

Bluewater District School Board

School Council Handbook



Parent Involvement Committee

**Prepared by
the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC)
to support School Community Councils**



October 2, 2009

School Council Handbook 2009 - 2010

Dear SCC Chairperson:

Congratulations on becoming the chair of your School Council. Ahead of you is a challenging and exciting time. Remember that you are not alone. Many of us are doing that same role, have done it recently, or have otherwise been involved in a school council or Home and School Association activities. We're the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) of the BWDSB.

We have created this handbook, this guidebook, to help you, perhaps give you an idea or two, or maybe direct you to another reference or resource that might assist or inspire you.

This is the third year the PIC has provided a package of information for SCC chairs. Please take a moment to flip through the document and get a feel for the information that we have included. Or better yet – read the whole thing and mark up the parts that might be of help to you. Refer to it at any time. Please also share this with other council members. Don't forget the "D" work – "delegate."

Many of the PIC members attended the public sessions for the board's "outreach" activities. Information in this manual should help address some of the questions or concerns raised by parents on the role and functioning of SCC's.

Thank you for taking the time to volunteer in your school and we hope that you have a very rewarding year.

On Behalf of the Parent Involvement Committee.

Jim Thorpe
Chair

Table of Contents

1.0 PURPOSE OF SCHOOL COUNCILS	4
2.0 ROLE OF SCC CHAIR	5
3.0 WHEN YOU NEED HELP IN A HURRY	6
4.0 SCHOOL PRINCIPAL – YOUR #1 RESOURCE	7
5.0 BWDSB WEBSITE	8
6.0 SCC - ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION	9
7.0 PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION – ONLY A PHONE CALL AWAY	9
8.0 SCHOOL COUNCILS – A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS	9
9.0 RUNNING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS	10
10.0 CREATING THE AGENDA	11
11.0 HOW TO HANDLE CONFLICT	12
12.0 SCC BY-LAWS	13
13.0 LIABILITY INSURANCE FOR SCHOOL COUNCILS	14
14.0 SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SEAC	14
15.0 SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL – NETWORK MEETINGS	15
16.0 FUNDRAISING AND USE OF FUNDS	15
17.0 PARENT INVOLVEMENT GRANT & IDEAS	15
18.0 PARENTS REACHING OUT GRANT	16

19.0	HANDLING SCC CORRESPONDENCE	18
20.0	BLUEWATER MEDIA RESOURCE CENTRE, LENDING LIBRARY FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS	18
21.0	HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS	19
22.0	ADVOCATING FOR ALL	19
23.0	PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE	19
24.0	WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT	22

1.0 Purpose of School Councils

School councils play a vital role in the education system in the province. They were first recommended in 1994 by the government appointed “Ontario Parent Council.” In January, 1995, the Royal Commission on Learning recommended the creation of “school community councils.” Later that year, the government adopted the recommendation, implementing school councils through policy/programme memorandum No. 122. In 1997, school councils were required by law.

Experience was gained. In 1998, the Education Improvement Commission made additional recommendations. The government consulted some more. In December of 2000, the government passed legislation bringing regulations 612/00 and 613/00 into force. These are the same regulations we are working within today.

Regulation 612:

...confirms the advisory role of school councils and clearly states that their purpose is to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents. This regulation also clarifies the role of school councils and establishes their right to express their views on any issues that are important to them (Ministry Guidebook, p. 2.2).

Regulation 298 (as amended by Ont. Reg. 613.00):

...sets out the duties of principals regarding school councils, in addition to the duties already described in Regulation 298 (Ministry Guidebook, p. 2.2)

Also from the Guidebook:

Both regulations, released under the Education Act, require school boards and principals to solicit views from school councils and report back to school councils on any advice received. They also ensure that all school boards and school principals across the province consult with and respond to their school councils in a consistent manner.

By strengthening school councils and helping them to operate more effectively, school councils will be better able to influence decisions affecting both students’ education and schools themselves. (Ministry Guidebook, p. 2.2)

Take a look at the guidebook. Chapter 3 is about the regulations. The regulations are listed in the Appendix. Why do this? Many of your questions will be answered. AND – when you create or revise your SCC by-laws, it is important to be in compliance with the regulations. They’re the law.

Note: Did you see how seamlessly we move from the word “school council” to “SCC”? Many boards, ours included, refer to school councils as school community councils (SCCs), acknowledging the important connection our schools have to the communities.

Speaking of our board, please look at the board procedure on SCCs. Procedure 1620-D. It is on the website:

- www.bwdsb.on.ca
- About Us
- Board Policies
- Procedures Listings

Note: Board “policies” contain the motherhood statements – important purposes but usually no detail. Board “procedures” contain the detail consistent with the related board policy.

From procedure 1620-D on school councils, please review the following objectives.

