

NVPAC
North Vancouver Parent Advisory Council

PARENT COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

For
“All Parent Email”
and
School Phone Directory
Projects

September 2008

Distributed to all PAC Chairs and School Principals
in North Vancouver School District #44

Parent Communications Protocol
“All-Parent Email” and School Directory projects

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Parent Communications Protocol
“All-Parent Email” and School Directory projects

Overview

History

Information is communicated in various ways to parents in our community. NVPAC primarily uses email to send messages to PAC representatives. Within an individual school, PACs generate their own internal messages as well, and may also receive information from the school teachers or administration. At the school PAC-level messages are then passed on through various systems, both on paper and electronically, with varying degrees of success in reaching individual parents.

Historically, many elementary PACs have also published school phone directories that provide families with much needed contact information for their children’s friends and fellow parents in their community. Over time, with particular concern for privacy and appropriate use, some PACs have met with resistance at the school level about publishing this information while other PACs have successfully produced a class/school directory each year, for the benefit of all families.

We acknowledge that there are some schools where such a communications system is already in place and working well, whereas, at others, proposals for this type of network may have run into various obstacles that have prevented its implementation. Obstacles could include a lack of volunteer parent commitment or limited knowledge of how to set up such a network, a particular concern from the school administrator about doing so, or the lack of understanding of the benefits a properly-handled network can provide to the school community.

This current NVPAC initiative is an effort to document and share the successful communications practices with other schools in order to benefit the broader parent community. After all, all the good information in the world can be sent to the schools, but if it doesn’t go down the line to more parents, its effectiveness will be limited.

Objectives

NVPAC is willing to take on the role in helping to make it easier for PACs to get an effective all-parent email system going. This will include education on technology as well as providing a template for set up. Additionally, we have developed a communications protocol to be used by school PACs and administration (school and district) which will enable both groups to have confidence in a system that can be effectively managed by the volunteers who are entrusted to take on the role of being responsible for communicating with parents.

The “*Parent Communications Protocol*” initiative and the “*Contact Permission Form*” referred to herein, are intended to enable an all-parent email communications network and published school phone directories that can be embraced by the individual school community as a PAC-led project which is fully endorsed by the District Administration and, most essentially, by the Administrator(s) at each school.

Short Term Goals for NVPAC

- § To provide a framework for a communications template for school PAC communications starting with email lists, and also applicable to publishing school telephone directories.
- § To work with the School District to gain endorsement of this protocol
- § To make communications easy and consistent
- § To commit to a “frequency discipline” that reduces email overload to allow regular streamlined communication with allowance for emergent issues.
- § To address permission/privacy issues through the use of standard wording on school forms
- § To establish an internal approval process for circulating information
- § To use technology for reliable and consistent emailing to all parents

Longer Term Goals for NVPAC

- § To improve technology to ease the process of developing annual ‘all-parent’ email address lists.
- § To streamline the email communication channel
- § To provide a framework for effective website use at the school PAC level.
- § To ensure that all parents have the opportunity to be well informed members of the educational community through the sharing of information

NVPAC will:

- § Outline roles and responsibilities at the school PAC level
- § Provide role descriptions (example for the parent communications volunteer)
- § Educate/train all parent communications volunteers (through workshops and protocol document)
- § Promote the inclusion of the position of “Communications Coordinator” on all school PACs
- § Encourage use of the communications protocol document at all schools

NVPAC will ask the District

- § To sanction a communications protocol for PACs developed by NVPAC
- § To help promote effective and consistent communications at school and district levels
- § To help provide expertise (*example: to help with technical workshops such as websites, email clients, etc.*)

A. Roles & Responsibility:

In order to help achieve the objective of setting up efficient and appropriate parent email and directory projects in all of our school communities, we have outlined some of the specific responsibilities and/or tasks that the participating partner groups can address.

