

Title: School-Level Community Engagement Procedure

Adopted: May 12, 2026

Effective: June 16, 2026

Amended/Reviewed: N/A

This procedure must be interpreted, applied, and implemented in ways that uphold Indigenous and human rights and responsibilities, promote accessibility, and prevent and address (and do not reinforce) discrimination/discriminatory barriers.

1.0 RATIONALE

This procedure provides operational guidance to support school administrators in planning and implementing school-level community engagement in alignment with the Community Engagement Policy.

School-level engagement is grounded in the ongoing relationships schools build with students, families, caregivers, staff, and communities. These relationships are sustained through consistent, transparent, and respectful communication as a matter of everyday practice, and through more structured engagement where appropriate.

This procedure supports school administrators in recognizing when structured engagement is appropriate, selecting an approach that is proportionate to the matter, communicating clearly with participants, and closing the feedback loop.

School-level engagement is distinct from system-level engagement in its scope, scale, and context. It is led by school administrators, grounded in the school community, and relies on the professional judgment of the principal to determine when and how engagement is appropriate.

This procedure shall be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement Policy.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Terms used in this procedure are defined in the Community Engagement Policy, except where additional procedural context is provided below.

School-Level Community Engagement

School-level community engagement refers to structured engagement led by school

administrators and staff in relation to school-based initiatives, decisions, or activities within the school's scope of authority.

For the purposes of this procedure, school-level community engagement is distinct from routine school communication and may be used where a matter has a meaningful impact, warrants a more deliberate and transparent approach, or would benefit from perspectives not readily available through routine school communication or operational channels.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 Principals

Principals are responsible for leading and overseeing school-level community engagement within their school community. This includes ensuring that engagement activities are purposeful, proportionate, appropriate to the school context, and planned in accordance with this procedure.

Principals shall exercise professional judgment in determining when structured engagement is appropriate and in selecting approaches that reflect the nature of the matter, the communities being engaged, and the extent to which input can meaningfully inform the decision, initiative, or outcome.

Principals are also responsible for ensuring that community input is considered and communicated in a manner appropriate to the engagement undertaken.

Where a matter may affect First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, families, communities, partners, or Indigenous rights, principals shall consult with Indigenous Education staff and follow established Board protocols to determine the appropriate approach.

3.2 Vice-Principals and School Staff

Vice-principals and school staff support the planning and implementation of school-level engagement activities in alignment with this procedure. This includes supporting clear, accessible, inclusive, and respectful engagement practices, and assisting with communication and follow-up, as appropriate.

3.3 Superintendents

Superintendents are responsible for supporting and overseeing school-level engagement practices within their families of schools. This includes providing guidance to principals, supporting consistency across schools, and ensuring that engagement practices align with the Community Engagement Policy and this procedure.

4.0 APPLICATION AND SCOPE

This procedure applies to school-level community engagement activities led by school administrators and staff in relation to school-based initiatives, decisions, or activities within the school's scope of authority.

This procedure does not apply to:

- individual student, family, or staff concerns addressed through established processes, including the Public Concerns Policy and Procedures;
- the legislated roles and responsibilities of School Councils, which operate under their own mandates and requirements. Engagement activities may involve or seek input from School Councils, but this procedure does not govern their role or function;
- employment-related matters, labour relations processes, or confidential personnel matters;
- system-level engagement activities led by central departments or senior administration in support of Board-level decisions, initiatives, or priorities; or
- situations where engagement is not appropriate, including urgent operational decisions or matters substantially determined by legislation, Board policy, or other constraints with limited flexibility.

Where engagement intersects with legislated requirements, Board policy or procedure, School Council mandates, collective agreements, or other formal requirements, those requirements, mandates, or processes take precedence. This procedure may be used to support clarity of purpose, communication, and approach, but does not replace or modify established obligations or processes.

5.0 PROCEDURES

5.1 Determining Whether Engagement is Appropriate

Engagement should be undertaken where input is being intentionally sought and can meaningfully inform a school-level decision, initiative, or outcome within the school's scope of authority.

Before initiating engagement, the principal shall determine whether engagement is appropriate and proportionate to the matter under consideration.

Engagement is generally appropriate where the matter:

- may have a meaningful impact on students, families, caregivers, staff, or the school community;
- would benefit from perspectives or knowledge not readily available through typical operational channels; or
- is of sufficient interest to the school community that a structured

communication or engagement approach is required.

