

THE PVNC CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD: PANDEMIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

Introduction

Effective and timely communication is critical before, during and after a pandemic influenza. This Communication Plan provides information about the role of communication and outlines the communication plans and activities the PVNC Catholic District School Board will use to provide timely, accurate and credible information to staff, students, parents and the public, before during and after a pandemic. During a pandemic period, the Manager of Communications will collaborate and work with the Emergency Preparedness Committee, when convened, on the implementation of this plan.

Core Communications

The Communication Plan addresses a number of areas critical to successful public and stakeholder communication before, during and after a pandemic. The plan identifies core goals, objectives, strategies, key messages and audiences, key spokespersons, approval processes, media relations and evaluation as appropriate to all pandemic periods. It describes specific actions required during the pandemic alert, pandemic and post pandemic periods.

The information needs of internal, external and stakeholder audiences are assessed in each phase to prepare appropriate messages and information products, and determine strategies. Risk (or crisis) communication principles are detailed and incorporated as necessary. This Communication Plan has been developed to ensure the goal of improved readiness to protect the health of our students and staff. It is aligned with the Provincial, Federal and World Health Organization (WHO) communication plans.

Core Goals:

1. Clearly explain and promote the PVNC Catholic District School Board 's Pandemic Response Plan
2. Provide information to our students and staff to assist them in making the best possible decisions about their well-being and the phases of the pandemic

Core Objectives:

- Establish a broad network for disseminating information during the pandemic phases
- Provide clear, accurate, consistent messaging to all audiences during the pandemic phases
- Communicate transparently, accurately and in a timely manner through a variety of methods to reach all audiences

Core Communication Strategy:

The pandemic communication strategy is broken down into three periods, corresponding with the phases of pandemic influenza as outlined by the WHO. The Communication Plan will evolve phase by phase, concurrently with the pandemic periods. Each phase or period has its own unique communication requirements. Communication products that are clearly understood, available through multiple distribution systems will be developed for each period. By following a phased-in approach, the communications needs of internal, external and stakeholder audiences can be anticipated and developed. A range of communication activities will be undertaken in each phase. The WHO Pandemic phases are:

1. Inter-Pandemic Period (Phase 1, 2)
2. Pandemic Alert Period (Phase 3, 4, 5)
3. Pandemic Period (Phase 6,7)

The Communication Plan also includes a Post Pandemic Period Evaluation of all Communication activities.

For more information or detailed definitions of the periods and the phases within the pandemic periods, please refer to the World Health Organization web site at www.who.int/en/

Core Key Messages:

During a pandemic two main messages will need to be expressed:

- What the PVNC Catholic District School Board is doing to reduce any potential for illness and death and ensure a safe and healthy environment for students and staff
- What the PVNC Catholic District School Board is doing to minimize disruption in our schools and departments while ensuring all emergency contingencies are covered

For example:

The Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board will continue to provide timely and helpful information from the local Health Units on how students and staff can protect their health, and what to do if others become ill.

Core Key Spokespersons:

Each phase or period of a pandemic requires a primary spokesperson representing the PVNC Catholic District School Board to ensure main messages are clear and aligned with those of other Board areas. The primary spokesperson for the PVNC Catholic District School Board during an Influenza Pandemic is the Director of Education or designate. Establishing a consistent, identifiable, credible spokesperson will contribute to reducing anxiety and panic. As the situation evolves and during each pandemic period, key spokesperson requirements and roles will be reviewed and evaluated. Knowledgeable and articulate subject matter experts outside the Board may be recruited as required. The PVNC Catholic District School Board Communication Department will coordinate media requests, verify appointed spokespersons, establish and build credibility for spokespersons and the PVNC Catholic District School Board and provide risk communications management and media Training for key staff as needed.

Core Information Approval Process:

All Pandemic information issued by the PVNC Catholic District School Board will be approved by the Director of Education in consultation with the local Officers of Health or designates and the Manager of Communications. Content development for information is the responsibility of:

- Director of Education
- Medical Officers of Health
- Manager of Communications
- Designated subject matter expert or manager

Information, key, messages, backgrounders and fact sheets will be developed and pre-approved in advance whenever possible. When an emergency has been declared, the PVNC Catholic District School Board information approval process will be revised based on the Incident Management System (MIS) and the requirements of the Municipalities' Emergency Operations Centre/Medical Officer of Health.