Through actions and beliefs Bluewater District School Board promotes the following objectives for School Community Councils:

- a) To improve pupil achievement through the promotion of parental and community participation in the education process.
- b) To act in an advisory capacity to the school principal and where appropriate the Board.
- c) To provide parents and students with a more responsible and active role in education programs and services.
- d) To enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.

Important information on school councils is included in this procedure. It is an important resource for you. Do you see something you would like changed? Write up the suggestion and send it to your trustee. There is a policy committee of the board that reviews board policies and procedures. The review of proposed new policies and procedures, and the review of suggested revisions is perhaps the greatest point of impact for parents. Many of the actions and decisions of our board come from these policies and procedures. Be engaged. Make suggestions. Ask for feedback – it’s required by law.

2.0 Role of SCC Chair

This is your job. There are lots of resources for you. Here is a short listing:

1. BWDSB Procedure 1620-D
2. Ministry Guidebook, sections 5.6, 8.12, and 9.1.
3. School Council Handbook Supplement, Quick Reference Guide, 2004, Halton District School Board
4. School Council Support Guide, Director’s Office, September 2005, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
5. School Council Chairperson’s Handbook, August 2002, Waterloo Region District School Board

From the Ministry handbook:

Accepting the role of school council members carries with it certain responsibilities. ...The chair/co-chairs of the council are elected by the council members and must be a parent or parents who are not employed by the school board. The chair/co-chairs are voting members who, in addition to performing the same duties as other council members, might:

- Arrange for meetings;
- Prepare agendas;
- Chair council meetings;
- Ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- Facilitate the resolution of conflict;
- Participate as ex-officio members of all committees established by the school council;
- Communicate with the school principal on behalf of the council.

Note: A school council's operating bylaws may outline other specific duties for the chair/co-chairs, as well as for other officers of the council, such as a secretary or treasurer.

So there it is. But we have some tips for you. Included in this guidebook for you are tips on running meetings and dealing with conflict, etc. Hopefully this document helps you.

3.0 When You Need Help in a Hurry

If you need help, here are six possible steps to consider:

1. Talk to your principal. This person has training and experience, and sometimes the legal obligation to answer your questions. He or she can often help direct you to the right resources, e.g. a board procedure that might help.
2. Consult your other SCC members and/or a previous chair.
3. Go to the BWDSB website and look for a relevant procedure.
4. Contact (Email) any of the PIC members and ask your question of us. We're here to help. We may be able to answer the question. If not, we may be able to email the question to other PIC chairs, and/or SCC chairs in the district. Networking with others may be your greatest resource.
5. Phone the parent support line at People for Education, 1-888-534-3944. They receive donations and funding to be able to provide this service to everyone in the province. www.PeopleforEducation.com.
6. Refer to the Ministry of Education's Guidebook. It is called "School Councils – A Guide for Members." This is the most comprehensive written resource for school councils. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html

School Principal – Your #1 Resource

The principal is the CEO of the school. The principal is the school leader and is often an experienced educator. He/she manages the day to day activities of the school, ensuring compliance to a myriad of regulations and expectations of the school board. The principal participates in improvement planning for the school and is the key driver for the implementation of improvement initiatives. The principal oversees the teaching and discipline of students. He/she is the link to the teachers, support staff, and parents. He/she deals with issues of employee performance and issues that are or may become confidential in nature. It's a tough job.

A characteristic of a good school includes the development of a solid relationship between the principal and the chair. But this doesn't mean that you will always agree, or your council will agree with actions or decisions made by the principal, or the school board for that matter. Remember that one of the main purposes of SCC's is to advise the school and/or the board on education matters. So after your SCC gives the advice, be prepared for a possible negative outcome. Life's like that. Remember, the principal has a boss, too. Working through these situations both professionally and respectfully should be everyone's goal.

Now, please take a minute to review section 12 of the Ministry handbook, specifically regulation 298 as amended to regulation 613. When you review the long list of legal obligations of the principal, you might wonder who would ever seek out this job! It is daunting.

Sections 12 through 20 of regulation 298 relate to SCC's. Key ones are paraphrased and listed below. The principal shall:

- Deliver materials forward to the SCC from the Ministry to the SCC,
- Make the names of SCC members known to parents, and public school board supporters upon request,
- Attend every SCC meeting (regulation 612 allows the principal to send a delegate),
- Act as a resource to the SCC, providing relevant information from legislation and policies,
- Consider recommendations made by the SCC, and, advise the SCC of the action taken in response to the recommendation.
- In addition to the requirement to solicit the views of SCC's mentioned above, and not limiting the matters on which the principal of a school may solicit the views of the SCC, the principal shall solicit the SCC's views on:
 - The establishment or amendment of school policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including the local code of conduct for the school and appropriate dress requirements for schools in the district,
 - The development of implementation plans for new education initiatives that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including the code of conduct and appropriate dress requirements, and
 - School action plans for improvement based on EQAO results.

