

Toronto District School Board

Operational Procedure PR.505 DIR
PARENT CONCERN PROTOCOL
REVISED DRAFT, 20 September 07

1.0 TITLE: PARENT CONCERN PROTOCOL

2.0 OBJECTIVE

To outline the procedures for addressing educational concerns brought to staff and trustees by parents, families, and School Councils.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

Concern: A school-related problem or issue affecting a child/children, families, or the community that is perceived to require the attention of the school or the Board.

Parent: Parent includes guardian or any caregiver with recognized responsibility for the care of the student; in this document “parents” includes families and school councils.

Principal: Includes Vice-principal throughout this document.

School Community: is a term that suggests that the child's school experience extends beyond the classroom and includes any event planned by the school or school council.

4.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Teachers, Principals/Vice-principals, Superintendents of Education, Central Supervisory Officials, Trustees.

5.0 PRINCIPLES

This document was created as a tool for dealing with concerns and issues that arise within the school community. Striving for collaborative resolutions, it recognizes parents, guardians, care-givers (family unit or group), sometimes represented by School Councils, as partners with Board staff in the education of our children.

As with all fair resolution practices, this document works from a base of transparency and accountability. Parties referring to this document must be

seeking a result that is worthwhile, achievable, and measurable. The aim is to be specific about concerns and clear about resolutions.

In the interests of a successful resolution process, all parties shall agree to abide by the following principles.

Respect

All parties involved in the resolution of a concern must be able to trust that they will be treated, throughout the process, with **respect**. To this end, each participant must acknowledge and respect the fact that all involved are working towards the best outcome for the student(s). This will necessitate, for example, respect for the parental viewpoint as well as respect for the professionalism of staff.

Open-mindedness

Successful resolution will require all participants to remain **open-minded** throughout all discussions, endeavouring to understand the perspectives of all other participants. In this spirit, positive resolutions will require that the focus of discussion be on the concern at hand and not include concerns not immediately relevant.

Trust and Confidence

Attempts must be made to ensure that all participants feel equally valued in any situation set up to discuss issues. An atmosphere of **trust** and **confidence** for all involved is an essential component of the process.

6.0 PROCEDURES

All parties shall agree upon a process for addressing a concern that:

1. establishes a timeline for the process;
2. maintains an agreed-upon process for tracking concerns and follow-up;
3. adheres to the relevant procedures governed by legislation or Board policy where the concern relates to such legislation or policy.

6.1 Concerns Brought to a Teacher

Arising from a classroom or teacher-related matter:

When a parent's concern arises from a classroom or teacher-related matter, the teacher may undertake one or more of the following before a response is given to the parent:

1. discuss the concern with the parent and respond with an explanation; or
2. seek advice from the Principal.

6.2 Concerns Brought to a Principal

Once a parent has brought a concern to the attention of the Principal, the Principal should, within 48 working hours, contact the parent to acknowledge the concern.

Concerns arising from a classroom or teacher-related matter:

When a concern is brought to a Principal about a classroom or teacher-related matter, the Principal should undertake one or more of the following actions, depending on the nature of the concern and its circumstances:

1. Advise the parent to discuss the concern directly with the teacher and resolve it at that level, if not already attempted;
2. Gather any information as may be required to determine the facts and relevant circumstances connected with the concern;
3. Discuss the concern with the teacher and offer advice to the teacher, where advice is required to resolve the concern, and inform the parent of the outcome;
4. Discuss the concern with the teacher and respond to the parent with an explanation should it appear that the explanation might be sufficient to resolve the concern to the satisfaction of all parties.
5. Meet jointly with the teacher and the parent to discuss the concern where the Principal determines that such a meeting will facilitate the resolution of the concern.

Additionally, the following actions may be required:

1. Consult with Superintendent of Education, other Board staff, or agencies, where appropriate; or
2. Refer the concern to the Superintendent of Education if the parent does not agree with the decision of the Principal and wishes to appeal to a higher staff authority.

Concerns arising from a matter of school policy, procedure, activity, event, or situation

When a parent and/or Council brings a concern about a school policy, procedure, activity, event, or situation to the Principal, the Principal should:

1. Gather any information as may be required to determine the facts and relevant circumstances connected with the concern by one or more of the following means:
 - i. Refer the matter for School Council discussion and advice where the concern relates to a matter appropriate for School Council consideration;
 - ii. Consult with the Superintendent of Education, other Board staff, or

agencies where appropriate;

- iii. Refer the concern to the Superintendent of Education if the parent does not concur with the decision of the Principal and wishes to appeal to a higher staff authority.

