

Human Resources Review

Prepared for the Board of Education
School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)

Established by the *Public Sector Employers Act*, BCPSEA is a multi-employer association and the accredited bargaining agent for all 60 public boards of education, including the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. BCPSEA supports public education through innovative human resource practices, partnerships, and services.



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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	4
Summary of Findings	5
Human Resources Strategic Plan.....	5
Staffing	5
Recruitment.....	6
Labour Relations	7
Mentorship Programs	8
Orientation Programs	9
Recognition Programs	9
Occupational Health and Safety	10
Payroll and Benefits.....	10
Staffing	10
Recommendations	11
Recommendation One.....	11
Recommendation Two.....	12
Appendix 1	13
Appendix 2	15

Executive Summary

The Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) requested the assistance of the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association to conduct a high level review of the district's human resources structure and services.

Thirty-three interviews were conducted with human resource department staff, members of the Board of Education, district senior staff, other district exempt staff, and representatives of the local principal and vice principals' association, district parent advisory council, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association. Issues included human resources strategic planning, staffing, labour relations, mentoring programs, orientation programs, recognition programs, occupational health and safety, payroll and benefits, and technology (see Appendix 1 for the interview template).

The interviews were supplemented by receipt and review of data from the human resources department, the payroll department and the finance department.

Overwhelmingly, participants cited as a critical gap the absence of a school district human resources strategic plan. Participants commented on a perceived lack of departmental direction or goals and of positions operating in silos, unclear on the roles of others in the department and unclear on effective interactions between those roles. All spoke of the need for a strong professional human resources leader. Further concerns identified included:

- no succession plan
- no articulated process for recruitment, selection and retention
- a historically contentious labour relations environment, although changes in approach/process implemented in spring 2011 were cited as positive and encouraging. Several components of the labour relations function were identified as requiring attention, including training, attendance management, mentorship programs, and orientation programs.

A further concern identified by participants was characterized as a lack of *business connectedness* among the various functions of the school district. As an example, it was noted that when a new employee commences employment, human resources puts into motion a chain of events that affect payroll, finance, and other departments yet there is little opportunity for cross training, regular discussion, or orientation to other departments. This has led to disputes between departments that are often a result of lack of effective dialogue and/or understanding of other school district functions.

This review includes a series of recommendations.

Recommendation One

- A. Hire an Associate Superintendent, Human Resources to provide the necessary leadership. This position, reporting directly to the Superintendent of Schools, would be responsible to

develop, implement, and maintain a human resources strategic plan for the district. The successful candidate should ideally be a human resources professional.

- B. Hire a Manager/Director of Labour Relations. Reporting to the Associate Superintendent, Human Resources the successful candidate could either be a labour relations professional or a carefully selected education leader who can be mentored and trained in the labour relations role.

Recommendation Two

- A. The Associate Superintendent, Human Resources in consultation with the Board of Education, senior management, principals/vice-principals, exempt staff, and union representatives, should immediately develop a comprehensive human resources strategic plan that aligns with the newly developed school district strategic plan.
- B. As part of the human resources strategic plan and with the assistance of BCPSEA, the Associate Superintendent, Human Resources will need to review the current positions in the human resource department, developing job descriptions, criteria for replacement, and reporting relationships. Training for new hires and incumbents, including articulation of workflow plans in the department should also be developed and implemented. An evaluation procedure will also need to be developed and implemented for exempt employees.
- C. As part of the human resources strategic plan, develop a comprehensive training program in consultation with various stakeholder and partner groups in areas such as collective agreement administration/interpretation, investigations, discipline, harassment, grievance/arbitration, accommodation/return to work, and attendance management.
- D. As part of the human resources strategic plan and aligned with the district strategic plan, develop a long-term comprehensive succession plan for all positions in the school district.
- E. Linked to the succession plan, develop an articulated recruitment, selection, and retention strategy.
- F. Conduct a system-wide review of the attendance patterns of all employees. Representatives of the district's employee groups should be invited to participate. Develop a comprehensive program of attendance management that is transparent to all employees.
- G. While the occupational health and safety department is functioning well, best practice indicates that this department should be integrated into the human resources department given that many occupational health and safety issues have labour relations/human resources implications.

