

# Communications Plan

## 2019-2022

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## Presentation

Maintaining respectful, effective and efficient two-way communication is critical for building trust and relationships with our students, parents and local communities. This is a priority of the Western Québec School Board.

## Context

In 2014 the Council of Commissioners established a Communications Committee to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on external communications. This includes developing strategic communications priorities and proposals for external communications to current and future parents, taxpayers, stakeholders and local communities, including decision makers at various levels.

Since 2014, the board has been more and more proactive in sharing timely and relevant communications with the local media to bring awareness of issues facing the board as well as highlighting the accomplishments of our students. As well, inserts into tax invoices have provided information to our local communities.

In 2016, the Secretary General conducted an audit of internal and external communications tools, which led to a comprehensive assessment of the most effective, efficient and timely sharing of information.

However, work still needed to be done to reach as many of our target audiences as possible. For example, while social media may be very effective, not all of our target audiences have easy access. Communications tools and the messages need to be targeted and shared through tools as varied as our targets audiences.

In 2017, the board hired a full-time professional dedicated to communications.

## Purpose

The purpose of this communications plan is to provide objectives and action items to enhance proactive and effective strategic communications within the Western Québec School Board in order to support its efforts towards realizing its vision, goals and values. This plan serves as a guide for internal and external communications regarding communication initiatives for staff, students, parents or guardians, and the broader community.

## Opportunity

The Western Québec School Board is committed to continuous improvements in order to realize its vision, follow its Commitment to Success Plan and uphold its values. Communication plays an integral role in moving towards success in these areas. Given the addition of a full-time communications consultant to the team and the recent deployment of new communication tools and channels, there is now an opportunity to embed strategic proactive communication initiatives into the strategic goals of the Western Québec School Board. This plan provides that link.

## About this Plan

The board's communications consultant drafted this plan with the support of the Director General and members of the Communications Committee. **The plan presents five Strategic Communication Goals: Inform, Strengthen, Position, Develop, and Prepare.** Communication objectives and strategies to achieve these objectives have been determined. Clear, achievable and measurable objectives, along with concrete strategies to reach these objectives, have been established for each year. Progress is presented to the Committee members, who meet four times annually and evaluate, review and amend when needed.

## Scope

This communications plan will apply to all representatives involved in administrative, promotional or boardwide communications, provided its relevance.

## Responsibility

It is primarily the responsibility of the board's full-time communications consultant and director of corporate services to look after the implementation of the strategies identified in this plan.

## Implementation

The communications consultant is responsible for implementing the means to reach the strategic goals and objectives within this plan, assisted by members of the Communications Committee, senior administrators and/or their delegates.

## Timeline and status

This communications plan serves primarily as a set of guidelines for the board's communications efforts in 2019-2022. Should the board's needs or priorities change significantly during this period, it can and should be edited.

The communications committee should consider preparing a new plan for 2022, to reflect progress on current strategic goals as well as introducing a set of new communication objectives and strategies.

## Evaluation

The following resources will be utilized to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the strategies and means within this communications plan. Other tools can be used to evaluate individual strategies.

- Monitoring of media
- Qualitative surveys to stakeholders
- Media hits (proactive)
- Social media subscriptions and interactions
- Website usage (analytics)
- Community feedback
- Software usage (mobile app)

## Procedure

- The Communications Committee will review all aspects of the communications plan.
- Before the adoption of the Plan by Council, it is to be presented to the Management Advisory Committee.
- A final consultation with the Communications Committee shall reflect the ideas, feedback and concerns collected at the Management Advisory Committee.
- The Chair of the Communications Committee is to present the document for adoption at Council.
- After its adoption, members of the Communications Committee can prepare recommendations for revisions to the communications plan to reflect current board priorities, changes to the strategic goals or objectives (technological advances, political climate, changes to the legal function of school boards), and experience with the strategies included in the current plan.
- The communications consultant will submit recommended revisions, along with his own, to the Director of Corporate Services for consideration by either the senior administration team or the Communications Committee, at his discretion.
- The senior administration team or the Communications Committee can accept, reject or amend recommended revision to the communications plans.
- The communications consultant will revise the communications plan and implement the revised plan as appropriate.

