

BD-2301 Communication and Collaboration with Parents/Guardians Procedure

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Lead department: CEO's Office

1. Policy

Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) believes in developing strong and positive relationships with students, parents/guardians, and the community. Communication and collaboration are essential for developing relationships that foster positive, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments that are built upon mutual respect, and that support student achievement and well-being.

This Policy, and the accompanying procedure, applies to communication between parents/guardians and school staff and central (board office) staff, and Trustees, and affirms TLDSB's commitment to:

- providing relevant and timely information to parents/guardians related to their child(ren)'s education;
- outlining the appropriate channels for effective communication;
- clarifying the process for accessing information or addressing concerns;
- establishing standardized timelines and process for acknowledgement and response to questions or concerns;
- assisting parents/guardians in understanding how they can become actively involved in the school community and their child(ren)'s education;
- creating a culture of mutual respect and consideration between parents/guardians and TLDSB staff.

The *Education Act of Ontario* and the *Ministry of Education Policy/ Program Memorandum 170: School board communication with parents* provide direction to school boards for strengthening communication standards, as well as increasing transparency and accountability in public education.

2. References and Related Documents

TLDSB Procedures and Reference Documents

- [Accessible Customer Service Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Code of Conduct Policy and Procedure](#)
- [External Presentations and Third-party Speakers Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Privacy and Information Management Policy and Procedure](#)
- [District School Council/ Parent Involvement Committee Policy and Procedure](#)
- [School Council Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Health and Physical Education Exemption Process Policy and Procedure](#)

- [Emergency Response Plan- Schools and Worksites Policy](#)
- [Emergency Response Plan- District Policy](#)
- [Emergency Response Plan- Lockdown Policy](#)
- [Transportation Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Volunteers in Trillium Lakelands District School Board Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Prevention and Resolution of Violence in the Workplace Policy and Procedure](#)
- TLDSB [school year calendar](https://tldsb.ca/calendar/) - tldsb.ca/calendar/
- TLDSB [school registration](https://tldsb.ca/school-registration/) - tldsb.ca/school-registration/
- [School catchment areas/ Transportation eligibility](https://mybustoschool.ca) - mybustoschool.ca

External Reference Documents

- [Education Act of Ontario](#)
- [Policy/ Program Memorandum 170](#): School board communication with parents
- [Policy/ Program Memorandum 128](#): The Provincial Code of Conduct/ School Boards Code of Conduct
- Ontario Ministry of Education [Curriculum Expectations](#)
- Ministry of Education: [Your child's education: A parent guide to our school system](#)
- [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario: A guide to Privacy and Access to Information in Ontario Schools](#)

3. Terms and Definitions

Central staff: Staff who work at an education centre (board office) (e.g., Chief Executive Officer, Superintendents, Technology Services staff, Human Resources Services staff, Professional and Paraprofessional Services Personnel (PSSP), etc.)

Collaboration: The action of working with someone to produce or create something; enables individuals to work together to achieve a defined and common purpose.

Communication: The imparting or exchanging of information using words, sounds, signs, or behaviour to share meaning or promote understanding.

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

District School Council/ Parent Involvement Committee (DSC-PIC): A committee comprising of school council chairs (parent members), a member of the board (trustee), and the director of education or designated Superintendent, that meets a minimum of four times a year to focus on supporting schools in the planning and implementation of strategies to involve parents at the school and the district level.

Educator: May refer to one or more of the following individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in a students' education: Administrators, Classroom Teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE), Educational Assistants (EA).

Superintendent of Education: Superintendents lead and supervise schools and programs, working with principals and staff to ensure that schools operate according to ministry and board policy. One of the key roles of a Superintendent of Education is to assist schools with increasing student achievement and well-being.

School climate: The learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community regardless of on or off school property.

School council: The local body which will support and advise the Board and the school in efforts to encourage enhanced parent involvement in children's education in consultation, where necessary with the TLDSB District School Council / Parent Involvement Committee as well as funds provided by the Ministry of Education. Funding allocations allow School Councils to support local efforts to communicate with and engage parents.

Trustee: School board trustees are members of the district school board. They are locally-elected representatives of the public, and they are the community's advocate for public education. They are required to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the Board in fulfilling its duties under the Education Act of Ontario. The primary responsibility of the Trustee is the oversight of board governance.

4. Administrative Procedure

Communication and collaboration between parents/guardians and the school board is essential to student success. TLDSB values the positive impact that parent/guardian engagement can have on student achievement and well-being, and is committed to welcoming parents/guardians as partners in education.

