

Updating Your Hard Copy of *School Councils: A Guide for Members, 2001*

Filing Instructions

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School Councils

A Guide for Members



2001

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The Regulations Governing School Councils

What Do the Regulations Mean for School Councils?

To help school councils with their work of influencing decisions that affect students' education and the effective operation of schools, Ontario Regulation 612/00 and Regulation 298 together address three key areas: the purpose of school councils, operational matters, and the obligation of boards and principals to consult with school councils. Regulation 612/00 confirms that school councils are advisory bodies and clearly states that they may make recommendations to their principals or school boards on any matter. The regulations require boards and principals to report back on how the recommendations have been taken into account.

Consultation With Parents

Regulation 612/00 clearly directs school councils to consult with parents of students enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council. It is therefore expected that any advice provided to the school principal or school board will be based on the general views of the school community and the best interests of all students in the school. Each school council is accountable to the school community it represents. (See "Consultation With Parents by School Councils", in Section 4: Consultation, for additional information.)

School Council Membership

The membership of a school council changes from year to year. Each year, potential new council members will be recruited for election, elections will take place, and the newly elected members will be oriented

to their tasks. School councils may want to develop some strategies that address the need for continuity and that ensure that the history, experience, and expertise of previous councils remain with the council. These strategies may include developing a good orientation package for distribution to new members and keeping quality records that include meeting minutes, policies, bylaws, and annual reports.

Ideally, the membership of the school council will reflect the diversity of its school community. Parents and guardians must form the majority of members on the council. All members may bring before the council the issues and concerns of the groups that they represent and provide links to those groups.

Ontario Regulation 612/00 establishes that a school council will consist of the following members:

- a majority of parents, as specified in a bylaw of the school council or by the board if such a bylaw does not exist¹
- the principal or vice-principal of the school (the principal may delegate membership responsibility to the vice-principal)
- one teacher employed in the school, other than the principal or vice-principal
- one non-teaching employee of the school
- one student, in the case of secondary schools (optional for elementary schools)
- one or more community representatives appointed by the elected council
- one person appointed by an association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and

School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation, if the association is represented at the school

Thus, the regulation confirms that the school council must include a majority of parents, the principal, and at least one student, and legislates a few new requirements:

- Rather than allowing for a minimum number of teachers and non-teaching staff as members, it establishes a fixed number (one teacher member and one non-teaching staff member).
- It identifies who can and cannot be elected to the parent and non-parent categories.
- It extends the composition of the council by adding representation from a recognized provincial parents' association, if the association is represented in the school.

Membership Requirements

Parent members. A parent member is one who is a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the school. (In a school that is established for adults, “parent members” of the school council will be the adult students themselves.) The board or the council must ensure that parent members form the majority of the school council membership. The regulation sets no maximum number of parents on a council; however, the number of parent members on the council should be stipulated by a school council bylaw or by the board if no bylaw exists. A chair or co-chair of a school council must be a parent member of the council.

Board employees and trustees. A board employee who works at the school his or her child attends is *not* eligible to serve as a parent member on the council. This provision recognizes that board employees have avenues other than school councils (e.g., staff meetings) through which to influence the decisions that the principal might make at their schools, whereas parents who do not work at the school their children attend have no occasion to discuss and have input into matters affecting the school. A board employee who works at the school his or her child

attends may, however, be elected as either the teaching or non-teaching staff representative.

Board employees who do not work at the school their children attend may be elected as parent members as long as they notify the other parents that they are employed by the school board prior to their election. The requirement to disclose their affiliation with a board will reduce the potential for conflict of interest.

An employee of the board that established a school council cannot serve as the chair or a co-chair of the council.

School board trustees are not eligible to be members of councils of schools within their boards.

Community representative(s). The council must appoint at least one community representative, who cannot be an employee at the school. If the community representative is employed elsewhere by the board, he or she must inform other council members of his or her employment prior to appointment.

Student representative(s). In a school with one or more secondary grades, at least one student member, appointed by the student council, must serve on the school council. If there is no student council, the student is to be elected by the student body. In an elementary school, the principal must consult with the school council to determine if the council should include a student. If the decision is made that a student should be on the council, then the principal can appoint the student. (The principal may consider advice received from students regarding the appointment of a student.) The student representative on the school council of either a secondary or an elementary school must be a student enrolled in the school.

Although the regulation requires the inclusion of only one student member on the school council, school council bylaws may provide for additional student representation (provided that parent members still form a majority). As well, students can be included in the committee work of a school council,

subject to school council bylaws. Furthermore, since council meetings must be open to the public, interested students are welcome to attend.

School staff representatives. Any teacher in the school is eligible to seek election for the one teacher position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other teachers in the school. The teacher position cannot be filled by a principal or vice-principal.

Any member of the non-teaching staff in the school is eligible to seek election for the one non-teaching staff position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other non-teaching staff members in the school. A non-teaching staff member is anyone employed at the school who does not have teaching duties, such as a secretary, an educational assistant, a library technician, a member of the custodial staff, or a lunchtime or hallway monitor. Parents working in such a capacity in the school that their children attend may consider running for the position of non-teaching staff representative if they wish to serve on the school council.

Elections and Term of Office

Ontario Regulation 612/00 also addresses the term of office of school council members and the need for elections to be held annually, within the first thirty calendar days of the start of the school year. *Elections must be held within this timeframe.* These changes ensure that any parent who is interested in the school council election process or in participating as a member on the school council has the opportunity to do so.

Elections are held at the beginning of the school year to ensure that even parents who are new to the school community, such as those with children just entering Junior or Senior Kindergarten, or those with children just entering secondary school, will be able to participate in the election of their representatives on the school council. This provision also gives them the opportunity to be considered for election as parent members of their school councils.

The regulation has changed the term of office to a one-year term. This enables members to consider,

on an ongoing basis, their involvement on their school councils. Should they find a change in their personal situations or circumstances, they may find that they are no longer able to continue with the commitment they made. The one-year term also allows parents to make decisions on a regular basis about how their interests and priorities are represented at the school. It is important to note, however, that the regulation does not restrict the number of times that a member can be re-elected.

Remuneration

School council members will not be paid for their work on a school council. However, each board, in consultation with the school council, must develop reimbursement policies regarding the expenses of school council members incurred as part of school council business.

Incorporation

Regulation 612/00 prohibits school councils from being incorporated. A school council already belongs to a corporation, that being the district school board that established the council. School councils are advisory groups to their principals or to their boards; they have been established to provide one way for parents to express opinions about how to improve student achievement and to ensure that parents can actively participate in the education of their children at the local level. This mandate does not require any additional legal status.

Fund-raising

Some school councils may decide to include fund-raising as one of their priorities. Fund-raising activities may be conducted as long as they are in accordance with board policies and guidelines and the funds raised are to be used for a purpose approved by the board. A school council may find that it is unable to continue a fund-raising activity in which it was previously involved, as the funds raised are not used for a purpose approved by the board. Similarly, a school council may find that it must change the way in which it fund-raises for an approved purpose to comply with board policies and guidelines.

Section 19(1)(1)(iv) of Regulation 612/00 requires that boards solicit school councils' views when developing policies or guidelines regarding fund-raising. Ultimately, if school councils decide that they would like to continue with certain fund-raising projects, they must work with their boards to develop policies or guidelines that permit the fund-raising and the use of funds for particular purposes.

School councils should be aware that, because the school board is a corporate entity and the school is not, any funds raised by the school council (and any assets purchased with those funds) belong, legally, to the board. The board may have policies specifying that the money raised by the council (and any assets purchased by the council) will remain with the school. However, such policies are not legally binding in the event that the school is closed.

All fund-raising activities conducted by the school council must be included in the annual report prepared by the school council. (See Section 10: Accountability.)

School Councils and the Ministry of Education

As part of its accountability to parents, the ministry will report annually to school councils on education in the province. In addition to this, the ministry may make other reports to school councils and provide information about their roles and responsibilities.

Collection of data on school council members.

During the government's consultations with school councils, many school council members indicated that they would like to receive materials and information directly from the ministry rather than through their schools. As a result, under Regulation 612/00, the Ministry of Education may now request that school council members provide their names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses should they want to receive directly any information related to the role of the council or to education in general. The provision of this information is voluntary on the part of school council members. Members may be assured that information gathered in this way is used only for the purposes of

consulting and communicating directly with school council members. The ministry may, however, share this information with the Ontario Parent Council, which will also use the data only to consult and communicate directly with school council members.