Core Audience:

Internal:

- PVNC Catholic District School Board Schools & Education Centre Staff
- PVNC Catholic District School Board Students
- PVNC Catholic District School Board Trustees
- Parents
- Volunteers
- Communication Department Staff
- Unions/Federations
- Administrators/Managers
- Human Resources, Occupational Health & Safety

Stakeholders & Partners:

- Community agencies and groups
- The Media
- Catholic Diocese
- Neighbouring Education Boards
- Health Care Professionals
- Hospitals
- Communication Professionals in Education and other sectors
- Suppliers
- Volunteer agencies

External

- General Public
- Media
- Child Care Providers
- Politicians
- Visitors

Core Media Relations:

The media will be essential to the delivery of timely information to the public during a pandemic. From school closings to hand-washing tips to health system status, news reports will be the primary source of information for the vast majority of community residents. The media will also play a central role in shaping public reaction to the pandemic itself, as well as the public's perception of how efficiently the PVNC Catholic District School Board are responding to it.

The PVNC Catholic District School Board will provide media with:

- A pandemic media phone number
- Access to a credible spokesperson (Director of Education)
- Accurate, consistent, timely and accessible information about the pandemic as it effects schools and the central office
- Details about what the PVNC Catholic District School Board is doing (except where it would compromise safety and/or security)
- Information placed in the context of provincial, national and global events
- Specific public health information provided by the Health Units about how people can protect themselves and maintain health
- Quick response to rumours or inaccuracies
- Information that is consistent with other responding agencies as appropriate

Media Relations includes on-going media analysis, monitoring to identify trends and assist in determining strategy and response. In-depth analysis and evaluation will determine the degree to which communications efforts have met objectives.

Core Risk Communications:

Appropriate risk communication considerations should be applied before, during and after a crisis. Effectively communicating information can improve public responses to a serious crisis.

The Communication Plan takes into account the following:

- Provide information that is relevant and easily understood
- Protect the PVNC Catholic District School Board credibility and reduce the chances of panic
- Don't over-reassure
- Don't underestimate risk
- Acknowledge uncertainty and change of circumstances
- Acknowledge people's fears and pain
- Give people things to do to adjust to the new environment
- Give people a choice of actions to match their level of concern
- Promote awareness of the changes environment

Core Evaluation:

Evaluation of the Communications functions will improve program delivery and determine if communications is effective in meeting its objectives. The development of evaluation tools to gauge changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skill, status or levels of functions will be considered for each pandemic period. Key evaluation objectives and criteria of program success will be developed.

Evaluation activities will include monitoring of:

- Media Relations – daily monitoring and analysis of media coverage will determine if strategy is working and if improvements are required. To facilitate lessons learned and evaluation of communications after the pandemic, copies of newspaper clippings and television/radio broadcasts will be saved. News conferences, briefings, major speeches will be taped.
- Web visits
- Call inquiries
- Hot line inquiries
- Public presentations
- Requests for information

Inter-Pandemic Period (1, 2):

Communication goal

- Ensure PVNC Catholic District School Board's stakeholders are confident that the PVNC Catholic District School Board is well prepared for a pandemic.
- Ensure stakeholders are aware of the ways to get information about the PVNC Catholic District School Board's plan.
- During a pandemic contingency, ensure stakeholders are highly satisfied at all times with the amount of information they are receiving about the status of PVNC Catholic District School Board's programs and services.
- Raise awareness of the risks of pandemic influenza and the steps students, staff can take to minimize a pandemic from spreading

Key messages

- The PVNC Catholic District School Board is well prepared for a pandemic. Our plan is completely open to staff, parents, students and the community for their information and feedback.
- During a pandemic, the PVNC Catholic District School Board will follow the advice and guidance of provincial and local public health officials who have the expertise to assess the level of health risk posed by a specific situation.
- The PVNC Catholic District School Board priority during a pandemic is to keep schools open as long as it is safe to do so. Non-essential services will be halted to focus on providing the most necessary services to our community.
- Inform staff, students and parents about infection control and what they can do to protect themselves.

Communication Strategies:

- Create new section of website, which will contain all information about the Board's pandemic plan. Create new subscription for any new information posted to this section.
- Communicate to all employees in June and September to inform them about pandemic plan. Create a template script and package that school administrators and supervisors can use to communicate with their staff about the plan.
- Roll out infection prevention program when complete - highlight prevention measures
- Meet regularly with representatives of staff associations to work together on the

Inter-Pandemic Period (1, 2):

development of the pandemic plan. Provide informal updates as needed between meetings. Gain their “endorsement” for the plan and develop joint communication to their members.

