

School Council Handbook Supplement

Quick Reference Guide

Halton District School Board



Spring 2004

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The *School Council Handbook Supplement, 2004* is available on the board website at www.hdsb.ca, School Council link and in accessible formats, upon request. Electronic copies are available from oxleyj@hdsb.ca.

Brief History of School Councils

School councils play a vital role in the education system in Ontario. They provide a forum through which parents/guardians and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.

In April 1995, the Ministry of Education and Training issued *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122: School Board Policies on School Councils*, which required boards to develop policies that would establish school councils in each school in their jurisdiction by June 1996. This *PPM 122* outlined the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils.

In 1997, the *Education Quality Improvement Act* mandated that there be school councils in all publicly funded schools in Ontario.

In 1998, the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) conducted focus groups throughout Ontario and conducted research on the work of school councils. The EIC findings concluded that most parents/guardians wanted their school councils to remain advisory bodies while having opportunities for meaningful input and an ability to influence decisions that would affect their children and their local schools. As well, the feedback stated that parents/guardians wanted their advisory role to be clear, consistent and province-wide. At the same time they wanted school boards and principals to be clear about their roles and responsibilities in dealing with school councils.

In 2000-2001, the Ontario government took significant steps to ensure that parents/guardians, through their school councils, would have greater influence in their children's education. New regulations were created that confirm the advisory role of school councils and clearly state that their purpose is to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents/guardians. This regulation also clarifies the role of school councils and establishes their right to express their views on any SCHOOL-WIDE issues that are important to them.

School councils are able to make recommendations to their principals and school boards on any matter (*O. Reg. 612/00*). Principals and school boards, in turn, must consult with school councils on a variety of matters that affect student learning. They must also consider recommendations made by school councils and report back to the councils on how they plan to act on their advice (*O. Reg. 613/00*).

The Ministry of Education is committed to supporting the long-term development of school councils and continually seeks ways to help school councils be an effective voice for parents/guardians.

Purpose and Use of this Handbook Supplement

This quick reference guide has been developed to help school council members fulfill their mandate in the most effective and efficient manner. This guide provides a succinct overview of the *HDSB School Council Handbook, revised August 2003* and is not meant to replace the *Handbook* but rather to be a synopsis of topics in the *Handbook*.

This *Guide* offers a brief outline of the regulations governing school councils and what they mean for councils, principals and the school board. It explains the roles and responsibilities of each partner and outlines the areas in which the school board and principals are required to consult with school councils. For more detail in each of these areas, please consult the *HDSB School Council Handbook* which is posted on the board website at www.hdsb.ca, School Council link.

Regulations Governing School Councils: O. Reg. 612/00

This is a brief synopsis of what *O. Reg. 612/00* means for school councils and is not meant to be inclusive of all aspects of the regulation. The regulation addresses three key areas: the purpose of school councils, operational matters, and the obligation of boards and principals to consult with school councils.

- School councils must consult with parents/guardians of students enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council
- Any advice provided to the 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
- **Composition of a school council** consists of the following voting members:
 - Parents represent the majority of voting members
 - Teacher employed at the school, one member only
 - Non-teaching employee of the school, one member only
 - One student, in the case of secondary schools, optional for elementary schools (principal of an elementary school in consultation with the council may appoint a student member)
 - One or more community representatives *appointed* by council
 - One person *appointed* by an association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and Schools, if the association is represented at the school
 - School principal or designated vice principal, *non-voting* member
 - **Note:** a *board employee* who works at the school his/her child attends is *not eligible* to serve as a parent member of council nor as

a chair or co-chair; however, this employee can serve as a teaching or non-teaching representative on council. School Trustees are not eligible to be members of councils of schools within their board.

- **Elections and Term of Office:** a one year term is stipulated and the election must be held within the first 30 days of the start of the school year. The regulation does not restrict the number of times that a member can be re-elected or reappointed to school council. The first meeting of the new council must occur within 35 days of the election.
- **Incorporation and Legal Liability:** *Regulation 612/00* prohibits school councils from being incorporated as the council belongs to the corporation of the Halton District School Board. This mandate does not require any additional legal status.
- **Insurance:** It must be noted that if a school council arranges activities outside the normal school day without an administrator present, the council could be held liable for any problems that might occur. If a council proceeds in this manner, the council should seek clarification about what is and what isn't covered by the board's insurance policy. Consult the principal, school superintendent and/or the Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) at www.osbie.on.ca.
- **Remuneration:** school council members will not be paid for their work on councils; however, each HDSB school budget has a budget line to support expenses incurred as part of school council business.
- **Fund-raising:** must be in accordance with board *Operating Policy/Procedure #1000-15*
 - The school board is a corporate entity and the school is not, thus any funds raised by the school council belong, legally, to the board; however, these funds are not collected by the board but remain with each school.
 - All fund-raising activities conducted by the school council must be included in the annual report prepared by the council.
- **Annual Reports:** at the end of its term, the school council must prepare and submit a written report to the school and to the board outlining the following information:
 - The council's goals for the previous school year
 - Activities and achievements
 - Fund-raising activities
 - List of council members and positions held
 - Dates of previous school year's council meetings
- ***The Council Financial Report, supported by bank records, must be submitted to Board Office by September 30th as required by the Public Sector Accounting Board.***