What Do the Regulations Mean for Principals?

Supporting and Promoting School Councils

School principals play a unique and important role in the success of every school. The principal's involvement and interaction with the school council are key to the council's success. As a member of the school council and leader of the school community, the principal can provide the guidance and support necessary to help the council achieve its goals and be an effective voice for parents. According to the regulations, principals are to consult with their school councils, and school councils may provide advice on any matter to their principals or school boards.

Specifically, the objectives of the regulations are to strengthen the advisory role of school councils, set consistent expectations, and make the education system more accountable to parents. To ensure that parents' voices are heard through their school councils, the regulations clearly require that principals (and school boards) support their school councils. The regulations also clarify the roles and responsibilities of principals in working with their school councils.

It is important that principals demonstrate a collaborative and supportive approach to working with their school councils. Strong communication between principals and their councils is essential to successful school councils. It is also essential that principals and the chairs or co-chairs of their councils find an effective method of working together outside of regular meetings.

Each principal must find a style that is appropriate to his or her school community, whether the school is large or small, urban or rural, elementary or secondary. Where a principal develops a strong relationship with the school council, parents are more likely

to become involved in the school community, and this in turn will have a strong impact on the overall effectiveness of the school. Several communication tips are provided in Section 9: Communication.

The following section provides some explanation of the specific areas of the regulations that principals must be aware of as they promote and support their school councils.

Amendments to the Duties of Principals

The duties of school principals to support their school councils were originally outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122. Although in many cases, principals and school councils were working well together and school councils were being consulted on a range of issues by their principals, Ontario Regulation 613/00, an amendment to Regulation 298, enhances this relationship by clearly outlining the principal's role and responsibilities in terms of the school council.

Some Important Roles Played by the Principal

Acting as an important source of information. The principal is perhaps the key source of information for the school council. He or she is the council's best link to finding out about the Education Act and its regulations, ministry directives, laws, school policies, board policies, the school profile, school improvement plans, and other new initiatives at the school and at the board level. By sharing knowledge and acting as a resource, the principal is able to provide the school council with the information required to be effective. Principals should be prepared to answer questions and volunteer information on any matter being discussed by their councils. The better informed a council is, the better it will be able to provide the principal with good advice and contribute to the effective operation of the school.

Receiving and responding to school council recommendations. School council members have many and diverse interests, and may make recommendations on any matter. In addition to the

mandatory areas of consultation, other examples of areas that might be considered by the school council include the scheduling of school special events and school policies regarding field trips. (A more complete list is included in Section 4: Consultation.) Good principals have always taken the recommendations made by school councils into account when making decisions; however, according to Regulation 298, principals are now required to report back on the actions taken or not taken in response to school council recommendations. Although to take action or not is still the principal's decision, the principal must provide the council with an explanation of how its recommendations have been considered or why a recommendation was not acted on.

Attending school council meetings. The principal is required to attend and participate in every school council meeting or to delegate this responsibility to a vice-principal. This requirement acknowledges the important role that principals play in providing support and continuity for their school councils. The principal and vice-principal may both choose to attend the meetings; however, only one of them can represent the school at the meeting in his or her official capacity.

Principals (or vice-principals) are not eligible to vote on any matters being discussed by their school councils, as it is not appropriate that the principal vote on the advice that he or she is given by the school council (e.g., regarding the school's policy on homework for students).

Delegating authority. In addition to attendance at council meetings, the principal may delegate other powers or duties related to the school council to a vice-principal. This is to ensure that the school council is supported by the administration.

Ensuring that the school council is in place. It is important that the school council be ready early in the school year to begin its work with the principal on the many significant areas identified in the regulation. For this reason, school councils must hold their elections within the first thirty days of the start of the school year. The principal's assistance to

either an election committee or to the chair of the previous year's council will go a long way towards ensuring that school council membership is in place within the thirty-day time frame required.

Notifying the community and posting materials for parents. It is important that the school community know the names of the parent representatives who were elected. The principal must publish names of the school council members no later than thirty days following their election. This information may be posted on the school's website and in the school, and may also be published in the first school newsletter sent out after the elections.

The principal can demonstrate his or her support of the council's work by encouraging the school council to prepare notices that can be sent home with students for delivery to their parents and posted in an obvious place in the school for parents to examine. Council news can also be included in the school newsletter.

The principal is legally obligated to notify the school community of the following information related to the school council:

- the date, time, and location of the school council elections, at least fourteen days before the election date
- the results of the school council election (the names of the members elected to the school council), no later than thirty days following the school council election
- the dates, times, and locations of all regular school council meetings and committee meetings
- the annual school council report, including a report of fund-raising activities and financial statements, if applicable (for sample annual report formats and sample financial statements, see Section 10: Accountability)

Providing information. As school councils frequently experience changes in membership as students move on to new schools and as parents find new interests, new council members will have to be briefed on the work of the council. As well, parents new to a school may wish to learn about some of the

priorities and activities undertaken by the school council in the past. For these reasons, the following information, which will help parents learn about the evolution and actions of their school council, must be stored in the school and made available for a minimum of four years:

- school council and committee meeting minutes
- financial transactions/records

A council may decide that other documents would also be of value for reference. These might include the following:

- school council agendas
- school council annual reports
- school profiles
- principal profiles
- position papers that were prepared for board consideration or submission to the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Parent Council

The above information should be readily available to parents wishing to learn more about the history of their school council. Regardless of where the material is kept, whether it be in the resource centre or in another location in the school, parents should be made aware of the location and should have easy access to this material.

Developing a school profile. Another important activity in which principals can involve school councils is to invite them to participate in the development of the school profile. Their participation will help them gain an understanding of the needs of the school, an insight into the unique characteristics of their school community, and an understanding of the demographics and other aspects of the school environment. Many schools have found that developing a school profile can be especially helpful in recruiting community representatives and other school council members, during the improvement planning process, or when preparing for a change in the principal or vice-principal. A school profile will also help a council identify the resources that the community might have available or suggest strategies that might be included in the school's action plan. A school profile can include any combi-

nation of information but usually includes at least the following:²

- student demographics
- enrolment trends
- languages spoken in the home and the ethnic composition of the community
- the school's and/or board's mission statement
- the school's program priorities
- programs offered in the school (e.g., guidance, library services)
- school facilities
- class sizes
- the rate of student turnover or transfer
- other relevant information, such as the relationship between the school and local French-language cultural organizations in the case of French-language schools, or the links between the school and the parish in the case of Catholic schools

A school council can help ensure that the school profile is kept up to date. By doing so, the school profile can demonstrate over time how changes in any one area have impacted on the school as a whole.

What Do the Regulations Mean for School Boards?

Setting the Stage for Success

Boards have a vital role to play in helping their school councils become well-informed and involved members of their school communities. Boards set direction through their various policies and guidelines and provide important support to the other partners in the education system, such as principals, teachers, parents, and students. School councils that are actively involved in the development and review of board initiatives are more likely to take ownership of the policies that are developed and to support their implementation. By seeking the advice of their school councils, boards will also strengthen their relationship with those school councils.

Board policies and guidelines should be discussed with the new school council early in the school year. A clear understanding of existing policies and

guidelines at the outset will enable the members of the council to make meaningful contributions, as necessary, through the course of the year. It will also benefit council members when they review and revise current school council bylaws or create new bylaws in accordance with applicable board policies.

In the numerous reviews of district school boards conducted by the former EIC, it was found that where boards established good channels of communication with their communities, their school councils were also likely to work more effectively in achieving the overall goals and mission set out by the board. Good channels of communication can be established in a number of ways. Boards can regularly forward information about board issues and priorities directly to their schools, post it on their websites, or include it in their newsletters.

Many school boards have found other innovative ways to involve their school councils in board issues. Some do so through a board-wide organization of school councils, referred to variously as a *school council assembly*, *council of councils*, *council of chairs*, or *regional council*. In most cases, one representative from each council (either the chair or a member delegated with this responsibility) attends a meeting convened at a central location of the board's jurisdiction. In some larger boards these groups are organized according to families of schools, which each delegate a representative to attend a central meeting. The responsibility of members attending such a meeting varies, but primarily it is to act as a liaison between their councils and the board.

By regularly communicating with school councils and inviting their feedback on the variety of issues they are addressing, school boards help create an environment that is open and receptive to input from school councils and parents. Strong support for school councils at the board level will demonstrate to the entire community that school councils are important partners and will encourage ongoing parental involvement. Strong support from the board will also encourage principals to work closely with their own school councils.