- Create plain-language summary fact sheet about Board’s pandemic plan, Q&A and other background material, as well as the complete plan. Translate summary fact sheet into all languages spoken in area. Distribute to community organizations, as well as posting in new multi-lingual section of PVNC Catholic District School Board website.
- Communicate Board’s pandemic plan to all other area public sector organizations. Hold information-sharing session to inform community groups about the Board’s plan.
- Create a series of template parent communications for newsletters and handbooks from to inform parents about various aspects of the pandemic plan.
- Hold one or more focus groups to inform parents/guardians about the Board’s pandemic plan.
- Focus the Catholic School Council training night on the pandemic preparedness plan. Create a consultation paper for school councils to provide feedback about the pandemic plan.
- Provide regular updates and opportunities for input for Trustees and senior administration.
- Hold a briefing for local reporters and education reporters to give them background on the Board’s pandemic plan.
- Create a briefing package about this issue for municipal politicians, as well as local MPPs and MPs. Provide them with contacts and information sources if they receive constituent questions.
- Update the Ministry of Education regularly, through appropriate reporting channels.
- Send summary fact sheet to all current permit holders. Include it with permit for all new permit holders. Add condition to all new permits that in the event of pandemic contingency, all permits will be cancelled.
- Through regular meeting with childcare providers, share details of pandemic plan. Emphasize the Board’s commitment to keeping childcare programs going as long as it is safe to do so.
- Provide detailed information to CEO of consortiums/bus companies. Provide summary fact sheet for distribution to bus drivers.
- Provide standard PVNC Catholic District School Board letters for schools to give to their food program providers, field trip or excursion vendors, etc. explaining the PVNC Catholic District School Board’s pandemic plan and the fact that these programs would be cancelled during contingency.

Pandemic Alert Period (3, 4, 5):

Communication Goals

- Increase awareness of the PVNC Catholic District School Board Pandemic Plan
- Raise awareness of the risks of pandemic influenza and the steps students, staff can take to minimize a pandemic from spreading
- Determine, refine, prepare and test communications channels between the Board and stakeholders

Communication Objectives

- Release and promote the PVNC Catholic District School Board's Pandemic Plan and encourage feedback
- Develop marketing campaign to encourage proactive responses and behavior change to reduce spread of infection
- Integrate pandemic communications with broader health, emergency and corporate communications as well as federal and provincial activities (annual influenza campaign, emergency response messages)
- Prepare audiences for imminent onset of pandemic, particularly during Phase 5

Communication Strategies – during the Pandemic Alert Period strategies include using a variety of communication tools to raise awareness of what the Board is doing to prepare for a pandemic and what students, staff, parents and others can do to prepare.

After consulting with public health authorities to gain reassurances that there is no imminent health concern in the area, the Board would continue to use all of the communication strategies from Phase 1 & 2 to reassure staff, parents and other stakeholders. Use the heightened interest to make sure stakeholders understand the Board's contingency/response plan and how they can gain information. Emphasize awareness of the services that have been identified as essential during a pandemic, and those that would be curtailed during contingency.

Communicating with staff

- Cascade of meetings to ensure face-to-face communication with all staff.
- Superintendents of Education meet with their administrators, providing information about the information received from public health authorities. Explain that if there is a confirmed case of pandemic in Ontario, the PVNC Catholic District School Board will go into contingency. Explain how schools will operate during contingency.
- Provide scripts and handouts for administrators to use in conducting meetings of all full-time and part-time permanent and casual staff, so they can deliver the same consistent messages to all staff at their location.
- Administrators and Superintendents hold staff meetings to provide information about how their department will operate during contingency. Managers/Supervisors hold meetings if necessary to make sure all staff receive messages face to face.
- All meetings will emphasize the message that, in the event of contingency, the Board expects staff to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the Board close their school/worksites. Provide staff with direction about how to find out if their school or worksite is open or closed (page on schools web sites, school's voice mail, emergency call-out).
- Set up briefing with heads of all staff associations. Assign one member of senior

Pandemic Alert Period (3, 4, 5):

administration to each staff association—this individual will be the main contact between Emergency Preparedness Committee and the staff association. The staff association will receive a daily update following Emergency Preparedness Committee, and will direct all major questions/concerns through this individual to Emergency Preparedness Committee. Keep in constant contact to identify staff concerns, questions.

Communicating with parents and the public

- Update website to provide most current information. Send update to subscribers.
- Provide all schools with a parent communication. Use this letter to reinforce information sources and remind them of essential services.
- Send background information to all media, informing them that the PVNC Catholic District School Board will go into contingency if there is a confirmed case of pandemic in Ontario and informing them of how the Board will operate in contingency.

