

PIAC WEBINAR Q&A

Supporting School Councils: Best Practices for Holding an Online Meeting or Event
May 21, 2020 | 5:30pm-6:30pm | via Zoom

This is a compilation of questions from our live webinar and other sources.

Q: Is it mandatory/required to have a School Council Meeting?

A: In a [letter dated April 28, 2020](#) from Director of Education, John Malloy, it states that “school councils may choose to hold one meeting in May or June if quorum can be achieved as outlined in your school council bylaws.” Note that O.Reg 612 requires School Councils to hold a minimum of 4 meetings per school year, so you may need to try to hold a virtual meeting to comply.

Q: Do we have to reach out to the entire school community for a meeting? If so how do we go about getting the word out?

A: School Council meetings are public and should be open to all members of the school community. You could share a flyer (date/time/registration link) on your School Council’s social media accounts, ask the Principal to email it to parents through School Messenger and/or use the school’s social media accounts. Remember it is best practice not to post the ACTUAL link to join the online meeting on flyer/social media due to online safety/privacy concerns.

Q: What if the Principal is not available to attend the meeting?

A: The principal of a school may delegate any of his or her powers or duties as a member of the School Council, including any powers or duties under this Regulation, to a vice-principal of the school. O. Reg. 612/00, s. 18 (1). If neither are attending, the meeting is not a formal School Council meeting.

Q: If admin are not supportive of having a virtual meeting/event, what can parents do?

A: Discuss with Admin but if you are not having success, engage your Superintendent. Principals are definitely being encouraged by the Board to support these council initiatives. You can still organize a virtual get-together without admin. Look at the Parent Concern Protocol to follow up on this.

Q: Do we need to have a quorum for any School Council matters to be voted on?

A: Yes. You need a quorum to be considered a formal School Council meeting.

Q: Should teacher, non-teaching and community reps be available to attend?

A: All school council members should be invited to attend a virtual online meeting, including teacher, non-teaching and community representatives.

Q: Should we survey our School Council for the best date and time for a meeting? How do we do that?

A: Some tools for our surveying your School Council and parents include the following:

- SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/global/canada/>)
- Google Forms (<https://www.google.ca/forms/about/>)
- Doodle Polls (<https://doodle.com/free-poll>)

Some councils have sent out "How are we doing with Remote Learning Surveys" to each family so that their voices are heard. The council then meet to discuss the results of the survey and ways in which they can make changes to current practice. Many topics have come out of such surveys for example how to honour our Gr. 8 Grades.

Q: How do we ensure privacy, safety on the call/online? Do attendees need to register to ensure safety/privacy?

A: In addition to tweaking options in the back-end of your chosen platform, we recommend that you do not post direct links to the meeting/event on flyers or on social media. Instead ask participants to register and then email the link to them closer to the day/time of the event.

Q: What platform do you suggest? (Google Meet, Google Hangout, WebEx, Zoom. Can we use the Google Meet account of our school?) and do any of these platforms have a call in feature to be inclusive of everyone's needs?

A: Of the platforms suggested, Zoom and WebEx have a call-in feature. Work with your Principal to choose the platform that works best for your School Council. (TDSB has licensed various platforms that can be used, like WebEx, Google.)

Q: What do we need to know about online meetings? (privacy, muting, video of participants, recording & permission of participants for that)

A: You can use [PIAC's Best Practices & Tips for Zoom](#) meetings. [Zoom Video Tutorials](#) and tutorials for WebEx and Google Meets are also available online.

Q: What about if our bylaws do not speak to virtual meetings? Can decisions be made on spending?

A: It is suggested during these exceptional times (in meetings held with a quorum) that a record of your minutes, votes, etc. in a transparent manner is sufficient for a School Council to make decisions in virtual meetings. You should plan to update your bylaws in the future to include virtual processes.

Q: What topics should we cover in the meeting? How do we consult with the Principal and committee chairs regarding the agenda and content?