Roles & Responsibilities of Council Members

School councils have been created to enhance students' learning through the cooperative efforts of parents, students, staff members and others in the community. Your school council is an advisory body of volunteers who work together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal and sometimes the school district, make the school a better place for learning.

Accepting the role of school council member carries with it certain responsibilities. Each school council will define the roles and responsibilities of its members in its Constitution and By-Laws. The following roles and responsibilities for specific positions are suggestions only. A school council's operating by-laws 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. For details please see *Section D of Halton School Council Handbook*.

- **Chair/Co-Chairs:**
 - Arrange for meetings, minimum of four (4) per school year
 - Prepare meeting agenda in consultation with the principal
 - Chair council meetings
 - Regularly keep up-to-date with information on the board website at www.hdsb.ca and share at council meetings
 - Use technology effectively, e.g. establish e-mail distribution list etc. to stay connected with council members
 - Ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and kept; not applicable to minutes and records that are more than 4 years old
 - Report regularly on the status of council recommendations
 - Communicate regularly with school principal, council members, school community
 - Facilitate the resolution of conflict
 - Participate as ex-officio member of all school council committees
 - Communicate with school principal on behalf of the council

- **Parent Representatives:**
 - Bring a wealth of experience and diversity to council and help create a culture of sharing, communicating and dealing with issues and challenges
 - Participate on any committees established by the school council
 - Contribute to the discussions of the council
 - Maintain a school-wide perspective on school council issues and seek to achieve consensus
 - Solicit views of other parents and members of the community to share with council
 - Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws

- **Staff Representatives (teaching, non-teaching):**
 - Contribute to the discussions of council

- Solicit views from their staff groups to share with council
 - May participate on any committees established by council
 - Communicate information back to their staff groups
 - Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws
- **School Principal:**
 - Non-voting member of council
 - Distributes material from the Ministry to council members
 - Acts as a resource to council on laws, regulations and board policies
 - Attends all council meetings unless a vice principal has been so designated
 - Considers each recommendation made by council and returns to council with the action taken in response to a recommendation
 - Support, promote and communicate council's activities
 - Solicits views on matters pertaining to establishing or amending school policies/guidelines relating to student achievement, accountability of the education system to parents and the communication of those plans to the public.
 - Assists council with annual goal setting and the establishment of operating norms
- **Student, Community, Home & School Association Representatives:**
 - Contribute to the discussions of council
 - The community representative represents an organization, social service agency or other group present in the community and is a person not employed at the school or if employed by the board, has declared this to council members before being appointed
 - Solicit views from their respective groups to share with council
 - May participate on any committees established by council
 - Communicate information back to their representative groups
 - Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws
 - Help build partnerships and links between the school and the community, student body, and organizations, respectively.

Staying Focused on the Mandate

It is important that all council 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. There is an important distinction to be made between providing advice and acting as an advocate on a specific issue.

Council's role is to maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of a school-wide concern. From time to time, a school council may encounter the particularly difficult situation in which a council member demands that 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.

Some areas of the school council mandate requiring energy and attention are as follows:

- Setting goals to improve the school’s learning environment in collaboration with the principal, teachers, parents and community members
- Setting operating norms, that is, ways in which members dedicate themselves to working together
- Participating in the development or review of the School Effectiveness Plan

As specified in the regulation, school councils can provide advice to the principal and the board on any matter. It should be noted 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 school administrators and superintendents who are granted this authority under the *Education Act*.

It is important for council to take time to periodically discuss and evaluate what it has been doing and how effective the council has been. The *Halton School Council Handbook, Section G pgs. 5-6*, has several meeting effectiveness surveys and other tools to assist councils with this process. As well, council should schedule time to review progress on strategic plans and their role in the School Effectiveness Plan to ensure progress is being made.

The *Halton School Council Handbook, Section F* lists many strategies for managing an effective council including goal setting, decision making, team building and communications.

