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March 27, 2018

Dear partners,

As you know, in fall 2017, the Ministry of Education engaged with its partners to identify effective practices that foster strong, accountable and transparent school board governance. As part of this engagement, we sought input from education partners and experts on five governance topics and received a total of 119 responses.

The ministry received feedback from the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, trustee and student trustee associations, teacher federations and unions, principal and supervisory officer associations, school boards, the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education, school board advisory committees and staff, a First Nation education department, student senates/councils, accountability officers, the Ontario College of Teachers, and individuals with governance expertise.

We carefully reviewed each submission to ensure that the views and concerns of our partners were considered. I would like to thank you for your feedback on topics that were of particular relevance and interest to you, and would like to share our next steps on all five topics of engagement.

**Trustee Codes of Conduct and Integrity Commissioners**

The ministry heard that a code of conduct for trustees is one of the key elements of a local accountability and transparency framework, and that, if used effectively, a code of conduct can serve to encourage respect for divergent views and help boards focus their efforts on student achievement, equity, well-being and public confidence.

The ministry also heard that school boards should continue to be given the choice of appointing an integrity commissioner where the need arises. Education partners indicated that trustees would benefit from having access to an ethics expert who would provide advice and education to trustees on their ethical obligations.

In response to the feedback received, in late 2018 the ministry will establish a working group with the trustee associations to develop minimum standards for trustee codes of conduct. The ministry will also work with key partners to provide school boards with voluntary access to integrity commissioners, should they choose this path.

In the meantime, a new regulation is being proposed that would, if approved, require all school boards to have a publicly available code of conduct for trustees and to review their code on a regular basis – typically following each trustee election cycle.

The ministry will also continue to work with our partners to develop and/or refresh resources, including *Good Governance: A Guide for Trustees, School Boards, Directors of Education and Communities* (2014), to support school boards in their efforts to strengthen board accountability and transparency.

**Trustee Honoraria**

Education partners raised a number of issues related to the current formula for calculating trustee honoraria, and student trustee honoraria. Due to the complexity of these issues, we heard that there is a need for further collaboration to understand the diversity of perspectives and identify acceptable options for moving forward. As such, in late 2018, the ministry will be establishing a working group with the trustee associations and student trustee associations to review the honoraria formula for trustees and student trustees in district school boards, as well as trustees in isolate school boards.

In the interim, changes to the regulation regarding honoraria are being proposed that would, if approved, increase the base amount for trustees in district school boards by $400, from the current annual rate of $5,900 to the new rate of $6,300, effective December 1, 2018. The full $400 increase would be provided in the Trustees Allocation within the Grant for Student Needs (GSN). The proposed changes to trustee honoraria are also outlined in the March 26, 2018, B Memo: B06.

**Student Trustee Term of Office and Election Process**

The ministry consistently heard from student trustees, students and student councils that student trustees experience a steep learning curve, and could benefit from more time to become familiar with the requirements of the role, accomplish their goals, and build relationships.

Proposed changes to the regulation regarding student trustees would, if approved, provide student trustees with more time and greater support, prior to and while in the role, by:

1. Requiring all school boards to have at least two student trustees to encourage collaboration and shared ownership of responsibilities;
2. Providing school boards with the option of a two-year, staggered term of office or a one-year term of office;
3. Moving the student trustee election date to the end of February for boards that maintain a one-year term of office to enable greater time and opportunity for orientation and mentoring of incoming student trustees.

These changes would take effect for the 2019-20 school year to give boards time to work with their student trustees and student councils to change their policies and processes.

Moving forward, the ministry will explore opportunities for greater consistency in the student trustee election process, promoting awareness of the position and increasing student voice in decision-making, in collaboration with our partners. This includes examining possible legislative changes that would allow student trustees to move board motions.

**Electronic Meeting Participation**

Education partners generally expressed a preference for in-person participation by the chair, while acknowledging that electronic participation should be permitted in extenuating circumstances. Some partners also raised that the current in-person requirement for board and committee chairs dissuades some trustees from running for the chair position, especially in geographically large boards.

To bring greater equity of access to the role of chair, amendments to the electronic meetings regulation are being proposed that would, if approved, permit boards to include in policy the ability for board and committee chairs to preside over meetings electronically in certain circumstances that would be outlined in the regulation (i.e., the distance from the chair’s current residence to the meeting location is 200 kilometres or more; weather conditions do not allow the chair to travel to the meeting location safely; or the chair cannot be physically present at a meeting due to health-related issues). No more than half of board meetings in a 12-month period could be chaired electronically. School boards would also be required to establish processes to ensure the security and confidentiality of proceedings discussed in closed meetings, including maintaining the current requirement for at least one trustee and the director of education to be physically present in board meetings.

**Director of Education Qualifications**

Education partners consistently expressed a preference for maintaining the existing framework for the recruitment, retention and development of directors of education. Education partners also expressed interest in working collaboratively with the ministry to develop and refresh policy and program supports.

In response to the feedback received, the ministry will work with its partners to develop and refresh policy and program supports, while enhancing the accessibility of related information to foster high levels of public confidence.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the governance engagement and for your continued work supporting strong and accountable school board governance.

Sincerely,



Bruce Drewett

Director

Leadership, Collaboration and Governance Branch