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Memo to SRCD Members: “What Happened?”

SRCD Governing Council Affirms Commitment and Seeks Collaboration, Input for SRCD’s future.

Dear SRCD Members,

Many of you have been asking questions about editorial autonomy, the Code of Conduct, and the Editors’ resignations. There have been accusations that the Governing Council has attempted to interfere with the Editors’ autonomy and concerns about the Code of Conduct and transparency. Here, we attempt to address the question of “What happened?”

Editorial Autonomy

There have been no infringements on editorial autonomy by the current Governing Council. The editors have autonomy to make editorial decisions about manuscripts without interference by Governing Council or SRCD staff. This is specifically set forth in the editors’ employment contracts. SRCD and Governing Council oversee and can make decisions about journal production, including cover art, typesetting, front- and back-matter, and production timing.

The editors’ contracts define editorial autonomy as follows: “As editors, you have complete authority to accept or reject manuscripts. Your decisions in this area are not subject to review by any officer or employee of the SRCD nor by any member of its governance structure.”

Also stated in the editors' contracts, the SRCD office is responsible for journal production, including copyediting typography, cover design, front matter elements and arrangements, length of issues, and production schedules.

Reasons for Governance and Climate Review and Code of Conduct

In 2020, SRCD's Governing Council determined that it needed to significantly improve its internal policies related to governance and climate. The Governing Council established a task force on climate and governance, co-chaired by Governing Council Members Lorah Dorn and Nick Allen.

As recommended by the Task Force, SRCD hired an external consultant to conduct a full review of our procedures. In addition, the external consultant interviewed each staff member, all Governing Council members, and each Committee/Caucus chair about the climate at SRCD and other governance and procedures. The resulting report included numerous recommendations including establishing a Code of Conduct, adding a Treasurer to the Governing Council, and aligning our bylaws so that they reflect the way SRCD conducts its work. This evaluation and its recommendations were presented to the Governing Council in its February, 2021 meeting (see minutes here and list of recommendations here). At that same meeting, the Governing Council voted to hire Saima Hedrick as its next executive director. Saima was asked to begin implementing these recommendations as best practices when she started in April, 2021.

The Code of Conduct was among the recommendations and was developed independently of the publications process. The Governing Council and Saima worked carefully to ensure that the Code of Conduct is compatible with the editors' contracts, other contracts, and with the various roles in SRCD. The Code of Conduct and updates to the Bylaws were reviewed and approved at the November, 2021 Governing Council meeting (see minutes here). The Bylaws, which includes the Code of Conduct, were approved by a vote of the membership in February, 2022. All Governing Council members, staff members, contractors, policy fellows, committee and caucus chairs, and *Child Development* Associate Editors have signed the Code of Conduct. However, the three Editors raised concerns that it would interfere with their editorial autonomy. Nancy Hill and Saima Hedrick had numerous conversations with the Editors attempting to understand and address their concerns. We offered to add an addendum to the Code of Conduct that specifically addresses concerns about editorial autonomy. Without a resolution to the matter, at the March, 2022 Governing Council Meeting, when we were planning to discuss the editor's concerns, we instead recommended that we not ask them to sign the Code of Conduct (see minutes here). This recommendation was approved and none of the editors

were asked to sign the Code of Conduct following this March, 2022 Governing Council Meeting.

Concerns about attending the Publications Committee Meetings and Policy Implementation

The Editors raised concerns about their relationship with the Publications Committee. They stated that they did not have sufficient say in the discussions and decisions around policies that effected the journals. They stated that some committee members lack sufficient knowledge of the publications process or the editors' workloads. They reported that attending so many meetings was overly burdensome. They stated that concerns and burdens about implementing some policies were not adequately considered and that Governing Council was unaware of their concerns.