NVPAC

- § Develop Protocol document for “all-parent email” and directory projects in conjunction with PACs and District (*launch Sep’08*)
- § Protocol document to be circulated amongst PACs including templates for “Contact Permission Form” and data collection
- § Training/explanation provided where appropriate and needed
- § Review/evaluate Protocol based on member PAC experience at the school level – get feedback and revise document as appropriate
- § Encourage school PACs to have a dedicated volunteer parent(s) to handle PAC communications
- § Negotiate and provide a communications timeline with PACs to help them implement a streamlined method of communicating (ie. setting up email system in Sept/Oct) (*See Appendix E*)
- § Establish “frequency discipline” with respect to setting expectations of how often and what type of email will be sent out for distribution. (*see Appendix B*)
- § Extend this protocol to cover school directory publications (*see Appendix C*) and, eventually, to PAC website management

District Administration:

- § Provide the appropriate legal wording (as sanctioned by Superintendent/Secretary-Treasurer) for stand-alone parental consent forms allowing the release of appropriate contact information to the PAC. (*see Appendix D*)
- § Incorporate appropriate wording/release into standard District form(s) for school office use.
- § Circulate information on this approved email process to all principals and administrative staff.
- § Extend this approval to school directory publication as well.
- § Potentially enable the electronic release of information as permitted by parents to PACs and/or provide technology/tools to facilitate web signup/subscription, etc through District IT department cooperation
- § Long term: Provide support for training/workshop(s) on NVSD website technology to PAC representatives and administrative staff.

School Administration

- § Enable PAC “*Contact Permission Form*” to go home to parents at the beginning of the school year.
- § Work with PAC to support the successful implementation of all-parent email communication within the school
- § Extend this support to the publication of a school directory

- § Identify staff liaison with PAC communications volunteer to help with future website/email set up.
- § Electronic release of data (names, email, phone #'s) by student and division based on permission granted (*proposed pilot project at this stage*)

PAC Chair/Executive

- § Approves all outgoing emails and passes on to PAC Class Rep/Communications Coordinator for circulation to the parent community through the “all-parent email list”
- § Ensures that all class reps (via Coordinators) are familiar with the Protocol and the PAC structure.
- § Liaises with the NVPAC rep to decide how well communication is working at the school level
- § Meets with administrators and PAC communications volunteer at the beginning of the year and as necessary to maintain good relationships.
- § Monitors any issues regarding all-parent emails circulating in their school
- § Extend the role of PAC communications to include publishing a school directory.

NVPAC Rep

- § Ensures that their local school PAC and parent community are familiar with NVPAC and BCCPAC structure and encourages circulation of information in order to keep all parents in touch with the broader educational community.
- § Attends NVPAC meetings to bring school concerns/issues forward to the district level, and reports back out to school PAC on issues of interest
- § Monitors circulation of NVPAC emails within a school.
- § Encourages participation in parent information workshops on communications issues

PAC Communications Volunteers

At the elementary school level, the email fan-out basically works by:

- § *PAC Chairs at each school receiving all emails for potential distribution;*
- § *Chair reviewing and approving appropriate content for distribution,*
- § *then sending the email through the Class Reps in the school who*
- § *then fan out to the parents in their individual classrooms.*

At the secondary school level, the fan-out may be somewhat different as the class rep structure does not typically exist in the way it does at elementary. However, it would still be possible to:

- § *collect the Contact Permission Forms and to have a centrally handled email list, perhaps with the help of several parent volunteers,*
- § *and/or have a subscribe/unsubscribe email list accessible through school websites*
- § *and/or use other suitable District technology or independent list-serve tools.*
- § *Note: There are currently examples in the District of secondary schools using electronic capabilities within the schools to communicate (eg. Synrevoice), a centralized PAC email network setup on a volunteer basis (ie. gmail), along with more traditional PAC and school communications such as newsletters, etc.*

PAC Communications/Class Rep coordinator(s) (ELEMENTARY)

- § Create as a PAC Executive position
- § Establishes a good relationship with PAC Exec and school administration to create a position of trust
- § Customize permission form template at the School/PAC level.
- § Coordinate individual class reps, keeping contact list (student and parent names, email and phone by division/grade) up to date, and ensuring that each class is kept in email contact on a regular/frequent basis
- § Estimate of time and commitment? Initial setup in September/October and consistent daily/weekly circulation of information
- § Support/coordinate publication of school directory as appropriate and as decided by the PAC.
- § Technology requirements – email proficiency and protocol, bcc, updates, frequency

Class Reps for each class (2 if possible) (ELEMENTARY):

