

# SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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## UNDERSTANDING REGULATION 612/00

### SCHOOL COUNCIL SECTION

Regulation 612 provides a framework for the role of the parent and principal as well as the process for electing members, voting and filling vacancies. This legislation is quite basic and is the starting point for school boards to write their own school council policies.

Some school council parent leaders feel they would rather operate in a less formal way and have councils be more a place to socialize with other parents. This, in fact, was very true years ago when the councils were known as “Parent Teacher Associations” and concentrated on raising funds for schools.

Today the majority of parents join school councils to work with administration in areas such as student achievement, school safety, facilities, technology and many others. Of course, fundraising is still needed and many councils continue to work hard in this area.

It should be noted that operating your council based on Regulation 612, board policies and local by-laws does not have to disturb the valuable networking and community building that the school council experience offers parents.

Referring to Regulation 612 as framework legislation is good because it is simply the foundation from which school councils can develop their own processes and operating norms i.e. by-laws. Like when building anything, you need to start somewhere and usually that place is in the instructions and guidelines. Think of Regulation 612 in this way and it makes it more pleasant for all concerned.

This issue of the newsletter will break down the Regulation for ease of understanding.

## REGULATION

# 612

### DEALS WITH THREE KEY AREAS:

1. Purpose of school councils
2. Operational matters of the council such as election process, vacancies, conflict of interest and composition of the council
3. Responsibilities of Principals and School Boards with respect to consultation with councils

## PURPOSE OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

- a) The purpose of school councils is, through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.
- b) A school council's primary means of achieving its purpose is by making recommendations in accordance with this Regulation to the principal of the school and the board that established the council.

*Demonstrated in these two simple points on the purpose of the school council is the government's intention to make the role of the parent in Ontario schools to be one of value and a contributing factor in increasing student achievement.*

*In addition, the phrase "to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents" recognizes that not only are parents invited to take on a more valuable role, but they now have the right to hold Principals, School Boards and the Ministry accountable for the education of children in schools. They can do this by putting matters to the principal on council agendas, or in writing to school boards.*

## OPERATIONAL MATTERS

### MEMBERS OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

The regulation sets out specific parameters regarding who forms the school council by way of election and who may be appointed by a vote of the council or staff.

### SECTION I - COMPOSITION

#### **A school council shall be composed of the following people:**

1. The number of parent members determined under subsection (2)  
*The definition of parent includes parents or guardians of student in the school.*
2. The principal of the school
3. One teacher who is employed at the school, other than the principal or vice-principal, elected in accordance with section(5)  
*The teacher representative will be elected by the other teaching staff at the school.*
4. One person who is employed at the school, other than the principal, vice-principal or any other teacher, elected in accordance with section(5)  
*This member shall be voted on by staff that is not the principal, vice-principal or teacher at the school.*

5. In the case of a school with one or more secondary school grades,
  - i. One pupil enrolled in the school who is appointed by the student council, if the school has a student council, or
  - ii. One pupil enrolled in the school that is elected in accordance with section 5, if the school does not have a student council.

*The role of a pupil in a school council is very important. In secondary school, it provides parents an opportunity to really get to know the issues that are important to the students and the areas where parents can play a role in supporting these priorities.*

*This member shall be elected by the pupils in the school or as they determine. This means that the student council may be given the authority to vote a student into the “parent” council.*

6. In the case of a school with no secondary school grades, one pupil enrolled in the school that is appointed by the principal of the school, if the principal determines, after consulting the other members of the school council, that the council should include a pupil

*At the elementary level it is a wonderful opportunity to give a Grade 8 student an opportunity to improve their leadership and presentation skills. They can speak on upcoming events and areas (such as graduation) where the support of parents would mean a lot to them. These skills are valuable to them as they transition to the secondary panel. \*\* NOTE; it would be beneficial to have the student present first on the agenda which would allow them to return home at an appropriate time and not be delayed with long discussions of the council.*

7. Subject to subsection (3), one community representative appointed by the other members of the council

*One of the most frequently asked questions about the composition of a school council is “who would be a community representative”. You may reach out to the daycare operator at the school or to the school bus operator for the school. It could be a local business owner that might support the schools priorities or the local librarian.*

8. One person appointed by an association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education or Parent Partenaires en Education, if the association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education or Parent Partenaires en Education is established in respect of the school

## SECTION II

**For the purposes of paragraph 1 of subsection (1), the number of parent members shall be determined as follows:**

1. If the school council has a by-law that specifies the number of parent members, the number specified in the by-law.
2. If the school council does not have a by-law that specifies the number of parent members, the number specified by the board that established the council.

