



PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE

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Supporting School Councils in the 2020-2021 School Year

Key Contact: Michele Giroux, Executive Officer,
michele.giroux@ocdsb.ca

PURPOSE:

1. To discuss some of the unique issues relating to school councils for the 2020-2021 school year, including meeting format, elections, and engagement between families attending Ottawa-Carleton Virtual - OCV schools and their home school in order to inform the drafting of necessary revisions to [PR.509.SCO School Council Elections, Constitution and By-Laws](#)

SUPPORTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN:

2. Supporting school councils is an important part of our strategic commitment to build authentic engagement with and among our communities. This includes engaging families who have opted for fully remote learning with other families enrolled in the OCV as well as with their home school. Our learning and meeting environment has shifted and this will require some adjustment to our school council practices to ensure their continued opportunity to successfully engage with school communities.

CONTEXT:

3. The 2020-2021 school year has required the rethinking of many practices related to the operation of schools. This year, schools are operating with a number of adaptations to safety practices, timetables, programming, and access to schools. In addition, families had the option of having students attend school in person or by remote learning. The response to remote learning has been significant with 17,000 students registered in OCV - Ottawa-Carleton Virtual. As we work through these changes, there are several considerations in terms of the impact on school councils, including:
 - the format for school council meetings;
 - the date and format for school council elections;
 - the creation of school councils for OCV schools; and
 - the participation of families on school council in home schools where students are attending the remote school.There are legislative and policy considerations in all of these issues. There is also a need to make some decisions fairly quickly so that councils can begin operations.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. School Councils are governed by regulation and by [Policy P.014.SCO School Councils](#) and [Procedure PR.509.SCO School Council Elections, Constitution and By-Laws](#). School Councils act in an advisory capacity to the principal and to the Board and/or senior staff in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Board and of the Education Act and Regulations.

The Policy and Procedure did not contemplate the unique circumstances of this school year, including a staggered start date, virtual meetings, and the creation of virtual schools. Similarly they do not address the interests of some parents who have registered their children for OCV but wish to remain involved with the School Council at their home school.

To support the engagement of families through school councils, while respecting health and safety guidelines established by Ottawa Public Health due to COVID-19, the rules for school council must be adjusted. Under normal operating conditions, this might include revisions to the policy, the procedure and to individual school council constitutions. Recognizing the one-time nature of the changes, the time required to work through revisions to policy, procedure and constitutions, and the need to put practices in place to allow councils to begin operations, it is recommended that a series of amendments be made to the procedure which address these issues for all councils for the 2020-2021 school year. This includes adjustments to allow for virtual meetings, electronic voting, and school council issues relating to virtual schools.

5. School Council Meetings

An important part of safety planning for this school year is restricted access to school buildings. This includes restrictions on parents and visitors to schools during the day and to community use of buildings during the evening. In support of this, and recognizing that the evening hours are the planned time for custodial staff to do thorough cleaning of schools, all School Council meetings will take place virtually using Google Meet. School principals are experienced using the Google Meet and will help to ensure that the meetings are accessible to all members of the school community. School council virtual meetings should be recorded and posted to the public. Guidelines for virtual meetings, with specific support for using Google Meet, will be provided to principals and school councils.

Procedure PR.509.SCO will be amended to provide for virtual meetings, stating that virtual meetings are equivalent to in-person meetings. All references to activities/postings in the school building will also be adapted to the virtual context. This approach will eliminate the need for every school council to introduce constitutional amendments regarding virtual meetings.

6. School Council Elections

School council elections are to be held within 30 days of the first day of school. Given the different start dates for students this year, the "first day of the school year" is not as straightforward as usual. However, the emergency provincial regulation suspending limitation periods and statutory timelines remained in effect until September 14th. The OCDSB will use the regulation as the starting point for the

school year so that the timelines for elections would begin to run on that date, giving school councils more time.

Given that School Council meetings will be held virtually, the established practice for voting must also be amended. A process for allowing voting with consideration for confidentiality will be developed. As always, a written summary of the vote and decision would be produced and included as part of the minutes of the meeting. Procedure PR.509.SCO will be amended accordingly.

7. School Councils and Virtual Schools

The District originally planned to keep all students who wanted to attend school remotely assigned to their home school, however the Ministry direction required the set-up of virtual schools with a designated administrator, staff and mident number. As a result, students are now registered in the OCV school and not in their home school. The virtual schools are schools and therefore, are entitled to have a school council. It is anticipated that a school council would be established for each of the seven virtual schools. The OCV school councils would follow OCDSB Procedure PR.509.SCO for elections (given that individual constitutions will not yet have been established). The District could develop a sample constitution, with the recommendation that OCV School Councils create a constitution once elected.

