



Ontario Catholic School  
Trustees' Association

**Response to Consultation Paper**

**ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

February 20, 2009



# Discussion Guide 1:

## Modernizing the *Education Act*

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As publicly-funded school organizations the four educational systems in Ontario share many responsibilities in common. They are all to comply with the Education Act, and all the Regulations made under that Act. Their function is the education of all the students committed to their care. However, two factors differentiate these four systems – language and religion. The governance of the English Catholic system must reflect the Gospel values on which its ethos and Mission depend. Those Gospel values hold Catholic Trustees and Directors of Education to a level of conduct that is rooted in the Servant Leadership of Jesus Christ.

In addition to carrying out those many responsibilities that they share with public school board trustees, Catholic trustees, as representatives of the Catholic community, must ensure that the mission of Catholic education, as part of the broader mission of the Church, is fulfilled. Because of this unique and distinctive mission, Catholic school trustees honour a set of additional expectations that have been set for them by their Church, by the Catholic community, by the traditional understanding of the Catholic trustee's role. For the Catholic trustee, the Church's mission to proclaim, teach and witness to the Gospel finds its particular expression in the mission of the Catholic school. And the mission of the Catholic school is to evangelize youth so that they will become not only well-developed persons and good citizens but also faithful disciples of Christ and witnesses to the faith.

### 1) For what should school boards be accountable?

Accountable for:

- Excellence in student achievement
- Effective and efficient use of allocated funding
- Communication to the community

Catholic school boards are also accountable for:

- Monitoring student realization of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations
- Ensuring that the traditional Catholic partnership of home, school and parish is maintained.

Accountable to:

- Their electors
- The people of Ontario through the Minister of Education

**2) What are the appropriate roles and responsibilities of:**

**a) the board?**

- Ensuring that administrative structures, operational procedures and employment practices reflect the Board Mission and Vision.
- Setting budget priorities.
- Providing governance and policies inspired by the values and traditions of the Catholic faith and the principles of democratic and accountable governance.
- Articulating the system's Catholic mission and vision.
- Appointing, holding accountable and supporting a Director of Education who is an authentic and effective Catholic leader.
- Providing Christian Stewardship of human and financial resources
- Implementing religious education programming and faith formation activities for students.
- Establishing a climate supportive of faith community
- Monitoring student realization of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations.
- Building significant partnerships within and beyond the Catholic community in support of Catholic education.

**b) the Chair of the Board?**

- As first among equals, is a link between the trustees and the Director of Education.
- Provides leadership to board colleagues and acts as spokesperson for the board on policy matters. The Board Chair represents the Board of Trustees to the broader community.
- Works with the director of education to set agendas and establish priorities.
- Have an excellent working relationship with the director of education. The relationship between the Chair and the director of education should reflect a mutual understanding of their respective roles at the Board.
- Ensures necessary in-service is provided to trustees.
- Signatory of the Board of Trustees (for minutes, etc.).
- Presides over meetings.
- Oversees certain expenditures as per board policy.
- Addresses other duties as per board policy and practice.

### c) individual trustees?

- A school trustee is a member of a team (the Board of Trustees).
- Only the Board of Trustees has the authority to make decisions or to take action; individual trustees do not have this authority.
- *From Educating Together (A Handbook for Trustees, 2006)*  
Once the board of trustees has voted, individual trustee members are legally bound by the majority decision, regardless of whether they supported it during the debate or voted in opposition. Although they may not agree with the decision, trustees should be able to explain the rationale for the policy and ensure that it is understood, implemented, and monitored. Trustees who wish to explain a school board decision should do so in this context. They may say that they are opposed to a decision, and may support this with their political opinion, but they are expected to do so respectfully.
- Successful trustees understand the need to balance the governance role with the representative role, participating in decision-making that benefits the whole board while representing the interests of his/her constituents.
- Trustees act as community representatives at various levels. At the local level, trustees work on behalf of the community and must consider the unique needs of that community when deciding what position to take on issues before the Board of Trustees.
- Trustees fulfill a liaison role in the community by helping community members to navigate board processes.
- Act as conduit to and from the community (liaison role)
- Catholic school trustees are advocates for publicly funded Catholic education in the community.