- § Needs a Job Description (template provided by NVPAC)
- § Keeps their own class email/phone list accurately and up to date
- § Checks email daily for PAC correspondence to fan out as appropriate.
- § Fans out PAC emails to parent list for their class in a timely and efficient manner
- § Passes on feedback received about any emails as appropriate
- § Liaison between teacher and parents, as necessary
- § Understands PAC structure and Communication Protocol
- § Supports publication of school directory as decided by the PAC

PAC Communications Coordinator (SECONDARY)

- § Create as an Executive position
- § Establishes a good relationship with PAC Exec and school administration to create a position of trust
- § Commits to initial setup time in September/October and throughout the year to keep email lists updated and information flowing in a timely and efficient manner.
- § Fans out appropriate email communication through master list with permission of the PAC chair.
- § Format of email setup may vary from school to school to meet the challenges of the secondary community.

See Appendix "A" for flowchart of communications through the various levels.

B. EMAIL PROTOCOLS

- § Parents must sign a “Contact Permission Form” allowing their personal email address to be included in the PAC mailing list.
- § All outgoing emails **MUST** be approved by the PAC Chair or designate
- § All emails **MUST** be for school community use only – no commercial, political, or personal emails are appropriate
- § No personal opinions should be added to forwarded emails from NVPAC, school PACs, BCCPAC, school administrators and District
- § Privacy – all emails should be circulated with addresses blind copied – ie. “bcc” (*see appendix for further examples*)
- § Use *.pdf format for documents being circulated wherever possible (*note: provide info about free, downloadable *.pdf conversion programs such as ‘cutepdf’*)
- § Subject headers should be consistent and meaningful to enable simple filtering (*see appendix for further examples*)
- § “Frequency discipline” to be established to reduce the number of emails that will circulate on a regular basis to avoid email overload. Time-sensitive material will need to be circulated as appropriate. (*see appendix for further examples*)
- § Consider whether emails are for general/broad circulation or whether they only apply to a particular target group (ie. family of schools, intermediate parents, French-immersion families, students of one particular class, etc.) (*see appendix for further examples*)

See Appendix “B” for suggested guidelines for issues around privacy, frequency discipline, and consistent subject headers for distribution

C. SCHOOL DIRECTORY

- § Can be setup by PAC based on “Contact Permission Forms” gathered at the school level, and with or without the involvement of the school administration for coordinating publication (*ie. could potentially be entirely put together by volunteers once the forms are collected, but with the sanction of the school Principal*)
- § For school/family use only.

See Appendix “C” for further information on School Phone Directories

D. WEBSITE

- § NVPAC to organize an orientation workshop for parents to cover email and web applications and protocols (*for the future*)
- § District to help by providing appropriate space (ie. Computer lab) and staff expertise

E. OTHER POSSIBLE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

- § School office-based email list (via BCESIS database)
- § Telephone (www.synrevoice.com) communication
- § Yahoo/gmail groups, etc – web signup
- § In situations where it may be difficult to reach some parents, or where the all-parent email list needs to be promoted as an important means of communication, PACs could:
 - Promote communication sign up at opening school social events
 - Promote communication sign up at Home room tours (secondary)
 - Promote communication sign up at a booth in school lobby during school events/interviews/open houses, etc.
 - ESL contact-coordinate with district staff, liaise with the Multicultural Society, to assist families with language barriers
 - Etc.

F. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

NVPAC would like to thank Superintendent John Lewis for his support of this project seeking to enhance parent communications in the North Vancouver School District. We greatly appreciate the participation of District administrative staff, in particular Irene Young, Victoria Miles, Stephen Lamb and Greg Milner, along with school administrators Karen Harrop, Ross Bligh, and Joe Campbell who have all contributed to the development of this document.

Over the past months, we have had input from many school PACs, DPAC reps, and individual parents, with respect to their experience and needs in improving email communication in their school communities. We thank them all.

The NVPAC Executive members of 2007/8 and 2008/9 have all had a part in the creation of this document, but special thanks go to Leslie Uhlenbruck, Karen Stewart and Franci Stratton who have taken an active role in the consultation, writing and editing process since the beginning.

We look forward to hearing your stories of how things go with using the Parent Communications Protocol.