## Distribution

The communications plan will be distributed by the communications consultant to all board administrators, commissioners, school principals and other relevant parties. It is only to be reproduced in its full unabridged version. Without necessarily being of interest to all stakeholders, the communications plan is not to be considered confidential in any way.

## Overview of our Communications

### SWOT Analysis

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active schools</li> <li>• Smaller &amp; inclusive communities</li> <li>• Resources in place</li> <li>• Highly involved audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bad at telling our story</li> <li>• More reactive than proactive</li> <li>• Communications roles not clearly identified</li> </ul>
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly involved audience</li> <li>• Promote dialogue/Get people involved</li> <li>• Being prepared in advance</li> <li>• Engaging principals and staff members</li> <li>• Communication training to directors, principals &amp; commissioners</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immense territory</li> <li>• Different interpretations of same message</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats

### Target Audiences

Primary	Secondary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our students</li> <li>• Their parents/guardians</li> <li>• Members of staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our English-language communities and organizations</li> <li>• Taxpayers and the general population</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>

## Approach

This communications plan begins by identifying the board's five main Strategic Communication Goals:

- ❖ **Inform** – Keep the community up to speed by promoting transparency and involvement
- ❖ **Strengthen** – Expand reciprocal community relations and recognize communities by celebrating innovative teaching practices and student initiatives
- ❖ **Position** – Seize opportunities of growth by promoting or marketing the board, its programs or services through annual communications campaign
- ❖ **Develop** – Provide new online or mobile tools to reduce staff workloads and better user experiences as well as maintain, freshen up or upgrade the channels that carry our communications
- ❖ **Prepare** – Be more proactive than reactive

For each of these five Strategic Communication Goals, the communications plan targets several objectives. Each objective is presented with its main audiences, indicators of success and opportunities for feedback. To help reach this objective, a set of strategies (or means) is laid out.

A series of appendices will eventually complete the communications plan. They include the board's *emergency communications plan*, a *social media policy*, as well as an *ambassadors' toolkit* with guidelines for addressing the media.

# INFORM

## First Strategic Communication Goal

Keep the community up to speed by promoting transparency and involvement.

Objectives	Main Strategies
Ensure availability, ease of access and validity of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehensive resource webpages</li><li>• Online semi-interactive forms</li><li>• Ease of navigation and search engine optimization</li><li>• Promote the board's mobile app at school level</li></ul>
Welcome dialogue and promote transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council Insider</li><li>• Information on parent involvement</li><li>• Social media activity</li><li>• Comprehensive resource webpages</li></ul>
Communicate in both English and French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Systematically translate everything made public</li></ul>

Objective: Ensure availability, ease of access and validity of information

### Strategies

- Make comprehensive resources available on the Web for members of staff, partners, taxpayers, reporters and the general population
- Move request forms online for ease of use (see with each department)
- Answer media requests within a reasonable amount of time
- 'Good Morning' Web dispatch tool and search engine optimization
- Gather information on schools, school boundaries, centres, programs, committees, projects, departments, Council of Commissioners, etc.
- Provide a user-friendly mobile application

### Main Audiences

- Members of staff
- Parents/guardians  
(both highly engaged and in search of specific pieces of information)

### Indicators of Success

- Quantity, quality and organization of the information available online, likely evaluated through a qualitative survey
- Media coverage (board contributions)
- Website analytics
- Mobile app usage

### Opportunities for Feedback

- Provide an easy way to contact the webmaster directly from the website
- Ask for feedback on new features
- Request updates annually to schools, centres and departments
- Communications committee interventions

