



**Making a Difference for Kids**  
**Running for Election**  
**as a School Board Trustee**  
Guide for Candidates  
and Communities



**Education  
that Connects**  
Global Achievement  
with Local Accountability

# Contents

## 1



### **School Boards and School Board Trustees**

- What is a School Board?
- School Board Trustees – Who are they?  
Why are they important?
- What are the Time Commitments for a School Board Trustee?
- Can anyone be a School Board Trustee?
- Experience and Knowledge that would be good to have  
Board Administration
- Trustees, School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees
- I want to run for School Board Trustee. What do I have to do?



## 2

### **Education in Ontario**

- Education Funding
- Curriculum
- Education Quality and Accountability Office



## 3

### **The Ontario Public School Boards' Association**

- What is OPSBA?
- Statement of Mission and Beliefs

# Touch the future Become a school trustee



WHEN THE ONTARIO LEGISLATURE approved changes to the *Education Act* in 2009, the education minister of the day, had this to say about the crucial role of school boards and those who serve on them: “Trustees are on the front lines and are the first point of contact in our publicly funded education system. You bring local knowledge of the education issues in your communities and the interests of your constituents into broader school board discussions. And school boards have the capacity to respond to local priorities, and to develop local policies, programs and solutions to respond to local needs.”

**T**ALK TO ANY TRUSTEE and he or she will tell you about the joys, and the challenges as well, that come with working on behalf of Ontario’s children, their families and their communities.

VISIT ANY SCHOOL BOARD WEBSITE – and prepare to be amazed by the breadth and depth of the programs and activities that Ontario school boards have developed to guide and shape Generation Next. There are programs designed to promote achievement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, and to welcome the world of new immigrants to Canada. There are math Olympiads, literacy initiatives, sports programs, art exhibitions, science fairs, innovative programs for special-needs kids, EcoSchools, early learning centres, adult education, homework clubs and a strong safety net of support services – all designed to help students succeed to the best of their abilities.

THROUGH THEIR MEMBERSHIP on local school boards and their involvement with provincial school board associations, trustees also have the opportunity to play a broader advocacy role and influence government policy.

DESPITE BUDGET CONSTRAINTS, Ontario’s school boards have demonstrated time and again that, through the collective efforts of creative and committed trustees, they are making a difference for kids.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A SCHOOL TRUSTEE? The following guide offers the ABCs of running for office and outlines the roles and responsibilities of school boards and trustees.

## Key Dates – 2010

NOMINATION AND CAMPAIGN PERIOD BEGINS	January 1, 2010
NOMINATION DAY (LAST DAY TO BE NOMINATED)	September 10, 2010
FINAL DAY FOR WITHDRAWAL OF CANDIDACY	September 10, 2010
VOTING DAY	October 25, 2010
SCHOOL BOARD TERM BEGINS	December 1, 2010
CAMPAIGN PERIOD ENDS	December 31, 2010
FINANCIAL FILING DEADLINE	March 25, 2011
SCHOOL BOARD TERM ENDS	November 30, 2014

## More information

can be found at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing web site: [www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page219.aspx](http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page219.aspx)

### RESOURCE DEVELOPED BY:

- Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l’Ontario (ACÉPO)
- Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
- Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association (OCSTA)
- Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA)

## SECTION ONE :

# School Boards and School Board Trustees



### What is a School Board?

A school board is a body established by provincial legislation and governed by its publicly elected board members (trustees). The *Education Act* creates four different kinds of school boards: English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic.

A fundamental pillar of a democratic society is free education for its citizens. Ontario's publicly funded school boards provide high standards in programming and ensure that there are supports and resources to help all students to reach those standards.