Regulation 612 has a similar listing of obligations of the board to the SCC. Look at regulation 612, specifically sections 18 to 21. Where any section of the regulations say the board shall do certain things, in effect this likely means the principal has to make sure these things get done. Remember, the principal is the board's "CEO" for the school. Again, paraphrased, these sections say that the board shall:

- Solicit the views of SCC's on policies or guidelines on:
 - School policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including policies and guidelines:
 - On conduct of persons in the school,
 - On appropriate dress for pupils,
 - Regarding funding for the SCC,
 - On fund-raising activities of the SCC,
 - On conflict resolution process for SCC disputes, and
 - On reimbursing of expenses incurred by SCC members and officers.
 - Implementation plans for new education initiatives that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents including the code of conduct and appropriate dress requirements.
 - School board action plans for improvement based on EQAO results.
 - The process and criteria applicable to the selection and placement of principals and vice-principals.

Note: Section 21 states that the board "shall consider each recommendation made to the board by the council and shall advise the council of the action taken in response to the recommendation."

Okay – that was a mouthful. Please appreciate that much of the regulatory stuff was paraphrased! Please don't take us to court. If you need the exact language, or are dealing with a stickler for detail, get a verbatim copy of the regulation(s).

4.0 BWDSB Website

A lot of work has gone into the board's website – a major reconstruction happened in 2007. It can be visited at www.bwdsb.on.ca. The PIC was approached for suggestions for improvement and board administration implemented many of the suggestions that we made. The Parent Involvement Committee is also in the process of updating the parent links on the web site and in the very near future you will see new and different information that is intended to help all parents.

But like most websites, it takes a little getting used to. If you have a question or suggestion on the website, send it to the webmaster. The hyperlink to the webmaster is at the bottom of the home page. Please practice navigating the various sections of the website. Scroll through the topics listed in the top tool bar. Check out the cool student site.

5.0 SCC - Electronic Communication

One of the very first priorities of the new Parent Involvement Committee was to get SCC Chair people communicating better.

The system that we have set up involves the use of a facilitator. An SCC email account has been established at scc@bwdsb.on.ca. To use this communication tool, you send a message to the above address and our facilitator in turn sends the message out to the e-mail addresses of the SCC chairs. If replies are received, they again are circulated to either the person who sent the message or to all the addresses. We encourage SCC chair people to use this to ask questions of others, get answers to questions you may be having problems with, to share with others good things that may be happening at your school. This process may be updated in the future, but at this time, this is the best method of communication among SCC chair people.

***Please remember that we have 51 schools in Bluewater District School Board and other schools may be experiencing similar struggles or may have already solved similar problems that you may be having within your SCC.
SCC's should not be operating in a vacuum anymore, with such a network of resources available to them.***

6.0 People for Education – Only a Phone Call Away

People for Education is an independent parents' group, a registered charitable organization, that is dedicated to the ideal of a fully publicly funded education system that guarantees every child access to the education that meets his or her needs. People for Education work toward this ideal by doing research, by providing clear and accessible information to the public, and by engaging people to become actively involved in education issues in their own community. As mentioned earlier, they operate a parent help line. 1-888-534-3944. They also provide numerous tip sheets for parents, in many different languages. They have a very useful tip sheet for SCC's.

Check out their web site for lots of useful information at www.peopleforeducation. They also hold an annual education conference with guest speakers and engaging workshops. The conference is held around the start of November each year.

7.0 School Councils – A Guide for Members

In 2001, the Ministry of Education published a binder full of information for school councils. It was revised in 2002 – and remains the most important written resource for you and your SCC.

Here's the address: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html

In the Ministry guidebook there is information on regulations, tips for effective school councils, information on SCC bylaws and how to prepare for and run meetings, effective communication, etc.

Print yourself off a copy. Or if this is difficult for you, politely ask your principal for a copy. There

might be one in the office. Or the principal might get a copy for you. That's why you ask nicely. You could try to get one from the previous chairperson – best of luck.

8.0 Running Effective Meetings

Let's imagine for a moment that you have volunteered to be the chair of an SCC that hasn't been really successful in the past. You are working hard to change this by engaging fellow parents and getting them interested. You start off with only a handful of people at the first few meetings. Then given your success in recruiting new members, the numbers increase. You now have many voices, many opinions – coming from engaged and well-intentioned people. To make sure the meetings don't become long drawn out affairs – how are you going to manage the success you have been instrumental in creating? That's what this challenge is all about.

Organizing and running effective meetings is a skill and it can be learned. Much of what the school council does hinges on having good meetings. We will give you a few suggestions, but again, the Ministry guidebook has two sections you will want to review. Section 8 talks specifically about “preparing for and running meetings.” It is well worth reviewing – meeting effectiveness is so very important.