8. Parent Participation on School Council at the Home School

Many questions have been asked about whether parents whose children are registered in OCV may continue to participate on the school council at the home school. Several important factors have been raised including the importance of maintaining a relationship between the home school and the virtual school; the importance of continuity of school council business; and the potentially negative impacts on school communities if parents who have been active volunteers are precluded from continuing their participation on council.

Regulation 612/00 (School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees), defines “parent” in respect of a school council as the parent of a student “enrolled in the school”. The Regulation does not contemplate parents being members of a school council in circumstances in which their children are enrolled in a different school, such as OCV. Consideration must be given to the different options for engaging parents through school councils under these circumstances.

9. Role of OCV Parents on School Councils

There are a number of options that could be considered to ensure the continued engagement of parents who choose to register their children in OCV, while still allowing those parents to remain connected to their children’s home school. These options would require amendments to the existing Procedure. Three options have been identified for discussion:

Option A - Allow OCV parents to continue to be parent members of the School Council at their children’s home schools. To do this, the Procedure could be amended as follows:

“For the 2020-2021 school year, a student enrolled in OCV shall also be deemed to be “enrolled in the school” which is considered their home school they were enrolled in the school in the 2019-

2020 school year and who are now registered for the Ottawa Carleton Virtual school (OCV), and for whom the school remains their home school should they elect to return to in-person learning. This shall also include students new to the school and who are registered for OCV.”

This option supports the requests to allow active school council members to continue in their role at the home school, notwithstanding where the child attends. It also provides for continuity and relationship building. A question worthy of discussion is whether parents whose children are not attending the school will continue to have the interest and information necessary to support them in their role as a school council member. Another discussion question is what conditions, if any, should be imposed. For example, without any conditions, it is possible that an entire school council and/or school council executive could be composed of parents whose children are not currently attending the school. This may or may not be an issue, but it may be important that this be understood by the school community. With that in mind, under this option, it might be prudent to encourage parents of students enrolled in OCV to disclose, prior to the election, that their children are not currently attending the home school.

Option B - Limit OCV Parents to OCV School Councils

OCV parents would be able to seek election to the OCV council and parents of students attending the home school would be able to seek election to the home school council. Under this option, OCV parents would not be able to continue to be members of the School Council at their children’s home school. However, as school council meetings are open to the public, they could continue to participate in a non-voting capacity.

This option is the most closely aligned with the regulation and past practice. It provides that the school council is a forum for parents of students enrolled in the school only, but allows interested parents to attend meetings to stay informed.

Option C - Consider Community Representatives in a liaison role

In this model, home school councils could amend their constitutions and/or by-laws to permit additional Community Representative positions reserved for parents of children formerly registered in the school but who are currently registered for OCV. This would facilitate continued engagement between parents and their children’s home schools, while still respecting the concept that only parents of students enrolled in the school can sit as parent members of the council. This option is more complex to operationalize as it technically requires amendment to individual school council constitutions rather than an omnibus amendment to the procedure. Practically speaking, many councils will not have the opportunity to amend the constitution prior to the elections and therefore the appointment of additional Community Representatives would likely take place once the amendments take place, following the regular school council elections.

10. There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these options and the PIC meeting will provide an excellent and much needed forum for discussion of the issues to inform the path forward. Like all planning for this school year, we are in a situation where we must consider the options and establish the best course of action based on the information and the time available. Following the PIC meeting, additional communication to schools and school councils will be necessary in order to support their operations.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

11. These changes to practice will require ongoing communication and support for school councils. From a resource implication perspective, the financial costs are primarily associated with the creation of OCV school councils. Specifically, providing school council insurance for an additional seven councils and the \$500 school council funding per council. Additionally, staff time is required to support the work as we move forward to facilitate parental engagement, create guidelines, and review/amend the corresponding procedure.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12. PIC is a key forum to discuss these issues. In addition, the School Council Newsletter provides information to all councils and will begin distribution on September 18th. The information in this report and information about the PIC meeting will be included in the newsletter so that school communities are aware. Information will also be shared with principals and trustees. The Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils is represented on PIC and will be a part of the discussions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Role of OCV Parents on School Councils – What are the advantages and disadvantages of having parents/guardians of students enrolled in OCV serve as parent/voting members of home School Councils?
- School Council / Advisory Body for OCV – What is the best structure for an established advisory body for OCV Schools?
- Virtual School Council Meetings – Should we establish a standard of practice where all School Councils are required to meet via a particular platform (e.g., Google Meet) or allow for flexibility and freedom of platform choice?
- Electronic Elections – What are the preferred options for managing elections electronically? How do the practices of different school councils inform these practices?

Michele Giroux
Executive Officer

Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board