Developing Important Partnerships

Consultation. The nature of consultation by school boards will vary depending on circumstances and, to some degree, on the size of each board. Many boards have adopted strategies to ensure that their policies are reviewed by the communities they represent. When consulting with school councils about policies under development by the board, consideration should be given to the limited amount of time council members may have available.

Consultation by boards can take the form of:

- paper-based surveys or questionnaires distributed to all school councils;
- presentations by board representatives at central meetings (e.g., regional assemblies, councils of chairs);
- town hall meetings held at various locations across the board's jurisdiction;
- focus group meetings involving a representative sample of constituents and school council members.

Each of these formats has its own benefits and disadvantages, and each board will ultimately have to decide which format best suits its needs at any given time. For additional information on this topic, including charts identifying areas that are both mandatory and optional for consultation, see “Consultation With School Councils by Boards and Principals” in Section 4: Consultation.

Reporting back. The new requirement that boards advise school councils of how their recommendations have been taken into account provides each school council with opportunities to learn more about how its board operates and how decisions are made. A strong working relationship between school councils and their boards will provide boards with opportunities to gauge public opinion prior to making decisions and to increase parents' support and understanding.

A board should report back to its school councils in a constructive and positive manner to facilitate discussion with the school council. Each report should outline:

- the decision that was taken;
- how the advice was considered and its impact on the final decision;
- other factors that were considered in making the decision;
- the next steps to be taken by the board regarding the decision;
- any additional opportunities for feedback on the issue or decision.

The way in which a board reports back to school councils will often depend on the nature of the recommendation made by the council. The board's response may be made:

- in a letter to the chair or co-chairs of the school council from the board person who received the advice;
- in person at the next school council meeting by the board person who received the advice;
- through the school principal, who then reports to the school council on the feedback received;
- through a member of the board's council of school councils (where one exists), who then reports back to his or her school council.

Improvement planning. An important area in which the board is to involve its school councils is in the development of the “action plan for improvement”. The board action plan for improvement will provide a framework for the school's action plan, whose focus would be more specific. A school's action plan for improvement outlines areas of focus for school improvement, and strategies that a school will take to help achieve these goals. A school council's involvement in the development of the board's action plan for improvement will help council members gain an understanding of the context for the board's and the school's planning. According to the former Education Improvement Commission, “the ultimate objective of the process is to improve student achievement levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered, by creating a positive environment for learning, and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning at school and in the home”.³

To help ensure that the plan is successful, the planning process should include everyone in the board and school community. All those involved must understand that as improving student achievement takes time, it requires an ongoing commitment. Boards, principals, teachers, parents, and students all play unique roles in the development of the plan:

- The board is responsible for establishing the overall framework for improvement planning at each school.
- The principal leads the planning process at the school, consults with the school council, and also identifies any local factors that contribute to student achievement.
- Teachers and students can help develop the overall goals of the plan and are key to the plan's implementation.
- School councils can help in the planning process by consulting and communicating with parents about the process, providing advice to the principal in the development of school policies, and assisting in setting goals and timelines and in monitoring progress.⁴

Selecting a new principal or vice-principal. While school councils must be consulted about all the areas that are identified in the regulations and legislation, many have expressed great interest in being involved in establishing the criteria and process for the selection and placement of new principals and vice-principals. School councils can provide important advice to boards about the key skills a new principal or vice-principal can bring to the school community. The decision to hire and place each principal or vice-principal is still up to the board, but the board must consult with the council about the process and the selection criteria applied.

The process for selecting and placing principals involves a number of stages. Many boards already have processes in place that govern the promotion and/or selection of principals and vice-principals. However, all boards should review their policies to ensure that their school councils have the opportunity to identify the role they wish to play in the process, if any. The board must invite school council

members to participate in the review of its principal selection/placement policy. This will enable them to determine the role they want to play in the selection process and the stage at which they would like to be involved.

Regardless of what role they may wish to assume, all school councils should be invited to complete principal profiles to help their boards select and place principals at individual schools. While such profiles may not be required each year, reviewing the profiles periodically as the needs of the school change is a good practice. A principal profile may simply identify, from a list provided by the board, the particular characteristics being sought in a new principal or vice-principal. Alternatively, the profile may be a description, developed by the school council after it has considered a number of focused questions. The samples provided on the following pages are intended to give school councils a sense of the many characteristics and skills that may be considered in the selection and placement of a new principal or vice-principal.

School councils might find it useful to review the current school profile in conjunction with the principal profile samples provided on the following pages. This approach would help council members select the most important attributes that a principal or vice-principal should have in order to meet the identified needs of the school. The attributes selected could then be listed in bullet point form, as shown in "Principal Profile: Sample 3", on page 3.18.

The following are some additional roles that councils might play:

- participating on a review panel to decide whether recruitment of candidates will be internal or external, depending on the availability of internal candidates
- serving on a résumé review committee to make recommendations about which candidates are to be interviewed
- delegating a member to serve as a panel member on an interview committee

Ensuring that the school council plays a key role in a board's principal selection process is essential to the successful implementation of the board's selection/ placement policy. It is also crucial that school councils understand (1) the reasons for board policies and (2) that it is a management responsibility of the board to assign staff to a school based on the identified needs of the school, in order to ensure that the school itself continues to grow and develop. For example, many boards have policies that govern the rotation of principals throughout their systems on a periodic basis (e.g., every four or five years). This may seem disruptive, but change is a necessary part of professional growth. As well, fresh leadership and perspectives on learning enhance the professional growth of staff and students. While changes in principals and vice-principals may be uncomfortable for some, it is important that all parents recognize the benefits that new leadership can bring to the school. Involving school councils in such decisions can help ensure a positive start when the new school year begins with a new principal or vice-principal.

Principal Profile: Sample 1

A number of criteria listed in the chart "Principal Profile: Sample 1" on page 3.11 are recognized as essential to the success of school leaders. When completing such a chart in preparation for the selection of a principal or vice-principal, council members should rate each criterion by putting a check mark in the appropriate column – high, medium, or low – to describe the administrator who would best suit the identified needs of their school. (Note that this is not an exhaustive list, and that the council may wish to add items that are of particular relevance to its school.) This kind of list will help to guide the selection team when it considers the principal placement for a school.

Principal Profile: Sample 2

People who are interested in becoming school administrators should demonstrate current knowledge, growth, and skills in a variety of areas. School leaders will have developed these over time, through experience.

The chart "Principal Profile: Sample 2" on page 3.15 could be used as a guide by school councils in identifying the areas that are a priority for their schools and the specific characteristics of leadership that they desire in their principals.

The placement team will refer to the comments in the profile chart to guide them when making recommendations about placing an individual in the school. The placement will be discussed with the school council before the team makes a recommendation to the board.

Principal Profile: Sample 3

The chart "Principal Profile: Sample 3" on page 3.18 is an example of a simple principal profile in which a school council has clearly outlined what it would like to see in a new principal.

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 3(2).
2. Adapted from Education Improvement Commission (EIC), *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils* (Toronto: EIC, November 2000).
3. EIC, *School Improvement Planning*, p. 5.
4. For more information about school improvement planning, see Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), *Ontario Report and Guide on School Improvement Planning* (Toronto: EQAO, 2000), and EIC, *School Improvement Planning*. Both of these publications offer advice to help boards, principals, and school councils develop school improvement plans.

Consultation

“To consult” means to seek advice, to confer, to discuss, or to deliberate on the views and opinions held by others. In the spirit of the regulations regarding school councils, there are clear expectations that all partners be consulted:

- School boards and principals are to seek advice from their school councils.
- School councils are to seek input from the parents of their school community about matters under their consideration.

Consultation With School Councils by Boards and Principals

To ensure that parents, through their school councils, are able to influence decisions affecting their children’s education, the school council regulation clearly directs school boards and principals to actively seek the views of their school councils on a variety of matters. Under the regulations, school boards and principals are now required to ask for the views of their school councils before they make decisions on certain matters.

Boards and principals are also required to inform their school councils on how the recommendations have been taken into account when decisions related to their recommendations are made. This is a meaningful addition to the responsibilities of school

boards and principals. Including school councils in the development or revision of policies and guidelines or the implementation of education initiatives affirms their role as a key partner in the education system.

The table on page 4.2 outlines the areas in which boards and principals are required to consult with school councils.