6.3 School Concerns brought to the Superintendent of Education

Arising from a classroom or teacher-related matter, or from a school policy, procedure, activity, event, or situation

When a parent and/or Council brings a classroom, teacher-related, or school concern directly to the Superintendent of Education for response, the Superintendent of Education may undertake one or more of the following actions, depending on the nature of the concern and its circumstances:

1. Refer the parent and/or Council to the Principal where prior discussion with the Principal has not taken place, and follow up with the Principal on the outcome;
2. Gather any information as may be required to determine the facts and relevant circumstances connected with the concern;
3. Consult with the Principal about the concern and take one or more of the following actions:
 - i. advise the Principal of options to consider;
 - ii. make a recommendation to the Principal for addressing the concern, and inform the parent of the outcome;
 - iii. make a final decision about the concern in consultation with the Principal and inform the parent and Principal about the outcome;
4. Ensure that the parent and/or Council receive a report in a timely manner;
5. Where the Superintendent of Education determines that the concern about a particular school or community of schools, is of sufficient importance as to require informing and consulting with the local trustee, the Executive Superintendent, or any other appropriate staff, the Superintendent of Education initiates such communication with those persons.

6.4 School Concerns brought to the local Trustee

When a parent brings a concern about a school matter (classroom or teacher-related, school policy, procedure, activity, event or situation) to a Trustee, the Trustee may ensure that the process is successful by:

1. Referring the parent to the Parent Concern Protocol and then to the Principal, and/or the Superintendent of Education, for their attention to the concern;
2. Discussing the concern with the parent, School Council, Principal, or Superintendent of Education in order to provide any information or insights

as may be helpful when a resolution is not achievable by way of the Protocol.

3. Where the trustee determines that the concern relates to a matter beyond the scope or jurisdiction of the school, advising the parent accordingly and informing the superintendent of education and any other relevant central staff of this matter.
4. Advising the parent of the outcome in a written report.

6.5 Concerns Brought to the Parent and Community Involvement Office (PCIO)

When a parent brings a concern about a particular school or group of schools to the PCIO, the staff may undertake one or more of the following:

1. Acknowledge the concern within 48 hours and provide follow-up information where appropriate.
2. Refer the parent to the Parent Concern Protocol;
3. Gather information from the parent regarding the concern and actions taken and contact the appropriate stakeholder (Superintendent of Education).

6.6 School Concerns brought to the Director of Education or Chair of the Board

When a parent or School Council brings a concern about a particular school or group of schools to the Director of Education or the Chair of the Board, the Director of Education or Chair of the Board refers the matter to the appropriate Superintendent(s) of Education and Trustee(s) for their attention.

APPENDIX

This document is a companion to the **Parent Concern Protocol (PCP)**. Its aim is to offer “how-to” advice to all parties in resolving parental concerns. Adhering to the principles laid out in the PCP, it recognizes the importance of establishing a partnership between home and school.

Advice for Parents

For Individual Concerns (regarding a particular student)

2. Follow the hierarchy established by the PCP: teacher, then Principal, followed by the Superintendent of Education, and finally Trustee, Parent and Community Involvement Office, the Director of Education, and Chair of the Board.
3. Prepare yourself before meeting with any staff member. Attempt to be focused with your concern and non-personal in your delivery. Be specific about what you would like changed or addressed.
4. Allow a reasonable amount of time for staff to acknowledge your concern. The PCP suggests 48 working hours as a reasonable window.
5. Always keep notes from the meeting. Include your points and the responses you received. The PCP recommends establishing an “agreed-upon process for tracking concerns.”
6. When there is an impasse, or you feel the principles, as outlined in 5.0 of the PCP, are not being followed, you may ask that discussions be halted. All efforts should then be made to remedy the situation. Involved parties might find it helpful to review the Principles section of the PCP. An honest assessment of your role in the deadlock will help return the atmosphere to one of mutual support and understanding. It might at this point be necessary to begin again, leaving differences of opinion in the past.
7. Individual concerns must never be taken to the School Council. However, if you feel that your concern may refer to a broader issue of school policy, procedure, activity, or event, the School Council Chair may be contacted.