Nancy Hill and Saima Hedrick became aware of these issues in the summer, 2021. We invited all the Editors to join the November Governing Council Meeting for a day long retreat to identify and solve the issues they raised. Since most of the Editors were unable to attend, we were not able to hold the retreat. However, during the November, 2021 Governing Council Meeting, we voted to increase the size of the Publications Committee by four members. The members who were added have significant editorial experience. Further, in a series of Zoom meetings, the Editors, Saima Hedrick, the Director of Science, and the Publication Committee co-chairs developed a SRCD Publications Process Protocol to guide the relationships between the Editors and the Publications Committee, ease the burden to attend meetings, and resolve their concerns. The SRCD Publications Process Protocol includes the following:

- Establishing a separate meeting with just the Editors and the Publications Committee co-chairs to discuss their concerns with implementation of new policies before policies could be voted on (e.g., EIC-SRCD-PC collaborative leadership meeting),
- Permitting Editors to rotate their attendance at Publications Committee meetings so as to reduce the number of publication committee meetings that the editors attended,
- Establishing requirements for experience and training for Publications Committee members.

The SRCD Publications Process Protocol was approved during the March 2022 Governing Council meeting (see minutes here and see the SRCD Publications Process Protocol here). We believed that we were establishing a foundation for better working relationships. Indeed, the Editors did not request meetings with the Governing Council and there were no serious concerns raised in their Editors' reports (see the Spring, 2022 Editors' Reports). The first of the EIC-SRCD-PC collaborative leadership meeting was scheduled for

Monday May 9th, 2022. The Editors resigned before it was held.

A Desire to Work Together

Over the past several months, we felt we were making good progress addressing the Editors' concerns. We knew there were still lingering issues on the Publications Committee and between the Publications Committee's co-chairs and the director of science. But, the SRCD Publication Process Protocol was a good first step in resolving them.

We regret that Judi and Glenn chose to resign in early May. When Nancy Hill began her term as President and Saima Hedrick began as Executive Director, the editors were already expressing significant concerns. In the 13 months since then, Nancy, Saima, the Governing Council, and the Publications Committee co-chairs have worked hard to understand and address these concerns. We clearly were not done with this work. It was our sincere wish that all three of the editors who resigned had stayed on and worked with us to create a stronger SRCD and more efficient operations. Further, we regret that this has been a stressful time for some members of the SRCD staff, Governing Council, and Publications Committee, resulting in resignations.

Going Forward

The Publications Committee is charged with identifying interim editors for *Child Development* and *Child Development Perspectives*. A search for interim editors who can begin immediately is underway. It is essential to identify and appoint interim editors immediately so that the current editors can complete their editorial responsibilities with manuscript submitted under their terms by their effective resignation date, which is May 4, 2023.

It is typically the case that an incoming editor and outgoing editor overlap for a full year. The incoming editor begins receiving new manuscripts for a full year, while an outgoing editor stops receiving in new manuscripts and finishes the editorial responsibilities for manuscripts received under their term. As such, it is important for the Publications Committee to identify interim editors who can begin receiving manuscripts as quickly as possible.

Consistent with SRCD Publications Committee policies and practices, the Publications Committee has taken nominations and has been interviewing potential individuals for these editorial roles. Consistent with the

Bylaws, the Publications Committee will make a recommendation to the Governing Council.

The Governing Council is in the process of establishing a task force that will focus on the concerns that have been raised about the Code of Conduct and other matters who will be charged to make policy recommendations. *In response to feedback, we aim to make the composition of the task force broadly representative, with a majority of members outside of the SRCD GC to maximize input from SRCD members.*

The Governing Council takes these matters seriously and we are committed to making SRCD stronger, better, and more inclusive. With regard to publications, we maintain our strong commitment to scientific integrity, editorial autonomy, and the peer review process. We are committed to meeting the professional needs of our members at all stages of their careers. The members of Governing Council affirm our commitment to SRCD and sincerely seek collaboration and input for SRCD's future.

Sincerely,
Governing Council

The Task Force on Publications and Ethical Behavior published a summary report earlier this year. To read their recommendations and the response from the Governing Council, click here: https://www.srcd.org/news/srcd-implementation-task-force