

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 30, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: School Councils Regulation Review

ORIGINATOR: R. MacNeil, Assistant to the Superintendent

RESOURCE
STAFF: Lisa Austin, Elaine Decker

RECOMMENDATION

That the response provided in Appendix I be approved for submission, on behalf of the Board, to Alberta Learning.

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Alberta Learning is in the initial stages of reviewing the School Council Regulations, which expire in 2006. For Phase I of the consultation process, key stakeholders, including school boards and school councils, were invited to review and respond to an online discussion paper survey.

The attached submission reflects the response of the school board (trustees and superintendent), which was informed by feedback from stakeholders. Individual school councils have also submitted their own responses.

LHA:pd

APPENDIX I Edmonton Public Schools Response to School Councils Regulation Review

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSE TO SECTIONS B AND C OF THE SCHOOL COUNCILS REGULATION REVIEW DISCUSSION PAPER SURVEY

Section B: Purpose for School Councils

(Seeks input on whether the purpose for school councils is clear.)

The purpose for school councils is identified in Section 22(4) of the *School Act* that reads:

22(4) *A school council may, at its discretion*

- (a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,*
- (b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,*
- (c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,*
- (d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and*
- (e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.*

Response: Purpose Unclear

We do not believe the purpose as outlined is clear. The *School Act* should include a purpose statement such as: *school councils are collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives who seek to work together to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby enhance student learning. A school council is a means to facilitate co-operation among all the concerned participants in the local school.* The purpose statement could then be followed by a defining clause, such as those outlined in Section 22(4) of the *School Act*.

Section C: Suggested Ideas for Inclusion

(Presents suggestions and ideas for inclusion in the School Council Regulation along with a brief rationale. Respondents are asked to indicate their preference and provide any comments about each suggestion.)

Idea #1 *Change “days” to “school days” through the regulation and reduce the timeline for the notice of establishment meeting from “21 days” to “10 school days.”*

Response: Agree

This idea speaks to the logistics of establishing a school council and we support strategies that will make this process less cumbersome for the school community.

Idea #2 *A school with a junior high school program must elect at least one student from that program to be a member of school council.*

Response: Agree

Having a junior high student helps all members of school council to focus on the purpose for their existence -- to support teaching and learning, and improve student achievement. Student representatives may also find this involvement enhances their education experience.

Idea #3 *Efforts must be made to have one or more representatives from the First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI) community be members on the school council if 10% or more of the students in a school are FNMI.*

Response: Agree in principle

It is a worthy goal. It is important that membership of school council reflect the unique school community it serves. At Edmonton Public Schools, all parents are encouraged to participate in their school council and every effort is made to ensure that school councils represent a cross section of the culturally diverse communities they serve including, but not limited to, the First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI) community.

Idea #4 *It is “preferable” to have a parent as chair of the school council.*

Response: Agree

It is important to engage parents and community. Wherever possible, having a parent chair meetings promotes meaningful engagement. However, the overall collaboration of all members in supporting student achievement is more important than who chairs the meeting.

Idea #5 *School boards must provide school councils with the opportunity to:*

- a) participate in the development and implementation of the school’s education plan (school improvement planning);*
- b) develop and include school council strategies to support the accomplishment of the goals in the school plan*
- c) receive a review and an interpretation of the provincial testing program results within a meaningful context; and*
- d) participate in the development of the school’s results report.*

Response: Agree in principle

There needs to be open dialogue about how education partners can assist with enhancing student achievement and this dialogue could be manifested differently in each school community. For example, Edmonton Public Schools reviews provincial testing and other student achievement information with parents. This information helps education partners in their review of students’ progress and ensures that future plans are developed to improve student achievement in areas of concern.

It should be noted that idea #5 includes responsibilities that require considerable knowledge of the education system in order to fulfill those responsibilities effectively. Not all parents may feel comfortable with this level of involvement, especially given the fact that the 1999 School Councils Review reaffirmed that the majority of school councils felt their role should continue to be advisory.