Tips for the Chair/Co-Chair:

- Set meeting dates, involving the SCC, to ensure the time and location is reasonable and doing your best to avoid other conflicting events. Publish them early in the year.
- Post the agenda several days in advance of the meeting.
- The chair is responsible for following the agenda, moving the meeting along, and ensuring no one monopolizes the floor.
- Start and end the meeting on time. Make meetings as fun as possible.
- Create a template form for attendance and easy collection of phone numbers and emails. People will provide this info only if they are willing.
- Keep opening remarks brief and welcoming. Introduce guest/presenters. Review the agenda. Outline what is and perhaps what will not be accomplished in the time allotted.
- Summarize main points before moving to the next agenda item or before making a decision.
- Keep to the agenda and timelines. Consider using a timed-item strategy. A little electronic timer works wonders, or appoint a time keeper. If new business arises, acknowledge its importance but carry it forward to either the end of the meeting (time permitting), or preferably, to the next meeting. A good tip might be to adopt the practice that it takes a 2/3 vote to add an agenda item after the meeting has started.
- Consider the use of sub-committees to take away a project or issue, to engage parents in that specific discussion, and then come back to the SCC with a recommendation or choice of recommendations with pro's and con's written out and circulated ahead of time. Always allow time for the SCC to discuss the possible recommendation(s). Never allow the decision of a select “few” be rubber-stamped.
- During discussions, maintain a speakers' list to facilitate all views being heard.
- Remind participants of the meeting norms, the rules of order, etc., that have been

established. (Perhaps have these in your by-laws?)

- Ensure the action minutes are kept.
- For an issue that might need a small bit of deliberation? Perhaps take a 5 minute “discussion” break. Work to involve all in attendance. As chair, suspend the meeting for a brief, formal or informal, brainstorming session. Then re-convene the meeting and re-adopt the meeting norms.
- Remain neutral and provide alternate ways to solve problems/make decisions. See “How to Handle Conflict.”
- Seeking consensus works well, but be alert to strongly held divergent opinions. You may have to adopt a voting process, e.g., the use of Robert’s Rules or something similar. Don’t be afraid to seek out help on the use of a more formal process.
- Summarize the meeting by reviewing key actions and decisions. Check that all members have the same understanding of any decisions.
- Review/announce the date, time, and location for the next meeting, perhaps identifying any key business deferred to that meeting.
- Consider offering food and/or child care to encourage attendance.
- Consider the use of guest speakers or visitors to encourage attendance.
- Don’t be too hard on yourself. You’re a volunteer. Don’t forget to delegate jobs. Don’t try to do everything yourself. It’s hard on you and doesn’t facilitate succession planning.

Many (but not all) of the tips, below, have been taken (or re-written a bit) from the Halton District School Board’s “School Council Handbook Supplement,” 2004. Did we mention the benefits of networking?

9.0 Creating the Agenda

An agenda is the road map for the meeting. Circulating it in advance is a nice reminder to your SCC members. Gets them thinking and allows for members to submit proposed agenda items. You also need to consult with the principal on his or her needs. For example, the principal might want an extra 15 minutes, over and above his/her normal report, to review EQAO results for the school and possibly the school’s plans to address possible areas of concern.

After requesting agenda items, put together the proposed agenda for the meeting. One of the first steps at the meeting is to ask for any additional items that should be added (or removed), and then get agreement on the agenda. A simple show of hands or nods around the table usually suffices. Then stick to the agenda. And remind anyone who strays: “Sorry, we have to stick to the agenda. But what you have brought up is important. Can we add that to the agenda for the next meeting?”

No-one likes being at a meeting that goes every which way, sometimes at the expense of the item(s) that was(were) supposed to be discussed.

The Ministry guidebook has information on creating an agenda, with a sample agenda included. Here is a simplified listing of key agenda items:

- Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)
- Review and approval of agenda (5 minutes)
- Guest speaker presentations or delegations (0 to 20 minutes?)
- Review and approval of minutes of previous meeting (5 minutes)
- Business arising from the minutes (action items), ONLY (5 to 10 minutes)
- Student report (part of meeting at some high schools, maybe 5 to 10 minutes)
- Principal's report (20 minutes)
(It is advisable to allow for a reasonable Q&A session after the principal's report because this could be the most important part of the meeting for many of the SCC members. But if an item is brought up that appears later on in the agenda, don't hesitate to ask that that discussion be deferred.)
- Other reports, e.g., from committees that report to the SCC (10 minutes)
- Correspondence (5 minutes)
- New business as noted in the agenda. If time is short, consider deferring non-urgent items to the next meeting, but only with the concurrence of the SCC members. (20 minutes?)
- Reminder for next meeting.
- Adjournment.

10.0 How to Handle Conflict

Let's imagine that your school is considering going from the previously traditional recess-lunch-recess model to what has become known as the "balanced day" of having two "nutrition" breaks through the year. Let's also imagine that you are aware of a developing difference of opinion on this; some for and some against. Your SCC is being consulted by the principal on this proposal. How do you navigate these waters to respectfully ensure parents have the opportunity to be heard? Does this mean that 50 parents can come to a meeting and keep talking until everyone is exhausted? You need to have a process and exercise good meeting skills to see your way through this.