*As part of the school board policy on school councils they may have a specific number of parents that can be voting members. You should check the policy before drafting your council by-laws.*

- (3) A school council may specify by by-law that the council shall include two or more community representatives, appointed by the other members of the council.
- (4) In specifying numbers under subsections (2) and (3), the board or the school council, as the case may be, shall ensure that parent members constitute a majority of the members of the school council.

*This clause supports the general purpose of Regulation 612, which is to elevate the role of the parent in partnering with the principal. If there are more members represented by staff, non-staff or community representatives then the parent's role would decrease in it's effectiveness to partner. Remember a meeting may not take place unless there is a majority of parents in attendance.*

- (5) A person who is employed by the board that established a school council cannot be appointed as a community representative on the council unless,
  - (a) he or she is not employed at the school; and
  - (b) the other members of the school council are informed of the person's employment before the appointment.

*This allows a teacher who works at a different school than his or her child to still be involved as a parent at the school that his or her child attends. The reason that staff at a school are not able to be members of the councils might include:*

- A school council could become influenced by the wishes of the teaching staff and not by what means the most to parents.
- Staff may be aware of confidential information that could influence their votes on a matter before the council.

- (6) A member of a board cannot be a member of a school council established by the board.

*A member of the board cannot be a member of the council because it could be seen as a conflict of interest when considering matters before the board. These areas could include budgets, staffing, facilities etc.*

- (7) Paragraphs 5 and 6 of subsection (1) do not apply in respect of a school that is established primarily for adults.

## **SECTION V – MEETINGS**

- (1) A school council shall meet at least four times during the school year.

*Although the regulation only requires four meetings per year, it is difficult to engage parents when they are only invited to a meeting four times a year. It sometimes takes a couple of meetings before members begin to talk to other parents about taking part and they actually get out to a meeting. It is also hard to accomplish you council goals for the year when you only meet a few times. Check your school board policy as it may require more than four meetings in a year.*

- (2) A school council shall meet within the first 35 days of the school year, after the elections held under sections 4 and 5, on a date fixed by the principal of the school.

*Your annual general meeting/elections do NOT count as a school council meeting. The first meeting is the time to elect the council officers, establish meeting dates and discuss budget matters.*

- (3) A meeting of a school council cannot be held unless,
  - (a) A majority of the current members of the council are present at the meeting; and
  - (b) A majority of the members of the council who are present at the meeting are parent members.

(4) All meetings of a school council shall be open to the public.

*School council meetings must be open to all members of the public. The reason for this is that schools in Ontario are funded by all taxpayers; this means that they are referred to as “stakeholders” and gives them the right to attend school council meetings at the school.*

(5) A school council is entitled to hold its meetings at the school.

(6) All meetings of a school council shall be held at a location that is accessible to the public.

(7) The principal of a school shall, on behalf of the school council, give written notice of the dates, times and locations of the meetings of the council to every parent of a pupil who, on the date the notice is given, is enrolled in the school.

(8) The notice required by subsection (7) may be given by,

(a) Giving the notice to the parent’s child for delivery to his or her parent; and

(b) Posting the notice in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

*Again, this notice cannot be emailed, it must be given directly to the students or posted in an area that parents have accessed to like a Parents Bulletin Board.*

## REGULATION 612

### HAS SEVERAL OTHER CLAUSES WHICH SHOULD BE REVIEWED BY COUNCIL MEMBERS INCLUDING:

- COMMITTEES
- VOTING
- BY-LAWS
- MINUTES AND FINANCIAL RECORDS
- INCORPORATION
- CONSULTATION BY THE BOARD
- ADVISORY AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL COUNCILS
- DUTY OF BOARD TO RESPOND
- FUNDRAISING
- CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS
- ANNUAL REPORT

**You can review the regulation in it’s entirety online at:**

**<http://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/000612>**

It is suggested that school councils print out the Regulation and provide every member of the school council with a copy. The above article only deals with certain specific sections. A complete review is required in order for members to have a complete understanding of the responsibilities and obligations set out in the Regulation.