Key Messages – key messages during the Pandemic Alert Period will focus on strategies in place to prepare for a pandemic and will inform staff, students and parents about the situation and what they can do to protect themselves.

- PVNC Catholic District School Board is are preparing for a pandemic
- Plans are being continually updated
- Website development and updates, Intranet/Internet, etc
- Protect yourself from the seasonal flu; get the flu shot
- Wash your hands
- Keep your hands clean
- Cover your cough / Do the Sleeve Sneeze
- Stay home if you are sick

Information Approval Process

The PVNC Catholic District School Board Education Centre is the communications lead for the system for all Pandemic communications. The Director of Education will establish internal communications verification and clearance/approval procedures for the Board. Corporate and school pandemic messages will be developed by Communication Services in coordination with the Public Health Units to ensure consistent key messaging. The PVNC Catholic District School Board will collaborate with local officials and public health units.

Media Relations

The PVNC Catholic District School Board central message in Pandemic communications focuses on planning and preparedness. The Board informs students, staff and parents that it is taking the risk of a pandemic seriously and is planning accordingly.

The Board web site will be a source of information on the pandemic and regular influenza for reporters. The PVNC Catholic District School Board will work with the media to deliver its annual messages about flu shots and clinics provided. This activity is an opportunity to deliver pandemic influenza messages as well.

A dedicated pandemic media hotline may be necessary. The PVNC Catholic District School Board staff person dedicated to pandemic communications and provided with the latest information would respond to calls. This would provide one-stop shopping for reporters and help ensure accurate, timely and consistent messages from the Board. A dedicated line would also free up the regular media lines for requests not related to the pandemic.

Pandemic Alert Period (3, 4, 5):

Risk Communications – communications will focus on the following proactive actions and strategies:

- Establish a credible, trustworthy PVNC Catholic District School Board spokesperson (Director of Education)
- Consider and address each audience's needs and concerns
- Prioritize development of messages for each audience
- Ensure message is free from jargon, provides realistic advice and is easy to translate
- Use clear and effective graphics and design
- Consider audience education, current subject knowledge, experience, age, language spoken/read, cultural norms, belief system, socio-economic status and geographical location

Pandemic Period (6):

Communication Goals

- Reduce potential for death and illness associated with sustained transmission of a new and virulent strain of influenza in the general Board population
- Minimize potential for disruption in Board operations while ensuring a safe and healthy environment for students and staff and all contingencies are met
- Communicate the changing role of the PVNC Catholic District School Board during a Phase 6 pandemic period

Communication Objectives

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities concerning decision-making authority and how decisions will be communicated – see roles matrix in Pandemic Response Plan
- Outline ongoing surveillance activities
- Communicate the importance of continuing with stringent infection control measures and other public health measures
- Communicate health information on symptoms of illness provided by health partners to students, staff and parents
- Follow procedures for Information Approval, Risk Communication and Media Relations as detailed in this plan

Communication Strategies – the strategy during the Pandemic Period will be to assist students, staff and parents in coping with the pandemic. Contextual information on what to expect during the phase of sustained transmission in the general population will be included as provided by Health Units. Included will be changes in Board services for all audiences.

Communicating with staff

- Email all staff informing them that the PVNC Catholic District School Board is now in contingency. Inform them of the public health guidance the Board has received. Remind them of the main ways that the Board will function during contingency—e.g. what essential services will continue and what activities will be curtailed. Remind them of information sources. Remind them that the Board expects them to come to work if they are well, unless public health authorities or the Board close schools or worksites. Remind staff how to find out if their school/worksite is open or closed
- Provide script, Q&A and other background to principals, managers and supervisors. Ask them to feed back questions and concerns they are receiving, through their Superintendent or Emergency Preparedness Committee, so they can be added to Q&As.
- Provide all staff associations with a daily telephone or email update following Emergency Preparedness Committee, and direct all major questions/concerns through individual rep to Emergency Preparedness Committee.
- Ensure business, residence, cell phone #s in place for Director, senior staff, Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Intranet broadcast page will be cleared of all messages other than contingency information. Staff will be given this as one of their main information sources. Daily updates will be posted after the Emergency Preparedness Committee meeting.