Start with the law. Section 23 of regulation 612 states that a "school council shall consult with parents of pupils enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council." So you have to consult and that is good.

Perhaps your first step is to ensure that an agenda item exists to establish the process that will be followed to consult the parents. This is an important step – get agreement on the process. For something like this, the issue under consideration has to be communicated to parents. The principal might do this via a school newsletter and perhaps a meeting dedicated to this consideration. Or perhaps the SCC could do this through an SCC newsletter and/or host the discussion. The SCC (or principal) can also consider a survey to go home to parents. Gather the facts and communicate those to the school community. Then publicize the meeting at which the results of the survey will be discussed and a recommendation made. So establish early the process that will be followed. Lay it out.

But who votes? The regulations say that each member of the SCC is entitled to vote. (There's

more to it than that. Please look up regulation 612.) If you have 50 parents show up at the meeting for the first time – are you going to tell them they can't vote? Is that what your set of by-laws says? If that is what your by-laws say, that is the process. But you have the obligation to listen. Consult with the parents who attend. Consider a parent vote. And then ask for the SCC to make its decision. As chair of the SCC, this is a good time for you to refrain from getting involved in the issue at hand. Your by-laws might actually state that you only vote to break a tie. This is reasonable. Your job as chair is to ensure the process agreed to is followed without prejudice.

But what if you have no bylaws and it isn't clear who the parent members truly are? You're in a pickle now. So why not accept the parent vote? It's a fundamental principle of democracy to respect the wishes of those who "get the vote out."

Send this result along to the principal as the recommendation of the SCC, include any survey results compiled. Feel free to note the variety of opinions and/or the closeness of the vote. The principal and/or the school board will make the decision after considering, among many considerations, the SCC's advice. They are then obliged to report back to the SCC.

Okay – so much for the hypothetical discussion. Other tips?

Check out the suggestions in the Waterloo Region District School Board's "School Council Chairperson's Handbook, 2002." First bit of advice:

"Be hard on the problem, easy on the person."

Other advice is in the Ministry Guidebook, pages 7.14 and 7.15. There are two tip sheets on resolving conflict and dealing with difficult people in Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's "School Council Support Guide, 2005." The Halton District School Board's "School Council Handbook Supplement, Quick Reference Guide, 2004," also has some tips in it on conflict resolution strategies.

11.0 SCC By-Laws

Under regulation 612/00, school councils are to have by-laws. They do not have to be complicated but have to include certain items as specified in the regulation, including:

- Rules on elections and filling of vacancies in school council membership,
- Rules on proceedings in cases of conflict of interest, and
- Establishing a conflict resolution process for internal school council disputes, one that is in compliance with board policies.

For more information on by-law creation, review the Ministry handbook. Another excellent reference is the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's "School Council Support Guide," September, 2005. A sample set of by-laws is included in that board's guidebook.

Question: Let's imagine for a moment that you have a set of by-laws that allows for 8 parent members. Let's also imagine that you have 8 voting parent members. How will you handle a situation that brings the parents out to your meeting in mass? Remember – this is good – you

need guidance from parents. Section 23 of regulation 612/00 states that a “school council shall consult with parents of pupils enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council.” So why not give this some thought ahead of time a put something in the by-laws for this? Why not have a by-law that includes the requirement to give notice to parents of significant issues up for consideration. Perhaps consider a two (or more) meeting process. First do the brainstorming and identify options to be voted on. Then tell the school community those options and call a parent vote for the next meeting? (See also the related information on handling conflict in section 11.)

12.0 Liability Insurance for School Councils

The School Community Council procedure, BP 1620-D covers this. You see? This is why you read those things.

When taking direction from the principal, and working with the school staff on school sponsored activities, School Community Council members are fully protected by the Board’s insurance, and do not need to purchase additional coverage.

When undertaking independent activities outside of the legislated duties, or duties not assigned by a principal, School Community Councils require their own insurance. The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) can provide an insurance package to School Community Councils to cover independent activities.

13.0 Special Education and SEAC

As SCC Chair, you might be asked about special education issues.

Each school board is mandated to have a “Special Education Advisory Committee.” The Committee is made up of parents, representatives of local agencies, other community groups and trustees of the Board. Board Student Services staff provide support and resources for the committee. All SEAC meetings are open to the public.

SEAC members are available to parents/guardians:

- To act as a resource to parents/guardians of exceptional students.
- To provide information for the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).
- To be a resource for schools and the community.
- To act as a resource for workshops held by various associations, school boards and schools to address the needs and concerns of exceptional students.
- To advise the Board in the provision of programs for all exceptional students.

As one of its responsibilities, SEAC makes recommendations to the school board on matters affecting the establishment and development of special education programs and services in respect of all exceptional students of the Board.