# QUICK NOTES ON OTHER CLAUSES OF REGULATION. 612

## CLAUSE

## NOTES

### REMUNERATION

A person shall not receive any remuneration for serving as a member or officer of a school council

School council members are volunteers and if they were paid it would create a conflict of interest. School boards may establish policies to reimburse school council members for expenses they incur while working on council business. This may include a member who drives frequently on behalf of the council or incurs other expenses specific to a task or role that they have been assigned by the council.

### INCORPORATION

A school council shall not be incorporated.

School councils may not be individually incorporated because they are considered a committee of the school board (through the schools). The school board is the entity that is incorporated and the ultimate responsible party for the operations and funds of a school council.

### ADVISORY AUTHORITIES OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

A school council may make recommendations to the principal of the school or to the board that established the council regarding any matter.

This clause gives school councils the authority to consult with the principal on any matter that affects the school community.

It is worth noting in this area that school councils are to consult on matters that affect all or specific grades in a school, and members are not to bring matters relating specifically to their own children to a council meeting.

### PRINCIPAL

(2) In addition to his or her duties under this Regulation, the principal of a school shall perform the duties relating to school councils that are imposed on the principal by Regulation 298 of the Revised Regulations of Ontario, 1990 (Operation of Schools - General).

You may refer to Regulation 298 for an expanded explanation of the role of the principal in a school council.

The combination of Regulations 612 and 298 provides a full understanding of the responsibilities of the principal including the requirement that they must respond to every suggestion or question that is put to them by the school council.

*\*\*\*It is helpful for the council to submit suggestions or questions in writing and for the principal to respond in kind. This creates a history that can be attached to the minutes of the meeting that brought out these issues.*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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*Written by: Amanda St. Louis, Toronto Secondary School Teacher*

Education is fundamental and essential to our children's well being. In order for our children to understand the value of education, we as parents, as their most influential role model, must too value education. Students, for the most part, will be surrounded by educators who love what they do and love to educate. What students aren't seeing as much of, are their parents being active participants in their education. Why is this important? It is important because our children are always students. Learning does not simply take place inside the classroom but everywhere. I cannot stress enough how important it is for a child to see their parent take an interest in their education and school community. When a parent becomes involved in the school community then the child's respect, loyalty and devotion to the building, the staff and their own personal education also grows.

As an educator, I see firsthand what parental involvement can do. There is a stark difference between the behaviour and academic successes in students who parents are involved and active versus those who are not. There is a delicate balance that needs to be found between being active and becoming what we have come to know as the "helicopter parent." Children need to see that parents value education enough to want to know more, to get involved and show an interest in what they are doing with 6-8 hours of their day. It is about developing ownership, a real connection to their school and education so that students feel safe, welcome and that they belong.

I do not want to spend the majority of this article rambling on about getting involved – I want to provide

you with some practical tips and suggestions of what you can do. Choose at least 1 thing from the list below to start immediately. As time allows, choose more and become more active in your school community.

## **1. KNOW YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL CALENDAR**

Every school has a school calendar – this can be found in the agenda, and often on the school's website as well. Know what is happening in the building and encourage your child to be active in their school community as well. Know when school holidays, parent teacher interviews and report cards occur.

## **2. ATTEND PARENT TEACHER INTERVIEWS / MEET THE TEACHER NIGHTS**

Every parent has a different work schedule now and this can often be difficult. But try your best to plan ahead (by looking at the school calendar) and book the time off to be there. If you cannot make it, be sure to contact your child's teacher(s) and set up individual appointments with them. This is extremely important even if your child is in secondary school.

