



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8
Tel: (416) 340-2540
Fax: (416) 340-7571
webmaster@opsba.org
www.opsba.org

Michael Barrett
President

Gail Anderson
Executive Director

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To: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Re: Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association appreciates the opportunity to address the changes proposed in Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act and to highlight the importance of school boards and the role of local democratically elected trustees. Municipal and School Board elections occur every four years. We are fortunate in Ontario to have these elections occur on the same day as we are of the view that this increases overall voter participation and knowledge about both important municipal representatives.

In previous years we have actively promoted these elections and distributed school board candidate information. We were greatly assisted in this with financial support from the Ministry of Education which allowed us to, along with the other school board associations, develop a suite of bilingual election resources to highlight the role of a school board trustee, provide in-depth knowledge of school board operations, and encourage informed voter participation. Our hope is that this support is continued for the 2018 election and beyond.

OPSBA did participate in a consultation process last summer that reviewed the 2014 election. Our Association provided a submission that discussed many of the proposed amendments brought forth in this legislation. Our comments are based on feedback collected in last year's consultation as well as input from trustees and staff among our member boards. Below are our comments regarding particular aspects of this proposed legislation.

Ranked Ballots

Although this particular proposed amendment is not applicable to school boards, it has been noted that this could be an option for consideration in future elections. At this time we are not advocating for this option to be extended to school boards, but we will be monitoring the actual uptake in municipalities seeking this option. We will also be interested in the actual implementation of the ranked balloting system on voting day. We do insist that if a municipality chooses this option, that there be clear communication with voters so they understand that ranked balloting would apply only for their selection of municipal councillors and not for their local board trustees. This could be confusing for some of the electorate.

Election Calendar

OPSBA strongly supports the shortening of the overall election campaign to the proposed period of May to the third Friday in July. We have previously stated our request to close the gap between the day nominations open (January) and Voting Day (October), noting that most election-related activities intensify towards the

end of the campaign period. By also moving up the Nomination Day (last day to file for candidacy), all candidates will have an equitable amount of time to develop campaign strategy and create support materials. The May date also closes a loophole for boards with regards to planning their trustee distribution. School boards receive Population of Electoral Group (PEG) reports in mid-February of an election year and these reports provide information that could change current board distribution and representation.

Advertising

We support the requirement that all candidates identify themselves on their election campaign advertisements. With regards to third party paid advertising, we understand that a framework is to be established requiring all third parties to first register with their local municipality before being allowed to incur expenses for third party advertisements that appear during the six-month election campaign period.

While we support this concept in its application for large corporations and unions (if a municipality does not prohibit them from contributing to a candidate), we are not convinced that individuals should be required to register in order for them to advertise.

Campaign Finance and Enforcement

We have seen a move in recent years to create simpler forms for financial collection and documentation. This has been appreciated. We would continue to request that candidates receive regular information about upcoming financial deadlines. We support the refunding of nomination fees when a candidate files their financial statements on time and also the option for a candidate to pay a late filing fee (\$500) in advance, but still be required to file their statements within 30 days of the deadline.

With regards to Compliance Audit Committees, some of our member boards continue to struggle with membership and the work required by this committee and the work done by the municipal clerk. We suggest further discussion about this be done with the ministry and the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMTCO).

Voters List

OPSBA believes that maintaining an accurate public record for voter registration is a matter of good public policy. For school boards, improving the quality of the data in the municipal voters list would result in more reliable school support data for public policy planning purposes. We have, and will continue to work with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and the other school board associations to remove obstacles that prevent the voters list from being current. For school board candidates, MPAC is obliged to prepare the Preliminary List of Electors and a plan must be in place to ensure that this document is as up to date as possible.

Election Administration

This proposed legislation would require school boards to set out in policy a process for conducting recounts. Our intention is to create a template policy to ensure consistency across our member boards. School boards will also be required to develop policies regarding the use of board resources during a campaign. Many of our member boards have such policies in place and again, we will consider a template for all of our 31 member boards.

Accessibility

The changes regarding accessibility are to ensure municipal clerks make their plans available to the public before voting day. We fully support this requirement and acknowledge that many schools are used as polling stations for both advance voting and on Election Day. It is worth noting that both OPSBA and its member

school boards have been fully supportive of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* that became law in 2005.

What's Missing?

- Bill 181 is entitled the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. However, we have yet to see a real push for “modernization” in terms of online candidate nomination forms, more support for telephone and/or electronic voting options (even smart phone technology and applications) as well as a centralized mechanism that collects and posts election results.
- We note that this proposed legislation now allows a municipal clerk to determine the hours for advance voting. We ask that consideration be given to altering the voting hours on Election Day to allow polling stations to be open earlier than 10 a.m. and perhaps later than 8 p.m.

As with past practice, we understand that there will continue to be post-election reviews to consider changes that will make the overall experience stronger and better for everyone, including changes that will promote voter participation.

We look forward to continuing our successful partnerships with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers on Ontario (AMCTO) and MPAC.

In closing, we would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee for listening to our voice during these public hearings. Our members, the trustees on Ontario’s public school boards, make decisions that affect more than a million students. They help shape the education experience, the school environment and the future of our children, communities, and the face of Ontario. Locally elected school trustees put the “public” in public education. They are the connectors who bring community voices to the table and make democracy meaningful. They influence children's experiences today and expand their opportunities for the future.

The changes being sought in this proposed legislation are, for the most part, a step in the right direction to ensuring we have a vibrant, engaging democratic process in Ontario that inspires individuals to seek a role in public service.

Sincerely,



Michael Barrett,
President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario’s elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system 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 affiliation.