



April 28, 2020

Dear School Council Chairs and Co-Chairs,

To begin with, I hope you and your family are staying safe and healthy. I know, despite the current circumstances, that many parents/guardians have found ways to connect with each other and support schools. All forms of parent engagement are valued and appreciated. Now, as we continue in a government-mandated closure, I want to provide an update on school council meetings as we move forward.

Right now, as staff, we need to focus our collective efforts on the continuation of learning and the well-being of students and staff while doing our best to stay connected to families and school councils. We need a common understanding of the continuation of school council meetings. We are hearing from some councils that now is not a good time to meet because many families are coping with issues such as illness, food, housing and financial insecurity. At the same time, some parents/guardians are ready to resume school council meetings. We recognize it is not business as usual for anyone and some families will face barriers to their participation in meetings. We must try to balance these different realities in our approach.

With these important considerations in mind, school councils may choose to hold one meeting in May or June if quorum can be achieved as outlined in your school council bylaws. There are many unknowns about the future such as when schools will re-open and the restrictions that will be in place which makes it difficult for councils to plan for September. I want to reinforce that this meeting is not expected during the school closure period, but we understand if there are urgent items that need to be addressed and that parents are also eager to support their schools. Please provide notice of the meeting to your school council members and the school community and explain that it cannot be fully accessible to all parents given the current situation and our limited experience in and lack of guidelines for hosting virtual school council meetings. School councils may select which virtual platform to use.

Many school councils have asked about reallocating school council funds or returning funds to families in light of the current economic situation. Staff are working on the logistics to accommodate this request given the different scenarios. Principals and School Councils will receive additional instructions this week about how to address school council funds.

The Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) has been consulted and provided feedback that was considered in forming this direction. PIAC will be offering tips or strategies to school council chairs and co-chairs to make these virtual meetings more successful. We are appreciative of their willingness under these circumstances to engage with the Board of Trustees and staff to advocate on behalf of families.





Lastly, there are innovative examples of parent engagement emerging during the pandemic. It is our commitment to share these examples widely so that others can learn from them. I value the important work that our school councils do each and every day.

These changes are not about the importance of that work, but rather about the current reality and our concern for the health and well-being of you, our staff, and our school communities. We will re-assess this direction around school councils as more information becomes known. I thank you for your continued understanding during these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Malloy".

John Malloy
Director of Education

