

SCHOOL COUNCIL HANDBOOK

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board



HWDSB
BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.

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Introduction

We know that outcomes improve for children and youth when schools, caregivers, guardians, and parents partner together and support a child's learning. For the purposes of this document, we use the term "parent" as an inclusive reference to all the people who might engage in supportive roles for students, including caregivers, guardians, and parents.

Parents may engage or participate in this learning in a variety of ways. Some parents are involved through discussions about school, which happens at home or in small informal groups; other parents volunteer or participate in formal structures like the School Council. We welcome all home-school connections in our work to support learning for all.

Purpose and History of this Handbook

This handbook is a support document for parents who choose to engage through School Councils.

This resource builds on the Ministry of Education document, [*School Councils: A Guide for Members*](#). We hope it will support the work of School Councils and Vice-Principals/Principals.

As outlined in our **Multi-Year Strategic Plan**, our commitment to parent engagement remains a high priority:

Vision, Mission & Values

Vision: Growing Together

Mission: Every student experiences a sense of belonging and engages in dynamic learning to reach their potential and build their own future.

Values: Our values of Compassion, Dignity, Trust, and Joy guide our daily work and ensure that we honour the unique identities and needs of all.

Strategic Directions

Upholding Human Rights, Safety & Well-being

We will support all students and staff to feel safe and secure in our classrooms and school communities.

Providing Equitable Quality Education

We will offer equitable quality educational opportunities to improve student engagement, learning and achievement for future-readiness.

Collaborating with Students, Families and Communities

We will build reciprocal relationships and partnerships to enhance access and engagement for students, families, and communities.

Building a Sustainable Education System

We will adapt to a rapidly changing world through responsible fiscal management, investing equitably in accessible and sustainable facilities, and supporting a robust workforce.

Reinforcing Indigenous Educational Wellness and Reconciliation

We will honour our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by nurturing respectful and reciprocal relationships among Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners, and by cultivating intergenerational healing and wellness in a restorative education system.

What is a School Council?

Purpose of School Councils

Under the Education Act [Regulation 612](#), school boards in Ontario are required to establish a School Council for each school within the board. The purpose of the School Council is “through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.”

The HWDSB Code of Conduct and Human Rights procedures applies to all members of the school community, including trustees, Board employees, students, parents/ guardians, Home and School, School Council, visitors, volunteers, contractors, community members on school premises, while on school buses, at school related events or activities, or in any other circumstances that could have an impact on the climate of the school.

The full procedures can be found at:

[Code of Conduct Procedure](#)

[Human Rights Accountability Procedure](#)

The Role of The School Council Is To

- ✓ Advise the Principal and, where appropriate, the school board.
- ✓ Place students’ interests first.
- ✓ Support school success planning goals.
- ✓ Encourage parent and community involvement.
- ✓ Promote positive attitudes towards public education.
- ✓ School Councils provide input to the principal or the board on any matter. The principal is ultimately responsible for activities related to the school and therefore is responsible for Council activities.
- ✓ School Council and Home & School: Both groups are represented in some schools. School Council is governed through bylaws created by the Council, which are aligned with Ministry Regulation 612. Home & School Associations are strong partners in the education of children; they are accountable to the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations and are not mandatory in schools.

Regulations

School Councils are governed by Ontario [Regulation 612](#), which sets out the purpose, membership, and election requirements for School Councils. Under section 2(1)

Composition/Membership

- ✓ Parents (must comprise the majority of the membership)
- ✓ Principal
- ✓ Teacher from the school
- ✓ Student (in high schools with some provisions for student membership in elementary schools)
- ✓ Non-teaching staff member
- ✓ Community representative(s) appointed by the School Council
- ✓ Home and School Association representative from the school (if a Home and School Association is a partner at the school.)

Roles

School Councils have voting members:

- ✓ Chair or Co-Chairs (must be parent members)
- ✓ Other possible roles (at the discretion of the School Council)
- ✓ Members (see above).

Note: Once voting membership is established, School Councils must have a quorum to vote. Quorum is 50% of the voting membership plus one. Anyone on the Council should be voting (unless their own constitution says otherwise), other than the Chair who should only vote in the case of a tie.

