

Subject: School Council Focus Group Session data
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Thanks to all of you for a very rich discussion this morning and many thanks to Gail for her transcription of the data.

As Ian requested, this is an opportunity for each of you to provide feedback on our session this morning: what you liked, what you learned, what different type of process could have been used, any other comments you wish to share.

I'm going to suggest we next meet on Thursday, Jan. 29th from 9:30am to 11am. Please forward agenda items for discussion to me.

Here are the names of the focus group members present this morning:

Name	School Council	E-mail address
David Evans	Robert Baldwin PS	hrcp@globalserve.net
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Focus Group: Leadership

Date: January 12, 2004

Leader: Jacki Oxley

Recorder: Gail Gortmaker

1. LEARNING COMMUNITY

a) What does the term “learning community” mean to you

Main Ideas

- Communication
- Partnering within and beyond schools
- Open and continuous dialogue
- Seek out learning opportunities
- Networking between councils
- Linking with community
- Enthusiasm, zeal
- Determine needs; focus on those
- Increased trustee/admin involvement
- Increased understanding of legislation and processes

Details

- Effective communication and partnering
- Open accessible, welcoming
- Shared responsibilities beyond council into council’s community; between board and school community
- Open and continuous dialogue
- Seeking out personal interests and information; using it to promote learning in community
- Beginning with students and working outward to link with partners
- Boosting role of council; increases interest beyond school
- How children are being taught and how – learning about the plans that focus on improvement for students (ie: EQAO)
- Closer interaction between council and teachers/students; working with staff to meet targets
- Community orientation
- Focusing on groups involved in learning and what they need to learn (assessing the needs) – students, parents, council members
- Developing enthusiasm/zeal for learning and sharing that beyond the school
- What do we need to learn to go forward – assessing to meet needs – not just for the sake of doing
- Increased involvement from board members (staff and trustees) in school council activities to build capacity of school community
- Increased involvement from community to school council meetings/activities
- Increased understanding of processes and legislation

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<p>2. LEADERSHIP</p> <p>a) What opportunities exist for leadership (formal and informal)?</p> <p>b) What barriers exist to leadership?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inertia of present school council model prevents many leadership opportunities within school community • Consideration for coordination of system-wide body of school councils/members • Culture shock between models at elementary and secondary • Inexperience and fresh perspective needs to be welcomed • Perceptions need to be clarified/corrected; information needs to be shared • Continuity between school administration and/or school councils needs to be established • Consideration for different socio-economic, geographic and educational levels • How much are volunteers willing to do? • Formal leaders need to be encouraged through better understanding of roles and responsibilities • Need to encourage parents in schools and move into informal leadership roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved from “chairs” to shared tasks within group • Councils shouldn’t continue as “PTOs” – more than just “sports scores”... may not be well received by inertia of model that has lack of understanding, particularly at secondary • Culture shock exists between models in existence at elementary level and secondary school • Inexperience should be welcomed as a fresh perspective – often same people are chosen time and time again for tasks/involvement • Perception that constituents not involved in consultation – open dialogue between board (trustees and staff) to school council • Formal council meetings can be effective if inclusionary model used to gain all perspectives – formal structures can be tight and not welcoming • Informal leaders are needed but should be integrated for ease of understanding – can be coordinated by those more experienced • Newcomers should be welcomed for new ideas – “veterans” have established culture and method of operation – little desire to generate (or generation) of new ideas • Are there really “new” ideas, or just regeneration of old ideas? • Continuity is informal – changes occur with new school council members or school administration – perhaps needs more of a formal structure to eliminate “scatter” • Volunteer duties, fundraising and other work is lacking structure/guidelines – can be done through school or through school council • Need higher level of coordination for school councils – rather than 89 different (scattered) models with little or no continuity • Guidelines don’t (and can’t) exist to affect dynamics of school environment and school community • Inequities exist – ie: education of council members, geographical region, socio-economic status, etc. • Consideration for how much are volunteers willing to do? • School council provides opportunity to be a leader; strong involvement with formal and informal leaders <p style="text-align: right;"><i>more...</i></p>

Leadership: What opportunities exist? Barriers?

- When appropriate leadership spin addresses interaction between council and administration -- often interaction between parents and school administration goes through school council to address issues (ie: info regarding school start times and crossing guard times)
- Infrastructure of school can assist leadership – committees and groups formulated from volunteers to deal with structures that are a layer below school council – (pizza days, spirit days, etc.)
- Networking among school council members and parents is key – visibility, approachability – particularly for school issues
- Discussions have to be of global interest to school – encourages leadership
- Sharing needs to occur between councils – and between council members – and it has to be more than just email messages
- A bare minimum of continuity may need to be established; guidelines allow each school to tailor to their own needs, but this interpretation may provide challenge to some councils
- Different operational structures of principals – consistency would be effective in transition in administration, and transition to new school council (acceptance of change, personalities and territorial issues should be set aside)
- Concern re: control of political agenda of umbrella group would fall to administration under policy governance
- Mandatory attendance of region-wide group of school councils to network and share; education
- Better transition between school council executive -- training
- Not everyone is an effective leader – understanding roles and responsibilities are key to encouraging formal leaders – and effectiveness of formal leaders
- How to generate involvement of parents to create informal leaders? Communication with school to determine where is the need – can move from volunteer into sub-committees and informal leadership

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3. SKILLS

- a) What critical skills are required for school council leaders (formal and informal)?

Main Ideas

Details

- Honesty
- Being straightforward
- Global perspective
- Innovation
- Organization
- Communication
- Patience
- "Beggar's virtue"
- realism of expectations
- discipline: preparation, respect for others' opinions and formal leadership abilities
- commitment
- time
- respect for all parents' level of commitment and what they're able to bring to the council
- need to focus on those who have a need to know

- Honest, straightforward and opinionated people have to be part of the solution
- Global perspective; set personal agenda aside
- Innovative, organized, good communication skills
- "beggar's virtue", patience
- realism of expectations, discipline, preparation
- respect for others' opinions and formal leadership
- commitment and time
- time management
- all parents, regardless of education, if they have the commitment, should be encouraged to participate
- subconsciously, don't send people away (those who may be afraid to speak, etc.)... need to be more inclusive/conducive
- need to pay attention to those who have a need to know; others will follow (don't be discouraged as momentum gains)