Pandemic Period (6):

Communication with parents

- Send home letter to parents, explaining that the Board is now in contingency. Letter explains main ways to get information—website, school voicemail, phone line. Remind parents of essential services that will continue in schools and those that will be cancelled
- Emphasize that, if they are well, students are expected to come to school unless public health authorities or the Board close schools
- Emphasize key message that students who are ill should remain at home
- Direct parents to check website or Board voicemail daily by 6:30am for information about any buses cancellations
- Explain that field trips, excursions, pizza days and other food programs will be cancelled during contingency and let them know they will receive specific information from their school about refunds/rescheduling (probably after contingency is over)
- Use website as main information source for parents and the community about the status of schools.
- Website home page is cleared of all information in what's new and spotlight except contingency messages
- Website listing of all schools with status (open or closed) will be updated daily or as needed
- Daily updates will be posted following Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Send all newly posted information out to subscribers
- Provide information on phone line.
- Communicate School Closure Protocol to superintendents/Principals for parents
- Use Board's voicemail system to provide overall information and status of schools
- Update voicemail messages daily following Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Provide schools with standard signage—"school is open" or "school is closed" to be posted on the school exterior each day to help communicate with parents.
- Provide schools with voicemail scripts to use on their school answering machine to provide parents and staff with the information about the status of their school.
- Provide schools with scripts for secretaries on a daily basis, or as necessary, to answer parent questions regarding contingency.

Community organizations and media

- Send information out to all permit holders indicating permits are cancelled until further notice.
- Post information on website about all other cancellations.
- Email information to complete list of community organizations informing them that the Board is in contingency, outlining essential services that will continue, directing them to website and phone line for updates.
- Communicate School Closure Protocol
- Provide information to inform all PVNC Catholic District School Board vendors that the Board is in contingency to assigned departmental staff. Outline the main essential services that will continue and those that will be cancelled. Explain how the contingency might affect vendors
- Prepare daily update for media. Distribute to media via email/fax; post on website and email to subscribers. School will be closed to media, except where special permission is given by the Manager of Communications and/or Emergency Preparedness Committee.
- Hold media briefings or news conferences, if needed, to share significant news.

Pandemic Period (6):

- Provide superintendents with a main Board contact to direct questions/concerns of all child care providers.

Communication with Trustees

Trustees will receive, by email and fax, daily updates following Emergency Preparedness Committee meetings. Regular Board meetings will be conducted by telephone while the Board is in contingency, unless otherwise determined jointly by the Emergency Preparedness Committee and Chair of the Board.

Key Messages – During a pandemic the PVNC Catholic District School Board will follow the advice and guidance of provincial and local health authorities who have expertise to assess the level of health risk posed by a specific situation. The priority will be to keep schools open as long as it is safe to do so. Non essential services will be halted to focus on providing the most necessary services to our community. Re-assurance of the Board community that the PVNC Catholic District School Board is doing what it possibly can to maintain a safe and healthy environment while maintaining contingencies is essential. Communicate School Closure Protocol as needed.

Post Pandemic Period (7):

Communication Evaluation

Evaluation and feedback mechanisms will be built into communications vehicles whenever possible. Evaluation materials will be focus-group tested. Strategies used to meet goals and objectives will be reviewed. Overall effectiveness of the Communication Plan will be assessed on an ongoing basis. Telephone inquiries, web site visits, event attendance, media coverage, correspondence will be measured. A communications summary report will identify benefits, costs and program changes prior to the next phase.

Criteria for monitoring information dissemination, and evaluation of communication programs will consider communication goals & objectives and will include:

- Web Site updates
- Establishment of a secure intranet site for staff
- Development of a Pandemic e-mail address
- Presentations to staff, students, parents
- Preparation of school-specific planning guides
- Social marketing campaign – hand washing, cover cough/sneeze, stay home if ill (and include multiple ways to disseminate information)
- Pandemic preparedness messages to be included with other Board messages to expand reach of communication channels
- Displays on infection control procedures developed/obtained for schools, departments
- Show video and public service announcements on infection control procedures developed for schools
- Hotline to record messages on pandemic information
- Phone messaging effectiveness
- Participate in newspaper ad campaigns
- Communications to staff – voicemail, e-mail, hotline, secure intranet sit for management of overall Board response, including staff re-assignments
- Notification re reduction of services and possible alternatives
- Promote official guidelines and recommendations
- Coordination of time, location, protocols for media briefings, staff meetings, teleconferences, etc.
- Updates and information exchanges with schools and health partners
- Posters, notifications on school buildings
- Direct mail campaign – Board update information, health information
- Electronic and video billboards
- Decision-making protocol