

*Mt. Pleasant School Council
By-Laws & Policies*

School Councils

School councils play a vital role in the education system in Ontario. They provide a forum through which parents and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.

In 2000-2001, the Ontario government took significant steps to ensure that parents, through their school councils, would have greater influence in their children's education. New regulations were created that confirm the advisory role of school councils and clearly state that their purpose is to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.

School councils are now able to make recommendations to their principals and school boards on any matter. Principals and school boards, in turn, must consult with school councils on a variety of matters that affect student learning. They must also consider recommendations made by school councils and report back to the councils on how they plan to act on their advice.

What Do the Regulations Mean for School Councils?

To help school councils with their work of influencing decisions that affect students' education and the effective operation of schools, Ontario Regulation 612/00 and Regulation 298 together address three key areas:

- *the purpose of school councils, operational matters, and the obligation of boards and principals to consult with school councils.*
- *Regulation 612/00 confirms that school councils are advisory bodies and clearly states that they may make recommendations to their principals or school boards on any matter.*
- *The regulations require boards and principals to report back on how the recommendations have been taken into account.*

Our Mission

As school council members we can discover new and exciting ways to contribute to the education of the students at Mt. Pleasant School.

We are a dedicated team working together with Parents, students, teachers, principals, school boards, government, and the community. Our goal is to ensure the highest quality of education for our children. Everyone's participation can make a difference.

Code of ethics

- **A member shall** consider the best interest of all students.
- **A member shall** act within the limits of the roles and responsibilities of a school council as identified by the school board and the Ontario Ministry of education.
- **A member shall** become familiar with the school policies and operating procedures and act in accordance with them.
- **A member shall** maintain the highest standards of integrity.
- **A member shall** recognize and respect the personal integrity of each member of the school community.
- **A member shall** treat all other members with respect and allow for the diverse opinions to be shared without interruption.
- **A member shall** encourage a positive environment in which individuals contributions are encouraged and valued.
- **A member shall** acknowledge democratic principles and accept the consensus of the council.
- **A member shall** respect the confidential nature of some school business and respect limitations this may place on the operation of the school council.
- **A member shall** not disclose confidential information.
- **A member shall** limit discussions at school council meetings to matters of concern to the school community as a whole.
- **A member shall** use established communication channels when questions or concerns arise.
- **A member shall** promote high standards of ethical practice within the school community.
- **A member shall** declare any conflict of interest.
- **A member shall** not accept any payment or benefit financially through school council involvement.

Quorum

Parents and guardians must form the majority of members on the council. All members may bring before the council the issues and concerns of the groups that they represent and provide links to those groups. Mt Pleasant School has established that a school council will consist of the following members:

- *a majority of parents, as specified in a bylaw of the school council or by the board if such a bylaw does not exist.*
- *the principal or vice-principal of the school (the principal may delegate membership responsibility to the vice-principal)*
- *one teacher employed in the school, other than the principal or vice-principal.*
- *one non-teaching employee of the school*
- *one or more community representatives appointed by the elected council*

Parent members. *A parent member is one who is a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in Mt. Pleasant School. The council must ensure that parent members form the majority of the school council membership. A chair or co-chair of a school council must be a parent member. Mt. Pleasant School council will consist of Eleven Parent members.*

Board employees and trustees. *A board employee who works at the school his or her child attends is not eligible to serve as a parent member on the council. This provision recognizes that board employees have avenues other than school councils (e.g., staff meetings) through which to influence the decisions that the principal might make at their schools, whereas parents who do not work at the school their children attend have no occasion to discuss and have input into matters affecting the school.*

A board employee who works at the school his or her child attends may, however, be elected as either the teaching or non-teaching staff representative. Board employees who do not work at the school their children attend may be elected as parent members as long as they notify the other parents that they are employed by the school board prior to their election. The requirement to disclose their affiliation with a board will reduce the potential for conflict of interest.

The principal Regulation 298, principals are required to report back on the actions taken or not taken in response to school council recommendations. Although to take action or not is still the principal's decision, the principal must provide the council with an explanation of how its recommendations have been considered or why a recommendation was not acted on.

The principal is required to attend and participate in every school council meeting or to delegate this responsibility to a vice-principal. The principal and vice-principal may both choose to attend the meetings; however, only one of them can represent the school at the meeting in his or her official capacity. Principals (or vice-principals) are not eligible to vote on any matters being discussed by their school councils.

School staff representatives. Any teacher in the school is eligible to seek election for the one teacher position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other teachers in the school. The teacher position cannot be filled by a principal or vice principal.