Recent amendments to Ontario's *Education Act* established through the *Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, 2009* stipulate that every school board shall:

- promote student achievement and well-being;
- ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources;
- deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils;
- develop and maintain policies and organizational structures that,
  - (i) promote the boards goals and,
  - (ii) encourage pupils to pursue their educational goals;
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies developed by the board in achieving the board's goals and the efficiency of the implementation of those policies;
- develop a multi-year plan aimed at achieving the boards' goals;
- annually review the multi-year plan with the board's Director of Education or the supervisory officer acting as the board's Director of Education; and

- monitor and evaluate the performance of the board's Director of Education, or the supervisory officer acting as the board's Director of Education, in meeting,
  - (i) his or her duties under this Act or any policy, guideline or regulation made under this Act, (including duties under the multi-year plan), and
  - (ii) any other duties assigned by the board.

Beyond these broad areas of accountability, the *Education Act* also spells out duties for school boards that include such obligations as effective operation of schools, setting the board's budget, implementing the Ministry's curriculum policies, and ensuring that appropriate staff are hired as required by schools. Boards will also make determinations about such matters as pupil transportation, school libraries, continuing education, childcare facilities on school sites. A full listing can be found in the *Education Act* at: [www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws/statutes\\_90e02\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws/statutes_90e02_e.htm)

A school board is **not**:

- a parliament with party divisions. A school board is a single body made up of members (trustees). A school board should speak as one united voice.
- interested only in the opinions of families with children. A school board must recognize that all of society has a stake in public education.
- a sub-committee of the municipality. In fact, school boards govern budgets substantially greater than those of most municipalities.
- a closed or private body. All school boards are public institutions and their meetings are open to the public.

*It's important to attract quality people to these positions. Obviously, I'm a little biased, but I do believe that education is the cornerstone of this country; it is the gateway to our future success.*

MARK BAILEY, owner of a small information technology business and member of the Upper Grand District School Board

## **School Board Trustees – Who are they? Why are they important?**

School trustees are the **members** of the District School Board. They are locally-elected representatives of the public, and they are the community's advocate for public education. They are required to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under the *Education Act*.

**A trustee's role is to maintain a focus on student achievement and well-being and to participate in making decisions that benefit the entire board district while representing the interests of his or her constituents. Trustees must also communicate the views and decisions of the board back to their constituents.**

This is not as simple as it sounds. Because Ontario is large and diverse, the job of school trustee varies widely. A trustee is responsible for identifying the needs and priorities of their community and for ensuring these are turned into practical educational opportunities for students. In doing so, trustees must mediate among conflicting interests and values. A trustee must do this in collaboration with the other members of the school board by developing policies that work for all students, and ensuring they are implemented effectively. School trustees are the most direct way for the community to express itself in our schools. They play an important role in preserving our democratic heritage.

### **The school trustee is a member of a team**

Only the team (the Board), not an individual trustee, has the authority to make decisions or take action. A school board must place all students first when making any decision.

Trustees are required to uphold the implementation of any board resolution after it is passed by the board. In exercising their role, they are required to comply with the board's code of conduct.

### **Trustees are responsible for establishing policy direction**

Policies set out the expectations about what should happen or how services are to be provided within the school board. A well-written policy describes to parents, the public and the board's staff, what they can expect. The Board of Trustees assign to the Director of Education responsibility for implementing board's policies. They entrust the day to day management of the board to its staff through the board's Director of Education.

### **Trustees, as members of the board, are accountable to the province**

The board of trustees is accountable, through the Ministry of Education, for the proper conduct of their duties and powers, including the implementation of provincial policy and the use of provincially allocated funds.

### **Trustees are accountable to their electorate**

As elected officials trustees must balance the demands of the community with the duties required by the Ministry of Education. By law, they are required to consult with parents, students and supporters of the board on the board's multi-year plan and bring the concerns of these groups to the attention of the board. This can be challenging and takes dedicated leadership coupled with a willingness to seek innovative ideas and the courage to implement them.



### **School Board Trustees are community leaders**

School trustees have a responsibility to all the families in their community – not just their neighbours, and not just families with school-aged children. They work with their school board colleagues and with other community partners to ensure that all the students within the board’s jurisdiction have equal opportunities to reach their maximum potential.

