

# ORIENTATION GUIDE FOR PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

*Developing Best Practice for Parent Groups in Schools*

## **Second Street Junior Middle School**

Phone (416) 394-7640  
Email: [Second.JMS@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Second.JMS@tdsb.on.ca)  
Address 71 Second St  
Etobicoke, ON M8V 2X4



## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Parent Council is dedicated to supporting, promoting, and enhancing meaningful involvement of parents and caregivers within the school community.

## **VISION**

Parent Council is recognized and respected as the parental voice within the public education system in TDSB.

## **VALUES**

Teamwork among staff, with and within the school board, with members,  
and all education partners

Honesty in dealings with one another and with its  
membership

Integrity – Parent Council actions reflect  
its words

Open and clear communication at all  
times

Respect for every individual involved in the organization and for the  
diversity represented in the community.

# INTRODUCTION

This guide was created in response to many conversations with our membership, educational partners and funders. Parent Council often feel as though they are in need of guidance to understand and clarify their role as effective partners within their school community. This Guide for Parent Council serves as a starting point for conversations and as a template for partnership development and relationship building within a school system.

Parent Council recognizes that the strength within a good relationship is crucial to empowering the parental voice. This guide will serve as that foundation for Parent Council Committee.

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## **SECTION 1: STARTING OR REFRESHING A PARENT COUNCIL**

### **A) WHAT IS A PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL AND WHY DO WE NEED ONE?**

#### **Why do we need a PARENT COUNCIL?**

PARENT COUNCIL is created for a reason, and it is important to discuss and decide together what that purpose will be within a school community.

The Parent Advisory Council within a school has many functions and roles. *Examining this purpose may lead to the development of your PARENT COUNCIL mission statement.* Some of the areas a PARENT COUNCIL might work in include:

- Offering supports, advice, and feedback (*parental voice*) to school administration teams on a variety of issues such as attendance, safety concerns, supports for learning, school and divisional planning and more
- Offering or creating supports, direction, and enhanced learning opportunities for both current and future students
- Providing an internal support system to address gaps in either funding or programming in a school community

#### **What are some of the things a PARENT COUNCIL can be involved in?**

The possibilities will be unique and should be decided together as a group in consultation with your school administration team. Some examples for consideration may include but are not limited to:

- School planning
- Divisional planning
- Lunch or breakfast programs
- Before and after school programs
- School committees concerning items of local interest such as safety issues, inclusive school environments, grounds development, and more
- Understanding curriculum and how families can provide supports for learning
- Understanding policies and processes within the school and school division and how to communicate these items to families
- Fundraising either for a large project, or smaller annual or ongoing needs
- Community building, like holding family nights or special events
- Communication with the parent community, through a newsletter or website
- Liaising with special groups, like the band program or sports teams
- Liaising with classrooms, to inform the school community of activities, or to address specific needs

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***Positive school climate is often linked to strong partnerships between schools and their communities, families, and parents. When all partners take responsibility for student learning, we share school improvement planning. People begin to work together and communicate more openly about needs, issues, and concerns that will make a difference in the lives of students.***

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## **B. PARENT VOLUNTEERS**

Parents in school communities volunteer for many different reasons. These include, but are not limited to:

- Having a personal connection to the school
- Wanting to know more about the school
- Looking for work experience
- Looking to make new friends
- Wanting to contribute a skill or talent
- Wanting to help their child have a better educational experience
- Looking to create change, and much more!

## **SO, HOW DO WE CONNECT WITH PARENTS IN OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND ENCOURAGE THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH OUR PARENT COUNCILS?**

### **RECRUITING**

#### ***Where are all the bodies?***

Parents can be found all over the place in many school communities. They are walking in the halls, dropping off their children, talking in the parking lot, assisting in the classrooms, and possibly thinking about becoming involved but are unsure about where and who they can speak to about helping out. Another possibility is that they do not know about the PARENT COUNCIL or they do not realize their involvement is needed to assist in building a strong school community.

One idea is to approach these parents personally and start a conversation to introduce them to the idea of joining the PARENT COUNCIL and help them to envision themselves working as a part of the group. The most common answer people give about why they don't volunteer is "Nobody asked me." Face to face meetings are crucial!

Everyone has a skill that can be shared. Look around your school community to see who has the expertise or skills that can potentially benefit your group or project. For example, your project might benefit from expertise such as someone experienced in writing proposals or having accounting skills. Teachers and principals are a great resource for identifying individuals in your community that could be beneficial to your group.

Have you thought about potential PARENT COUNCIL members by searching other potential sources in your community, such as: kindergarten parents, daycare parents, other community governance boards (community clubs, sport teams, etc.), grandparents, and community service groups?

Decide on a plan to approach these individuals and ask for them to become involved!

**ENCOURAGING INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION – THERE ARE MANY OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR TO CONNECT WITH PROSPECTIVE PARENT COUNCIL MEMBERS. IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS STOPPING TO CHAT AND INVITING THEM TO A PARENT COUNCIL MEETING, OR IT CAN INVOLVE A LITTLE MORE CREATIVE PLANNING AND STRATEGY. TAKE THE TIME TO BRAINSTORM WITH YOUR GROUP AND YOUR ADMINISTRATOR TO TRY SOMETHING NEW, SUCH AS:**

- Introduce or speak for a moment about the PARENT COUNCIL during assemblies and events
- Talk to parents on kindergarten enrolment days - maybe offer to host coffee and muffins for the new parents.
- Include Parent Advisory Council information in the school's handbook or website.
- Create a brochure to highlight the role the PARENT COUNCIL plays in the school, and identify projects that you have completed or are currently working on.
- Create a PARENT COUNCIL newsletter, or speak to your school administrator about having PARENT COUNCIL activities and meetings included in the school newsletter or on the school website. A number of schools and PARENT COUNCILs are now using other forms of social media. All of these mediums are a great place to advertise that you are looking for volunteers for specific duties.
- Have a volunteer sign-up during your opening day conferences, meet-the-teacher night or open house, or use that opportunity to gather parents' email addresses in order to communicate.

Every opportunity that you have to talk about what you are doing and the importance of parental involvement gives you another way to get your message out to future participants in your group.