Duties Of the School Council Chair

The School Council Chair is a parent/guardian who is not employed by the school board. The School Council Chair is elected annually and, in addition to performing the same duties as other School Council members, is responsible for the following:

- ✓ Arrange and chair meetings
- ✓ Prepare meeting agendas (in consultation with the principal). Post the agenda on the school website 48 hours before the meeting and circulate to School Council membership.
- ✓ Ensuring meeting minutes are recorded and maintained. Minutes should be shared with the larger school community after approval by the school Council at the subsequent meeting. The Chair and Principal should approve the minutes before they are brought forward to the meeting for approval.
- ✓ Facilitate the resolution of conflict
- ✓ Communicate with the Principal on behalf of the Council. Note: HWDSB will provide each School Council Chair with an email address. Principals will provide information about this email account to the Chair after the election of the Chair within the first 30 calendar days of the school year.
- ✓ A School Council's bylaws may outline additional responsibilities of the School Council Chair (e.g., acting as Secretary or Treasurer).

Duties of the Principal

- ✓ Distribute material to School Council members on behalf of the Board and Ministry of Education. This material should also be posted in an area accessible to parents.
- ✓ Attend, support and promote School Council operations, meetings and other activities. Note: A Vice-Principal may attend in a principal's place.
- ✓ Act as an important source of information on laws, regulations and Board policies and procedures including advising the Council when they may be in breach of Board policies and procedures.
- ✓ Solicit School Council views; consider and respond to their recommendations.
- ✓ May participate on committees of the School Council.
- ✓ Notify the community and post materials for parents (e.g., posting of School Council meeting minutes on school website).

Principals do not vote on School Council decisions. The relationship between the Principal and the School Council Chair is important. Every opportunity will be provided to ensure this relationship is managed in a positive manner.

The principal must consult School Council on school policies regarding:

- ✓ School Code of Conduct (if applicable)
- ✓ Appropriate dress for students (if applicable)
- ✓ School Plan for continuous improvement

The principal may also wish to involve their School Council and the community in conversations around a variety of other subjects. The principal must report how this advice has been considered.

School Council Elections Procedures

A person is qualified to be a parent member of a School Council if they are a parent of a pupil who is enrolled in the school. Ideally, the membership of the School Council will reflect the diversity of the school community. The maximum number of parent members on Council is a maximum of 20 as per the HWDSB School Council By-laws; individual School Councils may have a school specific by-law of a lower number.

An HWDSB employee cannot be a parent member on the Council of their child's school if they are employed at that school. If an HWDSB employee is employed elsewhere in the Board, they can be on Council if they take reasonable steps to inform people qualified to vote in the election of parent members of their employment.

Steps For Conducting a School Council Election

Pre-Election:

1. Consider forming an election planning committee consisting of parents, teachers and support staff. Secondary schools should include a student representative, appointed by the Student Council. Consider forming this committee in the spring, prior to the next school year, so that there is adequate time to plan the election. Note: Section 7.3 of the "School Council: A Guide for Members" provides useful timelines to help with this planning.

2. Develop an election plan before the last School Council meeting of the year. Include the date, time and location of the election for School Council parent members (must occur within first 30 calendar days of the school year) and ask the principal to submit a school use request.
3. Advertise the election – communicate in June through the school newsletter, social media, School Messenger, and school website. [See Appendix 8]
4. Inform parents of the process for nominations and elections. Communication regarding School Council elections can be shared through your school’s summer communication or September start-up letter. Parents must have at least 14 days’ notice before the date of the election. [see Appendix 3 for sample letter and form]
5. Ongoing communication in the days leading up to the election is essential to encourage parent engagement. Nomination forms are returned to the school or, as necessary, via an electronic collection process. Note: Some schools may prefer to call this form a ‘declaration of interest’ rather than a nomination. Whatever language or words best suit the community are the words that should be used.
6. Candidates may not engage in campaigning on or off school property or use any School Council social media or other tools to promote their candidacy.
7. Create a list of candidates. You may invite people to have an opportunity to speak to their nomination if multiple people are running for a position.
8. Inform parents of the election date and how many positions need to be filled.
9. Hold the election. [see Appendix 7]

During The Election:

1. Elections must be conducted by secret ballot.
2. Only parents or guardians of a student enrolled at the school can vote. All eligible voters may cast one vote for each parent position.
3. Voters must be present during the meeting.
4. Attendance should be taken to account for the number of voting individuals.