Objective: Welcome dialogue and promote transparency

### Strategies

- Share summaries of the matters discussed and decisions made at the Council of Commissioners (*Council Insider*)
- Invite parents and community members to get more involved (parents committee, governing boards, SEAC, Council)
- Remain active on social media and monitor comments constantly
- Answer media requests within a reasonable amount of time
- Make comprehensive resources available on the Web for members of staff, partners, taxpayers, reporters and the general population
- Optimize the 'Good Morning' Web dispatch tool and search engines
- Gather information on schools, school catchments, centres, programs, committees, Council, etc.
- Develop semi-interactive forms (contact, input, recruitment, disclosure of wrongdoing)

### Main Audiences

- Members of staff
- Parents/guardians  
(both highly engaged and in search of specific pieces of information)

### Indicators of Success

- Quantity, quality and organization of the information available online, likely evaluated through a qualitative survey
- Media coverage (board contribution to media pieces)
- Website analytics
- Number of *hits* on *Council Insider* stories
- Usage statistics of semi-interactive forms
- Frequency of activity on social media

### Opportunities for Feedback

- Social media interactions
- Ask for feedback from Commissioners on *Council Insider* stories
- Request updates annually to schools, centres and departments
- Communications committee interventions

Objective: Communicate in both English and French

### Strategies

- Systematically make everything made public available in both languages
- Review communications periodically

### Main Audiences

- Partners
- Government
- French-speaking members of the community

### Indicators of Success

- Absence of English-only content
- Web analytics of French pages
- Feedback from OQLF, or lack thereof

# STRENGTHEN

## Second Strategic Communication Goal

Expand reciprocal community relations and recognize communities by celebrating innovative teaching practices and student initiatives and board successes

Objectives	Main Strategies
Promote transparency and welcome dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council Insider</li><li>• Comprehensive resource webpages</li><li>• Online semi-interactive forms</li></ul>
Celebrate the new, the newsworthy and the noteworthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Celebrate innovative teaching practices and student initiatives</li></ul>

Objective: Promote transparency and welcome dialogue

### Strategies

- Share summaries of the matters discussed and decisions made at the Council of Commissioners (*Council Insider*)
- Make comprehensive resources available on Web for members of staff, partners, taxpayers, reporters and the general population
- Answer media requests within a reasonable amount of time
- Optimize the 'Good Morning' Web dispatch tool and search engines
- Gather information on schools, school boundaries, centres, programs, Council, etc.
- Develop semi-interactive forms (contact, input, recruitment, disclosure of wrongdoing)
- Remain active on social media and monitor comments constantly
- Share events & activities hosted by public partners and local non-profits
- Occasionally ask for input/feedback

### Main Audiences

- Members of staff
- Students
- Parents/guardians  
(all highly engaged and in search of specific pieces of information)

### Indicators of Success

- Quantity, quality and organization of the information available online, likely evaluated through a qualitative survey
- Media coverage (board contribution to media pieces)
- Website analytics
- Number of *hits* on *Council Insider* stories
- Number of *hits* on news stories
- Usage statistics of semi-interactive forms
- Frequency of activity on social media
- Numbers of interactions (shares, comments, likes and retweets) on social media

### Opportunities for Feedback

- Social media interactions

- Feedback from Commissioners and administrators on *Council Insider* stories
- Ask for *feel-good* story ideas at the end of each news story and staff newsletter
- Request updates annually to schools, centres and departments
- Communications committee interventions

Objective: Celebrate the new, the newsworthy and the noteworthy

### Strategies

- Celebrate innovative teaching practices and student initiatives, especially the ones involving technology, nature, sustainability, culture and/or special needs, through journalism, photography, social media and a boardwide event calendar (*feel good*/community stories)
- Remain active social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn)
- Send out a monthly staff newsletter

