Roles and Responsibilities of the Ontario Ministry of Education (Canada)

The following is a brief overview of the roles of some of the individuals and groups responsible for publicly funded elementary and secondary education in Ontario. The duties are legislated in the province's Education Act, Chapter E.2, Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1990, as amended.

The Ontario Government and the Education Act

Education is a provincial government responsibility in Canada. In Ontario, education is governed principally by the Education Act and its regulations. The Education Act and its regulations set out duties and responsibilities of the Minister of Education and the duties and responsibilities of school boards, school board supervisory officers, principals, teachers, parents and students.

The Minister of Education

The Minister of Education represents the interests of the ministry at the provincial cabinet and assists in the development of education policy. With the assistance of the Ministry of Education, the Minister also administers the provincial statutes and regulations that concern education including those that set the length of the school year and allocate funds to school boards in a fair manner using the education funding model.

The Minister is also responsible for:

• developing curriculum;
• setting policies and guidelines for school trustees, directors of education, principals and other school board officials;
• setting requirements for student diplomas and certificates; and
• preparing lists of approved textbooks and other learning materials.

School Boards

Ontario's school boards operate the province's publicly-funded schools. The boards administer the funding they receive from the province for their schools. Ontario's 72 District School Boards are made up of 31 English-language public boards, 29 English-language Catholic boards, 4 French-language public boards, and 8 French-language Catholic boards. As well, a small number of Ontario schools are operated by School Authorities. The School Authorities manage special types of schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities, and schools in remote and sparsely-populated regions.

School boards are responsible for:

• determining the number, size and location of schools;
• building, equipping and furnishing schools;
• providing education programs that meet the needs of the school community, including needs for special education;
• prudent management of the funds allocated by the province to support all board activities, including education programs for elementary and secondary school students, and the building and maintaining of schools;
• preparing an annual budget;
• supervising the operation of schools and their teaching programs;
• developing policy for safe arrival programs for elementary schools;
• establishing a school council at each school;
• hiring teachers and other staff;
• helping teachers improve their teaching practices;
• teacher performance;
• approving schools' textbook and learning materials choices, based on the list of approved materials provided by the Ministry of Education;
• enforcing the student attendance provisions of the Education Act; and
• ensuring schools abide by the Education Act and its regulations.
**Trustees**

Trustees are members of the school board. They provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision making. Trustees are elected every four years during municipal elections.

Under the law, only the elected board has the power to make decisions. Trustees do not have individual authority, but do have an important role to play as members of the board, including:

- working in partnership with school councils;
- explaining the policies and decisions of the board to community residents; and
- supporting and encouraging public education

**Principals**

Principals are responsible for the organization and management of individual schools, including any budget assigned to the school by the school board. They are also responsible for the quality of instruction at their school and for student discipline. One or more Vice Principals may also be assigned to the school to help the principal with his or her work.

Each principal is responsible for:

- determining the organization of the school and ensuring ongoing maintenance of the school buildings;
- administering the school's budget;
- student admission and placement;
- maintaining student records;
- ensuring report cards are sent to parents;
- developing a school safe arrival program with the help of the school council, parents, and the community (elementary schools);
- ensuring student supervision and school discipline;
- assigning teachers to classes and assisting and supervising them;
- making recommendations to the school board on the appointment, promotion, demotion and dismissal of teachers; and
- selecting textbooks and other learning materials from the approved Ministry of Education list, with the help of teachers.

**Teachers**

Teachers are responsible for:

- preparing lesson plans and teaching classes;
- encouraging students in their studies and evaluating student work and progress;
- supervising students behavior and maintaining classroom discipline;
- demonstrating good citizenship and respect for all groups of people; and
- acting as teacher-advisers for students in Grades 7-11, e.g. helping students complete their annual education plans and monitoring their school performance and progress toward their career goals.

**Students**

Students are responsible for:

- attending classes and taking examinations; and
- exercising self-discipline and behaving courteously toward both their teachers and their fellow students.
Parents

Parents are responsible for:

- ensuring their children attend school. Generally speaking, attendance is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16.

School Councils

School Councils advise principals and, where appropriate, school boards on issues affecting the education programs and the operation of individual schools. Their membership reflects both the school and the community, and must include parents and guardians of students, the principal, a teacher, a student representative (secondary school councils), a non-teaching school staff member, as well as members from the community at large. Parents and guardians must make up the majority of council members.

School Councils may advise the principal or the school board on:

- school year calendars;
- codes of student behavior;
- curriculum priorities;
- programs and strategies to improve school performance on provincial and school boards tests;
- safe arrival programs (elementary schools);
- communications to parents and communications to the community;
- community use of the school, and community programs and services provided at the school through school-community partnerships;
- school board policies that will affect the school; and
- selection of principals.

Ontario College of Teachers

The Ontario College of Teachers regulates the teaching profession and governs its members. The college was established by the provincial government in September 1996.

The College of Teachers is responsible for:

- setting requirements for teaching certificates and maintaining a provincial register of teachers;
- setting standards for teacher training programs at Ontario universities, and monitoring the training programs to ensure they meet the standards;
- developing codes of conduct for teachers; and
- investigating complaints against teachers and making decisions about teacher discipline and fitness to practice.

Education Quality and Accountability Office

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established by the Ontario government in 1996 to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education.

The EQAO is responsible for:

- developing and administering tests to evaluate the achievement of Ontario elementary and secondary school students;
- reporting test results to the Minister and to the public; and
- providing recommendations to improve test results.

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