



**NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING
INFORMATION SHEET**

DATE: June 7, 2023
TO: Education Committee
FROM: Don Balcombe, Assistant Superintendent
SUBJECT: Student Voice

Background

On May 24, 2023, the Board of Education passed the following motion:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) request that staff provide a list of student engagement involvement at the district and board level and to report back at the next Education Committee meeting.

This Information Sheet will provide an overview of student engagement involvement across the District.

Discussion

Student Voice, intentionally bringing students together to gather information, insight, and suggestions on how we can achieve the goals of the district, includes both informal and formal channels at the school and district levels. School leaders interact with students daily and have constant access to illicit thoughts from students, individually and collectively. Senior management brings together students from across the district for Student Voice sessions. Together, the combination of informal and formal inclusion of students ensures that student voice, representation, and perspectives are considered when decisions are being made that directly impact students.

At the school level, Student Voice is present in many forms. Through formal Student Voice groups, ad hoc Student Voice groups, schoolwide surveys, and informal conversations, students have participated in countless opportunities to address important issues at their school, including:

- Attending staff meetings to share out on topics of particular importance to students
- Setting up a Student Voice procedure for students to provide anonymous feedback to staff

- Student Voice (and/or Leadership teams) that connect with students to bring their voices back to staff
- Student Council/GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance)/SAGA(Sexuality and Gender Alliance)/Leadership/Social Justice/Youth Advisory Groups regularly share feedback with staff

At the district level, senior staff has met with Student Voice representatives from each of our secondary schools, most recently on the following dates:

- November 16, 2021
- February 28, 2022
- November 9, 2022
- April 19, 2023
- June 2, 2023

During these sessions, 2-3 students from each school met with senior staff, including the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Secretary-Treasurer, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director of Human Resources, and, for some sessions, the Board Chair.

Student Voice sessions are typically two to three hours in length and cover topics ranging from Truth and Reconciliation to Environmental Sustainability, Racism, Mental, and Sexual Health, Bullying, Academic programming, Graduation requirements, and elective offerings.

In addition to these formal Student Voice sessions, students were also engaged in developing the Environmental Stewardship Action Plan. Beyond the student representatives on that committee, a trustee representative and district staff also visited four of our secondary schools to meet with Environmental Club students during the Spring of 2022.

Student Voice opportunities at the school and district levels ensure that we consider student perspectives when making decisions about programming, resources, and facilities. From ad hoc groups to formalized districtwide Student Voice sessions, the voices of our students are ever-present in our work. The diversity of thought and representation that students bring forward helps us better meet the needs of our students.

Considerations

While the benefits of including student voice and agency through ad hoc and formalized districtwide groups are numerous, determining the best process for school trustees to include students within the district governance model is not clear. Trustees may want to consider adding student representatives to existing board committees or engaging trustees with existing Student Voice structures.

The benefits of having student representatives participate in current board committees include student agency, increased diversity of thought and perspective, and leadership opportunities.

Some potential challenges of involving student representatives in board committees include a lack of understanding by students of the governance model, difficulty in selecting students who are representative of the entire district, potential limiting factors related to legal and accountability requirements of boards, and time commitment for students to participate throughout the year at meetings.

The benefits of having trustees join existing Student Voice structures include maintaining structures that include a large number of students representative of diverse student thought, and meetings occur during school hours when students are available. Existing structures allow for both ad hoc and scheduled sessions.

Some potential challenges to including trustees in existing Student Voice structures include trustee availability for meetings during the school day, adding a political layer to current Student Voice meetings, and how to include the student voice from sessions within the board's governance system.