## TRAINING

Once your group has decided on what direction to take to increase participation on your PARENT COUNCIL, take some time to discuss with your PARENT COUNCIL and administrator, the following:

- Is there an orientation process for volunteers required by all school volunteers?
- Do we understand and know how to access school and divisional policies of concern and interest to volunteers?
- Do we have an up to date copy of our constitution and current job descriptions/expectations for volunteers on our PARENT COUNCIL?
- What risks are involved with volunteering in the school concerning privacy, safety, and health? Are volunteers and administration aware of these risks?
- Are Criminal Record and Vulnerable Sector Checks required by your school division?
- What do we do if a conflict within the Parent Advisory Council arises?
- Is the school willing and able to assist with providing meetings Parent Council and tools necessary for the PARENT COUNCIL to operate?

## RETAINING

### Addressing Challenges to Volunteering on a PARENT COUNCIL

Examining these different reasons and looking around your community to identify your unique opportunities and challenges can help address any barriers that your group might be experiencing. Discuss with your group some of these questions:

- Should we have our meetings on the same day and time every month to provide continuity, or should we alternate times
  - and dates to provide additional opportunity for those who are
  - traditionally unable to attend?
- How should we promote the meetings to reach people that
  - we may be missing? School newsletter and website? Phone trees? School bulletin board? Email? School blogs? Social media sites? Electronic message boards? At local businesses that are frequented by parents in the community?
- Can we provide babysitting for parents with small children?
- Can we provide snacks or a meal?



**ANOTHER IMPORTANT AREA FOR YOUR PARENT COUNCIL TO EXAMINE IS IN ITS MEETING STRUCTURES. TAKE THE TIME TO LOOK AT YOUR GROUP WITH A CRITICAL EYE AND ANSWER SOME CRITICAL QUESTIONS.**

- Is our communication clear, easy to understand, and - most importantly - easy to find?
- Is our group welcoming, friendly, and inviting, or could we appear to be cliquish or exclusive? What are we doing right and what areas do we need to improve?
- Do we give everyone the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard or are there some voices which dominate the conversation? Do we know where to direct questions that may not be appropriate for a PARENT COUNCIL to address (i.e. specific student issues or school staff issues)?
- Do we encourage volunteers on the PARENT COUNCIL to contribute in the manner they want to or do we fill the areas needing volunteers with whoever shows up first? Remember, not everyone wants to govern a PARENT COUNCIL.
- Do we recognize our volunteers and thank them for a job well done? Are we specific with what our expectations are of volunteers on the PARENT COUNCIL (time commitment, duties, reporting, etc.)? Do we contact them each time we need them, or do we assume they will just show up?
- What are some of the time challenges parents in our community are facing? How can we address these challenges?
- Are we open to feedback to make ourselves stronger?
- Do we always ensure that we have enough tasks for the bodies that step forward to volunteer? How do we address having too many people?

**REMEMBER – VOLUNTEERS ARE WORKING WITH YOU FOR A REASON. IT IS CRUCIAL TO NOT TAKE THEM FOR GRANTED OR TO WASTE A VOLUNTEER’S TIME. WHEN A VOLUNTEER CHOOSES TO PARTICIPATE ON A PARENT COUNCIL AND THEIR EFFORTS ARE RECOGNIZED, THEY LEAVE FEELING GREAT ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THE WORK THAT THEY ARE DOING.**

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*“When parents are involved in the decision-making process they are more likely to support the decisions that are made. Parents, families, and community members provide valuable perspectives that enhance the decision-making process.”*

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## C. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

PARENT COUNCIL believes that creating and maintaining respectful relationships supports the parental role in school communities. A useful exercise for your PARENT COUNCIL to consider would be to define what respectful behaviour looks like, so everybody is of the same understanding. There are many benefits to working together in a school community with a common goal in mind.

### ADMINISTRATION, STAFF AND SCHOOL DIVISION



*Set aside time at the start of every school year to have your PARENT COUNCIL Executive meet with your administrator to discuss goals for the year and foster relationships!*

The relationship between a PARENT COUNCIL, the school and the divisional administration team is a crucial one for effective partnership development in a school community. All parties are dedicated to the students of the school and have educational goals for these students as a top priority.

By establishing a respectful relationship between the PARENT COUNCIL, the school and the administration team, you are creating opportunities for richer discussion and deeper understanding of the school system. The administration team benefits from learning about different perspectives which exist in the community, as well as increased parental involvement for the benefit of the students. Simultaneously, the PARENT COUNCIL benefits by developing a greater understanding of the processes and challenges, as well as the opportunities, that exist to support student learning and the educational experience in a school community.

While it is important to recognize the value of an effective relationship between the school administration teams and the PARENT COUNCIL, it is also important to understand the parameters of these relationships for better understanding of all responsibilities involved in developing a successful group.

Working closely with the school team is an effective way of reaching parents, families and community members. This partnership helps the school team to learn more about what it is that the PARENT COUNCIL is working on and towards. It also helps to determine that your goals are in line with each other so you can provide mutual support as needed. It is also a valuable tool for gaining additional insight and feedback as you work on projects benefitting students in the school community.

It is also important to work closely with the school team so projects do not compete or interfere with each other. Remember, both the PARENT COUNCIL and the school are using the same target group for projects and fundraisers and you want to avoid donation and volunteer fatigue or strain, financially or otherwise.

A good idea might be to use a planning calendar to plan projects for both the school and the PARENT COUNCIL over the course of a school year so you are working together and taking turns supporting each other's endeavours.

*The principal, teachers, and school trustees operate as ex officios on the PARENT COUNCIL – they are there by the nature of their position. Their role is to provide resource, guidance, and support to the PARENT COUNCIL for increased understanding of the school and division and its events, policies, and other items affecting the school community*

## **PARENTS IN THE SCHOOL**

Parents volunteer to serve on parent councils for a variety of reasons and come to the meetings prepared with a variety of skills they have gathered during their lifetimes outside of the school community.