NVPAC - North Vancouver Parent Advisory Council – September 2008

Please provide any feedback on this document to NVPAC via email at:

northvanpac@gmail.com

APPENDICES

A. Communications Flowchart: Roles and Distribution

B. Email Protocols – privacy, frequency, subject headers

C. School Directory – content suggestions

D. Contact Permission Form – template for PAC use to develop email network and/or phone directory

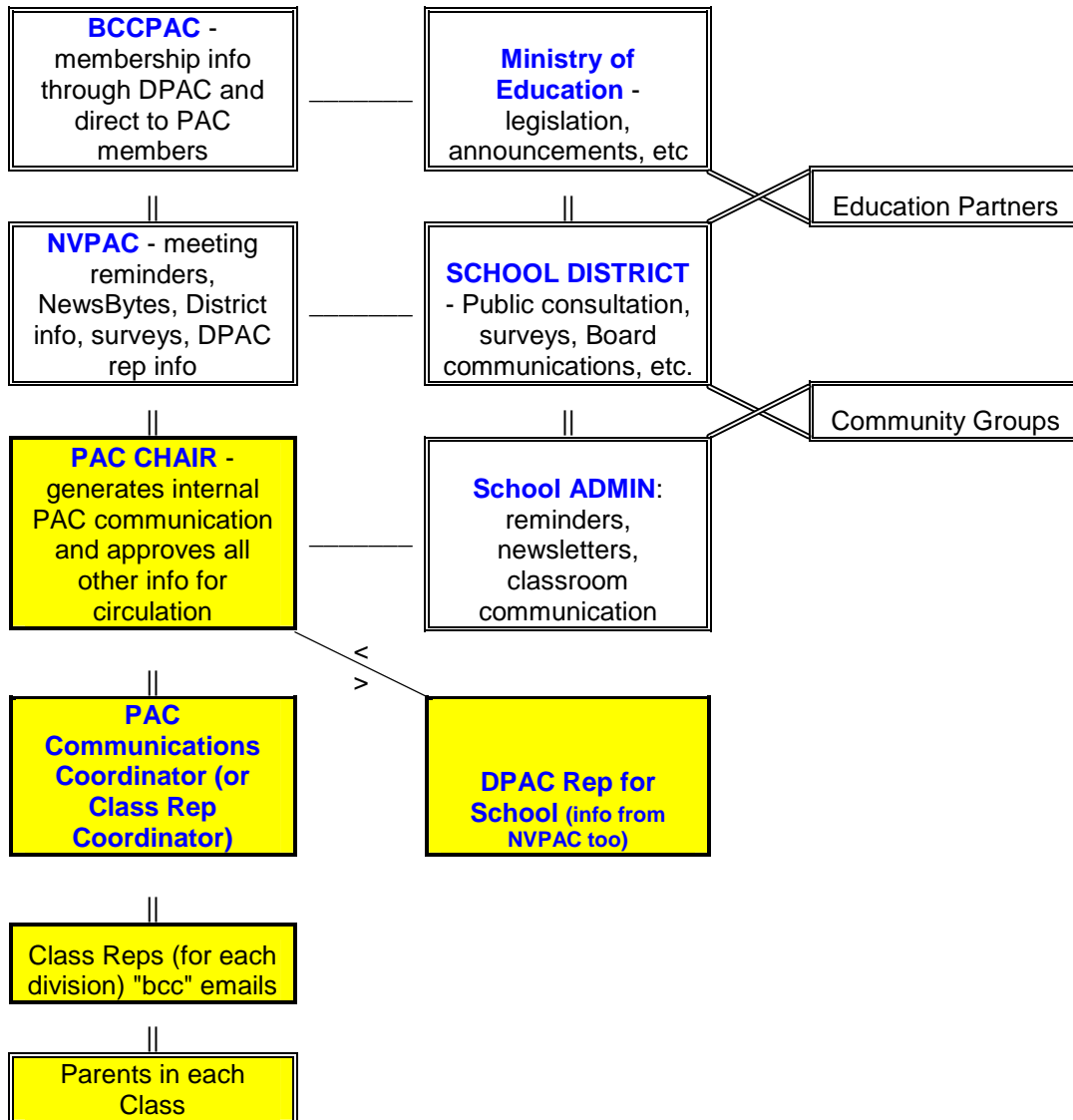
E. Proposed Timeline and Next Steps

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APPENDIX A: COMMUNICATIONS FLOWCHART

ALL outgoing emails must be approved by the PAC before being circulated. In the case where someone other than the PAC Chair provides information to be emailed out, whoever is actually clicking the final "send" button (ie. communications coordinator, class rep, etc.), should first check with the PAC Chair. See the PAC job descriptions for additional information.

