POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE   **14 November 2024**
Report No. 24-115

APPROVAL OF REVISIONS TO POLICY P.008.GOV ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY

Key Contact: Mary Jane Farrish, Superintendent of Education, Ext# 8821

PURPOSE:

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

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 opportunities 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.   <u>Committee Membership</u>
   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 practice in relation to membership has evolved in response to changing needs and 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 voices 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 lowering the amount of staff representation. The proposed composition allows for Trustee, staff, and Director representation but confirms that any other staff attendance should be for facilitation or purposed consultation, not as members. Simultaneously, the proposed revisions increase the number of voting members allowing for more individual members (now 8, compared to 4) than community organizations (now 5, compared to 7). Student representation will now be as non-voting members, to ensure privacy and safety of student members and account for quorum struggles.

There is also an intentionally increased emphasis on membership criteria for individual and organizational members that prioritizes demonstrated knowledge, experience and expertise related to equity and human rights.

5. <u>A Welcoming Space</u>
   Consultation with the Committee and the

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; and
- 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 a focus on membership criteria that are aligned with the Board's Human Rights Policy P.147.GOV and commits to representing underserved communities and peoples;
- Any designated 'public forum' portion of the meeting that is beyond regular public participation should be an operational concern for the Committee to consider for future meeting agendas;
- Inclusion of a Committee commitment to Ubuntu, a principle recognized by the Board;
- A policy section which addresses trustee conduct and their role on the Committee. We believe that this section (4.23) will ensure that, moving forward, the relationship between Committee and trustee members is respectful, safe, and representative of the Committee's guiding principles;
- Opposing Views: we have considered throughout the policy; and
- A return to in person meetings 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 welcome and encouraged to voice opposing and conflicting views respectfully and safely.

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
      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 recommends 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. In turn, the
      proposed policy mandates that one Committee co-chair must be an individual
      member, with no such stipulation placed on the second co-chair.

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 can 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.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

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

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12.   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 Committee meetings of 20 June 2024 and 12 September 2024.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the proposed revisions to Policy P.008.GOV Advisory Committee on Equity, attached to Report 24-115 as Appendix B, be approved.

_____
Mary Jane Farrish
Superintendent of Education

_____
Pino Buffone
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board

Appendices

Appendix A: Standing Policy P.008.GOV Advisory Committee on Equity
Appendix B: Revised Policy P.008.GOV Advisory Committee on Equity