Respectfully Submitted



Ron Pound
Seconded Director, Human Resources
August 26, 2011

Introduction

In early June 2011, the Secretary-Treasurer of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) advised that the Board of Education had passed the following motion:

...to request the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) to perform a high-level review of the school district's Human Resources Department organizational and administrative structure.

BCPSEA agreed to assist the Board by conducting the requested review, and a workplan was subsequently prepared, approved, and implemented.

During a five day period in June and July, Ron Pound of BCPSEA staff conducted 33 individual hour-long interviews with human resource department staff, members of the Board of Education, district senior staff, other district exempt staff, and representatives of the local principal and vice principals' association, district parent advisory council, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association. Each interview used a common template to gather information (copy attached at Appendix 1).

Data from the human resources department, the payroll department and the finance department, providing transactional information and budgetary expenditures, were also received and reviewed. Information gleaned from these data and the interviews was integral in shaping the recommendations for the organization and administration of the human resources function in the school district.

The interviews were focused on what are generally considered to be the central themes of human resources organization and service delivery:

- human resources strategic planning (position descriptions; workflow processes)
- staffing (recruitment and selection processes, succession planning, employees on call)
- labour relations (collective agreement administration and interpretation, grievance and arbitration management, investigations including harassment, discipline, attendance management/accommodation/ return to work)
- mentoring programs
- orientation programs
- recognition programs
- occupational health and safety
- payroll and benefits
- technology (use and impact on the human resources function).

Each participant was asked to respond to the themes from the perspective of their position and their duties/responsibilities, either within the school district or attached to the school district. Participants had the opportunity to add other related issues that were of particular interest or concern. Interestingly, despite the “reference groups” to which each of the participants “belong,” the perspectives that emerged were remarkably similar.

This report sets out a summary of the findings followed by the recommendations arising from those findings.

Summary of Findings

▪ **Human Resources Strategic Plan**

All of the participants highlighted the absence of a human resources strategic plan. Many participants articulated that without such a plan, a cohesive strategy for human resources that links to the overall district strategic plan led to district departments operating as “silos.” Human resources staff are unclear on department direction, goals or milestones as they conduct their day-to-day work, unsure how their duties/responsibilities link to other positions in the same department. Both the lack of such a strategic plan and consistent, insightful human resources leadership are seen as contributors to the struggle of human resources department staff to work together as a cohesive team. All participants echoed the need for a qualified, experienced department leader, appropriate department staffing levels, and a dedicated labour relations specialist. While most commented that the leadership role needs to be occupied by a trained human resources professional, the dedicated labour relations specialist position could potentially be drawn from the ranks of educational leadership the necessary training and mentorship provided and further, that this individual would need to dedicate themselves long term to the role to develop the necessary skills and trust of the unions and district staff.

▪ **Staffing**

Participants identified the lack of a comprehensive succession plan in the district and remarked that although there has been some high level discussion on this issue, no plan has been developed and implemented. Many participants believe that this is due to the lack of a human resources strategic plan integrated with the district’s overall strategic plan. Participants said that the replacement of employees is not linked to the long-term vision and directions of the district but, rather, to short-term replacement of employees through retirement, resignation, or various leaves. Participants indicate that there is little communication between departments outlining the long-term needs for replacement of all types of employees, nor has there been discussion about the criteria for hiring of new employees to various positions.

- **Recruitment**

Participants indicate gaps in the recruitment process, including no cohesive approach or information for entry into the district. Little information is available either in print or, for example, on the district website that outlines current and forecasted employee requirements. There is no information available to prospective employees regarding training requirements for various positions or transparent articulated criteria for hiring into positions. As a result of such information gaps, existing employees are unclear how they can advance through positions within the school district, and prospective employees are not able to determine entry points into the district. Further, new or prospective employees are not presented with a sense that the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district is a welcoming and engaging employer of choice with strong commitments to public education and employment value.

Interviewing

The district has developed some interview guides for the purpose of interviewing new hires to elementary and secondary teaching. Little training has been done in appropriate behavioural interviewing techniques for principals and managers whose task is to interview prospective teachers. Further, the development of criteria for the position of teacher is focused on internal transfers rather than “new to the district” teachers. Interviewing for positions in support, general exempt, and senior positions has a varied approach from detailed criteria development and coordinated behavioural interviews to interviews utilizing only the job description for a specific position. No coordinated approach has been agreed upon; consequently no training has been provided nor is information available to prospective employees regarding the interview process.

