practices, and ensuring that engagement activities are implemented in accordance with the selected engagement approach.

#### **3.4 Communications Services**

Communications Services provides strategic advice and coordination for system-level engagement, including communication planning, message development, accessibility considerations, engagement platform use, and alignment with system priorities.

Responsible departments are encouraged to engage Communications Services early for initiatives that are multi-audience, cross-departmental, public-facing, or likely to generate significant community interest.

Coordination with Communications Services is expected for large-scale, sensitive, high-profile, or system-wide engagement initiatives.

## **4.0 APPLICATION AND SCOPE**

This procedure applies to the planning, implementation, and communication of system-level community engagement activities led by central departments or senior administration in support of Board-level decisions, initiatives, or priorities.

This may include, but is not limited to:

- strategic planning initiatives;
- policy development and review processes;
- boundary reviews;
- school naming or renaming processes; and
- program or service changes with district-wide or community-specific impact.

System-level engagement may vary in scope and impact, ranging from matters affecting a specific school community to initiatives with broader system implications.

Where engagement intersects with legislated requirements, collective agreements, statutory or Board-established committees, or other formal consultation structures, those requirements, mandates, terms of reference, or processes continue to apply and take precedence. The engagement continuum and related guidance in this procedure may be used to support clarity of purpose, communication, and approach, but do not replace established obligations or processes.

Engagement activities under this procedure may involve or seek input from committees, advisory groups, affinity groups, students, rights holders, partners, or community organizations, where appropriate; however, this procedure does not govern their independent mandates, functions, or responsibilities.

Engagement may not be appropriate in circumstances involving urgent operational decisions, confidential matters, legal proceedings, or matters where options are predetermined by legislation, regulation, or Board direction.

## **5.0 PROCEDURES**

### **5.1 Determining Whether Engagement Is Appropriate**

Engagement should be undertaken where input is being intentionally sought and can meaningfully inform a defined decision, initiative, or outcome.

The responsible department or senior administration shall first confirm whether consultation or engagement is required by legislation, Ministry direction, collective agreements, Board policy or procedure, or other prescribed processes. Where such requirements exist, they must be followed.

Engagement is generally appropriate where the matter:

- involves changes to programs, services, boundaries, or Board policy where community perspectives could reasonably inform the outcome;
- carries sufficient public interest or institutional significance that a structured communication or engagement approach is required; or
- affects communities in ways that cannot be adequately understood through usual operational channels.

Engagement may not be appropriate where decisions are urgent, confidential, constrained by legislation or policy, or where input cannot meaningfully inform the outcome.

## **5.2 Selecting the Engagement Approach**

The department responsible shall select an engagement approach aligned with the continuum of engagement: inform, consult, involve, or collaborate.

The approach shall be selected based on the purpose of the engagement, the nature and scope of the matter, the communities of interest, any known constraints, and the extent to which community input can meaningfully inform the decision, initiative, or outcome.

The selected approach must align with what is open to input. Where the opportunity for influence is limited, the engagement approach should focus on providing clear information, explaining the context for the decision or initiative, and supporting understanding. Where community input can meaningfully shape understanding, options, implementation, recommendations, or outcomes, a consult, involve, or collaborate approach may be appropriate.

Engagement approaches are not hierarchical, and no single approach is inherently preferred. Approaches may be used individually or in combination, depending on the initiative. For example, an engagement process may include informing participants about fixed parameters, consulting on specific options, and involving participants in discussion about implementation considerations.

The selected approach shall be clearly communicated to participants, including what is open to input, how input will be considered, and any aspects of the matter that are not open to input.

### **5.2.1 Planning, Purpose, and Scope of Engagement**

Planning shall be proportionate to the scale, complexity, sensitivity, and potential impact of the engagement.

Before engagement activities are initiated, the responsible department shall clearly:

- a) Identify the project and purpose of engagement;

- b) Develop an engagement plan aligned with the selected engagement approach using the continuum (Appendix A) as guidance;
- c) Identify the communities of interest;
- d) Determine what is open to input, any known constraints, and how participant input will be considered.
- e) Establish the anticipated timeline for engagement and for any related decision-making process.

Engagement plans shall identify the selected engagement approach and describe how planned engagement activities align with that approach.

Engagement shall be planned and implemented in good faith, with clear alignment between the purpose of engagement, the approach selected, and the role community input can reasonably play in the decision, initiative, or outcome.

### **5.2.2 Identifying Communities of Interest**

The department responsible shall identify communities of interest that may be affected by, or have a reasonable connection to, the matter under consideration. Depending on the nature and scope of the initiative, communities of interest may include students, families and caregivers, staff, Indigenous communities and partners, advisory or affinity groups, community organizations, municipal or institutional partners, and other affected or interested groups.

Engagement should be designed to reach those most directly impacted by the matter under consideration, while recognizing that different communities may require different methods, formats, or supports to participate meaningfully.

Where engagement is directed to a specific community of interest, the rationale for that focus should be clear in the engagement planning and, where appropriate, communicated to participants.

### **5.2.3 Engagement with Indigenous Communities**

Where a matter may affect First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, families, communities, partners, or Indigenous rights, or where the potential impact is uncertain, the responsible department shall initiate consideration of Indigenous engagement early in the planning process.

The responsible department shall consult with Indigenous Education leadership and follow established Board protocols to determine the appropriate approach. This may include engagement with Indigenous communities, partners, or rights holders, as appropriate to the matter under consideration.

The approach to Indigenous engagement may differ from general community engagement and shall reflect respect for Indigenous rights, knowledge systems, community relationships, and the Board's commitment to reconciliation.

### **5.3 Designing Engagement Activities**

Engagement activities shall be designed to reflect the selected engagement approach, the communities of interest, the purpose and scope of engagement, available timelines and resources, privacy considerations, and any known barriers to participation.