TLDSB recognizes that to best foster positive and collaborative relationships, parents/guardians and school or central staff must be in communication related to a number of facets of education, including, but not limited to, information related to student registration and transportation, student achievement, student well-being, classroom behaviour, school/ class events, and parent/guardian engagement opportunities.

The following procedure outlines the guidelines for effective communication and collaboration in response to parent/ guardian inquiries.

4.1 Best practices for communication and collaboration

- a) Parents/guardians are encouraged to:
- actively work with their child(ren) at home to support their learning;
 - have conversations with the classroom teacher regarding questions or concerns about curriculum content, assignments, behaviour, or other appropriate queries related to the classroom or school;
 - request clarification or support from the school principal (if required) regarding to policy, procedure, or process;
 - access tools and supports provided by the school to gain information (e.g., SchoolMessenger, school or board website, social media, Google classroom resources etc.);
 - work as partners with educators and board/central staff to support student achievement and well-being for all students.
- b) Educators should:
- maintain ongoing, open and regular lines of communication with parents/guardians regarding student progress;
 - provide relevant information to parents/guardians about activities, events, and expectations related to their child(ren)'s education;
 - acknowledge receipt of parent/guardian queries or concerns in alignment with the timelines noted in this procedure;
 - work with parents/guardians to address concerns in a timely manner.
- c) Administrators should:
- promote parents/guardian engagement in their child(ren)'s education;
 - ensure that school events, activities, meetings (e.g., school council) and celebrations are communicated to parents/guardians in a timely manner, and, where appropriate, do so in alignment with the *External Presentations and Third-party Speakers procedure*;

- encourage and support regular, timely, and concise communication between the classroom, school, and school community;
- support parents/guardians and educators (where required) to resolve challenges or concerns;
- reach out to the superintendent in the event there is a query or concern that the administrator requires support to navigate.

d) Board staff should:

- ensure that parents/guardians have access to the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan;
- ensure that parents/guardians have regular opportunities to provide feedback on the Strategic Plan and other board programs and initiatives;
- communicate details to parents/guardians related to any opportunities for parent/guardian engagement (e.g., school board sponsored events, guest speakers, DSC-PIC Meetings, feedback opportunities etc.) and, where appropriate, do so in alignment with the *External Presentations and Third-party Speakers procedure*;
- communicate matters of public concern in an expedient and efficient manner, and, where applicable, in alignment with the emergency response or other TLDSB procedures (e.g., phone/internet outages, facilities issues, transportation issues, shelter in place/ hold and secure notices etc.);
- engage in various platforms for board-level communications to meet community needs (social media, school and board websites, school-to-home communications via SchoolMessenger);
- confirm- when receiving a query or concern from a parent/guardian related to the school - that the parent/guardian has first contacted the classroom teacher and/or principal about the matter;
- support parents/guardians with information requests, questions, or concerns that cannot be addressed and/or resolved via the classroom teacher or school principal.

4.2 Parent/ guardian involvement in the school community

- a) Parents/guardians are encouraged to become involved in School Council and the District School Council/ Parent Involvement Committee (DSC-PIC) to receive information and provide feedback;
- b) Parents/guardians are encouraged to become involved in school activities/ trips or other volunteer opportunities (in alignment with the *Volunteers in Schools Procedure*) to assist and support in creating positive and connected learning environments.

4.3 Recommended contacts for obtaining information

When a parent/guardian has a question, they should follow the general guidelines below about who to reach out to as a **first step** for obtaining information:

*Note that the references provided in section 4.3, below, are intended to be *examples only*.

TLDSB recognizes that they do not represent an exhaustive list or the full breadth of reasons a parent/guardian may want or need to collaborate or communicate with the school or board/central office staff.

- a) For classroom related topics, reach out to the *classroom teacher*.
Examples* include:
 - Student achievement (including marks and progress)
 - Curriculum content
 - In-class behaviour or social concerns
 - Class field trips or activities

- b) For general information, demographic information, or absences reach out to the *school office/secretarial staff*.

Examples* include:

- Daily absences/ safe arrival
- Change of address/ contact information
- Transportation inquiries
- School-wide event information

- c) For additional or more intensive support or to get involved in the school community, reach out to the *school principal*.

Examples* include:

- Support with resolution of ongoing or escalated concerns or issues (only after resolution has already been attempted via the classroom teacher)
- Questions related to additional services (e.g., Attendance, Mental Health, Special Education)
- General questions or concerns related to overall school culture/ climate/ safety
- School Council/ volunteering

- d) For board-related issues, contact the *board/central office*.

