



AD-HOC POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE
Report No. 24-081

12 September 2024

REVISIONS TO POLICY P.008.GOV THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY

Key Contact: Mary Jane Farrish, Superintendent of Education

PURPOSE:

1. To discuss the proposed revisions to Policy P.008.GOV Advisory Committee on Equity (the Policy) following consultations with the public and trustees.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Enabling the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) to meet the changing needs of marginalized communities and improve operational practices to better support the Board's commitment to providing equitable and inclusive learning and working environments. The proposed revisions support governance of the ACE Committee in alignment with the values of community building, equity, inclusion and accessibility from the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

CONTEXT:

3. The standing [Policy](#) provides the framework for the Committee and was last reviewed in 2018. As a part of this cyclical policy review practice, a comprehensive process was undertaken to invite feedback and suggestions to address challenges and offer opportunities, as highlighted in recent discussions regarding the function and operation of the Committee.

This report, along with the draft Policy (attached as Appendix B), addresses the challenges and incorporates the key themes identified during the preliminary consultations. The key considerations below have been organized into themes to capture the discussions that emerged during the consultation and review process.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. Committee Membership
The standing Policy allows for a total of up to 19 members:
 - 7 voting members who represent community organizations, agencies or groups who are representative of communities experiencing systemic barriers and marginalization, with a focus on diversity, equity, and

inclusion. The policy identifies a number of specific organizations and suggests that the list may be adjusted over time to ensure it continues to represent the diverse needs and priorities of the community;

- 4 individual voting members from the following identities: creed-based, disability, Indigenous, immigrants, 2SLGBTQ+, and racialized groups; and
- Up to 8 non-voting members including trustees, the Superintendent of Education, the Diversity and Equity Coordinator, and may include a student senator, 2 federation members, and a member from a local post-secondary institution.

Since the 2018 review, the Committee's actual practice in relation to membership has evolved in response to various operational challenges so that it no longer reflects what is outlined in the current Policy. The operational challenges identified during the above review and discussions include the following:

- The list of members has not been reviewed since 2018;
- The Committee now includes four community organizations which are not enumerated in the standing policy;
- A “member at a large” category of non-voting representatives was introduced to address concerns related to diversity of representation;
- “Alternate members” have been included to address quorum and attendance issues; and
- There is often an overrepresentation of staff and staff voice at meetings, relative to parents/caregivers and students.

The proposed revisions to the Policy reduce the number of total members from nineteen to seventeen by removing the “may include” category of non-voting members, thus addressing the challenge of overrepresentation of administrators. Simultaneously, the proposed revisions increase the number of voting members allowing for more individual members (now 7, compared to 4) than community organizations (now 4, compared to 7), while increasing the student voice (to 2, from 1) and removing the requirement for the student to be from the Student Senate. There is also an intentional increased emphasis on membership criteria for individual and organizational members that prioritizes demonstrated knowledge, experience and expertise related to equity and human rights.

5. A Welcoming Space

Consultation with the Committee and the Ad Hoc Policy Review Committee has highlighted several factors affecting the Committee’s ability to maintain a welcoming accessible space for all marginalized groups. These factors include:

- Perceptions related to the selection of members and lack of representation: While the standing policy allows for additional organizations to participate, the inclusion of a specific list of organizations has been seen as selective and unrepresentative of the minoritized groups within the District.
- Inconsistency in meeting formats: Committee meetings have continued to be held electronically since the pandemic, which is inconsistent with other

Board committees that have largely returned to in-person or hybrid meetings.

- Limited public participation: Although public participation is encouraged at the Chair's discretion, attendance at meetings outside of members and staff support is currently by invitation only. This restricted access, where only those on the distribution list receive the meeting link, does not align with the Board's commitment to transparency and fairness, public participation in committees or its obligation to ensure that committee meetings are open and accessible.

To enhance transparency and promote welcoming and accessible spaces for community input, staff recommend:

- Removing the list of specific community organizations from the policy and focus on membership criteria aligned with the Board's Human Rights Policy P.147.GOV;
- A return to in person meeting with some ability for electronic participation, to align with [Reg. 463/97: Electronic Meetings And Meeting Attendance](#).