Hiring

The system lacks position control for the hiring of personnel of all types and leads to unanticipated staffing increases and cost overruns.

Employees on Call

The doorway to temporary or continuing teaching positions is through the Teacher on Call (TOC) route or the casual route for support employees. As referred to in the discussion of succession planning under Staffing above, little has been done to connect the needs of the district with the supply of potential employees. Often the route into the TOC /casual pool is by recommendation of school principals/vice-principals or managers — based on the success the practicum student may have had or the perceived “fit” with the school — but not necessarily against any defined criteria. There is little information available in any form for the prospective employee outlining upcoming needs, whether related to teaching experience/training or trades needs.

- **Labour Relations**

Labour relations in the school district have, historically, been contentious. Both unionized and management staff report many fractious encounters between the parties, in which the perceived objective was to “win” rather than to constructively discuss problems and find mutually agreeable solutions. More recently, a more collegial and consultative approach has been applied, and some “mending of the fences” with respect to union concerns and grievances has been achieved. Union leaders commented on the respectful approach to problem solving and the genuine interest in resolving problems at early stages to avoid grievances. Union leaders recognize that the positions of the parties will sometimes differ, but the current approach by staff was recognized as positive and refreshing.

Participants believe that discrete positions with responsibility for human resources and labour relations are required. Without a dedicated professional leading the human resources function, the strategic planning necessary to support all aspects of human resources in the district cannot be accomplished. Further, a dedicated labour relations position is seen to be critical in providing a credible resource to deal with labour issues as they arise, as well as to work with the human resources lead on the development of labour relations training for all managers in the school district.

Collective Agreement Administration/Interpretation

There are two collective agreements in place that set out the terms and conditions of the majority of the school district’s employees. These agreements are between the unions representing employees and the school district, yet there is little, if any, training provided to school administrators and other school district managers who must ensure that they follow the provisions of these agreements. Managers report that they often seek necessary information about the collective agreement from the respective union rather than the district human resources department. The perceived “unavailability” of assistance in the department is sometimes characterized as a perception that department staff are overworked, overtaxed and, sometimes, somewhat dogmatic in approach to a particular issue. All participants cited the need for systematic training for all managers, principals, vice-principals, senior management, and union officials in the area of collective agreement administration and interpretation. The belief is that undergoing such training together would ensure common approach and eliminate misunderstandings. Participants believe that this joint training needs to be incorporated into the human resources department strategic plan. Participants also believe that such training would contribute to a more positive approach to working relationships between union and school district officials, lead to higher employee morale, and reduced expenditures on grievances and arbitrations.

Grievances/Arbitrations

Flowing from the discussion above, the district is often faced with management of an unwieldy number of grievances and costly arbitrations. In 2010-2011 the district reports 85 grievances from both the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Nanaimo District Teachers’ Association. Legal fees related to investigations, arbitrations, and the like for the period July 31, 2010 to June 30, 2011 were in the range of \$200,000. This leads to the

question as to whether a coordinated/strategic approach to human resources and labour relations, inclusive of a strategic plan, training, and a dedicated labour relations specialist would both reduce expenditures and contribute to improved employee relations.

Investigations/Discipline/Harassment

These issues have been bundled given that many participants spoke to them as a package. Participants observed that these matters are generally “closely held” in the human resources department and assigned to outside investigators. They further indicate a belief that there is little understanding or training in place for the investigation of issues that arise in the workplace. Further, it is participants’ perception that there are few, if any, consequences for inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. Participants cited as a critical issue the absence of articulated expectations on the part of the school district for their employees.

Accommodation and Return to Work

Participants generally agree that these issues are well handled by occupational health and safety staff, but most also agreed that there needs to be full integration into a human resources strategic plan. Further, participants believe that training needs to be introduced for both management staff and other employees to enhance understanding and clarify responsibilities.