Engagement may not be appropriate where:

- the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably accommodate a structured process;
- the matter is confidential or subject to privacy considerations;
- the outcome is substantially determined by legislation, Ministry direction, curriculum requirements, collective agreement, Board policy or procedure, or other constraints with limited discretion;
- the matter falls within routine operational decision-making where professional judgment is sufficient; or
- the matter is a system-level decision, initiative, or priority led by central departments or senior administration.

5.2 Planning the Engagement

Where engagement is appropriate, the principal shall consider the purpose of engagement, the school community of interest, the selected engagement approach, what is open to input, any known constraints, and how input will be considered before engagement activities begin.

The depth of planning should be proportionate to the scale, complexity, sensitivity, and potential impact of the matter.

Engagement shall be planned and implemented in good faith, with clear alignment between the purpose of engagement, the approach selected, and the role input can reasonably play in the school-level decision, initiative, or outcome.

5.2.1 Defining the Purpose and Scope

Before engagement begins, the principal shall establish:

- the school-level initiative, decision, or matter under consideration;
- the purpose of the engagement;
- the context, parameters, and known constraints within which the decision or initiative will be considered;
- what is open to input and what is not open to input;
- how input will be considered; and
- the anticipated timeline for engagement and for any related decision.

The purpose and scope of engagement shall be clearly communicated to participants before input is sought. Where constraints exist, whether legislative, operational, policy-based, or related to school authority, these shall be communicated from the outset.

5.2.2 Identifying the School Community of Interest

The principal shall identify the school communities of interest that may be meaningfully affected by, or have a reasonable connection to, the matter under consideration. Depending on the nature and scope of the initiative, this may include students, families and caregivers, staff, School Council, community partners, or other affected groups.

Engagement should be directed toward those most directly affected. Where the impact is specific to a defined group, such as families of students in a particular program, grade, cohort, or graduating class, engagement should be designed to reach that group in a deliberate and targeted way.

Where engagement is directed to a specific school community of interest, the rationale for that focus should be clear in the engagement planning and, where appropriate, communicated to participants.

5.2.3 Engagement with Indigenous Students, Families, and Communities

Where a matter may affect First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, families, communities, partners, or Indigenous rights, or where the potential impact is uncertain, the principal shall initiate consideration of Indigenous engagement early in the planning process.

The principal shall consult with Indigenous Education staff and follow established Board protocols to determine the appropriate approach. This may include engagement with Indigenous students, families, communities, partners, or rights holders, as appropriate to the matter under consideration.

The approach to Indigenous engagement may differ from general community engagement and shall reflect respect for Indigenous rights, knowledge systems, community relationships, and the Board's commitment to reconciliation.

5.2.4 Selecting the Engagement Approach

The principal shall select an engagement approach aligned with the continuum of engagement: inform, consult, involve, or collaborate.

The approach shall be selected based on the purpose of the engagement, the nature and scope of the matter, the school communities of interest, any known constraints, and the extent to which input can meaningfully inform the school-level decision, initiative, or outcome.

The selected approach must align with what is open to input and the school's scope of authority. Where the opportunity for influence is limited, the engagement approach should focus on providing clear information, explaining the context for the decision or initiative, and supporting understanding. Where input can meaningfully

shape understanding, options, implementation, recommendations, or outcomes within the school's authority, a consult, involve, or collaborate approach may be appropriate.

Engagement approaches are not hierarchical, and no single approach is inherently preferred. Approaches may be used individually or in combination, depending on the matter. For example, a school-level engagement process may include informing participants about fixed parameters, consulting on specific options, and involving participants in discussion about implementation considerations.

The selected approach shall be clearly communicated to participants, including what is open to input, how input will be considered, and any aspects of the matter that are not open to input.

Descriptions of each approach, including examples and Board commitments, are provided in the Community Engagement Policy and Appendix A.

5.3 Designing Engagement Activities

Engagement activities shall be designed to reflect the selected engagement approach, the school communities of interest, the purpose and scope of engagement, available timelines and resources, privacy considerations, and any known barriers to participation.

Engagement design should ensure that participants are provided with the information, context, format, and opportunity for input appropriate to the engagement approach selected.

5.3.1 Accessibility and Inclusion

Principals shall take deliberate steps to identify and address barriers to participation before engagement activities are finalized.