### Main Audiences

- Members of staff
- Students
- Parents/guardians

### Indicators of Success

- Likely evaluated through a survey
  - Quality and frequency of these *feel good* stories
  - Quality of images and/or footage
  - Frequency of activity on social media
- Media coverage
- Number of *hits* on web stories
- Numbers of interactions (shares, comments, likes and retweets) on social media
- Content of social media comments

### Opportunities for Feedback

- Social media interactions
- Ask for *feel-good* story ideas at the end of each news story and staff newsletter
- Feedback from Commissioners and administrators
- Communications committee interventions

# POSITION

## Third Strategic Communication Goal

Seize opportunities of growth by promoting or marketing the board, its programs or services through annual communications campaign.

Objectives	Main Strategies
Position WQ for staff recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and research</li> <li>• Partner with HR, schools, centres and universities</li> <li>• Collect information, ideas and opinions</li> <li>• Design, write up and refine a communication campaign</li> <li>• Design a branded recruitment booth</li> <li>• Build a web platform</li> </ul>
Position WQ AEVT services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and research</li> <li>• Partner with AEVT services and centre directors</li> <li>• Collect information, ideas and opinions</li> <li>• Design and write up a communication campaign</li> <li>• Build a web platform</li> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Create and share promotional videos</li> </ul>
Position WQ youth services to prospective families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and research</li> <li>• Partner with schools, parents / get the community involved</li> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Design and write up a communication campaign</li> <li>• Build a web platform</li> </ul>

Objective: Position Western Québec schools as supportive, fun workplaces in which to build one's career

### Strategies

- Analyze (SWOT) the current recruitment efforts
- Research efficient marketing strategies, social advertising and cost-effective ways for the board to stand out
- Collect or prepare staff testimonials, information on a few programs and information on the recruitment of teachers
- Design an appealing and professional branding specifically for this recruitment campaign
- Build a centralized platform (one stop) for employer and employment information as well as the recruitment of teachers
- Make the first steps of the recruitment process as easy and user-friendly as possible

### Main Audiences

- Education graduates of selected universities, college and teaching institutions
- Retired educators

### Indicators of Success

- Number of visitors at career fair kiosk
- Number of interviews or pre-interviews held at directly at career fairs
- Quantity and quality of information available to applicants about our board and its schools, allowing them to apply with much more confidence
- Number of applications received online
- Quantity and quality of information received at once by HR about a new applicant, allowing staff to filter through applications much more efficiently
- Fewer interactions between HR and applicants regarding missing documents
- Respect of set budget
- Simplified application process for applicants

### **Opportunities for Feedback**

- “How did you hear about us?” question within the online application form
- Career fair conversations
- Interviews
- HR emails
- Ability for applicants to provide feedback to HR regarding the application process
- Request feedback from WQ stakeholders
- Feedback received from other boards’ recruiters during career fairs
- Communications committee interventions

Objective: Position Adult Education and Vocational Training programs as opportunities for lifelong learning, upgrading and career training

### **Strategies**

- Research efficient marketing strategies, social advertising and cost-effective ways for the service to stand out
- Based on research, choose and develop effective marketing strategies (this may include video capsules, testimonials, social media, etc.)
- Collect information on each program and information on career opportunities to disseminate to target markets
- Filter information and ensure campaign content is appealing to target audiences
- Design an appealing and professional branding specifically for this promotional campaign
- Build a centralized platform (one-stop website) for prospective learners to gather information on each centre and their programs
- Make the website as easy and user-friendly as possible for members of the general public to request additional information and schedule visits to our centres

### **Main Audiences**

- Learners, 16 years and older

### **Indicators of Success**

- Quantity and quality of information available to future learners about our programs, classes, centres, and services
- Numbers of admissions, information requests
- Web analytics from the centralized website
- Quality of marketing strategies developed and implemented

## Opportunities for Feedback

- “How did you hear about us” question when learners register or request information
- Career fair conversations/general interest
- Suggestion forum on AEVT website
- Feedback from staff, partners and learners in programs, centres, and recipients of services
- Communications committee interventions