Attendance Management

The Absence Management module of the SRB Human Resources Information System contains a sophisticated tool to allow managers to track appropriate and inappropriate employee sick time usage. All participants, with the exception of representatives of one union group, devoted considerable discussion to this topic and expressed great concern about the inappropriate use of sick time. Participants cited the lack of articulated guidelines around the use of sick time and the resulting perception that use of sick time inclusive of reasons other than illness is seen as an employee entitlement. With respect to support staff, some employees are using their full sick time accumulation and yet are still sick. As a remedy, management and the union agreed to a plan as part of the collective agreement where each employee would donate one day from their sick bank accumulation to the central pool of sick days for the use of those employees who had exhausted their accumulated sick leave.

Article 23.05 establishes a Sick Leave Bank, and under Article 23.05 (A) it states: “each regular employee shall contribute annually a sufficient number of days to maintain the bank at 500 days.” Due to the high usage of sick days, support employees are now required to donate five days per year to the central sick bank. It is interesting to review the relevant data:

2010-2011				
Employee Group	Number of employees	Number of sick days used	Sick days per employee/year	Annual cost
Teachers	749	6969	9.3	
Support	538	7997	14.86	
Administration	94	426	4.5	
				\$4,924,694

Source: School District 68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith Annual Budget 2011/2012

As part of a human resources strategic plan, a reasonable target would be to reduce spending on replacements by 10 percent through a combination of training, education, and clarification of expectations. Appropriate resources would be required to support this objective. However, the resulting savings would be approximately \$500,000.

▪ **Mentorship Programs**

All participants expressed a critical need for mentoring programs for new employees in order to inculcate new employees into the culture and expectations of the district. Many employees commence their positions with little or no training and are often required to adopt a “self-teaching” approach. One example cited is the need for human resource department staff to electronically interface with payroll and finance on very specific issues of pay rates, leaves, and other issues arising from collective agreement provisions without any initial or ongoing training. Employees rely on each other to learn complex systems and often make errors which may cause conflicts between departments.

Mentorship programs do exist within the teachers’ collective agreement for teachers significantly changing assignment but are limited to two days’ time to work with a person of their choice.

▪ **Orientation Programs**

An orientation program provides an opportunity for the employer to formally welcome new employees to the district and introduce the employee to the district’s culture, values, and expectations. Participants indicate that the school district has a rudimentary orientation program that brings new employees to the district office to receive their email passwords, learn how to use the absence system, and to fill in documents for payroll and other purposes. Participants report that new employees do not receive an orientation from any senior person in the district. The Nanaimo District Teachers’ Association hosts an orientation for new teachers on call and will sometimes invite school district middle management to the orientation held by the union.

- **Recognition Programs**

Participants report that the Board of Education has been discussing the issue of recognition programs but no action has been taken. Retiring employees have regularly been celebrated at a dinner in their honour but a program for active employees has been inconsistent. It was further reported that the district attempts, through various communications channels including the media, to recognize employees who have made contributions to the district. Although acknowledged and appreciated, participants cited the desirability of a structured approach to employee recognition.

- **Occupational Health and Safety**

Participants noted that the occupational health and safety group has “stepped up” to the challenges presented by governmental and legislative changes. It was generally agreed that issues of safety and related training are taken seriously and, in fact, are making a difference with all employees. Further, participants remarked that individual return to work cases and accommodation cases are being managed in very positive ways.

- **Payroll and Benefits**

The human resources department function is inextricably linked to the payroll department function. The human resources department on-boards new employees and, utilizing the SRB software, notifies the payroll department of position, full time equivalent employment, hours and the like. Accuracy is paramount in this interaction. Participants report varying levels of accuracy in the communication of this vital employment information, with instances of error and confusion. Little cross-training exists between the departments and, while daily transactional interactions occur, little significant and regular dialogue happens on a formal basis between the departments.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation One**

- A. Hire an Associate Superintendent, Human Resources**

Hire an Associate Superintendent, Human Resources reporting to the Superintendent of Schools. This position should be part of the district senior management team. The individual hired to this position should be a professional human resources practitioner and professional certification through the BC Human Resources Management Association is desirable. This position should focus on development, implementation, and maintenance of a human resources strategic plan for the district, and oversee specific functional areas. While the position may be required to conduct some of the daily transactional work, this should be kept to a minimum.