For concerns arising from a matter of school policy, procedure, activity, or event:

1 Follow the hierarchy established by the PCP: Principal, followed by the Superintendent of Education, and finally Trustee, Parent and Community Involvement Office, the Director of Education, and Chair of the Board. You can also take a concern of this nature to your School Council Chair.

- 2 Prepare yourself before meeting with him/her. Attempt to be focused with your concern and non-personal in your delivery. Be specific about what you would like changed or addressed.
- 3 Allow a reasonable amount of time for staff to acknowledge your concern. The PCP suggests 48 working hours as a reasonable window. If you are taking your concern to the School Council Chair, be aware that it might be necessary to wait until discussion of your concern can be included on a School Council agenda. You may also have the opportunity to raise the issue under “New Business”.
- 4 Always keep notes from the meeting; include your points and the responses you received. The PCP allows for an “agreed-upon process for tracking concerns.”
- 5 When there is an impasse, or you feel the principles, as outlined in 5.0 of the PCP, are not being followed, you may ask that discussions be halted. All efforts should then be made to remedy the situation. Involved parties might find it helpful to review the Principles section of the PCP. An honest assessment of your role in the deadlock will help return the atmosphere to one of mutual support and understanding. It might at this point be necessary to begin again, leaving differences of opinion in the past.
- 6 Should your School Council decide to investigate your concern, be prepared to participate in follow-up work addressing the issue.
- 7 Should the Council not address your concern, and you have not done so already, you may take the issue to your Principal. Please see relevant sections of the PCP and Appendix.

Advice for Teachers

8. Always ensure that a parent receives a follow-up response to any

concern brought to your attention. This may be verbal or written. If the response is not immediate, endeavour to acknowledge the concern within 48 hours. This will ensure an atmosphere of transparency and accountability.

9. Be specific in your response, addressing the concern as much as possible.
10. When there is an impasse, or you feel the principles, as outlined in 5.0 of the PCP, are not being followed, you may ask that discussions be halted. All efforts should then be made to remedy the situation. Involved parties might find it helpful to review the Principles section of the PCP. An honest assessment of your role in the deadlock will help return the atmosphere to one of mutual support and understanding. It might at this point be necessary to begin again, leaving differences of opinion in the past.

Advice to Principals

11. To the best of your ability, ensure that parents follow the hierarchy established by the PCP : Teacher, then Principal, followed by Superintendent and finally, Trustee, Director of Education, and Chair of the Board.
12. Endeavour to acknowledge the concern within 48 hours, either in person, or through a written note, phone call, or e-mail.
Strive to be transparent and accountable when dealing with parental concerns. When parents feel they have been heard, they are better partners in finding a solution. To this end, endeavour to arrive at an agreed-upon process for tracking concerns and their resolutions.
13. When there is an impasse, or you feel the principles, as outlined in 5.0 of the PCP, are not being followed, you may ask that discussions be halted. All efforts should then be made to remedy the situation. Involved parties might find it helpful to review the Principles section of the PCP. An honest assessment of your role in the deadlock will help return the atmosphere to one of mutual support and understanding. It might at this point be necessary to begin again, leaving differences of opinion in the past.
14. Councils should be seen as valuable partners within the school.

While individual concerns must never be taken to the School Council, if you feel that a parental concern may refer to a broader issue of school policy, procedure, activity or event, the Council Chair should be contacted for assistance in resolving the concern.

15. Whenever a dispute arises between a Council and the Principal, advice may be sought from the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee, through SC411 (416- 395-5040). This sub-committee is trained in the provincial regulations and is a valuable resource to Principals and Councils alike.

Advice to School Councils

16. To the best of your ability, ensure that parents follow the hierarchy established by the PCP : Teacher, then Principal, followed by Superintendent and finally, Trustee, Director of Education, and Chair of the Board.
17. Individual concerns must never be taken to the School Council. However, if a parent feels that it may refer to a broader issue of school policy, procedure, activity, or event, the Council Chair may be contacted. When this occurs, strive to be transparent and accountable with the parental concern. When a parents feel they have been heard, they are better partners in finding a solution. To this end, endeavour to arrive at an agreed-upon process for tracking concerns and their resolution.
18. While is it reasonable that a concern may not appear on the next Council agenda, make every effort to include it at the earliest opportunity.
19. Include the parent in follow-up actions.
20. Encourage the practice of including Councils as school partners by working with the Principal on any concern brought to your attention.
21. Whenever a dispute arises between a Council and the Principal, advice may be sought from the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee, through SC411 (416- 395-5040). This sub-committee is trained in the provincial regulations and is a valuable resource to Councils and Principals alike.