Please see the board website for more information on SEAC, or you are encouraged to call the SEAC Chair who has to be a parent. Our SEAC chair is:

Trudy Baran; TrudyBaran@hotmail.com; (519-364-4015)

14.0 School Community Council – Network Meetings

If you are new to the SCC or involved for many years, you will find networking meetings an invaluable resource. This is an opportunity to meet other SCC Chair people from across Bluewater District School Board and to share information.

You will be getting a call from your Parent Involvement Committee family member to invite you to a networking meeting in your area. This is a good opportunity to meet others and find out what is happening.

Please plan to attend and bring someone with you. We only need to know how many are coming.

You never know what you might learn, or who you might meet that will help your SCC to solve a problem or run more effectively.

15.0 Fundraising and Use of Funds

Many SCC's are not engaged in fund-raising. If yours is, you should know that money raised through board-sponsored fundraising activities will be deposited and accounted for in accordance with the Board's Fund-Raising Policy BP 4655-D and related Procedures. Principals need to approve the fund-raising activities for the school, one reason for which is to ensure that the canvassing activities of the school are reasonable.

For some good tips for fund-raising, please see the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's "School Council Support Guide," September, 2005.

16.0 Parent Involvement Grant & Ideas

The Ministry of Education is committed to getting more parents involved in their children's education and in 2004 they created the **Parent Involvement Grant** which gave each school council in the province **\$500.00 to get more parents involved and to communicate better with parents**. You will receive your \$500 in approximately November and it will be directed into your school SCC budget. If you are having difficulty locating the money, ask your school principal or school office manager to help you.

What are you doing with your annual \$500.00 Ministry of Education Parent Involvement Grant? The following list are some projects in the BWDSB as shared at the recent networking meeting, plus ideas from across the province.

- subscription to Survey Monkey, an on-line survey program, to survey parents regarding school issues (*an excellent way to research information*)
- establishment of a school SCC web site for parents (*this is no longer an SCC expense since BWDSB has improved their site to include individual school sites*)
- fridge magnets to encourage school volunteers, provide the school phone number and encourage use of the school website for information

- purchased special colored paper for the SCC newsletter so it would stand out and not get lost; creation of monthly parent newsletters; creation of brochures or invitations to let parents know about the SCC
- food for meet-the-teacher night and other evenings in which the SCC might invite parents to the school: welcome back BBQ and information sharing night; family reading PJ night with food snacks
- information board and road signs to communicate to parents and the community
- grant money suggestions to improve attendance at School Community Council meetings: \$25.00 grocery voucher drawn at each SCC meeting; childcare is provided by paying grade 8 students to entertain the kids (grant money is then transferred to grade 8 fundraising accounts for year-end trip); food/dessert provided at SCC meetings that run 6pm-8pm
- volunteer appreciation gifts for parents and community members who have become involved
- school lunch snack bag for returning surveys (*incentives for returning surveys*)
- Premier family planners - 1 purchased for each family to keep track of special school dates, SCC meetings, etc.
- brochures to help parents understand transitions in the education system (i.e. to Kindergarten, to grade 9, to specialize programs)
- Eco-fair (G.C. Houston School in Southampton) an environmental awareness evening which parents are invited to the school

17.0 Parents Reaching Out Grant

The Ministry created a second grant in which schools could apply for additional funding for special projects to reach out to more parents. This was called the **Parents Reaching Out Grant**. School councils may apply for grants to support school-based initiatives focusing on engaging parents who may experience challenges in becoming involved in the school due to language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario's school system, or other factors.

School councils are encouraged to work with school staff to identify potential project opportunities. School councils may submit a project proposal on their own, or in partnership with other school councils, parent or community groups.

In Bluewater District School Board six schools received funding for special projects in 2006-2007. In 2007-2008 more than 1,300 projects were funded across Ontario through a \$2.3 million investment and 13 projects were approved in BWDSB. Listed below are some of the ideas approved and hosted in our district. Please note that the current maximum for PRO grants is \$1000 per school.

We encourage schools to submit applications for funding if you have ideas. The deadline for application this school year is October 16, 2009. If you need assistance with the application form, please contact the Parent Involvement Committee.

Parents Reaching Out Grant Ideas

Alexandra Community School received \$3,000.00 for a 'Parent Education Night'. There were 6 interactive parent learning nights from January to June with a special topic each evening such as: healthy family relationships, internet safety, promotion of educational opportunities for parents and children inside and outside the school. The goal was to also promote the SCC as a welcoming, engaging, learning organization and to make parents more comfortable with the group.

Arran-Tara Elementary School received \$3,000.00 for a 'Partnering with Parents Technology Project. They purchased two computer systems and held an orientation night for parents to help them improve their computer skills. The computers were to also benefit families who don't have access to computers, encourage parents to come to the school to work on the computer, to work with their children and to access educational websites.

Peninsula Shores District School received \$3,000.00 for a 'Celebrating Our First Nations' project. An evening was organized to build positive relations with First Nations parents and students. A speaker was hired, food and refreshments provided as well as transportation to the event.