Considerations may include:

- clear and accessible communication;
- accessible communication materials and formats, consistent with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and related standards;
- meeting or participation formats that support access, including in-person, virtual, or other options, where appropriate;
- timing and scheduling that reflect the needs of the school communities being engaged;
- language, interpretation, or translation needs, where appropriate; and
- supports required to enable participation by communities that may be disproportionately affected by the matter under consideration.

Engagement design should recognize that a single method may not reach all members of the school community effectively. Varied approaches should be considered to support inclusive, accessible, and meaningful participation.

Engagement practices shall reflect the Board's commitments to Indigenous rights, human rights, accessibility, and belonging.

5.3.2 Selecting Engagement Methods

Engagement methods are the tools or formats used to carry out engagement, such as surveys, feedback forms, school meetings, focus groups, workshops, classroom or student discussions, School Council input, or digital communication tools.

Methods shall be selected based on the selected engagement approach, the nature and scope of the matter, the school communities being engaged, and the purpose of the input being sought.

A mix of methods may be appropriate where different members of the school community may require different opportunities to participate.

In selecting methods, principals should consider:

- whether the method is appropriate for the selected engagement approach;
- whether the method is likely to reach the school communities of interest effectively;
- whether the method supports the type of input being sought;
- whether the method can be implemented within the available timelines, resources, and privacy requirements; and
- whether additional or alternative methods are needed to support accessible and inclusive participation.

Examples of engagement approaches and methods are provided in Appendix A.

5.3.3 School Council

School Council is an important and established forum for parent, caregiver, and community input at the school level.

Principals should engage School Council where appropriate, while respecting its legislated role and mandate. School Council engagement should be considered where the matter may affect the broader school community or where School Council perspectives would meaningfully inform the matter under consideration.

Engagement with School Council does not replace broader school community engagement where broader engagement is warranted. Principals should consider whether additional approaches are needed to support inclusive and meaningful participation from students, families, caregivers, staff, or other affected groups.

5.4 Communicating During Engagement

Principals shall communicate clearly with participants before and during engagement about:

- the purpose of the engagement and the matter under consideration;
- the selected engagement approach;
- what is open to input and what is not open to input;
- how and when input will be considered;
- any known constraints, fixed parameters, or decision-making requirements; and
- anticipated timelines and next steps.

Engagement activities should be communicated through established school communication channels, as appropriate to the school community and the nature of the engagement.

Communication during engagement should be clear, accessible, and proportionate to the scale and complexity of the matter. Where timelines, scope, or decision-making considerations change during an engagement process, updated information should be provided to participants as appropriate.

Clear communication supports meaningful participation, appropriate expectations, and trust within the school community.

5.5 Closing the Feedback Loop

Where input is gathered, principals shall ensure follow-up communication is made available to participants and/or the affected school community. The form and scope of follow-up communication should be proportionate to the scale, complexity, and approach of the engagement undertaken.

Follow-up communication should address, as appropriate:

- key themes and perspectives shared through the engagement;
- how input was considered;
- any decisions, outcomes, recommendations, or next steps; and
- anticipated timelines for further communication or implementation, where applicable.

Where input does not result in a change to the proposed school-level decision, initiative, activity, or outcome, follow-up communication should, where appropriate, explain why the existing direction was maintained.

Follow-up communication may take different forms, including school newsletters, email updates, school website updates, School Council updates, student

announcements, presentations, or other communication channels appropriate to the matter.

Closing the feedback loop reinforces the value of participation and supports transparency, accountability, and trust within the school community.

5.6 Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

Principals are encouraged to periodically reflect on school-level engagement activities to identify lessons learned and opportunities to improve future engagement practices.

Reflection may consider:

- participation levels and whether the intended school communities of interest were reached;
- the effectiveness of the engagement approach and methods used;
- accessibility, inclusion, and barriers to participation;
- the clarity of communication before, during, and after engagement; and
- opportunities to strengthen future engagement planning, implementation, or follow-up.

Insights from this reflection may be used to improve engagement practices within the school community over time.

6.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A – Community Engagement Continuum

7.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action
- DDSB P IND 01 Indigenous Education Policy
- Ontario Human Rights Code
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Education Act, R.S.O. 1990
- DDSB P COM 07 Community Engagement Policy
- DDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan
- DDSB P HRA 01 Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Policy
- DDSB PR SCO 01-01 School Community Councils Procedure