Trustees demonstrate their leadership in the following key areas:

- Establishing vision to ensure a strong public education system
- Setting goals for student achievement
- Undertaking assessment to measure progress
- Promoting accountability throughout the school board
- Allocating resources in ways that ensure equity of opportunity and demonstrate accountability
- Establishing a respectful, caring, professional climate throughout the school board
- Creating collaborative relationships inside the board and across the community
- Promoting continuous improvement
- Promoting community involvement and establishing communications

### **What are the Time Commitments for a School Board Trustee?**

#### **Attending Board Meetings and Committee meetings**

Trustees are expected to prepare for, and participate in all board meetings and all meetings of board committees of which they are members. Attendance at these meetings can be in person or through electronic means. Board meetings are not, however, the only time commitment for trustees. To get a full picture of board-related requirements, candidates should check with their local school board office. Preparing for a board meeting by reviewing all the material can be time-consuming.

#### **Other duties at the School Board**

There are other obligations for school board trustees to undertake in their role as a school board member. Some of these are statutory (meaning mandated by the province) and some are not. Statutory duties include the appointment of a trustee to various committees such as the Special Education Advisory Committee, or to board-based quasi-judicial committees such as those responsible for conducting proceedings dealing with the suspension or expulsion of students. Non-statutory obligations may include participating in ad hoc committees or working groups of the board.

#### **Attending Community Meetings as a representative of the School board**

One of a trustee’s key responsibilities is to facilitate communication between the board and community groups. Trustees may be asked to attend meetings such as: school council meetings, community groups, municipal councils and municipal committees,

*One of the most exciting parts of school board politics is that connection with the community because education is one of those key factors in eliminating poverty, in improving the life of children and their families . . . and that's what grounds trustees.*

CATHERINE FIFE, a social policy researcher and member of the Waterloo Region District School Board

meetings with MPPs and MPs, and other community agencies such as district health councils and library boards. Community meetings are often held at night to enable working parents to attend.

Attending school events and community functions will give candidates a fuller picture of the role.

#### **Responding to the concerns of parents and others**

A trustee is often the first point of contact for parents and community members who have questions and/or concerns about their local school. While individual trustees do not have the authority to direct board staff to undertake any particular action they can help in answering questions, finding solutions or facilitating interaction with the school and board administration.

#### **Communications**

Responding to telephone calls, meeting requests and mail from constituents is an important part of the trustee role and requires some time commitment.

#### **Can anyone be a School Board Trustee?**

A candidate for a school board must, upon nomination, be a qualified municipal elector and fulfil all of the following requirements:

- a resident within the jurisdiction of the board;
- a supporter of the board;
- a Canadian citizen;
- at least 18 years old;
- Roman Catholic (if running for a separate school board);
- not legally prohibited from voting; and
- not disqualified by any legislation from holding school board office.

**Note:** A candidate, if nominated, must remain qualified throughout the election and, if elected, throughout the term of office. The term of office is 4 years. School board candidates should confirm that they have the qualifications described in section 219 of the *Education Act*. It is the responsibility of the candidate to determine whether he or she is qualified to be elected to and hold office.

A candidate for school board office cannot be a clerk, deputy clerk, treasurer or deputy treasurer of a municipality within the jurisdiction of a board.

The following persons **are disqualified** from being elected to school board office:

- any person not eligible to vote in the municipality;
- an employee of any school board unless he or she
  - (i) takes an unpaid leave of absence before being nominated, and
  - (ii) resigns, if elected to the office;

#### **See additional note below**

- a judge of any court;
- a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, a Senator or a member of the House of Commons; or
- an inmate of a penal or correctional institution under sentence of imprisonment.

**Note:** An employee of a school board who wishes to run for office on **any** school board must take an unpaid leave of absence prior to being nominated. If elected, the employee must resign. A person may not be employed by one school board and hold office on a different school board. A clerk, treasurer, deputy clerk, deputy treasurer of a municipality wishing to run for office on a school board must also take unpaid leave prior to being nominated and resign if elected. An employer is required to grant a leave of absence.



### **Experience and Knowledge that would be good to have**

Trustee candidates do not need to have a background in education. However, the following skills and experience would be assets for potential trustee candidates.

