

DATE: January 17, 2012

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Report on the Work Communications is doing to Support All Schools (Response to Trustee Request #153)

ORIGINATOR: David Fraser, Executive Director, Corporate Services

RESOURCE STAFF: Cheryl Oxford, Cory Sinclair

REFERENCE: Strategic Communications Framework, draft Board Policy JBC.BP

ISSUE

The following information was requested: Report on the work Communications is doing to support all schools. What services are available to all schools? How is this new non-cost recovery method of delivering these services being received?

BACKGROUND

In past years, the Communications department provided both allocated and cost-recovery services to district schools and central departments, along with allocated services to the Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools. Allocated services to schools included: advice on FOIP (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act) and protocol for events; media relations and issues management support; and access to information via the Staff Room (intranet), external website, Need to Know News and Bulletin Board. All other services such as advertising, brochures, website designs, posters and other promotional items were provided to schools and central departments on a cost-recovery basis.

The former service delivery model resulted in the department providing excellent and extensive levels of service to those schools and departments who could afford to purchase them, while other schools and departments with limited budgets were not able to access these services. In addition, service had been provided on an ad hoc project basis to individual decision units, rather than as part of an overall district communications strategy.

In 2010-11, Communications undertook a review of its service delivery model. The review involved consultation with all principals, including a Communications Principal Advisory Committee, principal network groups and discussions at the Superintendent's Leadership Meeting (which involves all District schools). The consultations found that principals supported a more strategic and organizational approach to communications, rather than focusing on individual schools. The review also indicated that the work of the Communications department should benefit all schools equally, rather than those with the ability to pay for communications services.

The majority of principals clearly said it was time to move past the climate of competition and individual approaches to communications and that a district-wide effort was needed.

Principals also indicated they experienced information overload, getting overlapping requests from central services with deadlines that may not have considered school timelines.

As a result of the service delivery review, the Communications department developed a *Strategic Communications Framework* aligned with board policy and the District Plan. The service delivery model was also realigned to provide the most effective and efficient core services to district schools in a way that benefits all schools equitably.

These changes led to the decision that Communications needed to move to an exclusively allocated model, where the department no longer offered retainers, service agreements or cost-recovery services that were focused on individual schools or central departments that had the ability to pay for enhanced services.

CURRENT SITUATION

The new service delivery model began in September 2011. The realignment of services from Communications involved the continuation of some core services that schools stated they valued (e.g., issues management, media relations support) and the introduction of new core services that would serve all schools equitably, efficiently and effectively. The following is a breakdown of the services available to all schools:

External communications support available to all schools

- Issues management/media relations support
 - Media releases to profile school events, key initiatives
 - Key messages, letters, School Zone communications support
 - Emails to staff
 - School Council and school community meeting support
- Plan and deliver communications support for new schools
 - Develop visual identity
 - Support for school opening
- District-wide advertising / marketing effort that benefits all schools and programs equitably, including:
 - Preparing information for the public to help prospective parents and students be aware of all open houses and all schools
 - Promotion through District's website and social media
- Professional, graphically designed templates for print materials
 - Communications' staff consulting and design time provided as a core service
 - Schools continue to pay for all printing /delivery costs
 - All print material templates feature consistent use of district identity and content but allow for school's identity and content.
 - Examples of templates include: newsletters, parent handbooks, brochures, posters
- Professional, graphically designed visual identities for schools who meet the criteria/need for a new visual identity

- In partnership with District Technology, provide the graphics for school websites which are also a new core service

Internal Communications Support to Schools

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) advice, protocol advice, e.g., school special events
- Intranet for staff (Staff Room, calendars)
- Operational information to support staff in their work
- Unified district directory of services from central services
- Unified online operational calendar that lists all requests and timelines from central departments for schools

To date, the new service delivery model is being received favorably, especially by schools who previously could not afford any services from the department. Communications recognizes that it is a bigger change for schools who had previously received highly customized, individual pieces they had purchased. In order to support these schools to transition to the new template system, they are able to use and make changes to their existing materials (whether it was done through communications or by an external company) with the expectation that all schools will transition to use the new system in 2012-13. This will result in a cost-savings to the District as all the design and consulting work will be done internally.

Continued enhancements to the new service delivery model include: Communications undertaking further research and consultations with schools to ensure that the content and types of templates available are what parents, students and members of the public are looking for, and looking at systems to deliver templates efficiently and effectively.

In addition, Communications has also been working with District Technology to undertake an inventory of all school websites and visual identities and consulted with school principals to establish priorities for service for website development and creation/update of visual identities. The details or order of service are still being finalized however some of the service priorities will include schools with no website or outdated site as well as schools with visual identities that require updates or new looks. These services will now be at no charge.

In addition, draft board policy JBC.BP – Strategic Communications Framework has also been developed and it identifies the Board's beliefs and expectations regarding all communications in the District. There will also be an administrative regulation that outlines the Superintendent's expectations, guidelines and standards regarding a wide variety of communications tools and practices. Communications will provide training and support to help implement the new guidelines and standards.

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