

**DATE:** October 11, 2011  
**TO:** Board of Trustees  
**FROM:** Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools  
**SUBJECT:** Student Advisory Committee (Trustee Request #107)  
**ORIGINATOR:** Tanni Parker, Assistant Superintendent  
**RESOURCE STAFF:** John Macnab  
**REFERENCE:** June 14, 2011 Board Meeting (Trustee Colburn)

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### ISSUE

The following information was requested: Provide information regarding the best practices for a student advisory committee that would dialogue with the board on a regular basis.

### BACKGROUND

There is a small but growing body of research on the appropriate role of student voice in educational planning and policy-making. The bulk of this research targets student voice at the school level; there is very little information about student voice mechanisms at the District level.

### CURRENT SITUATION

The Province of Ontario is currently working to use student voice to inform Ministry policy. (see <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/index.html>). Ministry initiatives to include student voice in decision-making include a 60-student panel that will meet twice a year with the Minister of Education, open student forums held in various locations, and special projects that are initiated by students and, if approved, given a funding grant by the Province.

Several Canadian and US school districts have opened up positions for student representatives on the Board. Typically one or two high school students are selected. In some cases, schools recommend students for the positions, in others the students are required to formally apply to the board. There is little evidence regarding the impact of these positions.

### KEY POINTS

- That the Board consider creating student focus groups to provide insight and perspective at the District level.
- That the Administration identify students to participate in the focus groups.
- Research shows student voice is typically heard in three ways:
  1. Students as a source of information  
In this scenario, students are asked for their opinions. The District does this through the District Survey. A different quality and depth of information could be obtained through focus groups.

2. Students as collaborators

Here students are invited into decision-making bodies to be part of the process by which educational policy is formed. In instances such as these, the students are the equals of the teachers, parents, administrators, elected officials, etc. that sit on the committee.

3. Students as independent reformers

When students become politically active independently of official action, their voice can be an important part of policy directions.

In each of the three scenarios there are strengths, but they all share a common weakness. Not all student voices are heard. It has been widely reported that the students who tend to provide information or to sit on committees tend to be:

- academically successful,
- socially privileged, and
- female.

When voices are selective, or when the process is viewed as little more than an attempt to get students to say what is wanted, research shows that the activities often have strongly negative effects on students' sense of engagement with the process.

**ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES**

N/A

JM:jm