

# SCHOOL COUNCILS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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

## Supporting and Promoting School Councils – Principals

### 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.

# 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.

***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 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.

**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.**

# SOME IMPORTANT ROLES PLAYED BY THE PRINCIPAL

## **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**

## **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

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.

(12) The principal of a school shall provide for the prompt distribution to each member of the school council of any materials received by the principal from the Ministry that are identified by the Ministry as being for distribution to the members of school councils.

(12.1) The principal shall post any materials distributed to members of the school council under subsection (12) in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

(13) In each school year, the principal of a school shall make the names of the members of the school council known to the parents of the pupils enrolled in the school, by publishing those names in a school newsletter or by such other means as is likely to bring the names to the attention of the parents.

(14) The principal shall meet the requirements of subsection (13) in each school year not later than 30 days following the election of parent members of the school council.

(15) The principal of a school shall promptly provide the names of the members of the school council to a supporter of the board that governs the school or to a parent of a pupil enrolled in the school, on the request of the supporter or the parent.

(16) The principal of a school shall attend every meeting of the school council, unless he or she is unable to do so by reason of illness or other cause beyond his or her control.

(17) The principal of a school shall act as a resource person to the school council and shall assist the council in obtaining information relevant to the functions of the council, including information relating to relevant legislation, regulations and