Individuals running for a position should not be staffing the election table or the electronic voting method.

After The Election:

1. Announce names of elected Council members to the school community within 30 days of the election via as many communication methods as possible.
2. Hold the first meeting within 35 calendar days of the school year and elect your executive positions. A recommended practice is to hold the first meeting the same day as the election – this will satisfy both timeline (30-day election and 35-day meeting) requirements.
3. A School Council shall meet at least 4 times in the school year.
4. An official meeting of the School Council cannot be held unless a majority (51%) of the current members of the School Council are present at the meeting, including the principal or their designate. The majority of those present must be parent/caregivers.

School Council Critical Timelines:

Time Period:	Actions:
May/June	School Council election committee is established.
June	School Council election timelines are established and communicated, including the date, time, and location of the election to be held in the fall. Nomination forms are developed School Council Chairs communicate the plan to the principal.
Mid-August	The principal communicates the election plan and timelines as well as applicable forms (e.g., nomination forms) to the parent community. This information must be provided at least 14 days before the election.
Early September	The School Principal posts School Council election information in materials using a platform that is accessible to all parents. Parents return nomination forms to the school.
Mid to end of September	Ballot box is prepared for the election, and arrangements are made for volunteers to help with the election The election of the teacher, non- teacher, student representatives may take place at the same time or shortly after the election of the parent representatives.
Late September to early October	The first meeting of the School Council takes place and meeting dates, times and locations for the upcoming year are determined. (The first meeting of the new School Council must take place within the first 35 days of the start of school). The names of the new School Council members are shared with the school community within 30 days of the election as are the meeting dates, times, and locations of School Council meetings for the year.
October - June	Regularly scheduled meetings with agendas, minutes, and ongoing communications.

School Council Meetings

Communications and Announcements

School Council meeting dates and times should be communicated to the membership and school at large via a variety of methods which can include:

- ✓ Details in the monthly calendar or the school newsletter.
- ✓ Direct email or School Messenger facilitated by the principal.
- ✓ Details on the school sign.
- ✓ School website – highlight meetings as well as Council’s activities and accomplishments, facilitated by the principal.
- ✓ Caregiver engagement events based on areas of interest identified by caregivers.

- ✓ Set up tables at school events. (Kindergarten Orientation, Open House, etc.)
- ✓ Social media (standard tags are suggested by HWDSB – see Appendix 8)

Meeting Agendas

School Councils may run meetings in person and with a hybrid/remote option. All meetings will begin with the Land Acknowledgement.

The agenda is the responsibility of the Council Chair and Co-Chair with input from other members. The council chair should review the agenda in advance with the school Principal.

Agenda items should reflect the concerns and interests of the school community. A Sample School Council Agenda is available in Appendix 1. A Sample Principal’s Report is available in Appendix 2.

Meeting Facilitation

Usually, the Chair will lead the membership through the agenda items in order. Some Chairs will delegate various portions of the meeting to others.

Minutes

To help keep the membership informed, minutes should be taken, edited/reviewed, and shared back to the membership. Each School Council will determine who should be tasked with this important job.

School Council Funds

School council funds are the responsibility of the HWDSB and must follow all HWDSB financial procedures. The principal is responsible for ensuring these procedures are met.

School Councils may not enter into long-term agreements, loan arrangements or other contractual agreements under the name of the school or the School Council.

Each year, HWDSB provides every School Council with \$500. These funds, also called Parent Engagement Grants, are to support School Council operations and running an effective Council. These funds will help to encourage and increase parent involvement.

Building an Inclusive and Equitable School Council

- ✓ Communication – Knowing the demographics of the school community will help determine a communication plan and if there is a need to reach out to diverse communities.
- ✓ Language – Does the language used in outreach communication meet the language and reading needs of our target groups? How might translations of documents support your school community? To access support for translated services, consult with the principal.
- ✓ Varied communication methods – Newsletters, social media, school sign.
- ✓ Meeting dates – Be aware of days of religious significance. HWDSB publishes these dates and posts them here: [School Year Calendar](#)
- ✓ Alternative opportunities – Consider how to gather input from groups and individuals who are unable to attend events and activities that are scheduled at a specific time.
- ✓ What barriers might exist? – Consider time or location of meeting, technology requirements and access to tech support, childminding availability, agenda reflecting the needs of the community. What options does the School Council have that could reduce barriers and allow more people to participate?