Amabel-Sauble Community School received \$2,100.00 for a parent, teacher, principal positive communication parent resource. The resource packages were created for adults and students and included information on: dealing with separation and divorce, dealing with illness and death, anger management, adults and children with disabilities. The information is available to be signed out of the library and also includes videos and pamphlets.

Meaford Community School received \$1,700.00 for a 'Give Mom a Break' project. The SCC invited mothers to the school one day per month for two hours to meet other mothers, listen to guest speakers, eat a nutritious snack, learn parenting strategies. Babysitting was provided and the goal was to create a stress-free, comfortable environment, for families in all socio-economic groups and to ultimately encourage more involvement at school in the future.

Paisley Central School received \$1,100.00 to host Mr. Ron Morrish at a discipline workshop for teachers and parents. Mr. Morrish presented to 80 teachers during a PD in April 2007 about effective classroom discipline techniques. In the evening parents and caregivers were invited to a second presentation about effective discipline in the home. The goal of this forum was to support parents raising children, to ensure teachers and parents are using similar strategies for discipline therefore creating a better home and school environment.

Elgin Market Public School received \$854.00 to fund a Kindergarten Orientation meeting. Prior to the beginning of the new school year, kindergarten teachers, the Principal, School Community Council and Home and School Representatives organized an afternoon orientation. Parents were introduced to teachers and other parents who are active in the school. New students had a chance to visit their classrooms and play and chat with their new teachers. Childcare and nutritious snacks were provided.

Egremont Community School received \$1,000 to hold parent information sessions and workshops

Macphail Memorial Elementary School received \$500 to host an evening theme “Understanding their World”. They had four topics with guest speakers including: how to help your child with French if you don’t speak French, nutrition, plus two other speakers.

G.C. Houston Public School in Southampton used \$1000 to create a Parent Lending Library

Alexandra Community School received \$500 to host a family p.j. party night to listen to author Werner Zimmerman read from his books. This ran in partnership with the school that had the author during the day for the students and during the evening for families.

Saugeen District Secondary School received \$1000 to host a parent information night entitled “Education for the 21st Century” with guest speakers from People for Education, the Bluewater Foundation and Steven Reid, former BWDSB superintendent, on Aboriginal initiatives.

Beaver Valley Community School received \$1000 to host a family literacy night which included various information sessions for families to attend.

Northport Elementary School received \$1000 to have guest speaker Todd Cunningham talk about learning disabled students and how they learn differently.

18.0 Handling SCC Correspondence

Each school should have a mail box or mail slot for the SCC Chairperson for all correspondence that comes to the school. There will be lots of paper and information and it is important that you check your mailbox regularly, perhaps each week. People for Education and the School Advocate newspaper are two organizations that will regularly send information and these are great resources. There will be numerous other organizations that mail you information. Please share all relevant correspondence with the SCC. Use as the SCC sees fit.

The School Advocate newspaper (www.school-advocate.ca) is published five times each school year. The school board subscribes to this newspaper and distributes copies to our schools. It is full of ideas, covers relevant topics and shares stories of successes from around the province. It is well worth the read. Please make sure the issues get circulated.

19.0 Bluewater Media Resource Centre, Lending Library for Parents & Guardians

Bluewater District School Board has a media resource center with an impressive collection of videos and DVD’s for education purposes and in the past year a new system has been implemented in which parents and caregivers can now access this library of information. Please ask your principal about how to access these resources.

20.0 Home and School Associations

Many schools in the province, including a few schools in our district, are represented by a parent group called a "Home and School Association" as well as a School Community Council. You will likely meet some members of Home and School Associations at our networking meetings. This is an organization of volunteers committed to ensuring that the education, health, safety and social well-being of children and youth are a priority for all. If schools have both organizations within their school, a Home and School representative will sit on the School Community Council.

Home and School Associations are members of a provincial organization called the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. For more information on this group, please refer to their website at www.ofhsa.on.ca.

The Bluewater [DSB] Council of Home and School Associations President is Mary Helen Musselman. She can be reached at: mhm@tnt21.com (519-396-3465).

21.0 Advocating for All

As SCC Chair, it is quite likely that you are familiar with many of the key people in your school. You probably know many of your school's "ins and outs." You might be on a first name basis with the Vice Principal, the Principal, the Trustee, and perhaps even others on the administration team. You quite likely have excellent advocacy and self-advocacy skills. All these things should serve you well.

However, as the chair of an organization that exists to represent and work for all, we would ask that you make a special effort to reach out to all members of your school community whenever possible. In particular, please consider the sometimes unspoken needs of new families to your school, maybe those who are disadvantaged, and perhaps some who are unable or unskilled at advocating for themselves or their loved ones. Consistent with our Foundations for Learning guidance document, we need to do everything possible to ensure that our schools are "free of barriers and biases," and that they "provide opportunities for every learner to succeed." As SCC chair, you are in a wonderful position to help bring this ideal into reality.

