



# SCHOOL COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER

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## MARCH BREAK

Welcome to our March Break school council newsletter. Our regular contributors Sara Westbrook and Paul Davis are taking a break this month also to be with their families, so their articles will return next month.

This month we are focusing on beginning the planning for the new school year and succession planning for the new council. In addition, we are talking about by-laws, how to amend them and why we need them. There has been a lot of questions coming from parents about by-laws recently so we are dealing with the amendment process here and would refer you to your school board for specific policies, templates etc.

We have added a new section titled “Questions and Answers” where we will be responding to questions submitted to us by parents throughout Ontario.

If you have questions you would like answers to, please complete the contact section of our website and we will be happy to include it in our next newsletter.

*Happy Spring to All!!*

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Question and Answer



# Is there a Need for SCHOOL COUNCIL BY-LAWS?

Some school councils prefer to not have by-laws because they feel it will formalize their meetings. They prefer a more social meeting structure. By-laws are simply a tool to assist in making effective decisions for your school council. It doesn't have to change the social atmosphere of meetings.

According to Regulation 612 (15.1) school councils may establish by-laws, but does not say that they shall establish by-laws. School Board policies vary from board to board and may require every council to have by-laws.

If a school council does have by-laws they must include the following according to Regulation 612 (15.2):

- A by-law that governs election procedures and the filling of vacancies. The election procedure clause must comply with Regulation 612 S.4. The vacancy clause must state if vacancies will be

filled in one of two ways:

1. by "appointment", meaning council members can simply appoint new parents to fill vacant positions
  2. by "election", meaning new parents can only be added to the council by the same election procedure used to establish the council at the beginning of each school year.
- A by-law that establishes rules respecting participation in school council proceedings in the case of conflict of interest. This clause would require a council member to declare any personal connection they have to an item being discussed or voted on.
  - A by-law that in accordance with any applicable policies established by the Board that established the council provides a conflict resolution process for internal school council disputes.

## WHY DO SCHOOL COUNCILS NEED BY-LAWS?

### PROTECTION

Strong by-laws help protect councils from internal and external conflicts. If the method used to arrive at a decision is questioned, being able to point to the by-law regarding the process of presenting and voting on a motion (provided it has been followed) is valuable to settle inquiries.

### CONSISTENCY

Rules and policies take the emotion and personalization out of how to do things year after year.

### EFFICIENCY

Having procedures for making decisions allow more business to get done by the school council every meeting. For instance, you may place a time restriction on how long a member can speak on any one topic/ motion being considered by the council. This prevents one person from taking over a meeting.

### LEGITIMACY

By-laws can provide a sense of importance for a school council. It gives community members a better understanding that important decisions are made by the school council, since many people see them as just a “social group” who plan events at the school.

## PROCESS FOR AMENDING BY-LAWS.

1. Make sure that everyone understands the by-laws as they stand at present. If there seems to be some uncertainty by several members it would be helpful to run a session on by-laws. Invite a staff person or other expert on the topic to educate members on what needs to be included by regulation, as well as other standard or board required clauses. Even members who have been part of a council for years get accustomed to seeing the standard clauses included in their by-laws, but may not have a full understanding of how they would apply in certain circumstances. A full review of the by-laws may be beneficial for all when this is the case.
2. School council by-laws should state a process for amendments to be made. This would include when,

why and how revisions are made to the existing by-laws. This clause, or as a separate section under the main clause, should include the percentage of votes (Robert’s Rules of Order requires 2/3 of votes to approve a revision to a by-law) required to pass an amendment to the by-laws.

**Note:** this clause should also include the method and timing that the community will be notified that the council will be considering by-law revisions.

3. The revision should be presented in the following format:
  - The proposed amendment exactly as written.
  - The current by-law.
  - The by-law as it will be read if the amendment is adopted.
4. Notice should also include the proposer’s names and the rationale for offering an amendment.
5. The amendment cannot exceed the proposed by-law that the notice applied to. Simply this means that if a motion is made to amend the by-laws to increase the number of voting members from 8 to 12; the council cannot decide to increase it to 15 instead while dealing with this specific amendment. That would require a separate notice of amendment.

If you are on a council that has by-laws take this time to review them. Make sure that they still apply to the makeup and work of your school council. If you do not have by-laws, now is a good time to learn and consider implementing them for your school council.

## STILL HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING BY-LAWS?

After reading this article, do you still have some questions regarding your school councils by-laws? Not to worry Parents Engaged in Education has you covered. Please check out our newsletter archive. We have past newsletters that contain information on regulation 612 and school council by-laws. If you still can’t find the information you are looking for, be sure to check out our parent engagement forum and reach out to other parent council members.



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# School Councils TIME TO SPRING FORWARD



The month of March signals the end of winter and the beginning of spring. It is the time for school councils to spring forward and make those important plans to prepare for the next school year.