6. Decision Making

Proposed revisions to the Policy recommend a consensus-based decision making model that uses traditional voting only when necessary. The Committee should encourage consensus, while also ensuring that all those in attendance, including non-voting members and guests, are able to voice their views regarding agenda items.

7. Clarified Terms of Office

Currently, voting members of the Committee serve a two-year term with a maximum of two consecutive terms for individual members. While community organizations or agencies can serve multiple consecutive terms, their individual representatives are also limited to two consecutive terms. Non-voting members are appointed annually.

In the course of the comparative analysis conducted by staff, it was noted that the term of office in other districts was longer in duration than the OCDSB, allowing for a four-year term in recognition of the time it takes to implement change. After contemplation and consideration of the rapidly changing nature of community organizations working in equity, staff recommend maintaining the two-year terms and the ability for reappointment for one more term for individual members and allowing for new organizations to join every two years.

8. New Chairing Model

Although the standing Policy stipulates that a Chair and Vice Chair will be elected from among its eleven voting members, in practice, the Committee has been operating with a co-chair arrangement. The current Committee co-chairs are a community member and a non-voting (staff) member. The practice of having staff serve as Chair of a Board committee does not align with the standing Policy or

the practices in place for similar committees in other districts. Some districts do permit trustees to chair similar committees. This option could be explored through the consultation phase of the policy revision. Allowing Trustees to be eligible for the position of a co-chair may help address the following challenges:

- Filling the vacancy of a co-chair;
- Managing the meetings;
- Maintaining a District-wide focus; and
- Enhancing accountability

9. Alignment with the New Regulations

The newly enacted [Reg. 463/97: Electronic Meetings And Meeting Attendance](#) includes provisions requiring that the Chair of all committees of the Board attend committee meetings in person, unless the Chair is able to confirm that another member of the Committee, who is also a Board member (i.e. trustee) will be physically present. In addition, the regulation requires that the meeting room be open to allow physical attendance by members of the public at every regular meeting. To adhere to this requirement, the Committee will need to hold its meetings in a physical location that is accessible to the public, ensuring that members of the public can participate in person, as well as by electronic means.

10. Public Participation

Public participation is important, particularly in the context of the newly updated electronic meetings regulation and policy. With entirely virtual meetings, there is a risk of creating barriers to public involvement, as access to the meeting links and participation can become more restricted. While it's crucial to ensure that the Committee remains open and accessible to the public, it's equally important to protect the integrity of the meetings from disruptive incidents like "Zoom bombing". Ensuring that the Committee adopts practices that actively welcome and encourage public participation helps to counteract these potential barriers. Similar to other committee and board meetings, members of the public should have the same rights of access and participation whether attending in person or by electronic means. This includes the ability, where applicable, to delegate or make presentations and to ask questions through established fair and consistent processes.

11. Other Procedural Details

Staff are working on developing a new corresponding procedure to the policy. Suggestions for inclusion in the procedure include:

- A requirement for an Indigenous land acknowledgement at the beginning of each committee meeting;
- A requirement to communicate grounding practices at the beginning of each meeting; and
- Further details on the selection process and criteria for individual members and community organizations to ensure transparency, fairness, and representation.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

12. There are no resource implications for potential revisions to the ACE policy.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

13. The review process to date has included several discussions with the ACE Committee, the ACE policy sub-committee, public consultation on the EngageOCDSB platform, as well as a discussion at the Policy Review Ad-hoc Committee meeting of 20 June 2024. Moving forward, the revised Draft will be posted to EngageOCDSB and will be discussed at the 26 September 2024 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Equity to provide a further opportunity for feedback and input. The revised policy is scheduled to return to the Ad Hoc Policy Committee in November for approval.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Have we captured all considerations that could help inform revisions to the ACE Policy?
- Do the proposed revisions help to enhance the effectiveness of ACE in meeting its mandate as an advisory committee on matters related to equity, inclusion, diversity, accessibility and human rights?
- Do the revisions ensure a balance between community, individual and staff perspectives?

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Appendices

Appendix A: [ACE Standing Policy](#)
Appendix B: [Proposed ACE Revised Policy](#)