Ontario Regulations 612/00 and 298 advise boards and principals that they are also free to solicit the views of their school councils on any matter outside the mandatory areas for consultation. School councils are able to make recommendations in areas such as those listed in the table on page 4.3. School councils, boards, and principals may wish to work together as they develop or review policies, or develop board and school implementation plans.

AREAS REQUIRING CONSULTATION WITH SCHOOL COUNCILS

By Boards	By Principals
Policies Under Development and/or Review	
– all initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents	– all initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents
– the provincial code of conduct	– the school policy regarding code of conduct
– appropriate dress policy	– the school policy regarding appropriate dress for students
– a policy on reimbursement of expenses incurred by school council members	
– fund-raising activities by school council members	
– a policy or process for resolving internal school council disputes	
Planning	
– the board’s action plans for improvement based on reports of EQAO test results	– the school’s action plans for improvement based on reports of EQAO test results
– development of communication plans regarding the board’s action plans for improvement	– development of communication plans regarding the school’s action plans for improvement
– the criteria and process for the selection and <u>placement</u> of principals and vice-principals	
Implementation Plans	
– any new education initiatives at the board level	– any new education initiatives at the school level
– the board policy regarding the code of conduct for students	– the school policy regarding the board policy on the code of conduct for students
– the board policy regarding appropriate dress	– the school implementation plan for the board policy regarding appropriate dress
Other	
	– the annual review of the decision to recite the pledge of citizenship on a daily basis
– the development of a plan providing for co-instructional activities	– the sharing (at least once a year) of the school plan providing for co-instructional activities

Recruiting Community Representatives

Your council can begin the recruitment process by finding out more about the members of your community. In many areas, particularly in urban centres where there are greater numbers of immigrants, it is especially important to find ways of encouraging participation from the various and diverse ethno-cultural groups that make up the school community. For a number of reasons, some parents from these groups may be hesitant to involve themselves in local education matters regarding their children. Recruiting community representatives from the ethno-cultural groups in the school community to liaise with parents would serve to strengthen the links between the school and its diverse community partners and assure these partners that the school welcomes the active involvement of all parents.

To find out who makes up your school community, what information your school community receives and needs, and how information is presently provided, your council might consider questions such as the following:

- Who belongs to our school community?
- What is the racial and ethno-cultural composition of the community?
- What organizations exist?
- Who are the community leaders?
- To whom does the school and parent group send information?
- What information does the school communicate to our community?
- Does the information satisfy all of the diverse needs of the community?
- What do the members of our community need to know?
- How do the school and the school council currently exchange information with the diverse elements of our community?
- Does the school or the school council have a contact person in each outside organization or network?
- Is two-way communication promoted?

Identifying and appointing one or more community representatives, depending on the council's bylaws, may involve the following three stages:

1. Examine the needs of the school and the knowledge and skills that your council will require.

Community representatives to the school council support the work of the council and the school by tapping into a vast network of resources. Your council should seek individuals from a variety of backgrounds and should carefully consider what kinds of community representatives it is seeking. In preparation for recruiting representatives, the council should identify specific needs or expertise that might be needed in the school. It should then list the resources that the community might contribute to meet those needs. (Your school profile will help you determine what expertise the school requires.)

Your council may wish to consider representatives from the following examples of groups:

- employer groups or associations, such as the board of trade or chamber of commerce (these groups may be particularly important at the secondary school level)
- social service agencies
- health-care service organizations
- non-profit organizations (e.g., consider a person with experience in recruiting volunteers)
- senior citizens' groups
- community service agencies
- the parks and recreation department
- cultural agencies and arts groups (e.g., art galleries, theatres, musical groups)
- service clubs
- business and industry groups
- labour groups (e.g., the local labour council)
- neighbourhood representatives
- the parish council
- Aboriginal groups
- French-language cultural groups
- representatives of racial or multicultural groups

2. Prepare an information package for potential community representatives. Since those invited to serve on your school council will be asked to commit a significant amount of time to the work of the council, they will want to know how they can contribute. An information package should contain material that will give them this kind of information. Be sure to include a copy of the school profile and some of the school's newsletters and annual reports.

3. Identify and select potential community representatives. When appointing community representatives, the chair and/or members of a council could follow a procedure similar to the following:

- Consult your council's bylaws to confirm how many community representatives are required.
- At a school council meeting, discuss potential community representatives and develop a list of candidates. (The list should contain more names than the council requires in case one or more individuals decide not to join the council.)
- Determine how each candidate might contribute to the achievement of the council's priorities.
- Identify the candidates in order of preference based on the needs of the school.
- Designate one member of the council, such as the chair or a co-chair, to recruit the appropriate number of community representatives from the list of candidates identified by the council.
- Provide the potential members with copies of the information package. (Some people may want to review the information package before agreeing to become a member.)
- Formally appoint the community representative(s), in accordance with the school council's bylaws.

Team Building

Trust and respect are essential if the members of your council are to function effectively as a team. Team-building activities that include discussing the council's purpose, goals, and vision are ways to

build trust and get to know each other's beliefs, values, interests, and areas of strength. An orientation session prior to the first formal meeting might help begin this process. Building positive working relationships among council members will strengthen and promote teamwork. As trust and respect develop, council members will become more open to sharing opinions, taking risks, and resolving conflicts in a positive manner.

To different degrees, every group goes through the following four stages, although the length of each and the sequence will vary. It is helpful to be aware of these stages when you and your fellow members are feeling stuck, frustrated, or unproductive.

- *Forming.* Group members are polite, impersonal, watchful, and guarded.
- *Storming.* Some group members are trying to avoid conflict, while others are confronting people, opting out, having difficulty, or feeling stuck.
- *Norming.* Group members are developing skills in such areas as conflict resolution, listening to and evaluating other points of view, and giving feedback. They are also establishing procedures to deal with issues.
- *Performing.* Group members are becoming resourceful, flexible, open, effective, close, and supportive.

School Council Code of Ethics

Your school council may find it useful to establish a code of ethics that outlines the council's expectations of its members and guides their behaviour. The code may address matters such as the boundaries of the role and responsibilities of the school council, conflict of interest, and the manner in which members are expected to interact, in the interests of preserving democratic principles and minimizing and/or managing conflict. A sample code of ethics is provided on page 5.5. (Information about avoiding internal conflict or dealing with it when it does arise is provided in Section 7: Establishing Bylaws.)

CODE OF ETHICS

- *A member shall* consider the best interests of all students.
- *A member shall* be guided by the school's and the school board's mission statements.
- *A member shall* act within the limits of the roles and responsibilities of a school council, as identified by the school's operating guidelines, the school board, and the Ontario Ministry of Education.
- *A member shall* become familiar with the school's policies and operating practices and act in accordance with them.
- *A member shall* maintain the highest standards of integrity.
- *A member shall* recognize and respect the personal integrity of each member of the school community.
- *A member shall* treat all other members with respect and allow for diverse opinions to be shared without interruption.
- *A member shall* encourage a positive environment in which individual contributions are encouraged and valued.
- *A member shall* acknowledge democratic principles and accept the consensus of the council.
- *A member shall* respect the confidential nature of some school business and respect limitations this may place on the operation of the school council.
- *A member shall* not disclose confidential information.
- *A member shall* limit discussions at school council meetings to matters of concern to the school community as a whole.
- *A member shall* use established communication channels when questions or concerns arise.
- *A member shall* promote high standards of ethical practice within the school community.
- *A member shall* declare any conflict of interest.
- *A member shall* not accept any payment or benefit financially through school council involvement.

Source: Adapted from the bylaws of the Port Arthur Collegiate Institute School Council, Lakehead Board of Education, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

Accepting the role of school council member carries with it certain responsibilities. Each school council may define the roles and responsibilities of its members in its operating bylaws. These operating bylaws may include the expectation that members attend council meetings regularly. All council members are encouraged to be familiar with their council's expectations of members and be prepared to make a commitment to conduct the council's business in a professional manner.

There may be instances when an elected member fails, on a regular basis, to attend school council meetings, leaving the council without the quorum required to hold a meeting. To deal with this possibility, the council may consider including in its bylaws a provision for the chair or co-chairs to determine with the individual member whether he or she is able or willing to continue to serve on the school council. In many cases, the member may not be aware that his or her continued absence is affecting the council's ability to carry out its mandate under the regulation. On being made aware of this consequence, the member may be willing to make regular attendance a priority. In other cases, the individual may decide to resign from the council, thereby creating a vacancy in its membership.