Parents often choose to volunteer on their local PARENT COUNCIL because they believe in education and want to be a strong partner in supporting the students and the school community. There can also be a number of other reasons why they choose to volunteer. It is important to keep a few things in mind when working with a diverse group in a governance setting:

- Differing opinions often lead to the best solutions after discussion and making decisions together
- Open, honest, and respectful communication is critical for building trusting relationships.
- Having an agreed upon process for operating this PARENT COUNCIL leads to better understanding between members as well as more efficient meetings
- Everyone has an interest and a shared responsibility to participate on the PARENT COUNCIL
- PARENT COUNCIL executive is not the sole decision maker and is there to lead and ensure balanced participation by all members of the Parent Advisory Council
- The PARENT COUNCIL should represent parents in the school whenever possible

Not every parent wants to serve on the PARENT COUNCIL and some may not even know or understand what a PARENT COUNCIL is all about. Most people recognize that the parents who do serve on a PARENT COUNCIL are commonly understood to be “parent leaders” or representative of parents in a school community. PARENT COUNCIL members often act as cheerleaders in the community to promote active and meaningful parental involvement in school. They are also critical in promoting the work the PARENT COUNCIL does, informing the community about matters of interest to parents and students, encouraging respectful relationships with the school team, and conversing with parents to discover how parents might want to participate in the school community or what matters are of great interest and importance to them. Creating these relationships is sometimes a way to generate further interest in what a PARENT COUNCIL does and can often be used as a recruitment tool for identifying potential PARENT COUNCIL members in the future!

## **COMMUNITY AT LARGE**

Some PARENT COUNCILs choose to have “community members” who play an active role in the group and provide additional resource and assistance in achieving their goals. It is often a benefit to develop these relationships with community members who are interested in education, as there is a potential for additional skills, talents, and other volunteer opportunities which contribute to the richness of the educational experience for students. It is important to keep the following in mind when working with the community at large:

- The PARENT COUNCIL may not be the only group trying to gain its support
- Recognize their time, input, efforts, and donations

*“When parents, families, and the community are involved in the education of children and youth, student achievement tends to increase, students feel more supported, and students’ attitudes change in a positive way.”*

## SECTION 2: GOVERNING A PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

### A. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARENT COUNCIL

*It’s important to remember that the PARENT COUNCIL operates under its school division’s guidelines and policies. Check local school division policy to better understand divisional expectations.*

PARENT COUNCILs play an important role in; decision making and accountability, supporting school and division planning, collaborating with families in a school community, fundraising initiatives, and supporting student learning and experiences at school and in the home.

By establishing a PARENT COUNCIL in a school community, parents are given a forum to participate in their school communities in a meaningful way. It is a place to discuss concerns about education, create understanding about how to support student learning both in school and in the home, create relationships with the school for stronger communities, plan for large and small scale projects, and much more.

By creating opportunities for rich dialogue and feedback, schools develop stronger partnerships with families and are able to gain new insight and perspectives on some of the challenges they are experiencing or opportunities they may be missing.

Effective PARENT COUNCIL make schools stronger!

## B. EFFECTIVE MEETING STRATEGIES

Meetings are held in order to inform a PARENT COUNCIL about information and issues requiring attention as well as to conduct PARENT COUNCIL business. PARENT COUNCIL business should include, but not be limited to; receiving reports from teachers and administration, planning events, providing input to school and divisional planning, organizing fundraisers, and addressing concerns brought to the PARENT COUNCIL's attention.

Meetings provide an opportunity to share ideas and concerns and to come to agreement about projects and activities that might benefit the school community.

Being prepared in advance of the meeting will ensure that everyone has the information they need so they can participate and make informed decisions.

### **STAYING ON TOPIC:**

PARENT COUNCIL members are often excited about information that is being shared and conversation usually flows freely when these discussions are being held. It is tricky to provide the balance which allows for discussion while respecting time limits put forth in the agenda.

This task is part of the chairperson's responsibility. After allowing for a few minutes of discussion about a topic which excites the group, the chairperson might then remind the group of the agreed upon time limit set in the agenda and proceed to ask whether there is any objection to continue the discussion, revisit the topic at the next meeting, or arrange an additional meeting to discuss the topic in greater detail. Each suggestion has merit as well as concern. However, it is up to the chairperson to lead the group towards a decision which the group arrives at and agrees upon together. This might include gathering more information or examining items in greater detail, when time is not pressured.

If the topic is a heated one and emotions are running high, the same process might be followed or the chair can request a short break (a recess) to allow participants to "cool off". If the tone of the meeting has become too heated, disrespectful, or unsafe the chair can also choose to end the discussion, or the meeting, as a last resort.



## **C. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Many PARENT COUNCILs struggle with trying to communicate with its members (parents and families in a school community). Often, there is a sense of frustration as current methods are seen as not being effective.

PARENT COUNCIL recommends that whenever possible, PARENT COUNCIL should try to utilize a variety of methods to try and engage parents in participating on the PARENT COUNCIL, as a volunteer within the school community, or working with their child to further enhance their educational experience.

### **REACHING PARENTS – HAVE YOU TRIED?**

- The school website
- Printing newsletters and distributing them throughout the community where your parents will find them? (i.e. banks, grocery stores, gas stations)
- Using the same night, OR alternating days/times to hold your PARENT COUNCIL meetings? Where are the time conflicts parents are experiencing in your community?
- Using visuals such as posters or pictures of projects being worked on in places parents can see them in the school and in the community
- Translating newsletters and notices for parents whose first language is not English? (This might be a great place to find some volunteers with a specific skill!)
- Using email bulletins or Facebook? (Check your divisional policies!)
- Phone trees or Twitter? (Check your divisional policies!)
- Setting up a PARENT COUNCIL display at Meet the Teacher nights and other events?
- Face to face meetings with new and returning parents to the school community?

**PLEASE NOTE: INCREASED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS HAS RESULTED IN SOME DIVISIONS REVISING OR CREATING POLICY REGARDING THE USE OF THESE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION. ENSURE YOUR GUIDELINES REFLECT ANY EXISTING POLICIES BY CHECKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL DIVISION BEFORE UTILIZING.**

## **D. CONSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES**

### **WHY DO WE NEED RULES OR A CONSTITUTION?**

It is really important to work as a team and rules allow us the boundaries we need in order to do that effectively. Rules allow for respectful conversations and ensure that everyone understands what is being asked or expected of them. Constitutions are also useful when conflicts arise as they can answer the questions that may come up and provide clarity for running a PARENT COUNCIL.