### d) the Director of Education?

- Assists in the development of the school board's vision mission and policies.
- Implements the school board's vision, mission and policies, as approved by the board.
- Holds school staff accountable for student achievement.
- Provides support and direction to school staff.
- Manages school board organization.
- Implements the board's strategic plan, as approved by the Board of Trustees.
- Works with the Chair to develop system priorities for the consideration of the Board.
- Ensures all trustees have full information for decision making
- Implements Ministry of Education directives.
- Communicates with the community and at times the media.
- Is responsible for maintaining Catholic ethos in the system.

**3) Should Directors of Education have a dual reporting relationship – to the board and to the Minister as was the case not long ago in Ontario? If so, how should any conflicts between the mandates from the Minister and a school board be resolved?**

- The Director of Education has the responsibility of implementing Board and Ministry policies.
- The Director of Education does have a dual reporting relationship and this puts the director in a difficult situation when conflicting directions are given.
- The first responsibility of the Director of Education is to the Board.

## Discussion Guide 2:

### Identifying Effective Governance Practices

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#### 1) What is effective governance by elected school boards?

Effective governance for a Catholic school board must be based on policies inspired by the values and traditions of the Catholic faith and the principles of democratic and accountable governance. Catholic school trustees must:

- operate according to the model of democratic and accountable governance that integrates and embodies Catholic values and traditions
- develop policies critical to achieving the board's mission and vision as informed by Church teaching and gospel values
- establish the parameters for administrative operations and accountability
- ensure that all administrative operations and procedures are based on this vision of Catholic education and designed to achieve its realization.
- Implement Ministry directives in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching and Gospel values.
- ensure that board meetings are conducted in an open and transparent manner
- be responsive to the needs of the Catholic community.

#### 2) What would enhance the ability of boards to address local needs within the context of provincially mandated priorities?

The emphasis on provincially mandated priorities has increased in recent years to the point that there are fewer and fewer opportunities for local school boards to implement priorities to reflect local needs. The ability of school boards to address local needs would be enhanced by:

- having greater input into the development of provincial priorities
- having regular access to local MPPs on educational matters
- having sufficient flexibility within the funding formula to allow allocation of grant dollars to meet local priorities
- ensuring effective liaison between board staff and Ministry officials
- having adequate and ongoing funding for new provincial initiatives.

**3) What governance practices have you seen that work well?**

Most school boards in Ontario have in place effective governance practices. The specific model of governance used varies considerably from board to board as a result of board history and culture.

No one model of governance should be mandated for all school boards, as many different forms of governance have proven to be and can continue to be effective.

**4) What practices and policies support effective governance?**

Effective governance is the responsibility of each and every trustee. School boards are complex organizations that involve multiple relationships both within the school community but also with the broader community. Practices which support good governance that garners public trust would include the following:

- the development of a clear set of by-laws to address those matters that need clarification
- regular review of by-laws
- an expectation of respect in all relationships
- respect for minority views
- community engagement
- clearly defined roles for the Board of Trustees, for individual trustees, and for the Director of Education
- regular board self evaluation
- training for performance appraisals of Directors of Education
- regular, ongoing orientation and in-service for trustees
- frequent reviews of all board policies

**5) Should there be a provincial code of conduct/ethics for school board members or should such a code be developed locally? How should codes of conduct/ethics be enforced?**

School boards should have the option of accepting a code of conduct developed provincially by the Ministry OR one provided by the provincial or national trustee association OR one that is developed based on first principles that reflect local traditions and culture.

In all cases, the Board of Trustees should approve the code of conduct that will guide them.

The process to be used where there is a breach of the code shall be developed locally and shall be enshrined into the code of conduct as approved by the Board of Trustees.