It is important to remember that Ontario Regulation 612/00 contains no provision for the discretionary removal of a duly elected or appointed school council member before the end of his or her term. Bylaws created by a school council, or policies established by a board, must not conflict with the provisions of the regulation. A school council member is, therefore, entitled to hold his or her position until the term expires.⁵

As noted earlier (page 5.4), council members may be asked to adhere to a code of ethics that governs their actions and deliberations.

Some of the duties that might be expected of each of the representatives on the school council are

described below. Your council may wish to add other duties to reflect the needs of your local community.

The Chair/Co-Chairs

The chair/co-chairs of the council are elected by the council members and must be a parent or parents who are not employed by the school board.⁶ The chair/co-chairs are voting members who, in addition to performing the same duties as other council members, might:

- arrange for meetings;
- prepare agendas;
- chair council meetings;
- ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- facilitate the resolution of conflict;
- participate as ex-officio members of all committees established by the school council;
- communicate with the school principal on behalf of the council.

Note: A school council's operating bylaws may outline other specific duties for the chair/co-chairs, as well as for other officers of the council, such as a secretary or treasurer.

Parent Representatives

Parent representatives are voting members who:

- participate on any committees established by the school council;
- contribute to the discussions of the school council;
- solicit the views of other parents and members of the community to share with the school council;
- observe the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

School Principal

The school principal must be a member of the school council, as he or she is an important link between the council and the school. (In fact, a meeting cannot be considered a meeting of the school council

unless the principal, or delegated vice-principal, is in attendance.) However, the principal is not a voting member of the council.⁷ The principal:

- distributes promptly to each council member material identified by the ministry for distribution to school council members and posts the material in a school location accessible to parents;
- acts as a resource to the council on laws, regulations, and board policies;
- attends all school council meetings, unless this responsibility has been delegated to the vice-principal;
- considers each recommendation made by the school council to the principal and returns to the council with the action taken in response to the recommendation;
- solicits views on matters pertaining to the establishment or amendment of school policies and guidelines⁸ relating to student achievement, accountability of the education system to parents, and the communication of those plans to the public;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- may solicit the views of the school council on any matter;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

For further information on the principal's roles and responsibilities, see "What Do the Regulations Mean for Principals?" in Section 3: The Regulations Governing School Councils.

Student Representative(s)

The student representative is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- solicits the views of other students to share with the school council;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicates information from the council to other students;

- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

School Staff Representatives (one each from the teaching and non-teaching staff)

School staff representatives are voting members who:

- contribute to the discussions of the school council;
- solicit views from their staff groups to share with the school council;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicate information back to their staff groups;
- observe the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Community Representative(s)

The community representative(s) is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- represents the community's perspective;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- helps build partnerships and links between the school and the community;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Representative of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation

The representative of one of these organizations is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- represents the views of his or her association;

- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicates information back to his or her association;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Involving Parents and the Community

Parents play the first and most important role in their children's education and are key partners in building a quality education system. One purpose of the school council is to promote and support the involvement of all parents in their children's learning.

School councils can involve all parents by:

- providing parents with information and ideas about curriculum-related activities, decisions, planning, and how to help their children with their homework;
- communicating effectively with parents about school programs and children's progress;
- recruiting and organizing parents' help and support;
- identifying and using community resources and services that strengthen school programs, family relations, and student learning and development;
- inviting parents who have particular expertise to speak to the council (e.g., a nurse to speak about the nutritional needs of children, a marketing professional to help the council with a communication plan);
- helping parents establish home environments that support their children as students (e.g., helping them with homework, asking them about the day's events, showing an interest in their extracurricular activities, expressing care, and giving guidance).

This involvement contributes both to the children's success in school and to the quality of the school environment. Because parental involvement is so important, school councils need to break down any barriers between the home and the school and make the school a warm, receptive place for parents.

School councils should encourage all parents to participate, welcome them to school council meetings, and inform them of the many ways in which they can be involved.

Parents play a valuable role by being members of school councils. Celebrating the council's successes and communicating its accomplishments to the community helps retain the commitment of current school council members and encourages other parents and community representatives to become involved in the future. Involving parents throughout the year on committees and in other volunteer roles is an excellent way to spark interest and motivate parents to contribute in various ways to their children's education. *Every parent has something to contribute.*

Staying Focused on the Mandate

While school councils play a significant role, it is important that they act within the scope of the duties that are outlined in the provincial regulations and policies.⁹ These regulations and policies should be a part of every council member's package and should be reviewed carefully during the orientation of all new council members. It is important that all members clearly understand the regulations and policies so that they know where the boundaries lie in terms of what is – and what is not – within the scope of their duties. For example, there is an important distinction to be made between providing advice and acting as an advocate on a specific issue.

It is important that school councils maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of school-wide concern. From time to time, a school council may encounter the particularly difficult situation in which a council member demands that the council devote all of its attention and energy to a single issue. In some cases, the member's passion for the issue may be counterproductive to the council's efforts to achieve its goals.

Despite such challenges, members should try to focus their energy on fulfilling their mandate. For example, by setting goals to improve a school's

learning environment, school councils, in collaboration with boards, principals, teachers, parents, and other community members, can make their schools better places in which to learn. Participating in the development of the school's action plan for improvement is an excellent way for a school council to contribute to creating an environment that fosters student achievement. The school's action plan is a road map that shows the changes a school needs to make to help students improve their achievement. The school council should work closely with parents, the principal, staff members, and other community members in drafting the plan. It would be beneficial for the school council to have completed a school profile, which will help it in drafting the school's action plan. For more information, see "Developing a school profile" on page 3.6 and "Improvement planning" on page 3.8.

As specified in the regulation, school councils can provide advice to the principal and the board on any matter. It should be noted, however, that they are not authorized to perform managerial or administrative responsibilities that belong to the principal or to other school administrators. For example, assessing teacher performance in the classroom is the responsibility of principals and superintendents, who are granted this authority under the Education Act.

Questions of Legal Liability and Insurance

School councils should focus on the well-being of students in the school and must not allow their efforts to be derailed or distracted by special interests, especially if the special interests are not education issues. If a school council engages in activities beyond its assigned duties (e.g., by providing after-school child care, running music programs, organizing a Christmas party or social activity), it could be held liable for any problems that occur. School councils wanting to go beyond their duties and responsibilities as set out by the ministry, the board, and the school may want to inquire about their liability. If in doubt, a school council should seek clarification about what is and what isn't covered by the board's insurance policy. This information can be provided by the principal or a superintendent or other appropriate official at the board office.

The Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) is the insurance company that provides coverage to many school boards. School councils are encouraged to refer to the OSBIE website, www.osbie.on.ca, which includes information that relates to school councils.

Assessing Your Council's Effectiveness

It is important that your school council take time periodically to discuss and evaluate what it has been doing. All too often, school councils find that there is so much to do that there is little time left to reflect on or assess their direction and practices.

Evaluation forms or surveys are one way to collect information for the purposes of improving your meetings or council processes. An impartial observer may also play a valuable role in assessing your council's effectiveness. Your council should be sure to factor in time for specific discussions regarding progress on strategic plans and action plans to ensure that you are making progress.

A sample questionnaire that school councils may want to use to gauge the council's effectiveness is provided on page 5.10. Such a questionnaire could be distributed to council members to gather their opinions. Council members should be told that they do not have to sign the questionnaire.

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 20.
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 2.
3. Adapted from Anthony Bryk, John Easton, David Kerbow, Sharon Rollow, and Penny Sebring, *Report of the Steering Committee Consortium on Chicago School Reform* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, July 1993).
4. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 13.
5. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 6(1).
6. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 8.
7. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 14(3).
8. See Regulation 298, section 11(19).
9. For a list of current ministry policy/program memoranda, visit the ministry's website at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

ASSESSING YOUR COUNCIL'S EFFECTIVENESS

Are council meetings effective?

- rarely sometimes mostly always

How could council meetings be improved?

Are we on track with our strategic plan?

- not at all somewhat mostly consistently

What is the next step in our council's strategic plan?

What is going well?

Do we need to change any of our processes?

How do we want to improve?

Establishing Bylaws

School councils are not required to develop lengthy constitutions, since Ontario Regulation 612/00 sets out the mandate and roles and responsibilities for school councils. In effect, the regulation serves as the constitution for the school council. (If a school council already has a constitution in place, the council may wish to continue to use it, provided that it does not conflict with the provisions of the regulation.) Similarly, in the presence of the regulation, boards are not required to develop policies on school councils, except for policies dealing with the reimbursement of expenses incurred by members and officers of school councils while conducting council business, policies on fund-raising, and policies that address the resolution of internal conflict on a school council. Boards are, however, required to consult with school councils when developing these policies. While boards may want to facilitate the work of councils that are developing the required school council bylaws, they are not required to do so.

