



April 26, 2017

### **Expanded Committee of the Whole – Budget Input**

As per the terms of reference, we have the following input on operational challenges and efficiencies to be considered in the development of the annual operating budget.

We believe that parent engagement with the school system is important for student success. We want our schools to be places of partnership and respect, where every person feels included - parents, students, and staff members. Parents need to hold high aspirations and expectations for their children, and schools need to work in partnership with parents so that the home and school can share in these expectations and support learning. The positive results of a genuine partnership includes improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, positive student behavior, and increased confidence in parents about the school system. An important part of this engagement is communication; sending information to parents, receiving information from parents, engaging in conversations.

School District No. 57 does many things really well. For example, we collaborate through learning teams, mentorship programs and family of school initiatives; we operate using a decentralized operational model; and we work to foster relationships with partner groups. However, we fail repeatedly in communicating internally and externally.

The landscape of communications has undergone rapid change in recent decades. Where once there were only a handful of channels for delivering information, there are now endless possibilities. Effective, targeted communication is a skill that few possess. In an era of information at our fingertips, it is essential to ensure we send the right messages, at the right times, using the right channels and this can no longer be done off the side of someone's desk.

We need a professional to provide their communications expertise. We need someone who will develop an overarching communications strategy for the district. The strategy needs to identify the most effective methods for reaching our target audience. We need someone who will create mini plans based on subject matter and audience. We need someone responsible for public and media relations. We need someone who will draft the communications, ensure that the information is accurate and actionable, develop roll out plans and facilitate delivery. We need someone to ensure our communication is up to date.

Our district is not unique in this regard. The operational charts of many districts include a communications manager or specialist as part of the management team. Currently, four other school districts have postings for this position. These postings are provided for reference.

We believe that hiring a communications professional will support the board and district in fulfilling the values, goals and vision outlined in the SD57 Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021. The district has identified engagement as a goal; enhancing public education through ongoing communication engagement and partnerships with all stakeholders. We believe that hiring a communications professional will lead to increased engagement with parents and other community members, and lead to cost savings. If the district has a person with this expertise, we could communicate much more effectively and have it be completed in a fraction of the time it now takes.

The District Parent Advisory Council would like to thank the board and administration for the opportunity to participate in this year's budget development. We are available should more information or clarity be needed.

*Respectfully submitted by: Gillian Burnett – DPAC Chair*