A: Any formal decisions that need to be made should be on the agenda, as well as follow-ups from your previous meetings, plus topics that your families may have requested (please be sure to stick to the School Council mandate: improving student achievement and enhancing the accountability of the education system to parents). The Chair(s) should consult as usual with the Principal, sub-committees, and school community when drafting the meeting agenda. A call for agenda items can go out prior to the meeting.

Q: How do we determine the purpose/aims of the meeting? Is it to wrap up the year - final report of Chair and Treasurer? Plan for the school council election in the fall? Cancel activities?

A: Discuss the goal of the meeting with the elected members of the council while you are preparing. Do you have formal business to conclude? If this is your final meeting of the year, you should include anything that would normally be done at that time. You will want to ensure that decisions of the council regarding cancellations, budget & final reports are on the record

(minutes). Forming an Election Committee to prepare for the Fall election is wise, given that it may look different than usual.

Q: How much time on the agenda should be given to questions about COVID-19, remote learning, what happens next? Should we stagger this topic throughout the meeting, to keep attendees engaged throughout?

A: If there is a large amount of interest in these topics and your council has other "regular" business to accomplish, consider holding a dedicated session for COVID & Remote Learning. There may not be time for both in one meeting.

Q: How long should the meeting run? Should it still be held around the same time as a normal meeting would, or should this be amended to accommodate?

A: The length of your meeting will depend on what is on the agenda. Because you are using an unfamiliar online format, you will probably need additional time. Consider allocating times on the agenda in order to get through everything.

Q: Do we approve minutes of the previous School Council meeting? Do we report on items from the previous meeting? Should we table any issues that are pending?

A: Yes. To ensure accountability, you should follow your normal protocols, as outlined in your by-laws. There may be items that need follow-up or deferral to a future meeting.

Q: Do we keep minutes of the meeting? Are they distributed to School Council members and other participants afterwards? Does the School Council have to approve the minutes at the next meeting (in the fall)?

A: Yes. You must record minutes of all School Council meetings, as per O.Reg 612, and they must be available to all parents of the school and kept on file for a minimum of 4 years (7 years recommended for financial records, in case of audit). You should follow your normal protocol, as outlined in your by-laws, for approval and distribution of minutes.

Q: We haven't been able to post our March meeting's minutes because we weren't able to have our next meeting in April to distribute and approve them. How do we make that happen?

A: Do that in your final formal meeting for the year, that is allowed by the Board - approve all the minutes that haven't yet been formally approved.

Q: Should this be seen as a regular Council meeting or just a check-in?

A: If the Principal (or designate) is present and quorum is attained, then it can be considered a regular School Council meeting; otherwise, it will be a check-in. Some schools may have families struggling with the many issues COVID-19, Social Isolation, and Food Security may present. Consider holding an online get-together to touch base with your families.

Q: We are going to have a meet and greet. Is our principal required to help us get the message out to our parent group? Can we rely on the principal to broadcast this on School Messenger?

A: The Principal is your School Council support. He/she should certainly help communicate your event, as encouraged by the board.

Q: We were told that because it is not an official council meeting, but a parent meet and greet, communications for such events cannot be made through the school. Are you saying that principals and school administrators are allowed to help council set up and email communications regarding meet and greet? And are principals allowed to attend the meet and greet then?

A: They are not only allowed to do this, but are encouraged by senior TDSB staff to do that.

Q: Would there be any harm in holding a combined live/online meeting? A regular meeting that parents who are able to attend in person are welcome to go to, and others are able to attend online?

A: Once in-person meetings are again an option, your council may want to offer virtual attendance in combination with live attendance. It's a great way to encourage participation.

There are logistics around hearing everyone in a mixed meeting that will require a process to be set up. You will need to allow for virtual attendance in your bylaws.

Q: Can our council sub-committees use virtual meetings?

A: Yes. This would be a great way to wrap up business and plan for next year. As with any sub-committee meeting, these are open to the public, so publicize using the same methods as a full council meeting. And make sure to keep notes/minutes of all sub-committee meetings.