Compliance is the responsibility of each trustee and board policies should be consistent with the code of conduct. The concept of “enforcement” should be de-emphasized.

All trustees, including the student trustee, should be held to the same standard – *refer to Robert’s Rules of Order*. The code of conduct should be part of any in-service for new trustees.

**6) Should boards be required to establish and implement specific policies and procedures to enhance good governance? What would these be?**

Good governance should be a goal of all school boards.

- Policies should not be mandatory, but could be considered by boards who wish to commit to develop specific policies and procedures.
- There should be clear, enforceable board by-laws that are available to the general public.
- There should be a process at each board that articulates a form of self-evaluation, system performance, achievement of goals, and adherence to policies.
- Clearly delineated roles and responsibilities are essential to good governance.
- All boards should have a meaningful and constructive performance appraisal process in place for the Director of Education as one factor in a good governance model.

## Discussion Guide 3: Supporting School Board Leaders

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### 1) What type of training might be offered to school board members?

- OCSTA supports professional development that would assist trustees in achieving a comprehensive level of understanding (both as an individual and as a member of a board) around the issues and topics relevant to good governance and student achievement.
- Trustees should receive in-service around their accountability regarding:
  - service to their constituency
  - staff and students in the system
  - provincial government priorities, and
  - expectations of the general public.
- In the 1997 government report, The Road Ahead II specific types of training were recommended and described and are listed below:
  1. Training activities must include both orientation and follow-up sessions.
  2. All trustees, including those with considerable experience in the role must receive training in:
    - leadership;
    - change management;
    - strategic development;
    - parliamentary procedure;
    - the Education Act and Regulations;
    - data analysis; and
    - performance appraisals of Directors of Education.

Cost of training to be covered by the Ministry of Education.

3. Training must be readily accessible.
4. Training must be planned and delivered cooperatively. – The Ministry of Education and Training, district school boards, trustee associations, and supervisory officer associations, all have roles to play.

Specific types of training should be “practical and related to the challenges faced by trustees” and should address the following “major” topics:

- i) Public education and the responsibilities of boards
- ii) Orientation to district school board management, including statistical information (numbers of students, staff, schools, etc.) and the sharing of information about the policies, practices and the organizational culture of the board.
- iii) Operational practices of school boards
  - a. the conduct of meetings and rules of order;
  - b. policy development procedures;
  - c. processes in group dynamics (consensus building, conflict resolution, problem solving, etc.);
  - d. processes for public consultation and communication and;
  - e. school board governance models.
- iv) Roles of and expectations for individual trustees
  - a. The Role of Catholic Trustees
  - b. The role of Native trustees
  - c. The role of Student Trustees
  - d. Effective communication strategies, including protocols for teleconferencing and videoconferencing
  - e. Interactions with the public including procedures for responding to public concerns
  - f. The roles of board chairs and vice-chairs
  - g. The committee structure and related expectations for members
  - h. Roles and responsibilities related to the particular nature of the board (whether it is Catholic or secular, French or English, rural or urban, etc.)
  - i. Given current restraints around resources, community partnerships should be explored to identify cost effective means of providing professional development opportunities for trustees. Some boards are forming productive relationships with post secondary institutions. Catholic universities and colleges should be pursued as potential partners in providing programs to support Catholic school trustee formation.

## **2) Should training be mandatory?**

Full trustee attendance at in-service sessions should be strongly encouraged and facilitated in whatever way feasible.

Trustee orientation sessions should be offered at the beginning of every electoral term and trustee associations and school boards should work cooperatively and collaboratively to support the involvement of every trustee in these orientation sessions.

Videoconferencing capabilities should be researched to determine whether or not the use of such technology would help to support full participation in trustee orientations and other important training opportunities.

**3) What type of ongoing support can be offered to enable board members and Chairs to continue to build the capacity of elected boards? How could this support be delivered?**

Provincial school board associations, national school board associations, and other education sector bodies offer regular professional development opportunities for school board trustees.