### **WHAT DO WE DO IF WE DON'T HAVE A CONSTITUTION?**

Plan to make one as soon as you possibly can. You can start by enlisting volunteers to start a working group to create one for presentation at your next (or first) Annual General Meeting. Make sure to provide opportunities for the school community to give feedback with timelines to complete the project!

You can also ask other PARENT COUNCILs in your community - with a similar school makeup –to examine a copy of theirs to start your own discussions. Go through it line by line to see what you may want to consider adding or what might be missing from your own document.

### **DON'T FORGET – YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY IS UNIQUE SO MAKE THE DOCUMENT RELEVANT TO YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS!**

It's also advisable to have this working group create a brief *terms of reference* to outline the general workings of its meetings. It should include how meeting dates will be determined, meeting location(s), who makes up the group, how voting and decisions will be handled, and a reporting structure to the community. For new School Council, a Terms of Reference Document often ends up contributing to the development of the constitution as well, as it gives you the ability to create your working conditions and initial rules to discover what works (or doesn't) in your school community.

### **WHAT IS A CONSTITUTION?**

A constitution is the foundation document for building an effective Parent Advisory Council. It should contain all the key agreements made by members on how the PAC will work. In law it is called the "*founding document*" and it is legally binding on the executive and members of the PAC.



**TERMS OF REFERENCE IS A GOOD PLACE TO START FOR NEW GROUPS, AS IT WILL ALLOW YOU TO MAKE CHANGES AS REQUIRED, WITHOUT HAVING TO GO THROUGH THE FORMALITY OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AT YOUR AGM.**

## CONSTITUTION DEVELOPMENT

A constitution is the foundation for building an effective PARENT COUNCIL. They are not plans and should not need to be changed regularly. However, PARENT COUNCIL recommends that they be reviewed on an annual basis to address any areas of concern which may require a constitutional change at the next AGM (*see Annual General Meetings*). A constitution should tell its readers the following information:

- The name of the PARENT COUNCIL
- **Why** the PARENT COUNCIL exists, its mission, purpose, and objectives
- **Who** the PARENT COUNCIL's key stakeholders are and who benefits from the work it does
- **How** the PARENT COUNCIL intends to work and the basic structures for decision making and getting the work done including dealing with the finances of the PARENT COUNCIL

**A CONSTITUTION SHOULD BE CLEAR AND SIMPLE SO MEMBERS OF THE PAC AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY UNDERSTAND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, MANDATE, AND HOW TO REMAIN ACCOUNTABLE.**

The constitution should have detailed and clear sections on, but not limited to:

- The purpose of the PARENT COUNCIL: why it exists, who benefits from its work and how they should benefit
- The objectives of a PARENT COUNCIL: what it intends to achieve
- A Code of Conduct for members
- The membership of a PARENT COUNCIL: Who may become a member? What are the duties and rights of members?
  - How you join and how members can resign? How many members will you have and what will the executive positions be?
- The structures and main procedures of decision-making in your PARENT COUNCIL including:
  - annual general meetings and other regular and/or irregular meetings
  - elections and appointments for the different positions within the PARENT COUNCIL and the general roles and responsibilities of those positions
  - Voting procedures including who can vote, what constitutes quorum, and how voting ties are broken. Include proxy voting and if email or telephone voting is allowed
  - The finances of the PARENT COUNCIL are how they are managed so that no money or resources that belong to or are controlled by the PARENT COUNCIL can be abused or misused. (see Fundraising and Financials)

- Financial year-end and audit process that tell you when your annual financial account will be finalized and audited and who the report will go to. (Should be based on the policy of local school divisions) (see Fundraising and Financials)
- Closing down the PARENT COUNCIL: what process must be followed and what will happen to any money or assets of the PARENT COUNCIL. (see Fundraising and Financials)

## SUMMARIZING A CONSTITUTION



### **Constitutions are long term decisions.**

Constitutions should be written so that they will not need to be changed often. Consider your community and its current needs, as well as determine to the best of your ability

its future needs when creating or amending

a constitution. Day-to-day administrative information or “job descriptions” for each position are very useful

for PARENT COUNCILs, and would be considered policy.

They can be changed [amended] if members feel the need to make new agreements about the basic principles and operations of the PARENT COUNCIL. This should take place at your AGM only. (See Annual General Meetings)

Constitutions should not be too detailed. They should record only those agreements that will remain true throughout the life of the PARENT COUNCIL or until some major change happens. They should not, for example, include specific funding events or objectives that are short term.

## E. MEETING MINUTES AND AGENDAS

### PREPARING AN AGENDA

It is the responsibility of the Chairperson – in consultation with the PARENT COUNCIL Executive, Members, and School Administrator - to create the agenda. It must include the meeting date, time, and location. It provides structure for the Chairperson and participants to follow.

Any individual who is being requested to speak at the meeting should be given adequate notice, so as to come prepared to address any questions in advance. Any individual requesting an item be included on the agenda should be given consideration. If there is a timing or topic of relevance conflict, it should be discussed privately prior to the meeting and an alternative decided upon in advance.

Ideally, agendas should be prepared and distributed in advance of a PARENT COUNCIL meeting, in order to give members time to consider the items being discussed and formulate any questions or thoughts they may want to present. This can be done in a variety of ways (posted on a bulletin board, sent out electronically, mailed, delivered through backParent Councils, etc.), based on your school's needs and capabilities

**IT IS THE CHAIR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THAT THE AGENDA AND TIMINGS CONTAINED WITHIN BE FOLLOWED AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE. IF SOMETHING IS GOING OVER THE TIME ALLOCATION, REQUEST AN EXTENSION OF TIME, OR THAT THE ITEM BE POSTPONED TO A FUTURE TIME OR DATE.**

### RECORDING MEETING MINUTES

Meeting minutes are a permanent, legal record of the PARENT COUNCIL meeting. It is the responsibility of the PARENT COUNCIL Secretary (or designate) to record the meeting as it proceeds. Minutes should include what was done, not what was said. It must include the name of the group, date, time and location of the meeting, a list of all individuals present including PARENT COUNCIL members who are absent or have sent regrets.

