

CREATING EFFECTIVE POLICY: THE KEY ROLE OF TRUSTEES

Policy development is one of the most important responsibilities of the Board of Trustees.

It is a vital tool in carrying out our mission of *“Building communities of faith, hope and service”*.

Policies set directions for our education community, assign authorities for carrying them out and establish the controls that make the governing and management of the Board possible. Policies tell us who we are and become the means by which Trustees, senior staff and employees hold themselves accountable to their community.

Policies established by the Board of Trustees impact all phases of our operation and:

- ensure our plans and procedures support our mission;
- guide the Director and their staff in implementing the decisions of the Board;
- provide direction and consistency in day to day services, and
- inform our parents, students and staff what they can expect from being members of our faith-based education community.

All members of our community play an important role in the development of effective policy. While only trustees have the authority to make policy, the process works best when:

- the Director keeps Trustees informed of issues that would benefit from a policy to govern implementation;
- staff are involved in researching options, drafting reports and offering their best professional advice on elements to be included in the policy;
- parents, students and community members have the opportunity to offer feedback on proposed directions;
- stakeholders directly affected by the policy have an opportunity to comment on its impact;
- Trustees adopt an open and transparent policy approval process that ensures the risks and benefits of the proposed policy are well understood; and
- everyone in the education community operates with the understanding that consistency with the Board’s mission and compatibility with circumstances are the hallmarks of effective policy.

To support these best practices Trustees of the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board have put in place a Policy Development and Review Process. The key components of the process are as follows:

1. Once an issue requiring policy consideration is identified, a proposed policy is written by the appropriate department of the board.
2. The draft proposal is considered, through the Director of Education, to assess the need for the proposed policy and whether amendments to the draft should be made.
3. Following approval for consideration, community input is sought by posting all draft policies on the board's website for comment for at least one month (whenever possible).
4. Stakeholders directly affected by the proposal are invited to comment on the draft policy.
5. An opportunity for advice and comment is provided to diocesan officials.
6. Following consultation a revised draft is referred to the Board of Trustees for discussion.
7. If approved in principle by the Board of Trustees, the draft is referred to the next Board meeting for final approval.

To ensure that that the approval process is transparent and accountable:

- Trustees will consider and adopt all policies in public session of the Board
- The report recommending approval will clearly identify the benefits and risks of the proposed direction
- A representative of affected parties will be permitted to address the Board on the policy
- Upon receiving final approval, copies of the new policy will be made available to affected parties, distributed electronically to all principals and central staff and posted on the board's web site

For policies to be meaningful they must be must be well understood, relevant to changing circumstances and responsive to community needs. Therefore:

- all policies will be written in plain language;
- each policy will stipulate a review date;
- all policies will be reviewed at least once every ~~four~~ five years;
- a timetable for all policies to be developed and reviewed during the year will be presented in September; and
- a "policy primer" which outlines the key questions and stages of the process has been added to the policy section on the board's web site.

While proposals for policy development and review can be initiated by any individual or group, primary responsibility for the process has been assigned to the Director of Education. To ensure ease of access, coordination of effort, and effective communication and maintenance of the process, day to day management of the policy process rests with the Superintendent of Human Resources and Policy Development. The Superintendent is available to assist and should be the first point of contact.

Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board's Policy Development and Review Process seeks to ensure an appropriate balance between Trustees' responsibility to develop broad guidelines for the achievement of the vision with the opportunity for the Director of Education to exercise professional judgment in how best to attain the objectives. It provides the assurance that the needs of our communities and our common bond of faith are reflected in everything that we say and do.