Q: How do we handle the money our council has raised this school year? Can we reallocate funds? Can we hold money over to next school year?

A: As a result of school closures, planned expenditures will need to be deferred until schools reopen. As a result of the situation caused by this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, your School Council may need to discuss and vote to update your Fundraising Plan in order to move funds to another use. NOTE: The School Council General Ledger (GL) is 41500 and Cost Centre (CC) xxxxx135 School Donation CC (Note the first 5 digits are specific to the school.)

Q: Will the Parent Engagement funds and the School Council funds allocated to School Councils each year be lost or will they be held over to the next school year?

A: At this time, the Ministry has not provided confirmation as to whether allocated funds from the Ministry can be carried forward to the following school year. Typically unspent monies are not carried over to the following school year. FOR EXAMPLE: Cost Centre (CC) xxxxx001: which is \$1.25/student (minimum \$300 and maximum \$1,000) (Note: the first 5 digits are specific to the school.). Cost Centre (CC) xxxxx002: which is \$500 for parent engagement (Note: the first 5 digits are specific to the school.). NOTE: The School Council General Ledger (GL) is 41500.

Q: Are we allowed to redirect our PIG to support graduating parents from the highschoools?

A: No. Parent Involvement Grant money must be used for Parent Engagement, so council can vote to use it for that only.

Q: What happens with the Parent Reaching Out Grant (PROG) funds?

A: To date, the Board has received no directions from the Ministry of Education around the usage or reallocation of PROG. At this time, the Ministry has not provided confirmation as to whether allocated funds from the Ministry, such as the Parent Reaching Out (PRO) PPF funds, can be carried forward to the following school year.

Please note that the PRO grant was allocated to the four Learning Centers earlier this year. To date, schools have not been provided with a PRO PPF allocation from the Learning Centers yet. At this time, it is expected that unspent school budget funds can continue to be carried forward to the next school year. School boards are still awaiting direction from the Ministry around funding for COVID-19 related expenditures.

Q: What happens to Pizza Day money or other things our parents have prepaid with School CashOnline?

A: Fees collected for the benefit of specific students, such as pizza lunches, should be refunded to the families if those purchases were not made. For further clarification, council's may contact the help desk at businesshelpdesk@tdsb.on.ca Please note that all purchases done through School CashOnline can be reimbursed through School CashOnline by School Admin. Monetary donations received, where a tax receipt was issued from TDSB to the donor, cannot be refunded by TDSB. Any unspent donation funds will be carried over to the next fiscal year. The School Council should discuss and approve how the funds raised should be utilized when schools reopen.

Q: Are all fundraisers assumed cancelled for the year?

A: At this time, there is still no definitive direction on when publicly-funded schools in Ontario will reopen. Please note that the online donation module is available year round if schools still wish to conduct fundraising online. Funds received through the module are directed to the donation ledger in school budgets, and unspent donations are carried forward to the next year for future use. If end of year events are to be cancelled, School Councils that have booked fundraising and Fun Fair vendors this year and have issued Purchase Orders (POs), should cancel those POs in SAP. If the event is to be rescheduled to the 2020-21 school year, they can issue a new PO when the event is confirmed.

Q: Do you anticipate holding online School Council elections in the Fall? If so, how?

A: Yes, this is a real possibility. There are many options, some free and some that cost money, that are secure and provide for secret ballot. PIAC is working with the TDSB administration on a recommendation for a best practice to be ready for September.

Q: What happens to School Council Insurance?

A: Policy purchased for 2019/2020 school year will end November 1, 2020. Renewal notices will be sent out to schools in late September/early October.

Q: Will students be allowed to get back into the school before the end of year?

A: TDSB has created a procedure to safely allow parents into the buildings to collect their personal belongings.

https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/docs/Protocol_Student%20Retrieval%20of%20Personal%20Belongings_May%2028_FINAL.pdf