I know the initial reaction of many will be, “what already, we are still focused on this year”. That is true, however, most councils do not have a June meeting. It is usually fun fair/community event time leaving only two meetings, April and May to plan for the next school year.

## THERE ARE A FEW IMPORTANT ITEMS TO PUT ON YOUR NEXT TWO MEETING AGENDAS:

### 1. OFFICER TRANSITION PLANNING:

There may be executive council members who will be moving on, either because their child is graduating or they are moving. Now is the time to discuss who would be interested in running for executive positions next year. To ensure that the long range goals of the council will remain strong, it is beneficial to hold a couple of special meetings concentrating on reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the various

officer positions. It is the opportunity to discuss how the chair has found success this year, for instance how meetings were planned by the Principal, and the challenges they faced. For instance how to get input from the parent community on items included on the monthly agendas.

### 2. RECRUITING PARENTS FOR NEXT YEAR:

Since school council elections take place very early in the new school year, this is the time to look at strategies for recruiting new parents to the council.

- To begin, look at the strategies you have tried in the past. What were the results of those efforts?
- Think about the parents who have attended meetings throughout the year who were not elected members, but showed an interest in the council. Try to meet with them and encourage them to get involved. Have certain parents raised questions or comments about the work of the council? This is a good time to encourage them to run as voting members in the new school year.
- Consider whether the existing council represents the diversity of the school community. If not, work



Parents Engaged in Education have designed a **“DREAM TREE”** banner.

This vinyl banner is 5’ x 6.5’ with hundreds of blank leaves for parents and students to write their dreams.

This is a wonderful example of positive messages which will inspire the entire school community all year round.

**GREAT FOR CURRICULUM OR PARENT/TEACHER INTERVIEW NIGHTS!!**

Our aim is to raise enough funds this year to offer priority schools in challenged communities a **“DREAM TREE”** to encourage their communities to strive for the best they can be.

While we work on this program, if your school would like to purchase a **“DREAM TREE”** for your community you may do so by contacting  
Theresa.pastore@  
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**The cost is \$200.00 plus shipping**

(This is cost recovery only, we do not charge in excess of our cost)

with your Principal or community leaders to develop plans to engage parents from all ethnic, economic and learning (special education) communities. The council can only be effective for all students in the school if all groups are represented and have a voice on the council. Here are some tips on building a multicultural school council.

### 3. TEAM BUILDING EXERCISE:

Spring is the perfect time for the parent leaders in the school, in cooperation with the school Principal to organize a community clean up. The warmer fresh air is a great opportunity to round up students, parents and teachers to clean up the school grounds. Making the clean up a scavenger hunt will make the job fun and create an environment of team building for the whole school community.

### 4. REVIEW BY-LAWS FOR UPDATE:

School councils normally change their membership to some degree each year so it is beneficial to review the by-laws to be sure that they continue to adequately support the process and work of the council. It is important that all members understand the by-laws as they stand before making any proposals for amending them. For more information on school council by-laws, please read our blog, Is there a Need for School Council By-laws?

### USE THIS TIME WISELY

Spring is the perfect planning time for moving into the new school year. It is also a good time to look at what you have accomplished and what goals can still be met before the end of the year.

Like this article? Be sure to share it with other parents and school councils. Find more articles like this one in our monthly e-newsletter. Be sure to subscribe by going to our website.

### STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

After reading this article, do you still have some questions regarding Spring school council planning? Not to worry, be sure to check out our parent engagement forum and reach out to other parents and parent council members.

# QUESTION *and answer*



## PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL/PARENT COUNCIL QUESTIONS

Our latest blog features parent engagement and parent/school council questions that parents have submitted for feedback. The answers provided here are the opinion of Parents Engaged in Education based on the experience of our members. Parents are always encouraged to work with board and school staff to get specific answers to their concerns. Often many parental concerns may be affected by applicable policies and procedures in place at their board.

### Q: How can board members improve accountability to parents?

*This answer assumes the parent is talking about school boards and not school councils.*

The active involvement of parents is necessary to improving accountability. When parents are

familiar with the requirements of Regulation 612 (S.15 1-4) which outlines the requirements of school boards to consult and report to parent, they can be better prepared to inquire about

areas they are concerned about. If you educate yourself on board policies, learning improvement plans, code of conduct, multi-year plans etc., then you can advocate for change where needed. Knowledge is power so you can ask for reports which address these areas, or attend public board meetings when a matter you are interested in is on the agenda.

Remember, that accountability these days often is contained in board communications that are available through their website.

In addition, you can always ask your school Principal how to find information from the board on various topics.

With respect to school councils, Reg.612 requires the board to respond in writing to all matters brought before them by school councils.

### Q: How can boards improve their support of school councils?

This is a wide open question. Some boards already provide excellent support of their school councils and some are challenged by the lack of funding that would allow them to have a senior staff member assigned to this responsibility.