The body of the minutes should include the approval or amendment of the agenda as presented, the approval or amendment of the meeting minutes from the previous meeting, acceptance of the Treasurer's report, motions made recorded verbatim (word for word), whether carried or not, action items to be undertaken including the person(s) responsible, and a list of the correspondence, reports, and documents presented at the meeting.

Meeting discussions should be recorded as a brief and objective summary of the key points made during the discussion. The entire and exact conversation of “who said what” is unnecessary. Ideally, meeting minutes should be sent to membership in advance of the next scheduled PARENT COUNCIL meeting, in order to give members time to review what was discussed.

**NAMES SHOULD ONLY EVER BE RECORDED IN THE ATTENDANCE SECTION OF THE MINUTES AND WHEN A MOTION OR ACTION ITEM IS RECORDED. THEY ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR A SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE.**

## **F. VOTING, MOTIONS AND ACTION ITEMS**

### **VOTING MEMBERS**

The constitution should outline what the minimum and maximum numbers are for voting members on a PARENT COUNCIL. For example, if the constitution states that there should be a minimum 5 and a maximum 15 voting members, then that is the number range that you would follow. **Please note that if you only have 10 parents wanting to hold a vote that does not mean that you necessarily have to fill the other 5 voting spots.**

**IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PARENT COUNCILS TO CAREFULLY CONSIDER WHO WILL CARRY VOTING RIGHTS ON THE PARENT COUNCIL.**

Typically, it is not appropriate for the principal, teacher representative, or trustee representative to hold a vote, as they can be perceived as having undue influence over the vote. However, PARENT COUNCIL recognizes the need for a school community to have autonomy to make these local decisions to address concerns such as staff of the school or division who also have children in the school, team building, and other unique situations. PARENT COUNCIL recommends that if school staff is able to hold a vote, that PARENT COUNCILs take the time to review their constitutions and discuss questions such as:

- How many staff are permitted to sit on a PARENT COUNCIL, and in what Parent Councility?
- Are they permitted to sit on the Executive?
- Can staff members equal or outnumber the parents on the council who are not employees of the division or school?

Coming to a decision together to address topics such as this will help to address any concerns that may come up in the future relating to the topic.

## WHO IS ALLOWED TO VOTE AT A PARENT COUNCIL MEETING???

**The first** is that every parent of a child attending the school has the right to vote in all matters related to the PARENT COUNCIL. This method encourages participation by individuals who may not normally attend the PARENT COUNCIL and promotes inclusive communities. However, it runs the risk of having a stacked vote, where participants may not have the full understanding of the issue – only a position based on friendships or personal feelings.

**The second** recognizes Voting Members as having a formal position on the PARENT COUNCIL. A Voting Member would be expected to attend meetings regularly so as to have a full understanding of items being voted on and helps to ensure there is always quorum at the meeting. However, some groups experience difficulty recruiting the number of people required to fill the positions or run the risk of having other parents feeling left out when they are unable to vote on issues of importance to them.

**In both cases** ALL parents within a school community are allowed a voice. The only question is whether they all have a vote or not. This is a local decision that must be made by the PARENT COUNCIL in consultation with the school and school division, to ensure they are addressing the community's needs and philosophy to the best of its ability.

If a voting member of PARENT COUNCIL needs to leave their position for any reason during the year, the PARENT COUNCIL has the option of filling that spot for the duration of the year. The individual would typically be voted in during a PARENT COUNCIL meeting. PARENT COUNCIL does, however, recommend reviewing your policy or constitution in advance of holding a vote. Whatever the constitution states would be the rule to abide by.

Serious consideration needs to be made by anyone holding a vote on a PARENT COUNCIL. These considerations would include:

- Voting members need to attend meetings regularly
- Only voting members have the ability to put forth motions and to second motions
- Voting members and non-voting members are able to speak and be involved in all discussions – except in the case of in-camera discussions
- Voting members must understand that non-attendance affects quorum

*ALL parents within a school community are allowed a VOICE. PARENT COUNCILs must consult with their school and parent community to determine voting privileges for their community.*

## QUORUM

Quorum is the minimum number of voting members that must be present in order for voting to take place. Quorum is normally considered to be more than half of the voting council members. If there is no quorum at the meeting, then the meeting becomes an “informational” one where discussions can be held but no motions, formal votes, allocations of funds or expenditures can be decided on.

Ex officio members (such as a principal, teacher or trustee representative) are not counted in quorum, unless they are permitted voting rights.

**PARENT COUNCILS OFTEN STRUGGLE WITH A LACK OF QUORUM AT MEETINGS AND HOW TO ADDRESS THE ABILITY TO CONDUCT BUSINESS WHEN THIS HAPPENS. THERE ARE CERTAIN STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED AND MAPC MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT MAPC TO CONSIDER SOME OPTIONS WHICH MAY WORK IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**

## CONDUCTING VOTE

New PARENT COUNCILS need to decide how voting will take place within their respective groups. It should be agreed that all votes pass either by a majority (where a vote has the majority of the group in favour or against passing it) or by consensus (where the whole group must be in agreement with the direction that a vote takes). A majority vote should be conducted either by ballot or a show of hands – it is a local decision and there is no “right” way.

### **Consensus also differs from Formal Voting**

Formal voting requires a motion with a seconder so that the topic is put in front of the PARENT COUNCIL to discuss and explore until members are ready to make a decision. The decision is made through a formal vote. PARENT COUNCIL members vote in favour of or against what is being presented to them. The result is then recorded and may result in an action item that is noted in the minutes.

**NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS AND HOW THEY VOTED ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR INCLUSION IN THE MINUTES.**

Consensus voting is slightly different and less formal. A discussion may be held, facilitated by the PARENT COUNCIL chair. They may “go around the table” to see where members stand on the issue and if there is a general consensus (agreement) the PARENT COUNCIL chair can say that the PARENT COUNCIL supports the decision and there is no need for a formal vote to be held.