Engagement design should ensure that participants are provided with the information, context, format, and opportunity for input appropriate to the engagement approach selected.

#### **5.3.1 Accessibility and Inclusion**

Responsible departments shall take deliberate steps to identify and address barriers to participation before engagement activities are finalized.

Considerations may include:

- accessible communication materials and formats, consistent with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and related standards;
- meeting formats that support participation, including in-person, virtual, or hybrid options;
- scheduling that reflects the needs of the communities being engaged;
- language, interpretation, or translation needs; and
- supports required to enable participation by communities that may be disproportionately affected by the matter under consideration.
- Engagement design should recognize that a single method may not reach all communities effectively. Varied approaches should be considered to support inclusive, accessible, and meaningful participation.

Engagement practices shall reflect the Board's commitments to Indigenous rights, human rights, accessibility, and belonging.

#### **5.3.2 Selecting Engagement Methods**

Engagement methods are the tools or formats used to carry out engagement, such as surveys, public meetings, workshops, focus groups, advisory group discussions, feedback forms, or digital engagement tools. Methods shall be selected based on the selected engagement approach, the nature and scope of the initiative, the communities being engaged, and the purpose of the input being sought.

A mix of methods may be appropriate, particularly where multiple engagement approaches are being used or where different communities may require different opportunities to participate.

In selecting methods, the departments responsible should consider:

- whether the method is appropriate for the selected engagement approach;
- whether the method is likely to reach the communities of interest effectively;
- whether the method supports the type of input being sought;
- whether the method can be implemented within the available timelines, resources, and privacy requirements; and
- whether additional or alternative methods are needed to support accessible and inclusive participation.

### **5.3.3 Coordination and Platform Use**

The Board's designated engagement platform supports a consistent and transparent approach to system-level engagement and may serve as a central location for sharing information, gathering input, and documenting engagement activities over time.

The platform should be considered for system-level engagement initiatives that are:

- large-scale or public-facing;
- intended to gather input from broad or diverse communities;
- connected to a Board-level decision, initiative, or priority; or
- of significant system or community interest where transparency and centralized documentation are important.

Use of the platform may not be appropriate for small-scale, internal, or routine engagement activities, or where engagement is conducted through existing structures or prescribed processes.

Where an engagement initiative may involve the collection of personal information, sensitive information, or information requiring restricted access, responsible departments shall consult with appropriate staff, including Communications Services and privacy staff, to determine whether the platform is appropriate and what alternative approaches may be required.

Communications Services provides strategic advice, coordination, and support for the planning and implementation of system-level engagement activities. This may include guidance on engagement design, platform use, accessibility, communication planning, key messages, timelines, and public reporting.

Responsible departments are encouraged to engage Communications Services early when planning engagement activities that:

- extend beyond a single school or department;
- involve multiple audiences or communities of interest;

- are public-facing or likely to generate significant community interest; or
- would benefit from coordinated communication and planning.

Coordination with Communications Services is expected for large-scale, sensitive, high-profile, or system-wide engagement initiatives.

## **5.4 Communicating During Engagement**

Responsible departments shall communicate clearly with participants before and during engagement about:

- the purpose of the engagement and the matter under consideration;
- the selected engagement approach;
- what is open to input;
- how and when input will be considered;
- any known constraints, fixed parameters, or decision-making requirements; and
- anticipated timelines and next steps.

Communication during engagement should be clear, accessible, and proportionate to the scale and complexity of the initiative. Where timelines, scope, or decision-making considerations change during an engagement process, updated information should be provided to participants as appropriate.

Clear communication supports meaningful participation, appropriate expectations, and confidence in the Board's engagement practices.

## **5.5 Closing the Feedback Loop**

Every engagement initiative shall include follow-up communication that is made available to participants and/or the affected community. The form and scope of follow-up communication should be proportionate to the scale, complexity, and approach of the engagement undertaken.

Follow-up communication should address, as appropriate:

- how the engagement activities aligned with the selected engagement approach and how participant input was considered;
- key themes and perspectives shared through the engagement;
- how input was considered;
- any decisions, outcomes, recommendations, or next steps; and
- anticipated timelines for further communication or implementation, where applicable.

Where input does not result in a change to the proposed decision, initiative, recommendation, or outcome, follow-up communication should, where appropriate,

explain why the existing direction was maintained.

Follow-up communication may take different forms, including updates on the Board's designated engagement platform, public reports, website updates, direct communication to participants, presentations, or other communication channels appropriate to the initiative.

For major initiatives, engagement summaries may be included in reports to Administrative Council, the Governance and Policy Committee, or the Board of Trustees.

Closing the feedback loop is a core element of meaningful engagement. Consistent follow-through supports transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the Board's engagement practices.

## **5.6 Monitoring and Continuous Improvement**

Responsible departments should periodically reflect on system-level engagement activities to identify lessons learned and opportunities to improve future engagement practices.

Reflection may consider:

- participation levels and whether the intended communities of interest were reached;
- the effectiveness of the engagement approach and methods used;
- accessibility, inclusion, and barriers to participation;
- the clarity of communication before, during, and after engagement; and
- opportunities to improve future engagement planning, implementation, or follow-up.

Insights from this reflection may be used to strengthen engagement practices across the system.

## **6.0 APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Community Engagement Continuum

## **7.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action
- DDSB P IND 01 Indigenous Education Policy
- Ontario Human Rights Code
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Education Act, R.S.O. 1990

- Anti-Racism Act, 2017
- DDSB P COM 07 Community Engagement Policy
- DDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan
- DDSB P HRA 01 Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Policy
- DDSB PR SCO 01-01 School Community Councils Procedure