School Councils and Fundraising

Many School Councils are active in fundraising activities in the name of the school and, as such, are required to conform to the appropriate sections of Regulation 612 in the Education Act that deals with fundraising issues.

School Councils shall not engage in fundraising activities unless the activities are to raise funds for a purpose approved by the principal or authorized by any applicable policies established by the HWDSB.

Schools can access support with planning online events or collecting donations by contacting the Hamilton Foundation for Student Success.

www.hwdsb.on.ca/foundation Email: foundation@hwdsb.on.ca

Fundraising Guidelines

Ownership of School Council Funds – The Ministry of Education’s document, *School Councils: A Guide for Members*, states “School Councils should be aware that, because the school board is a corporate entity and the school is not, any funds raised by the School Council (and any assets purchased with those funds) belong, legally, to the board.” Fundraising for schools by School Councils is a collaboration between the school, the Board, and the fundraising group. View the full document here: [Ministry School Council Guidebook](#)

School Councils should refer to the HWDSB [Fundraising Policy](#) and [Procedures](#). As part of these procedures, the school Principal is responsible for the creation of an annual school fundraising plan. The school Principal will seek advice from the school council in the creation of this plan. The plan will then be reviewed and approved by the Superintendent of Student Achievement and Equity.

School Council must use the Board-approved vendors when available to ensure compliance with health and safety. Where approved vendors are not available, School Councils shall work with the principal to find an appropriate substitute.

School Principals have the responsibility for ensuring that all fundraising activities within a school including those organized by school councils comply with this policy and procedure.

Principals will share the school fundraising plan in the early fall for advice from the School Council.

Banking Procedures & Financial Reporting

School Councils should not have a separate bank account. All deposits and disbursements should flow through the school bank account. The School Council designate does not have signing authority on the school bank account for expenditures that will be charged to School Council funds.

School councils should work with the school Principal on funds raised by the school council. The principal will provide financial information regarding school funds as necessary.

Record Retention

Regulation 612, section 16, of the Education Act, states that “(1) A School Council shall keep minutes of its meetings and records of all of its financial transactions.” “(2) The minutes and records shall be available at the school for examination without charge by any person.” “(3) Subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to minutes and records that are more than four years old.”

Principals will retain all school council records following the HWDSB record retention procedures. All records are to be maintained on Board premises for a period of seven years.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Sample School Council Agenda

School Agendas are developed by Chairs and Principals and may follow a format that best suits the group. Here is a sample agenda that can be adapted to the needs and topics of a School Council.

AGENDA

**School Council Meeting
ABC Public School
October 21, 2020, 7 p.m., School Library**

1. Welcome and Land Acknowledgement
2. Introduction of members
3. *(if this is the first meeting of the year, it is advisable to provide an overview of the scope and role of school council)*
4. Review and Approval of previous meeting minutes (business might arise from previous minutes that will be added to the agenda)
5. Review and Approval of current Agenda *(deadline for agenda items previously communicated through Chair communication)
6. Guest Speaker (if a guest speaker is invited, have them speak before discussion of old and new business)
7. Business from previous meeting
8. Reports (Chair's Report, Principal's Report, Treasure Report, Student Council Report, Teacher's Report, any other reports as determined by bylaws)
9. School Improvement Plan
10. Next Meeting Date, time and location (dates are pre-determined at the start of the year)
11. Adjournment

Tips to consider when creating an Agenda:

- ✓ Personalize the Agenda with your school's logo or letterhead. The principal can provide a letterhead template including the HWDSB branding bar across the bottom of the page.
- ✓ Offer context about the role of the School Council as necessary, especially if new people join meetings.
- ✓ Communicate in advance a method and date for people to offer agenda items to the Chair.
- ✓ If a guest speaker is on the agenda, schedule this person's talk before any discussions about old and new business.
- ✓ Reports from various members can appear in any order that serves the group best.
- ✓ Make the Agenda available in multiple formats that reach your school audience (print, emailed copy, posted copy on the website, and social media links).