School councils must develop certain bylaws to provide them with direction for the operation of council business and to help the council work effectively. The development of operating bylaws should begin as soon as possible after a council meets for the first time. At a minimum, the regulation requires councils to develop bylaws to address the following areas:

- election procedures
- filling vacancies
- conflict of interest
- conflict resolution procedures

Bylaws governing other areas of operation may also be developed.

Once bylaws have been developed, your school council may want to review them from time to time, although they do not need to be rewritten each year. Conflict resolution bylaws must be established in accordance with any applicable policies established by the board.

Your council may also wish to develop bylaws related to the following:

- a school council code of ethics (see the sample under “School Council Code of Ethics” in Section 5: Effective School Councils)
- general expectations regarding meetings (e.g., attendance, promptness)
- the number and scheduling of meetings (at least four meetings must be held each school year)
- the number of parent members on the council and the number of members required for a quorum (in compliance with Ontario Regulation 612/00)
- the number, description, and duties of executive officers
- any requirements regarding signing officers
- the establishment and roles of committees
- a process for seeking input from the community

It is important to ensure that bylaws created by the school council do not conflict with any of the provisions of Ontario Regulation 612/00.

This section of the guide includes sample bylaws for election procedures and for filling any vacancies that may appear on your council. Section 9: Communication may also help you with the task of developing bylaws.

Election Procedures

According to Ontario Regulation 612/00, elections must take place at the same time each year – within the first thirty days of each school year.¹ However, in the case of a new school, the first election must be held during the first thirty days of the school opening, on a date fixed by the board that established the council. Since September is a busy time of the year for parents and educators, school councils may want to prepare an election plan in June.

Many school councils establish in their election bylaws an election committee that is responsible for ensuring that each constituent group (parents, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students) holds its own election for representation on the school council. The method of filling the position(s) of community representative(s) may also be outlined in a school

council's bylaws.² The appearance of conflict of interest can be avoided by establishing an election committee composed of individual council members who will not be standing for election the following year. Note that in the case of a new school, the principal may want to form and chair the election planning committee or invite interested parents to do so.

If there is an established parents' association at a school that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation, one representative would be appointed by that association to the school council.³

The following pages contain a sample schedule for the school council election of parent representatives, sample nomination forms for parent candidates, a sample nomination form receipt, a sample school council election ballot, and sample election procedure bylaws.

Communication

Establishing Channels of Communication

Communication Is the Key

Communication is the key to ensuring strong partnerships and a successful school council. It is crucial to achieving increased involvement and greater influence for parents in their children's education. School councils must have sound methods of communicating with the school principal, with the school board, with parents, and with each other. The school council's communication strategy should also include an effective method of communicating with the school community on a regular basis. This process should in time become routine.

Many channels of communication are required to ensure that your school council functions effectively. The following sections offer advice about using these channels.

Chair/Co-Chairs and School Council Members

Chairs/co-chairs must ensure that council members are accessible to each other. Council members with questions, issues, or simply agenda items to add to the next meeting's agenda will need to know how to contact the chair. It is a good idea to develop a list of contact numbers, addresses, and e-mail addresses for all council members at the beginning of the year and to distribute the list to all members.

The chair/co-chairs of your school council should remember to thank council members frequently. All school council members offer their time and expertise as volunteers on council, time that is very precious. Some go out of their way to do simple things such as arranging for special refreshments or coming early to ensure that the room and all the necessary equipment are ready. Some council members may spend hours working on committees. It is important to recognize and applaud their efforts, big and small, on a regular basis so that they will know that they are valued and will continue to take pride in the work they do. This kind of acknowledgement helps to sustain council members' involvement and provides for continuing support.

Chair/Co-Chairs and the Principal

The need to develop a good working relationship between the chair/co-chairs and the principal at the beginning of the year cannot be stressed enough. Trust, respect, and open communication are the nucleus for an effective partnership and, ultimately, an effective school council. To accomplish this, the chair/co-chairs and the principal must establish an effective way to communicate outside of regular meetings. This includes such things as how each would like to receive information (e.g., by maintaining in-boxes in the school office for materials related to the council, by using e-mail). It may also mean establishing a procedure for what is to happen when an urgent issue arises.

Your Council and the School Community

It is essential that a channel of communication is established between your school council and the school community. This is part of the school council's mandate, and it is crucial to effective school council operations.

Your Council and Other School Councils in Your Area

Periodically networking with other school councils can be extremely beneficial. Networking can occur in a variety of ways – for example, through meetings, teleconferencing, or e-mail – and can involve other school councils in your area, all the school councils in your board, or all the school councils in a regional organization of councils. Networking gives councils the opportunity to share best practices; to learn what is new locally, regionally, and provincially; to feel supported and connected to a larger community; and to have a stronger voice at the board level or the provincial level.

Your school council should determine early in the school year what kinds of networking opportunities exist. If there are no such opportunities, the chair of your council may wish to write to school council chairs in the area, the board, or the region, outlining the goals of your council and expressing your council's wish to exchange information. The chair can take the lead in establishing a method for exchanging information and creating an opportunity to meet and share ideas. Your council may wish to invite a speaker or panel to provide training or expert information on topics that would be of interest to the whole group. This could also be used as an opportunity to plan strategies and activities that would benefit the whole group.

Sharing information regularly with school councils in your area will keep information flowing among the councils, and all councils will benefit from this flow of information. The responsibility of communicating regularly could be assigned to one school council member, who would then share the information with the rest of the council.

Your Council and the Board

Establishing a good relationship with the board is important. If you have any questions about the board's initiatives, school council policies and procedures, or policies affecting students' success, the first place to seek clarification is with the principal of your school. You may also call your board's general-inquiries phone number. Some boards have designated a superintendent to liaise with school councils. Most boards now have websites where news, notices, and other educational data are available. Bookmark your board's website to make frequent referencing and updating easier. Your school council might, from time to time, consider inviting members of senior administration and/or trustees to obtain specific information that might be relevant to your discussions. While senior administration and/or trustees have an open invitation to council meetings, their regular attendance should not be expected.

Developing a Communication Plan

One of your council's first tasks might be to develop a communication plan. To do so, you should consider the following:

- the audience with whom you need to communicate
- issues requiring broad school-community consultation
- the various communication strategies and processes that you can use
- individuals responsible for developing the plan
- timelines
- ways of dealing with feedback from the community

Throughout the year, there will be many opportunities for your school council to assume a significant public profile in the school and in the school community, and it is important that you make the most of those events. Opportunities may take the form of:

- setting up a school council information table on parent-teacher interview nights;
- sending students home with a newsletter that could include the council's meeting minutes;

- posting the council’s meeting minutes on the school’s website;
- hosting special events that bring the school community into the school;
- making use of regular mailings, such as the mailing of report cards, to include a school council update, a list of the council’s activities for the year, or the school council’s meeting minutes;
- having the chair/co-chairs speak at various school functions;
- making personal contact with parents by phone or at special meetings;
- setting up a school council display in the main foyer of the school;
- making use of public service announcements and other forms of free radio, TV, and newspaper advertising;
- posting notices in local churches and community halls.

In choosing communication strategies, your council should consider their effectiveness and appropriateness for parents from diverse backgrounds and for the audiences within your community. For example, to assess the audience you wish to reach, you might begin by asking questions like the following:

- Who needs to know this? Which groups or communities need to be informed?
- With whom are we communicating already?
- Is the school reaching everyone it should?
- What organizations should we be reaching?

Next, you might decide exactly what you wish to communicate by asking questions such as the following:

- What does the audience need to know?
- What have we communicated up until now?
- Is the information we now wish to communicate appropriate for the audience?

Finally, you might determine how to deliver the messages you wish to communicate to your intended audience by asking questions such as the following:

- What is the best way and time to communicate?
- How are we currently exchanging information with the different groups in the school community?
- How can we assess the effectiveness of our current communication strategies?
- What communication efforts are working? Are not working?
- Are the messages designed to suit different audiences?
- Do we promote two-way communication?
- How will we know that the message has been received?