- B. Hire a Manager/Director, Labour Relations**

Hire a Manager/Director of Labour Relations to report to the Associate Superintendent, Human Resources. This individual could potentially be an educational leader with some aptitude for labour relations, or a labour relations professional. If the former, ongoing liaison and training will be necessary through BCPSEA, course work, and mentorship. If the latter, orientation and mentorship to the K-12 public education sector would be necessary if the individual is recruited from outside the sector. A dedicated labour relations position has the potential to reduce annual expenditures on grievance/arbitration (the district currently spends over \$200,000 annually on legal fees related to grievance/arbitration); the savings realized would potentially pay for the position. While it is understood that any school district must always target dollars for legal expenses, the absence of a dedicated labour relations specialist limits spending control in this area. This position represents cost avoidance and supports an improved labour relations culture by addressing issues in a timely and respectful manner. The selection of a suitable candidate for this position requires careful articulation and consideration of hiring criteria.

The district should use the services of Make a Future – Careers in BC Education to coordinate both of these searches. Attached at Appendix B are draft position descriptions. The position of Associate Superintendent, Human Resources should be posted concurrently with the Manager, Labour Relations but interviews and selection for the Manager, Labour Relations should not proceed until the Associate Superintendent is selected and has commenced employment. The Associate Superintendent should be actively involved in the selection process for the Manager, Labour Relations, including review of the selection criteria for the position as developed by the district in conjunction with Make a Future.

- **Recommendation Two**

- A. Human Resources Strategic Plan**

The Associate Superintendent, Human Resources in consultation with the Board of Education, senior management, principals/vice-principals, exempt staff, and union representatives, should immediately develop a comprehensive human resources strategic plan that aligns with the newly developed school district strategic plan. Research informs us that the top five issues challenging human resources departments are: talent management, employee engagement, succession planning, change management, and managing organizational culture. These issues alone require the focused attention of a talented human resources leader who is not wholly fettered by the daily transactional needs of the organization (Queen’s University/HRIA/IPMA). While the issues identified might constitute the highest level of planning, there are other strategic issues that will need to be included in the strategic plan.

- B. Human Resources Department Position Review**

As part of the human resources strategic plan and with the assistance of BCPSEA, the Associate Superintendent, Human Resources will need to review the current positions in the human resource department, developing job descriptions, criteria for replacement, and reporting relationships. Training for new hires and incumbents, including articulation of workflow plans in the department should also be developed and implemented. An evaluation procedure will also need to be developed and implemented for exempt employees.

Consultation may be required with a human resources specialist to assist with the business reengineering of the human resources/payroll departments/functions. This may have to be integrated further into the business processes of the school district. This approach will coordinate the services provided to district employees, ensuring that the “face of the district” is one that is welcoming, informed, and operates with a service orientation of “how can I help you?” A review of all school district business functions may be necessary to ensure full integration into a coherent and functional operation. No person should be hired into any business unit if they do not have the necessary formal training and experience as outlined in the job description. This will likely require an evaluation of current employees’ training and experience and the creation of individualized training programs.

- C. Training Programs**

As part of the human resources strategic plan, develop detailed training programs in consultation with specific partner groups as appropriate to the training:

- collective agreement administration/interpretation
- investigations/discipline/harassment
- grievance/arbitration

- accommodation and return to work
- attendance management.

Training needs to further address issues such as standardized operating procedures, safety management, continuous improvement processes, and district values and objectives. Areas such as employee engagement must address, through the orientation program and ongoing dialogue, clearly defined organizational goals and demonstrate to employees how their work contributes to the school district and student success (Degroote School of Business, McMaster University).

A lack of training has resulted in a lack of understanding of the fundamental operational components of the district. Principals often seek out union representatives for their advice on collective agreement issues and, while this can be positive, this does not allow the district to develop a culture of training, leadership development, and shared district vision. Further, the absence of training has contributed to cost concerns such as excessive employee absence, many employee investigations, numerous grievances from both union groups, and medical leave/return to work issues. These areas alone, if addressed appropriately, could realize substantial savings for the district. It must be remembered, however, that money must be spent on the organization of the district in order to realize cost savings/cost avoidance.

