



**AD-HOC POLICY COMMITTEE**  
**Report No. 24-069**

**06 June 2024**

**APPROVAL OF REVISIONS TO POLICY P.038.SCO SECONDARY  
SCHOOL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES**

**Key Contact: Brett Reynolds, Associate Director of Education**  
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**PURPOSE:**

1. To seek approval for the proposed revisions to Policy P.038 Secondary School Commencement Ceremonies.

**STRATEGIC LINKS:**

2. The proposed updates reflect the Board's commitments to inclusivity, social responsibility, and authentic community engagement as set out in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

**CONTEXT:**

3. Policy P.038.SCO Graduation and Commencement Exercises and Awards was developed in 1998 and has not been reviewed since then. One of the primary reasons for initiating a review of this policy was a desire to ensure that the policy reflects the Board's commitments to inclusivity. In recognition of the importance of celebrating the achievements of grade 12 students in a ceremony that honours the achievements and milestones of a school cohort and builds community and pride amongst the OCDSB community members, staff initiated the revision to the policy with a migration from "graduation" to "commencement" in order to include students with different educational journeys.

The Board received a higher than normal amount of feedback on the proposed revisions during the consultation period. In response to the input received, staff have made adjustments to the draft to ensure that the policy clearly reflects the intention behind the change, specifically the Board's commitment to fostering inclusivity and accessibility in alignment with the Strategic Plan.

**KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

4. A Shift from Graduation to Commencement

Students' educational journeys are diverse. By the end of secondary school, a grade 12 cohort will reflect a variety of student learning and achievements. Most students will receive their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas (OSSD); some students will receive other provincially recognized school-leaving certificates; students who have been engaged in the school community and are expected to satisfy OSSD requirements in the very near future; students who face systemic and personal barriers to graduation; and students who have demonstrated significant academic and/or personal growth.

The proposed shift in language from 'graduation' to 'commencement' ceremonies aims to reflect the breadth and depth of experiences of the District's grade 12 classes. In this way, the proposed policy revisions reflect the Board's broader commitments to inclusivity, social responsibility, and authentic community engagement.

The proposed policy changes better reflect the inclusive practices already in place in secondary celebrations and ceremonies. A review of the current practice and comparative analysis of the practices of other boards in Ontario prompted the shift to the use of the term 'graduation ceremonies' to 'commencement ceremonies'. This term better encompasses the intention for the inclusion of students who may not be receiving Ontario Secondary School Diplomas by the date of the scheduled ceremony due to varied reasons.

5. Key Revisions to Policy P.038.SCO

Section	Proposed revision
Title	Change from 'graduation' to 'commencement' to reflect the new language and intentions of the policy.  Specification of 'secondary school' to clarify the scope of the policy.
Throughout the policy	Migrating the policy to the new template including a new "Definitions" section.
Guiding Principles	3.1 - Acknowledging the Board's vision for what commencement ceremonies mean and represent.
	3.2 - Affirming the Board's commitment to inclusivity.
	3.3 - Affirming the Board's commitment to accessibility.

4.1	Delegating the responsibility of commencement ceremonies to the principal.
4.2	Outlining the criteria for commencement ceremony participation eligibility.
4.3	Stating the allowance of awards and recognitions in ceremonies: including a wider breadth of criteria for reception of these awards.
4.4	Delegating the responsibility for awards to the principal and an awards selection committee.
4.5	Affirming the Board's allowance of elementary ceremonies and clarifying that these ceremonies are beyond the scope of the policy.
Appendix B	Defining the term 'commencement ceremony.'

## RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- There are no resource implications stemming from the approval or subsequent implementation of the policy.

## COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

- The proposed draft was posted to the EngageOCDSB website and awareness was raised on this consultation through parent/guardian, student, and school council communications and social media. Feedback from the public was received between 2 February 2024 to 29 March 2024.

After social media posts and several news media stories on the policy in March 2024, engagement on the EngageOCDSB website increased significantly, to over 1,400 contributions. Much of the feedback received was from parents and community members who were critical of the proposed change to inclusive ceremonies and expressed their concern that the proposed language in the draft policy would diminish the celebration of students who had completed their OSSDs and lower student incentive for academic excellence.

Conversely, student and teacher engagement was positive. Students in particular, welcomed the celebration of a wider breadth of achievements that reflect the diverse educational experiences of students within the District. The student senate declared support of the policy changes and parents of special

needs students shared that the proposed changes help ensure that alternative achievements and educational journeys are celebrated also.

This feedback was implemented into current revisions of the policy to reflect the diversity of opinions on this shift.

Following the approval of the policy, communications will be shared with the community to raise awareness and a system memo will be shared with schools in order to support administrators in their planning for commencement ceremonies this school year.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

THAT the revisions to Policy P.038.SCO Secondary School Commencement Ceremonies, attached as Appendix A to Report 24-069, be approved.

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Brett Reynolds  
Associate Director of Education

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Pino Buffone  
Director of Education and  
Secretary of the Board

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A Revised Policy P.038.SCO Secondary School Commencement Ceremonies

[Appendix B](#) Standing Policy P.038.SCO Graduation and Commencement Exercises and Awards