The public learns about schools through the following sources:

- local newspapers
- conversations with friends and neighbours
- radio, television, or the Internet
- school newsletters
- conversations with students
- service clubs and business associations
- personal friendships with educators in the district
- personal visits to schools

Your council might want to consider including the following in your communication plan:

- any successful programs and practices that your school and parent group provide to involve families in their children’s education
- ways of obtaining feedback from parents and staff on current practices that might be improved or on practices that are to be introduced
- specific strategies to involve families who do not participate in any of the programs provided
- two to four priorities of the current year’s council
- ways of assessing the effectiveness of your council’s communication strategies and revising the communication plan for the following year

Communication Strategies for Community Outreach

Community outreach is a whole-school activity. It must involve all staff members, students, and school council members and should become a regular part of the school's business. The purpose of community outreach is to facilitate the continuous involvement of parents and community representatives in the school. Before determining which outreach strategies to use, you and other council members might consider the activities in which you would like to involve parents and community members, as well as the activities in which these people might be interested.

Your school community will include a number of diverse groups: those who share common geographical, racial, ethnocultural, historic, religious, linguistic, or life backgrounds or experiences; others who share a particular challenge; and still others who share business, organizational, or institutional experiences. All these people and groups of people have something to contribute to the school, and to be successful, your council should take advantage of the experience, knowledge, and skills of all of them.

It is expected that your council will work closely with the school to establish and maintain strong communication links with these diverse groups and to encourage their involvement in both the school council and the school itself. This section of the guide provides some suggestions for accomplishing this.

The following are some of the ways your council can communicate with the diverse groups that make up your community:

- distributing newsletters and flyers to them
- inviting them to visit the school
- consulting them on community issues and needs
- holding meetings of the school council or school events in locations other than the school, such as in various recreation and cultural centres

- using local translators for meetings
- advertising regularly in appropriate languages in local newspapers and publications and on local ethno-specific radio and television programs
- encouraging leaders of diverse racial and ethnocultural groups to share information about the school council with members of their communities and to promote the involvement of parents in the school
- using voice mail to record messages about council activities in appropriate languages
- avoiding scheduling meetings on religious holidays
- designating council members to work with specific organizations or networks

Here are a few suggestions to help make your council's outreach successful:

- Create an outreach committee, made up of members who represent the diverse groups within your community. Hold sessions with parents and other community representatives to brainstorm ideas for reaching others. Obtain specific information regarding outreach from everyone.
- Treat every parent and community representative with respect, trust, and courtesy.
- Make sure that there is a formal mechanism in place that lets parents and community representatives communicate what they want, need, like, and dislike throughout the year. Be sure to follow up on any concerns they raise.
- Offer information, workshops, and support for parents to help them learn more about what goes on in the school and how they can contribute to what their children are learning at school, both academically and socially. Include parents in pertinent planning sessions.
- Invite community leaders to school events.
- Use teachers, parents, and council members to actively recruit other parents to become involved in the school.

Communication Tips for Elementary Schools

Generally speaking, getting information home to parents in an elementary school community can be achieved fairly easily, as children in these grades are usually quite dutiful about bringing information home.

- Include information in the school's monthly calendar and in the school newsletter that goes home on a regular basis.
- Use space on the school's website to highlight activities and accomplishments of the council and to promote parental involvement.
- Organize a telephone tree.
- If possible, and with permission, collect e-mail addresses from parents and set up distribution lists.
- Host information sessions.
- Always remember to accommodate working parents/guardians when setting up in-school meetings.
- Advertise in appropriate and effective locations or mediums.
- Make use of free public service announcements.

Communication Tips for Secondary Schools

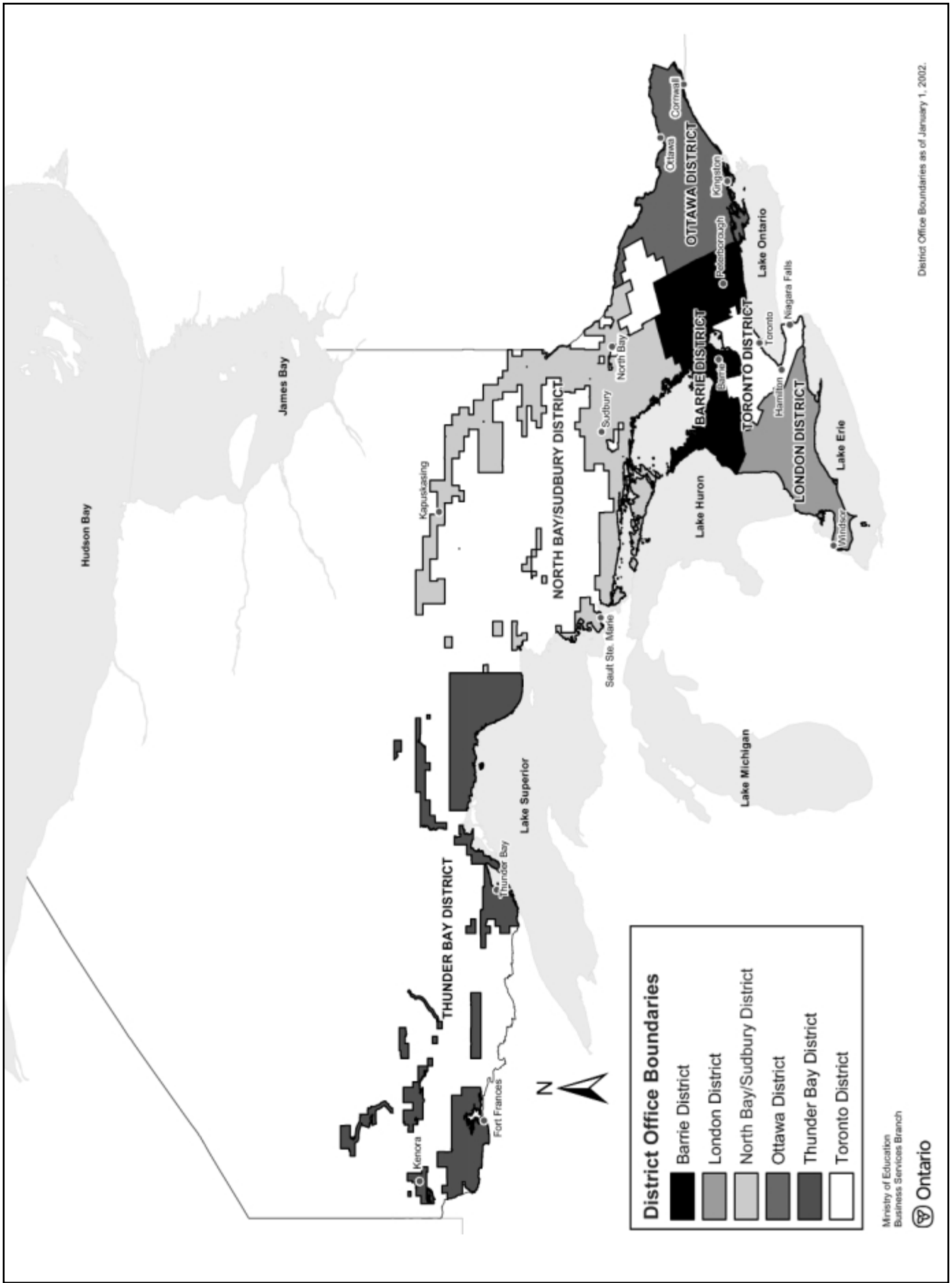
Many of the strategies mentioned above also work for secondary schools, although high school students may not be as reliable as younger students in bringing information home. However, regular communication with the school community is as important for secondary schools as it is for elementary schools. If your school council wants to ensure good communication, it should think creatively about ways of disseminating information. For example, if your council wants to get a newsletter home, find out when the principal is doing a mailing to the school community, and have a newsletter prepared for inclusion with the mailing. This incurs no extra cost, and it ensures that information is getting home to parents. Secondary school councils may, however, wish to ensure that they can afford to send information home in the mail throughout the year, including notices of school council meetings and previous minutes.

Sharing Information Across the Province

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is interested in what school councils have to say. The ministry also makes available a broad range of information on provincial policies and initiatives. Communication can take place in a variety of ways.