Consultation with Councils by Board & Principals

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 and report how this advice has been considered.
- School councils are to seek input from the parents/guardians of the school community about matters under their consideration and to report back how council has acted on the input provided.

This table outlines the **mandatory areas** in which boards and principals are required to consult with school councils. There are many other **optional areas** where school council input may be sought by the board and/or school principal.

Mandatory Areas of Consultation with School Councils	By Board	By Principal
<i>Policies Under development and/or Review:</i>		
1.all initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents/guardians	✓	✓

Mandatory Areas of Consultation with School Councils	By Board	By Principal
2. Code of Student Conduct	✓	✓
3. appropriate dress policy	✓	✓
4. fund-raising activities by school councils	✓	
Planning:		
1. board and School Effectiveness Plans for improvement based on the reports of EQAO test results and other relevant data	✓	✓
2. development of communication plans regarding the board's and School's Effectiveness Plans for improvement	✓	✓
3. the criteria and process for the selection and placement of school administrators: known as the Principal Profile	✓	
Implementation Plans:		
1. any new education initiatives at board/school level	✓	✓
2. annual review of the board/school code of conduct	✓	✓
3. development and sharing of a plan for providing co-instructional activities	✓	✓
Optional Areas of Consultation with School Councils	By Board	By Principal
1. school year calendar	✓	
2. scheduling special school events		✓
3. board policies regarding field trips for students	✓	
4. Absence Check policy and implementation plan	✓	✓
5. use of volunteers in schools	✓	✓
6. student homework policies	✓	✓
7. school closures	✓	
8. review of school boundaries	✓	
9. capital improvement plans for schools	✓	✓
10. school/classroom organization		✓
11. school budget priorities		✓
12. naming of new schools	✓	
13. other topics specific to a school		✓

Establishing a Constitution and By-Laws

School councils are not required to develop lengthy constitutions since *O. Reg. 612/00* sets out the mandate and roles & responsibilities for school councils. In effect, the regulation serves as the constitution for the school council. Similarly, boards are not required to develop policies on the operation of school councils.

School councils must develop certain bylaws to provide them with direction for the operation of council business and to help council work effectively. *Regulation 612/00* requires council to develop bylaws to address the following areas:

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

A school council may wish to develop bylaws related to the following:

- ❖ a code of ethics
- ❖ general expectations regarding attendance at meetings, other operating norms, e.g., promptness at meetings, decision making method, etc.
- ❖ the number of meetings and scheduling of meetings – *O. Reg. 612/00* requires a minimum of four (4) meetings of council per year
- ❖ the number of parent members on council and the number of members required for a quorum
- ❖ the number, description, and duties of the executive officers
- ❖ any requirements regarding signing officers
- ❖ the establishment and role of committees, e.g. Ad Hoc and Standing
- ❖ a process for seeking input from the community

According to *O. Reg. 612/00*, elections must take place at the same time each year – within the first 30 days of each school year. However, in the case of a new school, the first election must be held during the first 30 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 for execution in September.

Please consult the *Halton School Council Handbook, revised 2003* and the Ministry of Education resource, *School Councils: A Guide for Members, revised 2002*, for strategies and exemplars related to the preceding information.

Planning & Running Effective Meetings Tips for the Chair

- ✓ the chair is responsible for moving the meeting along and ensuring no one monopolizes the floor.
- ✓ start and end the meeting on time
- ✓ keep opening remarks brief and welcoming; introduce guests/presenters
- ✓ review the agenda; outline what is to be accomplished in the time allowed
- ✓ summarize main points before moving to the next agenda item or before making a decision
- ✓ keep to the agenda and timelines; consider using a timed-items strategy; if new business arises, record and carry forward to agenda of next meeting
- ✓ during discussions, maintain a speakers' list to facilitate all views being heard

- ✓ remind participants of rules of order as established
- ✓ ensure the action minutes are kept
- ✓ consider beginning with an “energizer” linked to agenda content to focus thinking and to allow participants to speak informally with each other
- ✓ allow for individual and small group input during discussion; work to involve all those in attendance
- ✓ remain neutral and provide alternate ways to solve problems/make decisions (see conflict resolution strategies)
- ✓ encourage decision making through consensus
- ✓ summarize the meeting by reviewing key actions and decisions; check that all members have the same understanding of any decisions
- ✓ review/announce the date, time, and location for the next meeting; include any items of new business
- ✓ Consider offering childcare to encourage parent attendance at council meetings.

Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness

School councils should consider putting a process in place twice yearly to assess how effective council has been. This reflective process and planning for improvement may be described in the Operating Norms part of the council bylaws. Some ideas to consider for reflection may be accomplished by all members in a group session or individually by each member with the chair providing a summary of the input for the following meeting of council.