Objective: Develop prominence and position Western Québec’s youth services to prospective families

## Strategies

- Analyze (SWOT) the board’s current promotional efforts
- Research efficient marketing strategies, social advertising and cost-effective ways for the board to stand out
- Collect or prepare alumni and parent testimonials
- Ask the community what sets Western Québec and its schools apart from French boards and private schools on our territory, as well as English boards in Ottawa
- Filter information and ensure the campaign’s content is relatable for members of the target audiences
- Design an appealing and professional branding specifically for this promotional and prominence campaign
- Build a centralized platform (one stop) for families to gather information on our school board, our schools, 101 eligibility, etc.
- Develop a user-friendly interactive form as part of that platform that will allow newcomers to obtain additional information (extensive masked keyword-based FAQ with a simplified contact option in case their question remains unanswered) or register for school-organized open-house events
- Assess the registration process and see if some of the first steps could be simplified through an online pre-registration form (optional)
- Prepare a set of scripts for video capsules on what sets the board and its schools apart, with a focus on our communities
- Collect feedback from staff members, governing boards and the parents' committee on everything above

## Main Audiences

- Young families on our territory
- WQ families (retention)
- Greater Ottawa families considering relocation
- Local and regional partners

## Indicators of Success

- Local and regional partners relaying campaign information
- Real estate brokers relaying campaign information
- Quantity and quality of information available to families about our schools, programs and special education
- Long-term: increase of admission into French Immersion and FSL programs
- Admission staff noticing a shift in their communications with parents from more general questions to more precise case-by-case interrogations
- Number of online admission applications and information requests
- Web analytics
- Quantity and quality of information received at once by admissions staff about a new student

- Respect of set budget
- Simplified admission process (possibly for all schools, including cross-boundary requests)
- Promotional video capsules: quality, quantity and number of views

#### **Opportunities for Feedback**

- Ask feedback from staff, families and partners
- “How did you hear about us?” question within the online application form
- Communications committee interventions

# DEVELOP

## Fourth Strategic Communication Goal

Provide new online or mobile tools to reduce staff workloads and improve user experiences as well as maintain, freshen up or upgrade the channels that carry our communications.

Objectives	Main Strategies
Identify weaknesses in internal and external communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consult admins, collect feedback, research solutions</li><li>• Propose possible solutions and prioritize projects</li></ul>
Renew the board's array of websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have different designs/layouts prepared</li><li>• Support school staff during the transition</li><li>• Offer training</li></ul>

Objective: Identify weaknesses in internal and external communications

### Strategies

- Consult with each admin on the management of their internal and external communications
  - Buildings & Technology: currently no place for transparency – It might be relevant for the public to learn why some projects are prioritized over others, as well as for the board to celebrate the department's successes.
  - Complementary Services: the department struggles mainly with external communications – The information provided on web and in print is not always up to date and parents have difficulty finding the information for which they are looking.
  - Education: there are concerns with the number of complaints from parents – It was recommended that a complaint mechanism be made public online so that complaints are sent to principals first.
  - Finance: recent implementation of online working groups with other departments, which makes collaboration between colleagues easier. Challenges include communications with suppliers.
- Collect feedback from staff and partners
- See what has been implemented in other boards
- Meet with admins again to discuss these weaknesses and possible solutions
- Prioritize initiatives and projects by potential impact and estimated span

### Main Audiences

- Administrator and staff of each department (at least until an idea becomes a project)

### Indicators of Success

- Collection of data, the source of which will differ from project to project
- Survey sent to staff of each department

### Opportunities for Feedback

- Feedback and follow-up from senior administrators
- Have priorities reviewed by the communications committee