Some school boards rely solely on the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) to develop resources and support the school councils in their board. This can mean a huge variance in one school board to the other. Since the PIC is largely made up of parent volunteers who already play an active role in their schools, it can be difficult for most to spend an extensive amount of time developing new board-wide initiatives.

The role of the PIC according to Reg.612 is to provide input to the board on parent engagement strategies and to support school councils.

Perhaps some of the actions that they could suggest to boards with respect to school councils could be that the board provide the following at the beginning of each school year:

- Provide a package to every council that includes:
  - A copy of Regulation 612
  - Board policies that affect school council operations (including the Code of Conduct and Conflict Resolution Policies)
  - A welcome message from the Board which includes the contact information for the applicable board staff that support school councils
  - A sample by-laws template and the process for adopting or amending by-laws
  - Financial processes information and any other relevant information that allows them to operate effectively and for all members to be informed so they can play an active role in their council
- Another thing the Board can do is provide a list of websites that have parent engagement and school council resources
- Remember that Reg. 612 provides a process for parents/school councils to consult with the board and receive a

response in writing to those matters raised. If you feel that school councils need more support at your Board, you can raise the matter to the Board for a response.

### **Q: How can a council ensure that your actions are transparent and representative of the wishes of the community?**

This is a great question because it shows that a school council member really cares about the importance of being accountable to the school community.

There are a couple of actions that you could consider to accomplish this:

- You may consider doing a survey of your parent community. A short survey that solicits their input on the various topics that the council would like to consider during the school year.
- Take topics which are relevant to the entire school community (not personal issues a parent may be having with a teacher, administrator or other parent) and be sure that they are added to a council agenda.
- Communicate to the school community that the topic has been added to the agenda and invite all parents to attend. This is a great way to be accountable to parents showing that

you consider all their input important as well as a way to increase parent engagement.

- To increase accountability to the community you have to increase communications by providing meeting agendas and minutes from those meetings. Reviewing the minutes help the community stay abreast of the decisions made on each topic. Moving forward the community can then attend meetings that feature topics of interest.
- Posting information for parents on a bulletin board in the school also provides a dedicated space where community members can stay up to date on the work of the council.

### **Q: Please provide further information about student, community and teacher/non-teacher representatives on school councils?**

Again, an excellent question because often we just read about these roles as part of a council composition, but rarely stop to really understand their role.

Here is a brief description of these roles on a school council:

#### **1. STUDENT**

Reg. 612 calls for a student to be part of the council in secondary school. The purpose is to bring the voice



of students to the parent council. Since the work of the council is for every student in the school, having the voice of the students on the council is important to be sure that the goals of the council are being met. In addition, student representative may bring requests from the students for support from the school council. Asking them for a report on student activities each meeting allows them to be an integral part of the meeting. The representative in the secondary panel is usually filled by a member of the student council. Although it is not required to have a student rep in elementary school, it is often a great opportunity for the older students to be part of the council meetings and present on student activities and what the students feel are the priority at the school. It gives the student the opportunity to gain presentation and leadership skills that they will need as they move into the secondary panel.

## 2. COMMUNITY REP

This role is one that could be filled by many different people that support the work of the council. This is the role that allows for members of various ethnic groups that represent the voice of parents/students of that community group. The community rep could be a business in the area whose members support the work of the school, or a daycare representative that can be the voice of their program and

help the council keep up with their activities in the school. You may invite someone to be a community representative from a specific group such as a member from an indigenous community that will provide an important voice on your council. They can help you understand this community and make suggestions on how the council can be more inclusive of parents from their community.

## 3. TEACHER REP

The teacher rep is elected by the teachers at the school to be a member of the school council. Their role is to provide feedback from the teaching community to the council. They can bring forth the needs of the teachers, in addition to materials already provided by government funding. They may report on what they learned on their last Professional Development Day. They may bring funding requests forward from the teachers to support special activities, transportation or desperately needed classroom supplies to celebrate a special occasion in class. It is also their role to bring back questions or information from the council, as it relates to the teaching staff, so all teachers are up to date with the work and the feedback from the school council.

## 4. NON-TEACHER ROLE

This is a position that often remains unfilled on a school council. This

position is usually by appointment from the Principal when the council is established. Non-teaching staff in a school could include caretakers, administrative assistants and the like. It is beneficial if a member of the caretaking staff will take part as they can keep the council appraised of work being done in the school, challenges they are facing that perhaps the council can advocate on their behalf to help make a change, etc.

## Share your questions with us!

We would love to answer more questions from you! We encourage parents to submit their questions via our contact form. We will do our utmost to answer them to the best of our ability or locate a resource that will provide the information you are requesting. Knowledge is power and by submitting questions we can all learn together!

Can't wait to have your question answered? Not to worry, at Parents Engaged in Education we have many resources that can help you. Try our newsletter archive or brochures page. If you still can't find the information you are looking for, be sure to check out our parent engagement forum and reach out to other parents and parent council members.

## ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO

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