D. Succession Plan

As part of the human resources strategic plan, develop a detailed approach to long-term (5-10 year) succession planning for all district positions. It is suggested that the assistance of BCPSEA's Director, Data Analysis and Planning be sought to assist with the data analysis. The succession plan should include development and implementation of recruitment/retention processes/initiatives. The Director of Make a Future will be a helpful resource in this regard. Development of the succession plan will require a significant investment of time to accomplish.

E. Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategy

Develop a detailed recruitment, selection, and retention strategy that is regularly reviewed for currency. This will require a training program for all individuals potentially involved in the hiring of any employee to the district in any position. The strategy must be aligned with the district strategic plan and be aligned with the mission and goals of the district. As part of the recruitment program a systematic orientation program for the "onboarding" of all employees must also be developed. Supported by the senior administration and Board of Education, such a program must welcome new employees to the district and articulate the key goals/objectives/directions as well as expectations for each new employee. New employees must both understand the key position they hold in the district and the value with which they are viewed by district administration. They must feel that the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district is not only a great place to work, but that they are also provided with the opportunity to obtain/maintain the

necessary skills to contribute to student success, regardless of the particular position they may occupy.

F. Attendance Management

As part of the human resources strategic plan, a system-wide review of the attendance patterns of all employees should be initiated. Representatives of the district's employee groups should be invited to participate. Current replacement costs as taken from the school district budget are in the range of \$5,000,000 annually. A 10 percent reduction in this area would return funding to the district to manage programs and enhance services to students.

G. Occupational Health and Safety

In keeping with best human resources practice, the occupational health and safety department should be integrated into the human resources department. Many occupational health and safety issues are directly related to labour relations/human resources issues; this approach will enable coordination/coherence of safety training, accommodation and return to work issues under the human resources strategic plan.

Appendix 1

Interviewee		Position		Date	
Topic	Action	Issues	Training available/required	Gaps	Recommendations
Human resources strategic plan					
	Position descriptions				
	Workflow processes				
Staffing	Succession planning				
	Recruitment				
	Interviewing				
	Hiring				
	Employees on Call				
Labour Relations	Collective agreement interpretation				
	Grievances				
	Arbitrations				
	Investigations				
	Discipline				
	Harassment				
	Accommodation and return to work				
	Attendance management				
Mentor programs	Support staff				
	Teachers				
	Administrative staff				
Orientation programs	All staff				
	Materials				
Recognition Programs	All staff				

Occupational Health and Safety	Safety training				
	WHMIS				
	Wellness programs				
Payroll and Benefits					
Technology	Payroll				
	Employee casual replacement				
	Online forms				
	Employee records				

Appendix 2



Associate Superintendent, Human Resources

A senior role for a collaborative leader with strong expertise in Labour Relations

As a key member of our senior staff, working closely with top decision-makers and leading a strong HR team, you will use your excellent judgment and interpersonal skills to lead staff from all levels and disciplines. In addition to day-to-day leadership, you'll also take responsibility for the strategic direction of the department, directing the budget and planning process and implementing and evaluating the district's HR policies as a whole.

With a strong labour relations focus, you will liaise and consult with both union and non-union employee groups as well as oversee all aspects of negotiations and contract management, and district staffing functions. Your expertise in interpreting and administering collective agreements and labour legislation will be a key factor in your success.

Your excellent conflict resolution and analytical skills and the ability to provide positive and collaborative leadership is backed by a degree in human resources or business administration and continued specialized training and experience in HR administration and labour relations. Experience in a school district or the public sector would be ideal.

With 2,000 employees serving over 15,000 students, the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District provides top-level education in both traditional and alternative environments, including Learn@Home and specialty academies.

Located on central Vancouver Island, the district is ideally situated for easy access to the Lower Mainland and everything the Island has to offer: year-round recreation, Canada's mildest climate, and some of the most beautiful wilderness in the world.

For more information, please visit www.sd68.bc.ca or www.makeafuture.ca/nanaimo-ladysmith.

To apply, please send your résumé and supporting documentation for delivery by 2 pm, Friday, October 22, 2010 to:

Superintendent Michael J. Munro, c/o Mrs. Jennifer McNeil, Executive Assistant,
School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith), 395 Wakesiah Avenue, Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 3K6;
email: jmcneil@sd68.bc.ca; fax: 250 741-5218