The *Parent Communications Protocol* as illustrated in the flow chart below basically covers all of the internal PAC emails at each school with respect to privacy, content, frequency, and format.



APPENDIX B: EMAIL PROTOCOLS

(a) PRIVACY OF INFORMATION:

In order to avoid the misuse and release of personal email contact information, PACs must:

- Use the “bcc” tag when sending all of their emails out through a fan-out list. This will make it impossible to inappropriately “reply-all” to an email message, and will also stop someone from inadvertently (or intentionally) passing on individual email addresses.
- The Contact Permission Form specifically notes that an individual’s email address will not be published – that means neither in print nor electronically. The PAC does NOT have permission to broadcast any individual’s email address.
- If you want to receive central replies to your emails, be sure to put an email address link inside the text of the email for people to reply to, or use the “reply-to” feature on your address line to direct recipients back to one central reply address.

(b) FREQUENCY DISCIPLINE:

PACs should try to establish a regular routine to sending out emails that will be acceptable to their own parent community. Rather than inundating everyone on your list with several emails a day or even each week, consider consolidating information into one email when appropriate, and try to provide web-link information wherever possible, especially if it can replace bulky attachments. Obviously if information is of a time-sensitive nature, it may be necessary to send things out immediately. The key is to be considerate with the amount of email that you send out to your parent list and to avoid email overload.

Sample “frequency” plan:

- PAC monthly newsletter on the Friday before each PAC meeting
- Monday or Friday PAC NewsBytes with upcoming information including reminders for deadlines and events coming up within the next week or so and links to relevant websites of interest to the parent community.
- Occasional “urgent” emails as necessary.
- Where possible, target particular emails for a sub-group of the whole email list – ie. French immersion classes only, primary Gr.K-3 classes, or even a single division or grade.
- It may be necessary to send separate for matters of special importance or for emails that require multiple attachments.

APPENDIX B: EMAIL PROTOCOLS (cont'd)

(c) "SUBJECT" HEADERS should be used consistently

PACs should use a consistent labeling format when distributing email to the parent community.

If your PAC is referred to as "BPAC", use these initials (without fail!) at the beginning of the subject line in EVERY email. This will enable the recipients to "filter" their emails for "BPAC" topics and may help to avoid having them rejected as spam. Parents should also know who to expect PAC emails from (ie. their class rep or communications person) so they can allow mail from these senders if necessary in their setup.

Sample subject "headers":

- BPAC NewsBits for the month of September 2008
- BPAC Weekly Reminders for September 8-15, 2008
- BPAC *URGENT* News re: change of dates
- BPAC Fwd: NVPAC NewsBytes for September 2008
- Etc.

APPENDIX C: PHONE DIRECTORY

As with the email network, the Directory is optional according to the wishes of each individual school community. Once the PAC has decided whether it would like to take on the Directory project, the next step would be to talk to the Principal about how best to coordinate the publication for that particular community. In some cases, the parents do all of the compilation and editing of the information, and the school can take care of the copying while in other situations, the school may be more or less involved in the project. In all cases, the PAC and the Administration need to be in coordination on how to make it happen.

The Student/School/Family directory can be of great use to all members of the school community. The same rules of privacy and consideration apply to the printed directory as they do to email use. The Directory is only to be used for school community use and should never be distributed outside the school population, nor used for any commercial, political, or other purposes.

Apart from the family contact information that is given by individual parents on the “*Contact Permission Form*”, the PAC may choose to include additional information such as:

- School contact information including school address, office phone, and callback phone number
- PAC Executive names and contact information (including email address for executive and committee reps)
- School calendar
- School Code of Conduct
- School Staff – admin, teachers, and support staff by grade, division, department
- Student/Parent listings sorted by Grade and Division, including teacher’s name
- Class reps contact information for each class
- School and/or PAC website contact information
- Space to fill in new and/or revised contact information
- Acknowledgements
- Some kind of condition of use phrase like “*This directory was compiled by the [school name] PAC, as a resource for families. This directory is NOT for public or commercial use. Not all students’ phone numbers appear in this directory as per parent request.*”

NOTE: No student or parent contact information can be included in this Directory unless a signed and completed “Contact Permission Form” has been received from the individual family.