Are council meetings effective? rarely sometimes mostly consistently

How could council meetings be improved?

Are we on track with our goals? Not at all somewhat mostly consistently

What is the next step in our council’s goal setting/strategic plan?

What is going well?

Do we need to change any of our processes or operating norms?

How do we want to improve?

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Disagreements and challenging issues will arise in council. Viewing disagreements as a strength and an opportunity for a meaningful problem solving dialogue requires a well established conflict resolution process as outlined.

1. Acknowledge that there is a problem.
2. Commit to finding a solution.
3. Suggest a strategy for resolving the conflict.
4. Listen to each person's views. Make no judgements.
5. Attack the problem, not the person. Give "weight" or importance to the person. Avoid labeling the person.
6. Communicate how you feel and your views.
7. Allow the others involved to state their needs and concerns. Use active listening strategies.
8. Share your needs and concerns.
9. Invite others to suggest ways to resolve the conflict.
10. Agree on a solution. Follow up to ensure the solution happens.

Recruiting Council Members

Effective school councils are continually seeking responsible volunteers. As part of this process, the school council chair/co-chairs and principal are on the lookout for qualified people from the school community to take on new responsibilities. The following are some strategies for consideration:

- Ensure a welcoming and open school environment
- Invite interested parents to participate, volunteer, attend a council meeting
- Encourage participation from various and diverse cultural groups in your school community
- Host a school council information/get involved event, e.g. high school council can host a barbeque for parents of incoming Grade 9 students in June and share council accomplishments, issues being worked on etc.

- Publicize council's activities via e-mail, newsletter message, brochures, no-cost ad in local community paper advertising council meeting, etc.
- Provide a list of meeting dates for the coming year
- Provide information on elections, bylaws, decision making and conflict resolution process
- Establish childcare services to assist parents with council attendance; local high school students may look for this opportunity to earn their required 40 hours of Community Involvement
- Be explicit about whether participation on committees is expected
- Many companies encourage their employees to be involved in community-related volunteerism; advertising council participation as an excellent way to make a difference by supporting student learning and achievement is an important message for the business and parent community to hear.

Fundraising

The key to successful fundraising is to have a clearly defined purpose for the funds raised. The purpose must be aligned with the goal areas of the School Effectiveness Plan which is designed for the continuous improvement of student learning. The School Effectiveness Plan is one of the most important school documents as it guides the school strategic planning process and all monies raised and expended must be aligned with the plan.

Fundraising for a purpose may target school yard activities, curriculum needs, library, teaching, and field trip resources, to name a few areas directly connected to the School Effectiveness Plan. Other purposeful fund raising activities may be designed to rally the school community around a specific goal area in the School Effectiveness Plan and may involve arranging partnerships with local business in pursuit of a common goal.

Councils and principals receive many fundraising advertisements from companies dedicated to this business. Checking out the details and meeting with the representatives can be very time consuming. The Halton Learning Foundation, the charitable organization of the Halton District School Board, organizes a Fundraising Fair each spring (usually mid-May) where fundraising representatives showcase their products and ideas and can make arrangements for a more in-depth presentation at your school. A member of school council should attend this annual event with the school administrator.

School are allowed to hold two (2) major fundraising events per school year as per Operating Policy/Procedure 1000-15.

Successful School Councils

Though participation in a school council requires hours of volunteer time, the rewards are many and significant. The personal and professional satisfaction that results from contributing to an effective school council involves the following:

- Focus on student learning and the *best interests of all students*
- Promote meaningful parental and community involvement
- Are inclusive and include members with the diverse views of their school communities: strength through differences!
- Actively involved in setting school priorities for improving student achievement
- Utilize clear and consistent processes for decision making
- Communicate regularly with the community
- Fosters mutual respect, trust and understanding
- Understands clearly the roles and responsibilities of council and school administrators
- Share a common vision for student success
- Keep well informed about school and board policies & procedures
- Maintain high ethical standards

Resources

Halton District School Board, *School Council Handbook. Revised 2003*. Posted at www.hdsb.ca, Parents & Community, School Council link.

Ministry of Education, 2002. *School Councils: A Guide for Members*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/>

Ontario Regulation 612/00,
http://192.75.156.68/DBLaws/Regs/english/000612_e.htm

Ontario Principals' Council, 2001. *School Councils – Making A Difference*, video (32 minutes) and workshop *Guide*, available from HDSB Media Department.

Coming together is a beginning,

Staying together is progress,

*Working together is success.**

*Ontario Principals' Council, *School Councils – Making A Difference Guide*, 2001