Examples* include:

- Information related to board-wide communications or events
- Information related to public board meetings
- Support from the school superintendent with resolution of ongoing or escalated concerns or issues (only after resolution has been attempted via the classroom teacher and the principal)
- District School Council- Parent Involvement Committee (DSC-PIC)
- Suspension Appeals and Expulsion Hearings or Appeals
- Freedom of Information Requests
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities
- Home Schooling notifications

4.4 Process for addressing and resolving concerns

Trillium Lakelands District School Board firmly believes that maintaining and fostering the relationship between the parent/guardian, student, and school staff is the most effective way to support student success.

Parents/guardians are asked to approach the classroom teacher as a ***first step*** about any concern related to their child(ren)'s education for attempted resolution before escalating concerns to a principal or superintendent.

Parent/Guardian steps for addressing concerns

Step 1: Contact the classroom teacher to discuss the situation

The parent/guardian should bring concerns or issues forward to the classroom teacher for resolution.

then, if necessary:

Step 2: Contact the principal or vice-principal and request help in dealing with the matter

If the parent/guardian and the classroom teacher are not able to resolve the issue, the parent/guardian should request that the issue be reviewed by the school Principal (or designate). The school principal (or designate) will review the issue and work to resolve the issue.

then, if necessary:

Step 3: Contact the superintendent of your child's school (or, if/ when applicable the appropriate central department- e.g., Transportation Department)

If the parent/guardian and the school principal are not able to resolve the issue, the parent/guardian should request that the issue be reviewed by the school's superintendent of education (or designate). The superintendent (or designate) will review the matter as it relates to the Board's established policies and procedures and the Education Act of Ontario and will respond to the parent/guardian regarding their concern.

then, if necessary:

Step 4: Contact the Student and Family Support Office

If the parent/guardian has further questions or concerns after speaking with appropriate school staff and the school superintendent, they may reach out to the Student and Family Support Office. The office will review the case and confirm that all aspects of the Board's established policies and procedures have been considered and applied in an equitable manner. The office will respond to the parent/guardian regarding their concern.

then, if necessary:

Step 4: Contact the CEO's office

If the parent/guardian has reason to believe that that procedure is not being followed, the parent/guardian should request that the issue be reviewed by the CEO (or designate).. The CEO (or designate) will review the matter with the superintendent to ensure that board policies and procedures are being followed, and discuss potential next steps, and a response will be shared with the parent/guardian regarding their concern.

4.5 Equitable practices and application of TLDSB policies and procedures

- a) TLDSB staff make every attempt to align actions and decisions with relevant legislation, including the *Education Act of Ontario* and with TLDSB policies and procedures in order to support equitable and consistent practices for all members of the school community.
- b) Parent/guardian disagreement with the contents of an established policy, procedure or process is not grounds for an individual exemption or exception to the policy, procedure or process.

4.6 Methods of communication with parents/ guardians and community members

TLDSB is committed to communicating with parents/ guardians and the community through channels that promote clear communication, offer opportunity for two-way dialogue, and protect personal privacy.

- a) Digital forms of communication leave permanent electronic footprints that can be intercepted, misdirected, forwarded, or misinterpreted. Verbal forms of communication are encouraged when dealing with private, sensitive, or multi-faceted questions or concerns.
- b) Staff may request telephone calls or face-to-face meetings with parents/guardians instead of using digital forms of communication to allow for clear and meaningful discussions. Telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings help to:
 - Assist staff with their duty of care and prevent potential privacy breaches in relation to receiving or discussing student or school-based information.
 - Avoid confusion or misinterpretation, allow for clear and robust two-way dialogue regarding questions or issues, and foster strong and meaningful relationships between the school and family.

- c) Staff have professional discretion to request a face-to-face or telephone meeting and are not obligated to provide a communication in writing except in cases where formal documentation must be provided in alignment with legislation, regulation, or procedure (examples include, but are not limited to suspension or expulsion notice and decision letters, IEPs).
 - Following a telephone or face-to-face meeting either party may consider following-up with a written summary to recap the key points of the conversation and note any takeaways or action items. This strategy may assist to ensure mutual understanding following a conversation.
- d) Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and in alignment with TLDSB procedure, appropriate accommodations can be made upon request to support individuals with disabilities (e.g. TTY/ transcription, interpreter etc.)
- e) General information (e.g. newsletters, updates, notices) from the classroom, school, and board will continue to be shared through digital communications (e.g. SchoolMessenger, emails).