22.If the members of a School Council determine that the issue could be of Board-wide interest to parents, they may bring it to the attention of the Trustee for further consideration or action. This may include discussion at Ward Councils or Forums.

Advice to Trustees and Ward Councils/Forums

1. When a concern related to school policy, procedure, activity, or event is brought to a Ward Council or Forum by the Trustee or parent, the members may determine how they will address the concern as a “broad educational issue.” If the Trustee or members of the Council/Forum determine that the issue could be of Board-wide interest to parents and School Council they may refer it to the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee. (PIAC)

The Path of A Parent Concern

The following is an example of how a typical parent concern might be handled.

When Mary Bell was in Grade 5, she was bullied by two former friends who were also classmates. She was very upset at home, crying herself to sleep. Mrs. Bell tried to remedy the situation by speaking with the mothers of Mary’s former friends but, despite their efforts, the bullying continued.

After a few weeks, Mrs. Bell approached the teacher, Mr. Webster, in the hall. He listened to her concerns and stated that he had never seen any bullying - inside the classroom or outside. Mrs. Bell insisted that it was occurring and reminded him that verbal bullying was difficult to detect. She asked that he keep his eye on the situation. He agreed to do this.

The bullying continued in the following weeks, observed in the playground by another teacher. Mrs. Bell was concerned that perhaps Mr. Webster had not acted effectively in dealing with the issue and requested a meeting with the Principal, Mrs. Seville. A week later, Mrs. Bell was given a time for a meeting.

At the conference, Mrs. Bell stated that Mary was being bullied by two girls in her class and demanded that this behaviour stop. Mrs. Seville asked for examples of the bullying and heard of a number of instances that had occurred in the previous weeks. She told Mrs. Bell that she would speak with Mr. Webster and Mary. However, Mrs. Bell did not want her to speak with Mary, who was feeling insecure because of the experience. She left the meeting hoping that something would be done.

Mrs. Seville did approach Mr. Webster about the situation but, respecting the wishes of Mrs. Bell, she did not approach Mary. Within the next weeks, a Board staff person visited the classroom to deliver a presentation on bullying. No mention was made of specific incidents but Mary felt uncomfortable. Mrs. Seville kept her eye on Mary in the playground and the matter was dropped. However, the Bells felt that nothing had been resolved, and Mary learned to cope with the bullying by making new friends.

What might have happened:

23. *The Parent:* With a situation as serious as bullying, Mrs. Bell might have acted more quickly to arrange a meeting with the teacher. When she did, she might have requested a specific meeting time to sit down with him, presenting a written account of the bullying and outlining specific incidents. She might also have suggested some specific actions that she would like to see happen. Since bullying is an issue that arises in every school, Mrs. Bell could have used the opportunity to approach the School Council, requesting a workshop on Bullying be arranged for the near future. Helping to arrange this event may have eliminated some of the feelings of helplessness with which she had to cope.

24. *The Teacher :* Mr. Webster might have arranged a time and place to meet at length with Mrs. Bell, thus encouraging a feeling of support and understanding in the parent. When he was advised of the concern, Mr. Webster might have demonstrated confidence in the details presented by the parent and assured her of a clear resolution to her concerns. As well, he might have consulted with Mrs. Seville about his responsibilities and possible actions. A further meeting with Mrs. Bell might also have been necessary to inform her of his planned course of action.

25. *The Principal:* Mrs. Seville might have acknowledged Mrs. Bell's

concern within 48 hours, arranging a meeting at the earliest acceptable time. Though she did take action after hearing Mary's story, her suggestion to meet with Mary was not agreed to by Mrs. Bell and no clear course of action was outlined. A process for tracking the concern that was agreed to by both parties would have assured the parent that her concerns were respected and an investigation would be conducted. After she had collected her information from all sources, Mrs. Seville might have informed Mrs. Bell that she was bringing a speaker into the classroom and what she hoped would be achieved by this action. This would have permitted Mrs. Bell to prepare Mary for the visit. Finally, a final report to Mary's parents would have demonstrated the school's transparency and accountability. All parties would have been confident that the resolution to the concerns was successful.