APPENDIX D: Contact Permission Form

[Insert PAC/School Logo if available]

[school name] Parent Advisory Council 2008/9
Contact Permission Form for PAC Email List and School Directory

The [school name] Parent Advisory Council, NVPAC, and the District and school administration, are working together to provide better communication with parents of students at our schools in North Vancouver in accordance with the guidelines provided in the "PAC Communications Protocol". Along with suggested procedures for setting up and managing the PAC email network and directory, this document includes protocols with respect to maintaining privacy, a frequency discipline, and ensuring that only appropriate school community content is distributed through these means.

PARENT EMAIL NETWORK: {recommended}

To keep parents well informed, [school name] PAC will be establishing an email list to be used for PAC purposes only. Email messaging is an important way to keep up-to-date on local classroom, school, and PAC activities and on matters affecting our broader educational community. Your email address will NOT be published but will be used to dispatch information through a PAC email fan-out structure within our school.

- o YES _____ I would like to receive PAC email communication at the following email address (please complete contact information):

_____ @ _____.

- o NO _____ I do not want to receive PAC email communications.

PHONE DIRECTORY: {optional}

The [school name] PAC will also publish a school telephone directory listing the names of students, their parents, and phone number. Your individual consent to be included in this directory is required as indicated below.

- o Do you agree to have your name and contact information published in a School Directory that is provided to other parents?
YES _____ (as per contact information) or NO _____

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Teacher: _____ Grade: _____ Division: _____

Student Surname: _____ Student First Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Parents/Guardians First Names (Usual Names) _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX E. TIMELINE:

May 1'08: Review draft "All-Parent Email project" at District Communications committee

May 1-15'08: Revise draft based on feedback and get approval of Superintendent, Secretary/Treasurer, Communications Manager, and IT Director

May1-15'08: and circulate to DPAC/PAC reps for feedback

June'08: Introduce document to AEA/SSG reps and District Admin Services

May22'08: Present "All-Parent Email project" document at NVPAC AGM for implementation in September 2008

Next steps prior to Sep'08 implementation:

- § Incorporate appropriate wording into District permission forms/documents
- § Distribute protocol through all PAC Chairs/DPAC reps and Principals to incorporate in Sep'08 parent information packages
- § Setup workshop for Sep/Oct'08 for PAC Communication volunteers/coordinators

Phase 1 / Short-term 2008/9 school year – September'2008:

- § Build school-based email lists based on the names that have given permission (this is the existing method in several schools)
- § Provide templates to PAC volunteers that are endorsed by the District and School Admin to facilitate parent communications by email and school directories.
- § Hold Communications workshop for parent volunteers in Sep/Oct'2008

Phase 2 / Longer Term:

- § Develop an "opt in" system that is online/web based and supported by District IT
- § Provide training to parent volunteers to work with managing a web-based email circulation list

APPENDIX F. NVPAC Mandate

NVPAC's major focus is on improving and extending our communications in order to build a well-informed and interested parent community in our school district. NVPAC's commitment to establishing a "*Parent Communications Protocol*" within the North Vancouver School District is reflective of the following excerpts from NVPAC's Constitution:

b) To establish and maintain a parent group on a School District level and thus provide the framework for continuous communication among parents, teachers, trustees, and administrators so that in time of need the means for constructive discussion is readily available.

h) To help parents become more aware of the realities of running a school system on both the local and district levels, to encourage them to take the broader view, to see the possibilities as well as the problems and thereby make informed contributions to discussions. To ensure that opinions formed and circulated throughout the community are based on fact.

i) To determine, as far as possible, the priorities of parents and to communicate this information.

NVPAC recognizes that we are not yet reaching parents across the School District consistently. As a first step to improving communications with parents, NVPAC has begun the process of encouraging all PACS to ensure that they have an executive position dedicated to the area of "Communication" as part of its regular roster of parent volunteers.

While we have made great progress in the form and timing of our outgoing email communication to virtually all schools in the past year, we still think assistance is needed to help school PACs with setting up and maintaining their internal communications structure. Our goal is to ensure that the parent community in every North Vancouver school is connected by means of an email fan-out tree, and potentially a school telephone directory, to be fully coordinated by PAC volunteers within a framework acceptable to PACs, District and school administration, and the recipients.