Appendix 2 – Sample School Council Nomination Forms



123 Any Street
Hamilton, Ontario L9G 3K8
Phone: 905.648.4468
Fax: 905.648.8228

EMAIL: abcschool@hwdsb.on.ca
PRINCIPAL: Ms. B. Kinderly
VICE-PRINCIPAL: Ms. S. Fernwood & Mr. M. Crouse
www.hwdsb.on.ca/abcschool

September 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Every school in Ontario is required to have a School Council to work collaboratively with the principal to improve student achievement and to enhance accountability of the school with parents. Information about School Councils can be found here:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/council02.pdf>.

We welcome all parents/guardians who are willing to volunteer their time to participate on our School Council for the 2020-2021 school year. Typically, School Councils meet in person on a regular basis to discuss school-wide interests and to make recommendations to the principal, however, this year, due to Public Health considerations, meetings will be held virtually.

School Councils must hold annual elections to identify voting members and various positions such as School Council Chair. Elected members vote on School Council matters and represent the group's ideas and advisory suggestions for the Principal. Please note that you do not have to be an elected member of School Council to attend meetings. All meetings are open to all parents/guardians who wish to attend.

To declare your interest to become an elected member on School Council, please complete the **nomination form** below. You may also nominate another parent/guardian of a student at our school to become an elected School Council member. All nominations forms must be received by [insert deadline date prior to first School Council meeting]. Please note that you must attend the meeting on [insert date of first School Council meeting] in order to be elected to Council. Our first meeting of this school year will be held virtually on [Insert date and time] via MS TEAMS. Please join us at [link, phone contact and conference identification number].

Please consider joining us on School Council as an elected or general member. School Council involvement is a great way to support your child's education and we look forward to working together.

Sincerely, |

[insert name of current chair/co-chair] and [insert principal name]

Below is a sample letter to parents/guardians and a School Council Nomination Form that can be shared with your school community in print or electronic form.

[SCHOOL NAME] SCHOOL COUNCIL NOMINATION FORM - 2020-2021

SELF-NOMINATION

I would like to join School Council as an elected member. I understand that an elected position requires more involvement and responsibilities than a general member does. I understand that this role involves attending School Council meetings.

My Name: _____

My Phone: _____

My E-mail: _____

I am interested in serving in one of the following School Council roles (please circle):

CHAIR CO-CHAIR TREASURER SECRETARY MEMBER AT LARGE OTHER

I am the parent/guardian of _____ **[student name] who is**
currently registered in Grade ____ **at [insert school name].**

I am an employee of HWDSB (please circle): YES NO

NOMINATION OF ANOTHER CANDIDATE

Nominator's Name: _____

Nominee's Name: _____

Nominee's Phone: _____

Nominee's Email: _____

Suggested School Council roles for the nominee (please circle):

CHAIR CO-CHAIR TREASURER SECRETARY MEMBER AT LARGE OTHER

The nominee is the parent/guardian of _____ **, who**
is currently registered in Grade ____ **at [insert school name].**

Is the nominee an employee of HWDSB? (please circle): YES NO

Please complete and return this form to the school office by [insert date]

Appendix 3 – Fundraising Rules, Checklists, And Forms

Schools can access support with planning online events or collecting donations by contacting the Hamilton Foundation for Student Success. www.hwdsb.on.ca/foundation Email: foundation@hwdsb.on.ca

School Councils should review the HWDSB Fundraising Policy which state that fundraising activities in Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will:

- ✓ Be complementary to publicly funded education
- ✓ Be voluntary
- ✓ Provide a safe environment for students, staff and volunteers
- ✓ Be accountable and transparent

Full details may be found here: [School Fundraising Procedures](#)

Note: Funds raised by School Councils are called ‘School Generated Funds (SGF)’. In partnership with the principal and authorized school personnel, the School Council will account for SGF funds in accordance with this SGF Guide.

For complete information, read the Procedures Guide here: [School Generated Funds Procedure](#)

Appendix 4 – Communications Strategies, Tips, And Good Practices

Communicating with parents/guardians, the community, and school staff is an important role of School Council Chairs and other elected members. The following methods of sharing information are all available to the School Council.