## **3. ASK YOUR CHILD – EVERYDAY WHAT HAPPENED AT SCHOOL**

Even if your child says "nothing" for weeks on end....keep asking! Eventually, they will have something to tell you. Help them with homework if they ask and help them to stay organized with upcoming assignments or big projects.

***It is important because our children are always students.  
Learning does not simply take place inside  
the classroom but everywhere.***

#### **4. GO TO YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL – ACTUALLY INSIDE**

Often when children become young adolescents and teenagers and are walking themselves to school, we don't even step foot in the school building. Don't let this be the case. Opportunities such as parent nights, concerts, shows, sports games and community gatherings are happening often, try to attend whenever possible – especially if your child is participating.

#### **5. GET INVOLVED – JOIN THE SCHOOL'S PARENT COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND VOLUNTEER FOR FIELD TRIPS | AND EVENTS**

It doesn't mean you need to help out with everything – just attend when you can and help where you can. If more parents became active in these groups then there would be very little work for everyone to share.

#### **6. ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO GET INVOLVED**

There are a variety of events and activities for your child to participate in. If finances are an issue please talk to an administrator at the school, often special funding or payment plans can be used to help ensure that all children can participate.

Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed and analyzed eighty-five studies that documented the comprehensive benefits of parent involvement in children's education. This and other studies show that parent involvement activities that are effectively planned and well implemented result in substantial benefits to children, parents, educators, and the school.

### **BENEFITS FOR THE CHILDREN**

- Children tend to achieve more, regardless of ethnic or racial background, socioeconomic status, or parents' education level.
- Children generally achieve better grades, test scores, and attendance.
- Children consistently complete their homework.

- Children have better self-esteem, are more self-disciplined, and show higher aspirations and motivation toward school.
- Children's positive attitude about school often results in improved behavior in school and less suspension for disciplinary reasons.
- Fewer children are being placed in special education and remedial classes.
- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals work together to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the culture in school.
- Junior high and high school students whose parents remain involved usually make better transitions and are less likely to drop out of school.

### **BENEFITS FOR THE PARENTS**

- Parents increase their interaction and discussion with their children and are more responsive and sensitive to their children's social, emotional, and intellectual developmental needs.
- Parents are more confident in their parenting and decision-making skills.
- As parents gain more knowledge of child development, there is more use of affection and positive reinforcement and less punishment on their children.
- Parents have a better understanding of the teacher's job and school curriculum.
- When parents are aware of what their children are learning, they are more likely to help when they are requested by teachers to become more involved in their children's learning activities at home.
- Parents' perceptions of the school are improved and there are stronger ties and commitment to the school.
- Parents are more aware of, and become more active regarding, policies that affect their children's education when parents are requested by school to be part of the decision-making team.

## BENEFITS FOR THE EDUCATORS

- When schools have a high percentage of involved parents in and out of schools, teachers and principals are more likely to experience higher morale.
- Teachers and principals often earn greater respect for their profession from the parents.
- Consistent parent involvement leads to improved communication and relations between parents, teachers, and administrators.
- Teachers and principals acquire a better understanding of families' cultures and diversity, and they form deeper respect for parents' abilities and time.
- Teachers and principals report an increase in job satisfaction.

## BENEFITS FOR THE SCHOOL

- Schools that actively involve parents and the community tend to establish better reputations in the community.
- Schools also experience better community support.
- School programs that encourage and involve parents usually do better and have higher quality programs than programs that do not involve parents.

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*Excerpt from Home-School Relations: Working Successfully with Parents and Families, by G. Olsen, M.L. Fuller, 2008 edition, p. 129-130. <http://www.education.com/reference/article/benefits-parent-involvement-research/>*