Moreover, because the opportunities outlined in Idea #5 will occur at the school level, we suggest rewording this Idea to read:

School councils must have the opportunity to:

- e) participate in the development and implementation of the schools education plan (school improvement planning);*
- f) develop and include school council strategies to support the accomplishment of the goals in the school plan*
- g) receive a review and an interpretation of the provincial testing program results within a meaningful context; and*
- h) participate in the development of the school's results report.*

Idea # 6 *School boards must provide school councils with the opportunity to identify a profile of the preferred criteria and skills to be considered in the selection process for principals.*

Response: Agree in principle

There can be a fine line between “advising” and “mandating.” While input from school councils and parents is always welcomed by Edmonton Public Schools, school council members may require some training in identifying and developing criteria. Moreover, it would have to remain clear that the Board and its delegates have ultimate authority and responsibility for making staffing decisions that reflect the needs of the local school.

Again, we suggest rewording this Idea to read:

School councils should be encouraged to identify a profile of the preferred criteria and skills to be considered in the selection process for principals.

Idea #7 *School boards must provide school councils with the opportunity to provide a profile of preferred qualities of potential school staff.*

Response: Disagree

Our belief is that this Idea would create a situation in which school councils are too involved in the day-to-day operation of the school. This involvement may also create problems with respect to collective agreements.

Idea #8 *School boards must provide school councils with policy respecting fundraising at the school level.*

Response: Disagree

Before school boards could implement such a policy, the province must define appropriate uses for monies raised by school councils and parent fundraising societies. Specifically, the government must define “core needs.”

While fundraising for “extras” has become a practice for many parent groups to enhance the learning experience for their children, it does not supersede the important role that school councils play in enhancing student achievement.

Idea # 9 *School councils must report annually on their fundraising activities and how the funds were used.*

Response: Agree in principle

The majority of money being raised by parents is not raised by the school council, but rather through a registered non-profit society. The society is responsible to “Alberta Gaming” not “Alberta Learning.”

Idea #10 *School councils must make the minutes for each meeting of the school council available to the public on request.*

Response: Agree

Many school councils already publish a summary of school council minutes or activities in the school newsletter. Some schools have a school council binder for parents to review that includes school council minutes. We believe this information is already available to those who want it.

Idea #11 *School boards must provide guidance and may develop policies that define the purposes for which school councils can collect, store, and disclose information.*

Response: Agree

As our partners in education, school councils must follow current legislation. At Edmonton Public Schools, we are already providing guidance and direction in this matter.

Additional Comments:

Many of the Ideas outlined in this survey are current practice in Edmonton Public Schools. In assessing these Ideas, we believe it is important to ensure that school councils maintain their important advisory role and that their role does not evolve to include greater governance and control over school operations and decision-making.

In Alberta Learning’s School Councils Handbook Meaningful Involvement for the School Community, school councils are defined as follows:

School councils are collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives who seek to work together to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby to enhance student learning. A

school council is a means to facilitate cooperation among all the concerned participants in the local school.

Each school council is unique and reflects the interests and needs of their respective communities. What remains fundamentally clear is that school councils provide the framework for parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives to work together for the common goal of enhancing student achievement.

The goal of enhancing student achievement should be the driving force behind the work of school councils.

Edmonton Public Schools has a strong and long standing commitment to involving parents as partners in the education of their children. This support and commitment is demonstrated in the following ways:

- A full-time Communications consultant responsible for providing support to school councils and parent groups, including, but not limited to, on-site presentations to school councils, consultation, training, and resource development
- An annual school council training meeting that provides information and skill development for members of school councils
- A district-wide Key Communicators program that brings together school council representatives/administration/trustees six times per year focused on sharing information, consultation, learning and networking related to supporting teaching and learning and supporting school councils
- A Key Communicators Advisory Committee that plans meetings and sets program direction for the Key Communicators program. Members include parent volunteers from all wards, trustees from the community relations sub-committee of the Board, principal representatives and a communications consultant.
- *Keynotes*, a bi-monthly newsletter, that provides information and support to school councils
- A website for parents and school councils that includes a information “tool kit” at <http://partners.epsb.ca/toolkit.html>.