**PARENT COUNCIL STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THAT ANY MOTION CONCERNING FINANCES REMAIN FORMAL, TO PROTECT THE PAC FROM ANY LIABILITY**

## MAKING MOTIONS AND SECONDING MOTIONS

When a proposed item comes up on the agenda, a voting member would then move the motion. (“I move that we spend up to \$500 on books for the school library.”). A seconder then supports the item presented (“I second the motion.”). It is critical that the secretary record the full name of the individuals involved in making the motion! The Chair would then open the motion for discussion by the members present. There may be questions or comments needing to be addressed prior to a vote being held. If the Chair feels that the discussion has run its course, he/she calls for a vote. He/she asks first for all those in favour, and next all those opposed – and the motion is then recorded as either adopted or defeated. There is no need to record numbers – unless a PARENT COUNCIL’s practice requires it to do so.

Reports such as the Treasurer’s report are usually accepted in the minutes and are filed. If your PARENT COUNCIL uses an auditor or your school division’s policy dictates such, an Auditor’s report must be formally adopted.

Motions to approve, adopt or amend (correct) the agenda and meeting minutes are also required, but can be stated by anyone on the PARENT COUNCIL.

*HINT!*  
**PARENT COUNCILs**  
*may want to create Motion Forms to assist in the accurate recording of motions made during meetings*

## ABSTAINING FROM A VOTE

Abstentions (not participating in a vote) should only ever be allowed when a PARENT COUNCIL member is in a position of Conflict of Interest, or when they were not privy to vital information regarding the item being voted on. Abstentions should never be used as a means of non-committal for fear of offending a fellow PARENT COUNCIL member. A secret ballot should be considered if this is the case. Abstentions should not be recorded unless a person specifically requests that this be done.

## ASSIGNING ACTIONS

The end result of a voted item usually results in an action. This means that someone needs to do something! Sometimes, decisions are made and quickly forgotten by the next meeting – especially if the meeting minutes do not come out to our members in a timely manner.

It is important to make a note of any items or discussions resulting in an action to be taken. For example, *“Follow up with teachers on their wish list – PARENT COUNCIL Chair”* This helps individuals remember what was decided and what needs to be done and who is the person responsible.

## **G. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)**

All PARENT COUNCILs are expected to hold an annual general meeting (AGM) once during the school year which is open to all parents and interested stakeholders in the school community. The AGM is an opportunity for all members, both voting and non-voting, to learn about the PARENT COUNCIL and what it has accomplished over the past year.

### **WHY SHOULD A PARENT COUNCIL HOLD AN AGM**

The business of the Annual General Meeting  
is to:

- Receive reports of activities conducted during the past year including a presentation of annual financial statements;
- Present and approve any Constitutional changes;
- Adopt a budget for the coming year;
- Receive reports from executive and other committees;
- Appoint voting members and elect executive positions; and
- Share or transact any other business requiring the input from members.

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### **WHO ATTENDS THE AGM?**

All parents who have children attending the school may participate in the AGM, in addition to the principal and teacher representative(s) as ex-officios, and anyone else who is interested in the school community and is recognized within your constitution as “community members”. This is also the time that new parents or school members wishing to become involved with the PARENT COUNCIL should come forth to learn more.



## **WHO VOTES AT THE AGM?**

Any parent attending the AGM should carry a vote, but check your constitution as there may be restrictions (e.g. one vote per family).

## **WHO CHAIRS THE AGM?**

The AGM is usually led by the PARENT COUNCIL chair or, in their absence, the Vice Chair.

## **WHAT NOTICE OF THE AGM IS GIVEN TO PARENTS AND PARTNERS IN THE COMMUNITY?**

PARENT COUNCIL recommends that advance notice of the upcoming AGM be presented to the community with enough time to review any constitutional changes or material that will be presented for input. A good rule of thumb is four weeks, if a group has the ability to post or circulate materials needing to be considered or reviewed. In some school divisions, an ad may be placed in the local newspaper on behalf of the PARENT COUNCIL to advertise its AGM.

The principal should be consulted regarding the date and any other information that would be presented to the participants so they are prepared to address any questions from their perspective as administrator.

## **HOW DO WE PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES?**

Constitutional changes should be circulated to members ahead of time so they can review the information and be informed about proposed changes. It's a good idea to request any grammatical or spelling errors be presented in advance (with a specific deadline) to avoid using time at the AGM for editing purposes.

It's a good idea to show the original wording, the proposed change in wording and the rationale or reason for the change of wording for members to consider in advance of an AGM. Have copies available at the AGM as well. This will often help to save time.

## **HOW DO WE CONDUCT ELECTIONS FOR EXECUTIVE POSITIONS?**

Start by asking an impartial person to conduct the election. Often, the principal, teacher representative, or another community member will take on this role. A director of PARENT COUNCIL may be available to assist as well, when available.

A "call for nominations from the floor" for each position, starting with the Chairperson's

position is made. This will be followed by the Vice Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer.

The person nominated must be asked if they “agree to let their name stand” and a nomination must be supported by a mover and a seconder.

If they are the only person nominated and a request has been asked three times for further nominations for that position (as recommended by Robert’s Rules of Order) then the person is declared as being “acclaimed” to that position.

If there is more than one nomination for a position, an election must be held. This can be done either by ballot or by a show of hands with all who are present at the AGM. PARENT COUNCIL recommends that this be done by ballot in order to ensure individuals are voting what they believe, rather than what they wish to display. Decide on a process in advance.

***NOTE: SOMETIMES IT MAKES SENSE TO ALLOW THE CANDIDATES TO SPEAK FOR A MOMENT OR TWO PRIOR TO THE SECOND VOTE SO THAT THEY CAN LET THE GROUP KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM AND WHY THEY ARE INTERESTED IN ASSUMING THAT ROLE ON THE PARENT COUNCIL.***

## **HOW DO WE DETERMINE VOTING MEMBERS?**

All parents and community members are welcome at the AGM, but refer to your constitution if there are any additional pieces which need to be considered when reviewing voting practices.