#### **Basic understanding of official meeting procedures and governance policies**

Candidates should review a copy of their board's bylaws, governance policies and Code of Ethics or Conduct. They could also observe board meetings to get an understanding of the process.

#### **Basic understanding of a Trustee's role as a member of a Board**

Under the *Education Act* trustee power lies solely in membership on the corporate school board. As members of the corporate board, trustees are legally accountable to the public and to the Minister of Education for the collective decisions of the board and for the delivery and quality of educational services. This means that once the Board has voted, it is a trustee's responsibility to act in a manner that promotes and upholds the board's decision and to communicate the board's decision back to the constituency.

#### **Some awareness of the legal, political and legislative parameters in which school boards operate**

School board operations are often highly prescribed by legislation or regulation or other forms of provincially driven policy. Candidates need to be aware of this fact, especially when making campaign promises.

#### **Willingness to learn**

A newly-elected school trustee has a fairly steep learning curve, and must be willing to spend time becoming familiar with existing board policies and relevant legislation.

**Acceptance to serve on a school board assumes an awareness of the legislated expectations and responsibilities conferred through legislation, provincial policy, contractual agreements or any other mechanism. Trustees must act within these parameters, and be aware of the consequences of decisions that don't respect these commitments. Anyone considering candidacy for school board membership should carefully consider these accountability relationships and responsibilities when making the important decisions to serve, or continuing to serve, on a district school board.**

#### **Board Administration**

The Chief Executive Officer of the Board is the Director of Education. The most important leadership relationship in the school system is the one that exists between the Board of Trustees and the Director of Education. While their roles are distinct and different, they must also be complementary for the system to operate effectively. Each board's success depends on the leadership of the Director of Education. Each Director of Education's job is greatly influenced by the successes the board achieves and by the challenges it faces. Both parties need to be cognizant of their inter-dependence, and willing to work cooperatively for the successes of the system and the students in the schools.



*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

MARGARET MEAD

Organizational structures differ among boards. However, the school board's administration manages the day-to-day functions of operating the school system.

## **Trustees, School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees (PICs)**

### **Trustees and School Councils**

Effective trustees establish regular and consistent communication with their school councils. Through the use of email, e-newsletters, websites, meetings and other public forums, trustees and school councils can remain in constant communication. Increasingly, trustees are creating online journals, websites or weblogs (a.k.a. blogs) to help them communicate with their constituents. Trustees who facilitate communication among school councils within their jurisdiction are better able to speak on their behalf at the board table.

School councils are provincially-mandated advisory bodies, providing advice to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board. Their structure and responsibilities are determined by government regulation. A trustee that has open and consistent communication with school councils is creating a climate of inclusion that benefits the board and the students in its schools.

It is important to note that a trustee's responsibility is to advocate for decisions which will better serve the board's entire jurisdiction, while school councils advocate almost exclusively for their own students in their own schools. This is an important point to remember when determining what advice one should consider.

### **Parent Involvement Committees**

A Parent Involvement Committee is like a school council for the school board. Where school councils focus on the local school and community, Parent Involvement Committees focus on things that affect more than one school. They also discuss issues that matter to parents across the school board. They do this by:

- Supporting parent involvement at the regional level
- Linking parents with the school board's Director of Education and trustees.

Most members are parents and the committee is chaired by a parent. But the Director of Education and trustee representatives also sit on the committee. This helps communication flow both ways. It helps the school board communicate with parents and makes sure that parent voices are heard by the board. Recent changes to the *Education Act* pave the way for government regulations about PICs, their establishment, composition and functions.



**I want to run for School Board Trustee.  
What do I have to do?**

**Key Dates – 2010**

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**More information**

can be found at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing web site: [www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page219.aspx](http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page219.aspx)

**Nomination**

Interested candidates must file nomination papers. Nomination papers may be filed in the office of the municipal clerk from the first day of January 2010 that municipal offices are open (January 4, 2010 in most municipalities) until 2 p.m. on nomination day, Friday, September 10, 2010. The nomination must be in the prescribed form and accompanied by the prescribed fee.