Best practices in delivering appropriate training in school board governance, public communications, etc., using a combination of the most effective video/computer technology (web-conferencing) and face-to-face meeting opportunities should be shared among these associations and government bodies in order to offer the best local and long-distance training opportunities for school board trustees.

The Ministry of Education should provide funding to boards to support in-service sessions.

**4) What supports should be offered to Directors of Education to assist them in providing effective leadership for governance functions?**

Professional development opportunities for Directors of Education in regard to governance functions should be similar to that offered to trustees.

Mentorship should be incorporated into the professional development program offered to Directors of Education.

## Discussion Guide 4:

### Strengthening School Board Accountability

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**1) To what standards should boards be held accountable in the areas of literacy and numeracy, and graduation rates?**

Student success and increased student performance are key priorities for school boards.

The Ministry of Education will set standards for what students are required to know, but boards, through their Director and supervisory officers will be accountable for ensuring that these standards are achieved by students. Ultimately, school boards are held accountable by the electorate for performance and outcomes.

Boards are responsible for ensuring, through the Director of Education, that a comprehensive plan is designed, monitored and revised as necessary to ensure that all students are provided with the instruction and services required to help them to achieve their maximum potential. Boards are also responsible for allocating funding in a manner that supports this plan, within their provincially determined allocation.

Boards are responsible for ensuring that resources are distributed fairly across the school system, in order to guarantee equity of educational opportunity for all students.

Catholic school boards use the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations to guide the education and faith formation of students in Ontario Catholic schools and the preparation of curriculum.

The life roles, knowledge, skills and attitudes outlined in this document describe the distinctive expectations that the Catholic community has for graduates of Catholic secondary schools.

These expectations are based on research which identified current and future educational goals and priorities across the province and enhance the expectations of the Ontario Ministry of Education as outlined in provincial curriculum documents.

**2) What other student outcomes and implementation measures should be specified in regulation in order to ensure quality of education?**

None.

**3) How should school boards demonstrate accountability for student outcomes?**

Boards must report on their performance to their communities and to the Ministry of Education on a regular basis.

Annually, boards should review their EQAO results and based on those results set objectives for the year ahead. These priorities should then be reflected in the boards' budget decisions.

The annual Report of the Director of Education, a public document, reports on the performance of students and includes EQAO results from across the system.

This information should also be on the Board website.

Schools, through their school principals and in consultation with school councils, should develop, monitor and report on annual school improvement plans.

**4) Should the Minister intervene if a board is systematically underperforming and failing to meet a provincial standard? At what points and in what manner should intervention occur? What stages should be involved and what supports should be made available to a board in such a situation?**

Any Ministry intervention must involve partnership, collaboration and dialogue between the board and the Ministry, who together agree on a strategy to address an identified problem. Provincial support could include sharing best practices and possibly additional funds.

The Ministry must ensure that any additional funds provided to improve student outcomes (or other initiatives) is made available on an equitable basis to all school boards, not just those who are not meeting provincial standards. Boards whose students are performing above provincial standards may well have re-assigned funds internally and forgone other projects in order to improve student achievement. These efforts must be recognized and financially supported.

Overall provincial funding allocations to boards must be adequate and equitable.

**5) Are there mitigating factors that should be considered in contexts where standards are not met?**

There is great diversity within and between the communities served by school boards.

Many factors, including socio-economic considerations, immigration patterns, demographic shifts, or drastic changes in employment levels in a community can impact students' performance.

Availability of specialist teachers, community resources for families or top-level health care facilities can all have an impact on achievement and student outcomes, and must be considered when comparing actual achievement to provincial standards.

School boards must rely on the Ministry of Education to provide the funding required, giving all students the best possible opportunity to meet provincial standards.

## Conclusion

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The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association appreciates the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of our member boards. We respectfully ask to be consulted on any regulatory changes that may result from the recommendations of the Governance Review Committee.