# SUPPORTING FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

*Submitted by Canadian Parents for French (Ontario)*

## HOW SCHOOL COUNCILS CAN SUPPORT FSL PROGRAMS IN THEIR SCHOOLS

- Add FSL updates to your school council's regular meeting agenda to keep parents informed about French resources in the classroom and library, staffing, French cultural events, etc.
- Have a parent member meet with school administrators/ French teachers to discuss French resources, field trips and cultural performances for students.
- Organize a "French Homework Help" workshop for parents. [Email Rosemary Sutherland](#) for more information.
- Offer French enrichment activities for families such as a French Cuisine Night or a French Movie Night (a great way to fundraise for French resources or trips!).
- Encourage your school to participate in CPF's French public-speaking event, [Concours d'art oratoire](#) (Gr. 4-12). Secondary students can win cash prizes and scholarships to pursue their bilingual education.
- Form a CPF Ontario Chapter to access funds and grants to subsidize French socio-cultural events at your school. [Email Rosemary Sutherland](#) to learn more.
- Provide a link to [Canadian Parents for French \(Ontario\)](#) on your school's website or in their newsletter.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD'S FSL EDUCATION

- Keep a positive attitude towards your child's education!
- Promote literacy at home by reading to your child or listening to your child read to you in your native language.
- Help your child develop good study/homework habits.
- Advocate for your child at the school or board level when needed to ensure the best education for your child. Visit [Canadian Parents for French \(Ontario\)](#) for more information.
- Ensure that your child has the tools & resources they need

to complete their French homework (i.e. a French-English dictionary, access to French search engines, online French grammar tools).

- Show an interest in learning French too - explore various French apps and websites such as [www.fslhomeworktoolbox.ca](http://www.fslhomeworktoolbox.ca) and [edululu.org/en](http://edululu.org/en).
- Volunteer with your local CPF Ontario Chapter and help organize more opportunities for your

### ABOUT CANADIAN PARENTS FOR FRENCH

- Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is a national non-profit organization which is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French Second Language learning opportunities for youth in Canada. There are 11 provincial branches across Canada.

### GET ENGAGED IN YOUR CHILD'S FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH CPF

- Join our network by October 31st to enter into a draw to win [a free French performance for your school!](#) Have your school become [a member of CPF](#) for \$60 per year to access our series of homework help tip sheets, an online step-by-step guide on organizing parent workshops, and access to our French socio-cultural grant.
- Attend the [CPF Symposium on French Second Language Education](#) on Saturday, October 24, at the Toronto Marriott Bloor Yorkville Hotel. This special event is your chance to hear from leaders in the field with a variety of perspectives on FSL best practices along with positive directions in FSL education. Open to parents, teachers, trustees, and administrators, the fee is \$95 per person (includes plenary sessions, 3 workshops, hot breakfast & buffet lunch).

Watch our new video – [Quick Tips on Helping Your Child Learn French](#), a parent engagement video in English on how to support your child in FSL programs, Kindergarten to Grade 8. For more information on Canadian Parents for French (Ontario) or to find out about starting a chapter in your community, visit our website or contact Rosemary Sutherland, Chapter Development and Outreach Officer at 905-366-1012 ext. 3.

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State of FSL Education in Ontario January 2015

## PARENT ORIENTATION BUILDING A SCHOOL COUNCIL ORIENTATION KIT *“Giving members a good start”*

To build a strong school council it is important that every parent feel they can contribute in an informed manner. To start people off on the right foot, consider creating a school council orientation kit which provides new members with most of the information they will need to be effective participants right from the start.

It would be helpful to put this information in a three ring binder which would allow members to keep meeting agendas and minutes during the year.

### Consider including:

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

- Copy of school council by-laws.
- Copy of last school council annual report
- Copy of last school council financial statement
- Copy of last year's council minutes so that new members can get up to date on matters which have been discussed by the council.
- School timetable – start, lunch and dismissal times
- Role of parent volunteers in the school
- Meeting dates
- Safe school policy including code of conduct
- History / background of the school

#### SECONDARY SCHOOLS

ALL OF THE ABOVE PLUS...

- Introduction to the student council
- Overview of courses offered by the school
- Uniform policy, if applicable

# ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO



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→ [oct.ca/thestandard](http://oct.ca/thestandard)

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### WATCH FOR NOVEMBER ISSUE WITH FEATURE ARTICLES:

Recruiting, Retaining and  
Succession Planning for  
School councils.

Inquiry based learning –  
how parents engage.

Young People's Theatre –  
developing a child's sense  
of wonder.



### PARENT ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANTS GROUP

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