**Nomination Process**

- Obtain nomination papers from the clerk of the municipality or online.
- A nomination paper must be filed in person by the candidate or by an agent.

- The nomination paper must have original signatures. The nomination paper may not be faxed, mailed or emailed. Either the candidate or the agent must bring the completed and signed nomination papers to the office of the clerk. The candidate may be required to show proof of identity and qualifications.
- The prescribed nomination filing fee must be paid at the time of filing the nomination. Payment to the municipality must be made by cash, certified cheque or money order.
- The nomination filing fee for the office of school trustee is \$100.

**Withdrawal of Candidacy**

If a candidate decides to withdraw from the election, he or she must notify the clerk in writing no later than 2 p.m. on nomination day (Friday, September 10, 2010). A candidate who withdraws before nomination day is entitled to a refund of the nomination filing fee. A candidate who withdraws is still required to submit a completed financial disclosure covering all financial transactions made up to the date the nomination was withdrawn.

**Elections Finances**

All candidates are responsible for acting in accordance with the financial provisions set out in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*. Candidates should become familiar with these provisions.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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#### When can I accept contributions and spend funds?

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The campaign period defines when a candidate can accept contributions or expend dollars in support of the campaign. The Campaign Period begins on the day when the candidate files a nomination for office, and ends on December 31, 2010. Contributions cannot be made to or accepted by a candidate nor an expense incurred outside of his or her campaign period, and candidates cannot accept campaign contributions before they are nominated. At the end of the campaign period, all candidates are required to file a financial statement with the municipal clerk and should ensure that an accounting system that meets the requirements of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* is used.

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#### What are the limits that apply to campaign contributions?

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The limit on contributions donated in money, goods or services from any individual, corporation or trade union is \$750 to any one candidate, regardless of the number of offices the candidate was nominated for during the election period. The limitation applies whether the contribution consists of one large donation or is the total of a number of smaller contributions of money, goods or services from the same contributor or from related companies. The maximum total amount a contributor may contribute to candidates in the same jurisdiction is \$5,000. Each municipal council and each school board is a separate jurisdiction.

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#### Can I contribute to my own campaign?

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A candidate may contribute to his or her own campaign regardless of whether the candidate normally resides in Ontario. There is no limit on contributions from a candidate or his or her spouse to the candidate's campaign, but they are considered to be a contribution and must be reported as such and a receipt must be issued. Contributions to a candidate's (or spouse's) own campaign do not count toward the \$5,000 limit. If a campaign ends in a surplus, a candidate may withdraw from the campaign surplus the value of the candidate's contribution.

Financial reports must be filed by March 25, 2011.

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#### What rules apply to fundraising events?

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Fundraising functions are events or activities held by or on behalf of a candidate for the primary purpose of raising money for the candidate's campaign. Such activities include dinners, dances, garden parties, etc., for which there is an admission charge, as well as auctions, button sales, etc., for which there may not be an admission charge. A campaign event at which incidental fundraising takes place does not qualify as a fundraising function.

Fundraising functions can only be held for a candidate and only during that candidate's campaign period. The gross income (both admission revenue and other revenue) and expenses from each function must be recorded and reported on the candidate's financial

“Education gives citizenship a broader meaning, giving us the tools to face today’s challenges and the will to meet them head on. To shape the world, we must first and foremost shape our place in it.”

Her Excellency the Right Honourable MICHAËLLE JEAN, Governor-General of Canada

disclosure form. The price of admission to a fundraising function is a campaign contribution and a receipt must be issued for the full amount.

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#### What are the limits that apply to campaign spending?

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There are limits on the amount a candidate may spend on expenses during the candidate’s campaign period. Campaign expense limits are based on a formula that corresponds to the number of electors in the jurisdiction or ward in which the candidate is seeking office. There are different expense limits for heads of municipal council and for members of municipal councils and school boards.