- For general inquiries, call toll-free in Ontario at 1-800-387-5514. In the Toronto area, call 416-325-2929 or fax the ministry at 416-325-6348.
- The ministry's telecommunication device for the deaf is available by dialling 1-800-263-2892.
- The ministry's mailing address is Correspondence and Public Inquiries Unit, 14th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2.
- The ministry's e-mail address is info@edu.gov.on.ca.
- The ministry has a bilingual website – www.edu.gov.on.ca – which has a searchable database and links to other websites involved with, and committed to, education.
- There are six ministry field services branches: Barrie, London, North Bay/Sudbury, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and Toronto (see map on page 9.6). School councils can contact the office nearest them:
 - Barrie: (705) 725-7627
or toll-free at 1-800-471-0713
 - London: (519) 776-1440
or toll-free at 1-800-265-4221
 - Ottawa: (613) 225-9210
or toll-free at 1-800-267-1067
 - North Bay/Sudbury: (705) 474-7210
or toll-free at 1-800-461-9570
 - Thunder Bay: (807) 475-1571
or toll-free at 1-800-465-5020
 - Toronto: (416) 325-4190
or toll-free at 1-800-268-5755



The Ontario Parent Council Website

The Ontario Parent Council (OPC) maintains a website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org to communicate with parents of elementary and secondary school students and with school council members in Ontario.

On the website you can find information about the OPC, information on today's education issues, information about school councils and their important role at your child's school, answers to questions parents often ask, links to resources related to your child's education, and information about the ways in which you can voice your views and concerns.

The OPC welcomes the ideas of parents and school councils. To locate the OPC member nearest you, visit the OPC website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org. You can contact the council by phone at 1-800-361-6483, by fax at 416-314-0425, or by e-mail at opc@edu.gov.on.ca. The OPC's mailing address is: Ontario Parent Council, 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1511, Toronto ON M5B 1J3.

Financial Statements

In the following two sample financial statements, “project funds” refers to fund-raising done for specific projects; “operating funds” refers to the ongoing operation expenses of the council.

Note: School councils shall not engage in fund-raising activities unless the activities are conducted in accordance with applicable policies established by the board.²

Sample Financial Statements: Sample I

**The [name of school council]
Sources and Uses of Project Funds for the Year Ended August 31, 2002**

Cash on hand for projects at the beginning of the period (September 1, 2001)	\$227.64
Add revenues: Net funds raised (see Analysis 1 below)	<u>717.11</u>
	944.75
Subtract expenditures: Project expenditures (see Analysis 2 below)	<u>- 746.00</u>
Project cash on hand at the end of the period (August 31, 2002)	\$198.75

Analysis 1: Net Funds Raised

Activity	Expenditure	Receipts	Net Proceeds
Candy bars	\$137.48	\$340.00	\$202.52
Milk	383.16	510.00	126.84
Fun Run	8.73	65.00	56.27
Raffle	86.02	417.50	331.48
Totals	\$615.39	\$1,332.50	\$717.11

Analysis 2: Project Expenditures

Project	Expenditure
Instrument repair (recorders)	\$300.00
CDs for music program	296.00
Bus subsidy for Grade 6	150.00
Total	\$746.00

**The [name of school council]
Sources and Uses of Operating Funds for the Year Ended August 31, 2002**

Operating cash on hand at the beginning of the period (September 1, 2001)	\$147.12
<i>Add allocation from board</i>	<u>500.00</u>
	647.12
 <i>Subtract operating expenditures (see breakdown below)</i>	
Expenditures	
Postage	\$291.27
Photocopies	176.63
Miscellaneous	42.92
Total	<u>510.82</u>
Operating cash on hand at the end of the period (August 31, 2002)	<u>\$136.30</u>

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 24.
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, sections 22(2) and (3).

The establishment of the EQAO was based on a recommendation made by the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning in 1995. The commission consulted extensively with educators, parents, other taxpayers, and students and concluded that province-wide assessments would help to address public demands for excellence and accountability in the publicly funded school system.

The EQAO's assessments provide information that teachers and parents can use to improve learning for all students. They also provide information that parents, educators, policy makers, and members of the public can use to monitor the effectiveness of the education system over time. In addition, the EQAO works to ensure that this information is used to bring about improvement for individual students and for the education system as a whole.

For more information about the EQAO, visit their website at www.eqao.com.

The Ontario College of Teachers

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) is a college of professionals with authority to license, govern, and regulate the teaching profession in Ontario. The college was established by the provincial government in September 1996. Its primary functions are to set out clear standards of practice, ensure sound professional learning goals, and coordinate and monitor ongoing accredited professional learning for teachers.

The college is responsible for:

- setting requirements for teaching certificates and maintaining a provincial register of teachers;
- setting standards for teacher training programs at Ontario universities and monitoring the training programs to ensure that they meet the standards;
- developing codes of conduct for teachers;
- investigating complaints against teachers and making decisions about teacher discipline and fitness to practice.

For more information on the OCT, visit the college's website at www.oct.on.ca.

The Ontario Parent Council

Established in 1993, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) is a provincial agency that provides advice to the Minister of Education from a parental perspective regarding elementary and secondary school education. The OPC also provides advice about ways to increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The OPC is committed to providing parents across Ontario with comprehensive, up-to-date information on various aspects of education through its website, at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org (see "The Ontario Parent Council Website" in Section 9: Communication).

The OPC is composed of twenty members appointed by the Minister of Education. Individuals seeking appointment must be parents or guardians of students enrolled in elementary or secondary schools in Ontario. Members of the council are appointed for a term of two years and may be reappointed for further terms, although no person can be appointed for three or more consecutive terms.

Six members are selected from parents nominated by school councils at regional forums. One member is recommended by each of three provincial parents' organizations: the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, and Parents Partenaires en Éducation. The Minister appoints eleven other parent members from across the province, including the chair.

For more information about the OPC, visit the OPC's website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

School Boards

While the Minister of Education establishes general policy for schools, Ontario's school boards operate the province's publicly funded schools. It is each board's responsibility to administer the funding it receives from the province for its schools and to ensure that standards established by the ministry are achieved by students in its jurisdiction. School boards are the oldest form of publicly elected government in Ontario. As elected members of the

school board, trustees represent the local community, providing a link between voters and the education system.

Ontario's seventy-two district school boards are made up of thirty-one English-language public boards, twenty-nine English-language Catholic boards, four French-language public boards, and eight French-language Catholic boards. A small number of special types of Ontario schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities and schools in remote and sparsely populated regions, are operated by "school authorities", which take the place of school boards.

As managers of Ontario's schools, board officials, led by the Director of Education at each board and including supervisory officers, provide management and support for the schools in the board and play a major role in implementing ministry and board policies and decisions.

School boards are responsible for:

- determining the number, size, and location of schools;
- building, equipping, and furnishing schools;
- providing education programs that meet the needs of the school community, including needs for special education;
- the prudent management of the funds allocated by the province to support all board activities, including education programs for elementary and secondary school students, and the building and maintenance of schools;
- preparing an annual budget;
- supervising the operation of schools and their teaching programs;
- establishing a school council at each school;
- hiring teachers and other staff;
- helping teachers improve their teaching practices;
- teacher performance;
- approving schools' textbook and learning materials from the approved Ministry of Education list;

- enforcing the student attendance provisions of the Education Act;
- ensuring that schools abide by the Education Act and its regulations;
- establishing and implementing the board's code of conduct;
- negotiating and administering collective agreements.

School boards may also provide transportation for students to and from school and operate summer and evening classes.

Principals

Principals are responsible for the organization and management of individual schools, including the management of the budget assigned to the school by the school board. They are also responsible for the quality of instruction at their schools and for student discipline. Depending on the size of the school, the school board may also assign one or more vice-principals to a school to help the principal with his or her work.

The principal is the head teacher in the school and in addition to any teaching duties, each principal is responsible for:

- determining the organization of the school and ensuring ongoing maintenance of the school buildings;
- administering the school's budget;
- supervising the instruction in the school;
- evaluating the performance of teachers;
- admitting and placing students;
- maintaining student records;
- ensuring that report cards are sent to parents;
- attending every meeting of the school council, acting as a resource person for the council, considering council recommendations, and reporting back on actions taken (or delegating those responsibilities to a vice-principal);

Appendix 3:

List of Related Websites

For a more complete listing of education-related websites, follow the links provided on the Ministry of Education website and/or the Ontario Parent Council website.

- Ministry of Education
www.edu.gov.on.ca
- Ontario Parent Council
www.ontarioparentcouncil.org
- Statutes and regulations of the Government of Ontario
www.e-laws.gov.on.ca
- Ontario Regulation 612/00 (School Councils)
http://192.75.156.68/DBLaws/Regs/English/000612_e.htm
- Ministry of Education: School and Board Finder
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/schoolfinder
- Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)
www.eqao.com
- Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE)
www.osbie.on.ca
- Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)
www.oct.on.ca