School Council Email Address

All School Councils have an HWDSB-created email address that should be used by the School Council Chair. The standard protocol for this address is as follows: schoolnameSC@hwdsb.on.ca. An initial password will be provided by the school Principal which can then be changed.

School Website

All HWDSB schools have a website that follows HWDSB standards. To post information to the website, School Councils should provide content to the principal who will then ensure that the messages are posted. School website addresses follow this pattern:

<https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/schoolname/>

<https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/highview/>

<https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/ancasterhigh/>

School Messenger

All HWDSB schools have a school Messenger service which can be configured to send personal and public messages to parents and guardians. A personal message can, for example, provide information about a child's attendance. A public message is a communication to the entire school community, or even a specific segment of the school, depending on the audience. For example, an invitation to a Grade 9 Information Night can go just to Grade 9 parents. An invitation to attend the next School Council meeting could go to all families, all grades. A message to parents about Grade 8 Graduation could go just to the Grade 8 families.

School Messenger can be set up to send phone messages (to the number parents/guardians have provided as their primary contact). It can also send emails, and it can include attachments. School Councils may request that the principal use School Messenger for both phone or email messages or both, to try and connect with as many people as possible.

Direct Email

School Council Chairs or other members may wish to communicate directly with specific parents/ guardians, many of whom voluntarily provide their contact information to the School Council. School Council Chairs should consider using the official School Council email address for these communications. Direct email is often used for the distribution of Agendas and Minutes.

School Outdoor Sign

All HWDSB schools have an outdoor sign on campus with options to update an LED portion of the sign with short timely messages. To use the sign, School Councils should determine what messages should go to the entire community. Provide this information to the principal who will make sure that the sign is updated.

Newsletters And Flyers

Some families may not have internet access. To reach as many people as possible, School Councils can work with the principal to send home print documents and/or post documents and flyers at the school.

We Help

HWDSB provides an anonymous communication strategy for all community members, including parents/guardians to share observations or perhaps concerns. While the School Council is not authorized to see these messages directly, it is helpful for the School Council to remind parents/guardians that this method of communicating with the school and others is available. The principal will receive the messages and, if relevant, will then share information with the School Council. Students are the most frequent users of WE HELP, but School Councils can promote this service for everyone in the community. To connect anonymously with **WE HELP**, text 905-963-0066.

Appendix 5 – HWDSB Land Acknowledgement/Welcome Address

The following text is used at HWDSB gatherings.

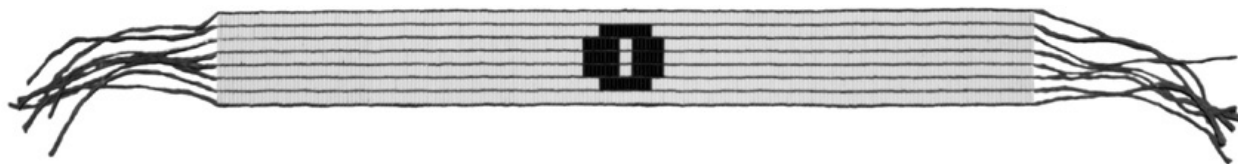
The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board acknowledges our presence on ancestral Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacy land as determined by the Dish with One Spoon treaty.

The intent of this agreement is for all nations sharing this territory to do so responsibly, respectfully and sustainably in perpetuity.

We respect the longstanding relationships with the local Indigenous communities, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River.

Note: All HWDSB schools have been given a wampum (see below) and use it as a teaching and learning tool, agreeing to keep it visible, accessible, and safe for all to use. It reminds us of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty and helps students, staff, and community members broaden our understanding of HWDSB's commitment to Indigenous education. Indigenous knowledge has historically been excluded and marginalized in Canada.

Ontario and HWDSB have committed to working with Indigenous partners in education, with a focus on closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. School Councils can be part of this learning.



Appendix 6 – Additional Resources and Links

[HWDSB School Councils](#)

[School Administrator's Guide to Parent Engagement, by Ontario Principals' Council](#)

[Ministry of Education: School Councils - A Guide for Members](#)