The clerk must provide each candidate with an estimated spending limit upon filing of nomination papers. The estimate will be calculated based on the number of electors in the previous election. Within ten days after the close of nominations, the clerk must provide each candidate with a final spending limit. The final campaign spending limit will be calculated based on the number of electors on the voters’ list for the current election. If the final limit is lower than the estimate, the higher amount becomes the candidate’s official spending limit.

#### Formula to calculate the candidate’s limit:

Member of municipal council or school board:  
\$5,000 plus \$0.85 per eligible elector.

#### Penalties

Penalties for contravening the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* have been increased. An individual who contravenes the contribution rules may face a fine of up to \$25,000 (\$50,000 for corporations and trade unions) and/or up to six months in prison if the offence was committed knowingly. Candidates who are convicted of contravening certain provisions of the Act also forfeit any office to which they were elected, and are ineligible to run until after the next regular election has taken place.



## SECTION TWO: Education in Ontario

Under Canada's Constitution, education is a provincial responsibility.

### **Education Funding**

Education funding flows to school boards from the Ministry of Education. For details of the funding model go to [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/funding.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/funding.html) The fiscal year for school boards is September 1 to August 31. A financial plan, or budget, which reflects the needs of students and school boards' educational priorities is developed and approved, each year, by the Board. The financial plan, together with program planning, facilities planning and strategic planning assist the Board in managing its total resources.

School boards are responsible for establishing the Board budget – and for operating within it. Boards are legislatively required to plan for balanced budgets. Setting the board's budget is one of the most important tasks a trustee participates in as a member of the board because it ensures that available dollar resources are properly allocated to meet provincial and board priorities to achieve the desired student outcomes.

The *Education Act* makes boards accountable to the province for balanced budgets and the effective use of available funds.

### **Curriculum**

Curriculum policy documents from the Ministry of Education describe the overall and specific learning expectations for students in Kindergarten through Grade 12, according to subject area. As of September 2010, school boards will begin to implement full-day

Early Learning for four- and five-year olds. Curriculum documents can be found on the Ministry of Education website at:

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html)

### **More information**

For more information about education in Ontario and how the school system works, visit

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/)

### **Education Quality and Accountability Office**

The Ministry of Education sets policy for student assessment, which is then carried out by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), an arms-length agency responsible for standardized testing. The EQAO provides to parents, teachers and the public accurate and reliable information about student achievement.

### **More information**

Visit

[www.eqao.com](http://www.eqao.com)

## SECTION THREE :

# The Ontario Public School Boards' Association



### What Is OPSBA?

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.2 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called upon by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy decisions.

### Statement of Mission and Beliefs

The mission of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association is to promote and enhance public education by:

- helping member boards to fulfil their mandates
- developing effective partnerships with other groups interested in public education
- providing a strong and effective voice on behalf of public education in Ontario.

OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality or religious preference.

Local democratically-elected schools boards play a key role in ensuring that schools remain responsive to both provincial program requirements and local needs and resources.

Excellence in education is achieved by:

- promoting high standards of individual achievement
- providing the understanding and basic skills required for active, compassionate participation in the life of the family, the community, the province, the nation, and a global society
- cultivating a love of learning
- recognizing the value of diversity among learners and communities; and
- exploring creative educational alternatives.

To maintain excellence, the public school system must be accountable to the community it serves and work to fulfill its mandate through building strong community partnerships.

More information about OPSBA is available at:

[www.opsba.org](http://www.opsba.org)



**Education is for improving the lives of others  
and for leaving your community and  
world better than you found it.**

*Marian Wright Edelman*



# Education that Connects

Global Achievement  
with Local Accountability



**OESC**  
**CSEO**

Ontario Education  
Services Corporation  
La corporation des  
services en éducation  
de l'Ontario

The Ontario Education Services Corporation represents:

Association des conseils scolaires  
des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)



Association franco-ontarienne  
des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)



Ontario Catholic School Trustees'  
Association (OCSTA)



Ontario Catholic School  
Trustees' Association

Ontario Public School Boards'  
Association (OPSBA)



Council of Ontario Directors  
of Education (CODE)

**CODE**

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