4.7 Considerations related to privacy and access to information/ communication with parents/guardians

- a) Under *MFIPPA*, the *Education Act* and the *Children's Law Reform Act*, custodial parent/guardians who have decision making responsibility have a right to access to information about their child(ren)'s personal information (in presence of a school administrator) with some legislated exceptions:
 - Until a child turns 18, their parents/guardians have a right under the education act to examine a child's OSR without the child's consent *unless* the child is 16 or 17 and has formally withdrawn from parental control
 - When a child is 16 or 17 years old and has withdrawn from parental control, the parent/guardian no longer has access to school information or records
- b) Under the *Children's Law Reform Act*, the federal *Divorce Act*, and the *Education Act*, non-custodial parents/ guardians are entitled to access a child's OSR, and to make enquiries and receive information regarding a child's health, education, and welfare *unless* there is legal documentation on file in the OSR (court order, separation agreement, custody document) *specifically limiting or removing access to information rights* or unless the child is 16 or 17 years old and has withdrawn from parental control.
- c) In all situations related to custody, unless the school is provided with a court order, separation agreement or another legally binding document, staff will interact with both parents/guardians as if they have equal and full rights to access information, communicate with the school, and be in contact with the child(ren).

4.8 Expectations related to courteous conduct of all parties

- a) The Education Act of Ontario, Policy and Procedure Memorandum 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct, and the TLDSB Code of Conduct provide the expectations related to conduct of every individual in the school community.
- b) The TLDSB Code of Conduct applies to the entire school community, including all individuals on school property, school buses, at school-related events or activities, virtual learning environments, and any circumstances that impact the school climate. It is the expectation of all individuals to actively maintain a positive school climate.
- c) When engaging in difficult conversations, or when expressing a difference of opinion, all individuals involved must do so in a manner that does not threaten, intimidate, or endanger the other parties involved.

- d) TLDSB is committed to maintaining a safe, caring, and welcoming environment. We will not tolerate any abusive, derogatory, discriminatory, or threatening behaviour or language during a telephone or in-person conversation, or via email or other correspondence.
- e) In the event an individual engages in abusive, derogatory, or discriminatory behaviour or language, communication may be temporarily suspended until such time all parties can work toward resolution in a calm and appropriate manner.
- f) In the event of explicitly threatening or dangerous behaviour, the appropriate authorities will be contacted.
- a) Queries or concerns posed by a parent/guardian in any format (phone call, email, in-person meeting) must be acknowledged *as received* within two (2) business days.
- b) In the event the query cannot be fully addressed within five (5) business days of receipt, an estimated date of response must be shared with the parent/guardian.
- c) During certain high-volume times of the school year, it may be necessary that a temporary adjustment to the response timelines specified above be made for some central departments. Any temporary alterations to response times will be communicated by the department on voicemail notifications or email auto-replies (for example: the Transportation Department during the first few weeks of school).

4.9 Role of the school board Trustees

- a) The primarily responsibility of the Trustee role is board governance, including ensuring accountability and transparency related to board policy, and fiscal management. Trustees are not responsible for the day-to-day operational and procedural aspects of the school board.
- b) While Trustees are able to assist parents/guardians to navigate the system, individual Trustees are not able to grant exceptions or exemptions to procedure or process in order to overturn operational decisions made by a Superintendent or the CEO.
- c) Parents/guardians may contact trustees at any time.
- d) Trustees can provide information and direction with regard to the staff person parents/guardians should contact in the Board.
- e) Trustees shall direct the parent/ guardian to the process which should be followed in resolving any concerns or to the appropriate person or step in the process (depending upon the steps the parent/guardian have already undertaken to resolve the concerns at the time the trustee is contacted) but shall not act as a representative of the parent/guardian.

4.10 Representatives of the parent/guardian when working with the school

- a) Parents/guardians have the right to have a representative of their choosing in attendance at meetings with staff, subject to any limitations under existing laws or statutes. Any costs/expenses associated with such a representative are the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- b) Principals, staff, and parents/guardians will be notified in advance of a meeting as to who is anticipated to be in attendance.
- c) A representative supporting the parent/guardian must agree, at the outset of the meeting, to respect and maintain the confidentiality matters discussed at a meeting between parents/guardians and staff.
- d) Parents/Guardians will be asked to sign an *authorization for exchange of information* form prior to the school sharing any personal information about a student with any representative who is not a legal guardian of the student.

If you require this information in an accessible format, please contact Communications Services at info@tlgsb.on.ca