Any member of the non-teaching staff in the school is eligible to seek election for the one non-teaching staff position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other non-teaching staff members in the school. A non-teaching staff member is anyone employed at the school who does not have teaching duties, such as a secretary, an educational assistant, a library technician, a member of the custodial staff, or a lunchtime or hallway monitor. Parents working in such a capacity in the school that their children attend may consider running for the position of non-teaching staff representative if they wish to serve on the school council.

Community representative. The council must appoint at least one community representative, who cannot be an employee at the school. If the community representative is employed elsewhere by the board, he or she must inform other council members of his or her employment prior to appointment.

Elections and Term of Office

*Mt. Pleasant School will hold elections annually, within the first thirty calendar days of the start of the school year. **Elections must be held within this timeframe.** This will ensure that any parent who is interested in the school council election process or in participating as a member on the school council has the opportunity to do so.*

The term of office is a one-year term. The one-year term allows parents to make decisions on a regular basis about how their interests and priorities are represented at the school. It is important to note, however, that the regulation does not restrict the number of times that a member can be re-elected.

Communication

One of a school council's main purposes is to share information with parents and the community and to seek their ideas and views about matters under consideration by the council. When and how this happens depends on the issues before the council.

The impact of the issues before council will vary – from having no direct or indirect impact on the students in the school to affecting all students in the school. The issue before the council will determine when it is appropriate to consult with parents and the community. Some issues may only require that information be provided to the school community. Other issues may require obtaining a formal position from the school community.

Correspondence

The School Council Chair or Co-Chair will be responsible for ensuring the distribution of the agenda to the council members within one week prior to the meeting date.

The Principal will distribute the agenda via email or post the agenda on the school website within a minimum 72hr period prior to the meeting.

Posting council meeting minutes will be on the school website and distributed to the council members within one week after the meeting.

All emails and any other correspondence that are brought forward by the school community will be acknowledged as received within a 48hr time period. Each council member will receive a copy of such correspondence to determine the appropriate measures to be taken.

Conflict of interest

Each school council member shall avoid situations that could result in an inconsistency between the overall goals and vision of the school council and a personal or vested interest, that arise in connection with his or her duties as a school council member.

Should an issue or agenda item arise during a council meeting where a council member is in a conflict of interest situation, he or she shall declare conflict of interest immediately and decline from the discussion and resolution.

Resolving Conflict

From time to time, school councils may find that they are not able to come to agreement on matters under their consideration. Consistently being unable to find common ground in decision making is almost certain to result in a dysfunctional council.

Actions considered signs of dysfunction are verbal abuse or harassment of other council members or the chair, constantly interrupting speakers, interjecting derogatory comments, or displaying behavior that is unbecoming of adults entrusted to represent their community.

- *Council members are elected to serve the school community and will demonstrate respect for their colleagues on council at all times.*
- *If a council member or members become disruptive during a meeting, the chair shall ask for order.*
- *If all efforts to restore order fail or the unbecoming behavior continues, the chair may direct the individual council member(s) to leave the meeting, citing the reasons for the request.*
- *The removal of a member for one meeting does not prevent the council member from participating in future meetings of council.*
- *The incident shall be recorded and submitted to the Superintendent of Schools within one week of the meeting.*
- *When the chair has requested the removal of a member or members from a meeting, the chair shall request that the disputing members of council participate in a special meeting, the purpose of which will be to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the dispute.*
- *Such a meeting may be a private meeting, and shall not be construed as a meeting of the council.*
- *The chair may request the intervention of an independent third party to assist in achieving a resolution to the dispute.*
- *An independent third party may be a board official or another individual mutually agreed on by the parties involved in the dispute.*
- *Any resolution reached at the meeting to resolve the conflict shall be signed and respected in full by all parties to the agreement.*

School Council Voting

School Council will have to make decisions, establishing how decisions are made is crucial to effective resolution. Mt Pleasant school council will base its decision making on a consensus of the school community as a whole. Consensus will take time, patience and persistence.

After an idea or issue has been brought to council's attention there will be an open discussions among the council members.

After the council has had time to discuss the idea or issue there must be a goal of a possible solution.

Council must subject the possible solution to a majority vote before presenting it to the school community.

The council will seek the consensus of the school community via school newsletters, e-mail or the school website giving a reasonable time line for feedback.

During the following meeting all school community feedback will be presented and evaluated.

At that time the council will decide by a majority vote what recommendations shall be put forward.

The Principal will have the final decision as to the course of action taken. If for any reason the principal decides to reject the council's decision he must provide reasonable cause for his decision.

At any time the Principal may come to council to seek advice pertaining to a decision he/she may be considering. During open discussions the council may give advice based on the information provided by the principal.