## **WHAT IS A PROXY VOTE ?**

A proxy vote is a vote from a voting member of the PARENT COUNCIL that is given to someone else to cast. This is usually done when a member is unable to attend the AGM and they still want their vote to be considered. A PARENT COUNCIL should determine its proxy vote process well in advance of its AGM, in order to ensure transparency and fairness for members.

PARENT COUNCIL, allows its membership to complete a form that shows that they have given their vote (and direction to vote) to someone else to cast at its AGM.

## **WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE MINUTES AFTER THE AGM?**

The minutes of the meeting are recorded and presented back to the PARENT COUNCIL for review and approval as draft minutes only. The AGM minutes will be presented at the next AGM (one year later) to be formally adopted by membership, with any changes or amendments recorded and referenced in the current year.

## **H. WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS**

People don't always work well together, get along, or act appropriately. This is human nature when groups of people interact with each other. Every individual comes with a different set of communication styles, experiences, understandings, and perceptions which can lead to conflict as a natural process in life. Acknowledging this and creating a process to address these moments can help a group deal with conflict in a respectful and effective way. PARENT COUNCIL also encourages PARENT COUNCILs to learn about the school and divisional Code of Conduct so they are familiar with the behaviour that is expected of adults working in the school community.



## WHAT DO WE DO WHEN...?

### *What should I do when a PARENT COUNCIL member acts disrespectfully?*

- Remain calm. Most actions are not meant as being disrespectful, but can often be seen as such. Ask yourself, “Where is this coming from”? If you don’t know, ask. Remain respectful at all times.
- Identify the behaviour that is being seen as disrespectful, don’t focus on the personality.
- Set up ground rules for your meetings that all members can agree to, such as no name calling, yelling, or swearing, and to be conscious of unspoken body language which may be interpreted as aggressive or threatening.
- Remind members to stick to the ground rules.
- Have a plan of action for ongoing behaviour issues that is agreed upon by the PARENT COUNCIL and administrator in advance. This might include pausing or stopping a meeting or asking someone to leave if behaviour gets out of hand.

**REMEMBER – ALL ADULTS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO IDENTIFY BAD BEHAVIOUR THAT IS IMPAIRING THE WORK OF THE PARENT COUNCIL BY MAKING ANYONE FEEL UNWELCOME OR UNWANTED. WORK WITH YOUR PARENT COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATOR TO AGREE UPON CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF BEHAVIOUR SO EVERYONE HAS THE SAME OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE.**

### *What do I do when a PARENT COUNCIL member seems to have a “hidden agenda”?*

Sometimes, individuals become involved in a PARENT COUNCIL with a plan to change something that is of personal interest to them. It may be a concern with a particular student or teacher, or a personal concern that is not appropriate for the PARENT COUNCIL to address. Knowing the role and responsibility your PARENT COUNCIL plays in the school community, as well as school and divisional processes and where to find them often helps to redirect the individual to the appropriate channels. Sometimes, concerns that may be personally based can be answered in generalities, which may help the individual to be heard. An example of this might include a parent who comes to a PARENT COUNCIL meeting to ask about what punishment a child received who was bullying their child. While the specific child can’t be discussed at a PARENT COUNCIL meeting, the PARENT COUNCIL may want to coordinate a “Bullying Awareness” meeting, where the principal, division, and professionals experienced in bullying can come together to develop community understanding of policies and process, as well as learn about programs parents and PARENT COUNCILs can explore together.

### *You can also try:*

- Directing the individual to the appropriate rules and policies for the PARENT COUNCIL, school, or division. If you don’t know where these are, promise to look into it and follow up with them at a later date.
- Using any of the strategies listed previously (see “How do I deal with disrespectful behaviour?”)

- Getting guidance and support from the school administration as necessary

***How can I ensure that everyone feels safe and comfortable enough to contribute something at the meeting without fear or ridicule?***

It's important for every PARENT COUNCIL to take time to discuss together how the group will engage with each other in a respectful manner. Setting up some basic meeting rules and beliefs is often helpful. These might include:

- Respecting everyone's opinion – even when it differs from our own
- Not making disrespectful comments or behaviour in response to a suggestion or idea presented by another member
- Identifying bad behaviour when it shows itself. Focus on the behaviour NOT the individual!

**IF MATTERS BECOME VOLATILE AND ORDER CANNOT BE RESTORED, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO CONSIDER \* CALLING FOR A TIME OUT FOR TEMPER TO COOL DOWN, \* LEAVING THE ROOM/MEETING IF NECESSARY, \* ENDING THE MEETING EARLY, OR \*ENLISTING THE HELP OF THE PRINCIPAL OR DIVISION IF SAFETY IS A CONCERN**

***How do I work with members who are not respecting the rules the PARENT COUNCIL agreed to?***

Start by revisiting and restating the ground rules established by your PARENT COUNCIL.

It sometimes helps to meet with the individual in question privately first, to ask about the behaviour and what they feel can be done to address it. This is often an area that the administrator may be helpful in providing assistance, if you are not comfortable doing so on your own.

***You can also:***

Refer to any of the strategies outlined above and plan a course of action in advance whenever possible.

***Does the principal have the responsibility to run PARENT COUNCIL meetings?***

The relationship between a PARENT COUNCIL and the school principal is recognized as being a respectful partnership which provides mutual support, resource and advice. Principals participate on a PARENT COUNCIL as ex-officio members, meaning that they are there by nature of their position. They are responsible for everything that goes on in a school community. They should not be setting the agenda, but could be included in determining items to include on the agenda as a matter of respect for both the PARENT COUNCIL and the school.

It is not appropriate for any school official to carry a vote on PARENT COUNCIL matters, as there may be a perception of undue influence being used. However, if the PARENT COUNCIL should

decide that it wishes for any or all of them to carry a vote, it should ensure that it has strong conflict of interest policies, policies as to whether they can occupy executive positions or not, and other guidelines to address any potential conflict which may occur, contained within the constitution. This should also include the allowable number of seats that might be allowed for staff of the school and/or division to occupy (if they are parents of students attending).