Objective: Renew the board's array of websites

### **Strategies**

- Survey principals and members of the parents' committee on their needs and expectations in school websites
- Gather a committee (which will include at least one member of each PLG, the director of technology, the IT analyst and the communications consultant) to look into different options
- Update websites content and set clear expectations
- Provide training for the principal or director as well as at least one staff member for each school or centre

### **Main Audiences**

- During the project
  - Principals and directors
  - Parents' Committee
  - School staff and parents through governing boards
  - Staff members who will act as school webmasters
- After launch
  - Parents
  - Students
  - School staff
  - Future parents
  - Future students (especially for AEVT centres)
  - Future employees

### **Indicators of Success**

- As measured in a survey sent to principals, school webmasters and members of the parents' committee
  - School website content more relevant in the short term
  - Ease of use and adaptability of new school websites
  - Implementation of the features requested
  - Efficient training and support is provided to relevant staff members
  - Relevance of the webmasters guide
- Web analytics

### **Opportunities for Feedback**

- Consultation with principals and members of the parents' committee

# PREPARE

## Fifth Strategic Communication Goal

Be more proactive than reactive.

Objectives	Main Strategies
Develop an emergency communications plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify risks, channels, and spokespeople</li><li>• Prepare template messages and a checklist for each risk</li><li>• Provide a “bug-out” communication kit and training, if needed</li></ul>
Provide media training and a public communications toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify the kind of training and resources that should be provided to WQ ambassadors</li><li>• Research and consultation</li><li>• Provide a go-to set of resources to ambassadors</li></ul>

Objective: Develop an emergency communications plan

### Strategies

- Analyze (SWOT) current emergency communications procedures
- Identify emergency risks and organize by sources and level of risk
- Identify strongest communication channels based on the audience, ease of use, speed of transmission and risk of failure
- Identify a main spokesperson and a backup for
  - Each of the risks identified
  - Each establishment, should a risk not require support from the school board
- Prepare template messages for each of the emergency risks identified
- Prepare a checklist of the steps to be taken and the channels to be used for each of the emergency risks
- Ensure compatibility of emergency communications plan with the emergency preparedness plan
- Consult senior administrators, the communications committee, school administrators and finally the parents' committee
- Provide a compact and straightforward “communication bug-out bag” as well as training (if applicable) for each of the spokespeople identified
  - Likely accessible online
  - Likely tight-knit with the ambassadors' public communications toolkit

### Main Audiences

- Ambassadors
  - Senior administrators
  - Chair
  - School principals and vice principals
  - Communications Consultant
- The plan, in turn, will outline communications destined for everyone, internal and external, including media

### Indicators of Success

- People know their communication roles in an emergency

- A survey sent to ambassadors shows that
  - They generally would feel more confident when it comes to addressing the parents or media during and after an emergency
  - They find value in the emergency communications plan, through its content, easy of access and use

### **Opportunities for Feedback**

- Consultation with
  - Senior admins
  - Communications committee
  - MAC
  - External partners
- Survey

Objective: Provide media training to ambassadors, and prepare a public communications toolkit

### **Strategies**

- Survey the current general level of comfort of WQ ambassadors in addressing the media
- Together with members of the communications committee
  - Identify what kind of training should be provided, and in what form (webinar, online classes, live during MAC)
  - Identify what kind of resources should be made available in the public communications toolkit
- Research
- Consultations with partners, professionals and members of the committee for feedback
- Build a public communications toolkit for ease of use and availability
  - Likely accessible online
  - Likely tight-knit with emergency communications plan

### **Main Audiences**

- Ambassadors
  - Commissioners (including Chair)
  - Board administrators
  - School principals and vice principals
  - Communications Consultant

### **Indicators of Success**

- A survey sent to ambassadors 2 weeks after training shows that
  - They generally would feel more confident addressing the public or media
  - They find value in the toolkit, through its content, easy of access and use

### **Opportunities for Feedback**

- Consultations with
  - Senior admins
  - Members of the Communications Committee
  - MAC
- Survey