22.0 Parent Involvement Committee Who are We?

We are a group of mostly parents representing elementary and secondary school students who meet monthly to discuss and plan strategies to improve parent involvement in the school district. This often involves providing support to school community councils. Mary Anne Alton, our Director of Education, plus three trustees also sit with us and support our efforts. If you would like to learn more about us, please contact any of the members and ask for a copy of our current PIC terms of reference document.

Accomplishments Since We Began in 2007:

- Created a terms of reference that allows for up to 4 parent members from each of the four school family areas.
- Hosted spring SCC Networking meetings in 2007, 2008 and 2009 for chair people to facilitate sharing and problem solving among ourselves
- Hosted community presentations on: “Raising Healthy Children” with Randy Calvert; “Beyond the Hurt: Preventing Peer Harassment and Bullying for Adults” with the Canadian Red Cross; Dr. Bruce Ferguson presentation on his Early Leavers Report
- Established an electronic communication system to link all SCC chair people in BWDSB
- Starting in 2007-2008, have circulated SCC Information Packages to all SCC chairs
- Hosted Family Networking meetings to establish better links within school family areas
- Hosted a Parent Conference entitled “Better Understanding the World of our Students” in November 2007 for all parents and community members
- Created a Playground Tip Sheet for School Community Councils who may want to tackle the job of revitalizing a playground

Our Current Projects and Goals:

- Hold meetings to engage in inter-school communications including a family of schools networking meeting
- Review the outreach activities of the board for possible areas where we could support, e.g. training for school councils
- To continue to reduce barriers to parental involvement with support, encouragement and enhanced meaningful parental involvement within schools and across the District, including, outreach to parents who find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system, or other factors
- Participate in the promotion, application and implementation of grant applications and projects funded under the Ministry of Education Parents Reaching Out (PRO) program
- To improve the ‘School Community Council’ and ‘Parent’ pages on the BWDSB web site to continuously share more information

2008-2009 Parent Involvement Committee Members:

Executive:

Chair	Jim Thorpe	Kincardine	South-West	396-8523	lynden@bmts.com
Vice-Chair	Helen Pepplar	Hanover	South-East	364-4739	PepplerH@explornet.com
Secretary	Kevin Larson	Port Elgin	North-West	389-4534	KLarson@bmts.com

Committee Members:

Name	Location	Phone #	Email
<u>North-West</u>			
Teri-Lyn Campbell	Southampton	797-1194	teric@sympatico.ca
Melinda Myette	Port Elgin	386-4628	melindamyette@bmts.com
<u>South-West</u>			
Rhonda Beckenhauer	Chesley	363-6595	rho-2@hotmail.com
Gail Walden	Kincardine	396-8472	mgwalden@tnt21.com
Dan Wong	Walkerton	881-1790	wongatparkwood@bmts.com
<u>North-East</u>			
Brenda Foster	Meaford	538-3396	brenlar@bmts.com
Rosie Harrison	Meaford	538-5838	harrison7@rogers.com
<u>South-East</u>			
Wendy Stewart	Flesherton	924-3860	wstewart@3web.com

Bluewater District School Board Support:

Director of Education: Mary Anne Alton MaryAnne_Alton@bwdsb.on.ca
 Administrative Support: Bev Simms Bev_Sims@bwdsb.on.ca

Trustees:

Jennifer Yenssen (Chair of BWDSB) Jennifer_Yenssen@bwdsb.on.ca
 Ross King Ross_King@bwdsb.on.ca
 John Chapman John_Chapman@bwdsb.on.ca
 Jan Johnstone (Vice Chair & PIC alternate) Jan_Johnstone@bwdsb.on.ca

If you would like to become a member of the Parent Involvement Committee, please contact one of the members. Ask for our current Terms of Reference. Review the reference document and if you are interested, please contact Jim Thorpe, PIC Chair, or any of the executive.

23.0 What Research Tells Us about Parent Involvement

Simply put: The best thing that parents can do to help their children is to help their children. Help with reading. Talk to your children about school. Help them when difficulties arise with homework. Support and encourage them. Help them see the fun and excitement of education. Also - call the teacher and talk if you have any concerns or questions. It has been said that the best tool that a teacher has is the phone. This statement may also be true for parents.

An expert on parent involvement, and how to support the various kinds of involvement, Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Network, author of over 100 related publications, states: "There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. The main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life."

Dr. Epstein has categorized parent involvement into six types and identified supportive activities in each. This might interest you and your SCC.

1. Parenting
Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.
2. Communicating
Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.
3. Volunteering
Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.
4. Learning at Home
Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
5. Decision Making
Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.
6. Collaborating with the Community
Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

Epstein, et. al. 2002. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Also: www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/

Coming together is a beginning

Staying together is progress

Working together is success.

Halton District School Board
School Council Handbook Supplement, 2004
From:
Ontario Principals' Council
School Councils – Making a Difference, 2001

One Final Word....

We sincerely hope that you find this information package helpful.
We'd love to hear from you.
Have a great year.