While principals should not be running a PARENT COUNCIL, it is important to realize that if the PARENT COUNCIL is negatively impacting the school community, they can suspend the operation of the PARENT COUNCIL until the matter can be cleared up and addressed. This is an option that should only ever be utilized as a last resort, and PARENT COUNCIL would encourage PARENT COUNCILs and

principals to visit a variety of other resources before coming to this decision, of which PARENT COUNCIL might be one.

### ***When Hot Button Topics Are Discussed:***

**Be informed:** Know what is happening around your school community and division. Keep a solid line of communication with administration and teachers. Listen to what your parents are saying and working with. Be aware of student concerns and wishes.

**Be proactive:** Whenever possible, focus on prevention rather than reaction to concerns in your school community.

**Be respectful:** Work together with staff and administration to deal with concerns; especially those of a sensitive or confidential nature. Understand that concerns might be confidential. Knowing the chain of command or concern protocol will help when problems arise. Always start the conversation with the teacher and move upwards from there.

**Be inclusive:** Look for participation by all members of your school communities; new families, newcomers to the community, non-traditional families, students and others. If they need to be at the table to provide input and feedback, ensure that their voice is included and heard.

**Be professional:** Act in an ethical and honourable manner at all times. Treat every person and every opinion with respect.

**Be thorough:** Get all the information needed in order to make informed decisions. Hear all sides of the story or issue. Deal with facts and not emotions whenever possible and be compassionate and honest in all dealings within your school community and with each other.

self-interest.

### **Question - Spending Funds on the PARENT COUNCIL - Is it okay?**

Yes, but make sure to discuss it as a group and explore what benefits the PARENT COUNCIL will experience. Follow your constitution guidelines regarding motions for expenditures and check your decision against the Universal Code of Conduct.

## **FUTURE PLANS INCLUDE; CONSTITUTIONS, FINANCIALS AND FUNDRAISING TO NAME A FEW!**

Modules are available to all PARENT COUNCIL members upon request. We will have a board director or PARENT COUNCIL volunteer come to your PARENT COUNCIL to provide this training and guidance to your members. PARENT COUNCIL may also be available to come to your AGM to assist with elections as an impartial observer.

## **FINANCIALS AND FUNDRAISING**

### **A. FINANCIALS**

Many people are intimidated by the thought of responsibility for finances other than their own. The best way to help ease the stress is to familiarize yourself with the process required. First, does your PARENT COUNCIL have a job description for the position? Does your school or division have requirements which need to be considered for financial reporting with PARENT COUNCILs? Will your PARENT COUNCIL support professional development learning opportunities for you? Does your PARENT COUNCIL require annual audits for its financials?

Second, if there is a clear reporting system in place—use it! If not—or if it needs updating—develop one in consultation with your PARENT COUNCIL, School Administrator, and School Division. (Your school division contact would most likely be the Secretary-Treasurer or School Business Official).

Always remember, all governance groups are bound by the Duty of Loyalty, Duty of Care and Duty of Obedience. If you can demonstrate that you have acted in the best interests of all three, you will be fine.

Relax and enjoy the experience! Do your best and contact PARENT COUNCIL with any additional questions you may have.

## **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Your PARENT COUNCIL has the ability to fundraise and secure funding for projects or events to support your school. It is very important that you understand the responsibilities you would have in order to do this and to account for those funds and/or purchases or costs. Being accountable to your membership (the administration and parents/families of your school community) includes ensuring that funds are spent for their intended purpose and financial reporting is accurate, which protects both the group and the individual responsible for financial record keeping. This also demonstrates a need for frequent and open communication to your school community.

***It is very important to understand and comply with your division's policies in regards to financial policies, budgeting, and reporting – where they exist.***

## **ROLE OF THE TREASURER**

The role of the Treasurer should be outlined within your constitution. Typically, the treasurer is:

- One of the designated signing authorities for all PARENT COUNCIL related banking matters
- Responsible for maintaining accurate records (such as a ledger or electronic bookkeeping) for all financial transactions including recording and filing receipts, cheques, and deposits
- Responsible for creating and providing a financial report at PARENT COUNCIL meetings
- Available to assist with creating a PARENT COUNCIL budget on an annual basis

## **BUDGETS**

Budgets should be kept simple to ensure clear understanding to the wide variety of people involved with the PARENT COUNCIL. They consist of funds coming into the PARENT COUNCIL and funds being spent by the PARENT COUNCIL which support school based events and projects. They are created and approved by the PARENT COUNCIL – with input from the Treasurer - and maintained by the Treasurer with an update provided at each PARENT COUNCIL meeting.

## **FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Financial reports are created to ensure that the PARENT COUNCIL understands its financials and what it is fundraising for. These reports should be made available in written form although some PARENT COUNCILs may choose to have them available



as both a written and accompanying verbal report. Remember, the entire PARENT COUNCIL is responsible to understand its financials. If you have a question – ask!

## **AUDITS OR REVIEWS**

PARENT COUNCILs will often conduct an audit or financial review annually to identify where monies are being held, reconcile accounts (i.e. make sure they balance) and to prove that monies were used appropriately. Check with your division whether it requires an annual audit for PARENT COUNCILs in the division and whether it can provide assistance to PARENT COUNCILs to coordinate one.

## **ACCOUNTS AND SIGNING AUTHORITY**

Some PARENT COUNCILs have an account set up through the school. Others have their own account set up in a local bank or credit union. Good accounting practices suggest that there be three signers on the account with any two signers being necessary to sign any cheque or to remove funds. An important tip to remember – ensure that signing authorities and process is included in your constitution. Typically, those signers would (or could) be the Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer. PARENT COUNCIL does not recommend having a school staff member as a signer, but recognizes that it is a local decision. Check with your school division about any policies it may have to address signers.



## **ALLOCATING FUNDS**

PARENT COUNCILs are not revenue generating groups. They do not fundraise just to raise money. They fundraise for specific projects, events or use. When PARENT COUNCILs consider various projects, they determine which will be supported through fundraising or soliciting donations and then, those funds are given directly to that project and cannot be spent on any other. If there are surplus funds after a project is completed, the PARENT COUNCIL can decide where to reassign those funds (eg. to the lunch program or to purchase books for the school library). This reassignment of funds must be communicated to the school community.