

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 23 – BOARD COMMITTEE REPORT

COMMITTEE: General Affairs DATE: October 3, 2007

CHAIRPERSON: Trustee Moyra Baxter STAFF CONTACT: Mike Roberts, Superintendent

In attendance:

Trustee M. Baxter, Committee Chairperson

Trustee R. Cacchioni

Trustee A. Hunt-Binkley

Trustee S. Nicholl

Trustee G. Scanlan

Trustee C. Wiebe

Absent: Trustee Horning

Staff:

M. Roberts, Superintendent of Schools

M. Stolze, Executive Assistant (Recorder)

Partner Group Representation:

COPAC Deb Butler

COTA Tom Potts

COPVPA Des Sjoquist

Regrets:

CUPE Bill Zeman

DSC Membership yet to be confirmed for 2007/08

Item 1. Action: Whistleblower Policy

During this year's financial audit, the Auditors recommended creation of a 'whistleblower' policy and service for the School District. Discussions on that topic had proceeded through the Finance and Legal Committee to this meeting of the General Affairs Committee. Staff provided information concerning an external service that is available at a small cost to the Board. The Superintendent confirmed that collective agreements as well as the teachers' union code of ethics contain very specific language around how employees are to deal with certain concerns. Additionally, there are very specific guidelines in place on how employees are to deal with issues such as harassment and professional discipline. In his memorandum to the Committee, the Superintendent indicated that he supported implementation of a 'whistleblower' service, provided the District met the need for employee education on the purpose and an appropriate guiding policy were in place. Such services are considered good practice in the private sector, and are a standard recommendation of Auditors. The Committee discussed the issue. The Superintendent responded to questions.

In providing input to the Committee, the President of COPAC agreed with those Trustees who supported the implementation of a 'whistleblower' policy, indicating that in the private sector, people are reluctant to come forward because of repercussions. The President of the COTA and the Principals' and Vice-Principals' representative both expressed concerns about implications of mistrust that could be evoked, particularly if any 'whistleblower' policy/process was not limited to financial matters. It is believed that no school district in BC currently has a 'whistleblower' policy or service.

Outcome: Following further debate on the need and value of such a policy, the majority of Trustees voted to recommend that the Board, at its October 10, 2007, Public meeting, **“request the Superintendent to proceed with establishing a Whistleblower policy and process for School District No. 23 financial matters, on a one-year, trial basis, including an end report and recommendations, provided all contractual obligations are respected.”**

If the Board were to approve this recommendation, the intent is for the Superintendent's recommendations and draft policy to be returned to the General Affairs Committee for consideration on December 5th. By consensus, it was agreed that, prior to preparing draft policy and process, the Superintendent would consult with the District's partner groups.

Item 2. Action: New Policy: School Charitable and Community Service Activities

The Board had previously authorized the Superintendent to create a draft for a new District policy governing school and student participation in charitable and community service activities. The Superintendent explained that the purpose of the policy would be to give guidance to schools and administrators on the types of activities that schools could undertake. This decision making is currently at the discretion of the Principal. Similar policies exist in a number of school districts across Canada.

Outcome: Following amendments to the draft to distinguish internal and external activities, all Trustees voted to recommend that the Board, at its October 10, 2007, Public meeting “**approve new Policy 731: Community Service and Fundraising by Schools and Regulations 731.**”

It was agreed that the Superintendent should consider providing the list of approved activities as an Administrative Procedure, rather than as a Policy Regulation. The list will require updating periodically during the year, and should be easily accessible to Principals.

Item 3. Information: District Review November 18-22, 2007

As part of Ministry of Education practice, an external team of six people will visit our District to consider how our District sets direction, organizes for improvement, builds learning communities, and achieves results. Opportunities will be provided for selected partner groups to meet with the team. District responses to reviews are monitored by the Ministry through subsequent Accountability/Achievement Contracts and ongoing interaction with the District.

Future General Affairs Committee Meeting Topics: Wednesday, December 5, 2007, SBO at 4:30 PM

1. Superintendent’s recommendations – Policy and Process: ‘Whistleblower’ Service (subject to Board decision)
2. Information: Draft Amendments to Policy 645 and Regulations: Video Surveillance (referral from Superintendent)

Questions: Please Contact:

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Mike Roberts, Superintendent	Phone: 250 470-4356	e-mail: mroberts@sd23.bc.ca