



**ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Leading Education's Advocates**

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Municipal Elections Act Review  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
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**OPSBA Submission to the Municipal Elections Act Review**

**Questions on Voting in Municipal Elections**

**From your experience, what parts of municipal elections in Ontario currently work well?**

OPSBA appreciates the fact that school board elections occur on the same day as municipal elections in Ontario. We feel that by sharing the voting date, candidate information and voter turnout is enhanced for all municipal positions. This has also proven to be an effective and economical approach.

Because voters tend to know more about mayoral and councillor candidates and, therefore, make more informed decisions in this regard, our organization has been active in promoting greater knowledge of the role of school board trustee. In last year's election, with financial support from the Ministry of Education, we, along with our partner school board associations in the province, developed a suite of bilingual election resources to highlight the role of school board trustee, provide in-depth knowledge of the workings of school boards, and encourage informed voter participation. These included the Good Governance Guide, a pre-election candidate information guide, a guide to hosting an all-candidates meeting, public service announcement videos, promotional materials and a dedicated School Board Election Website. The government viewed this as an important initiative, as did we.

It is our intention to build on these supports to raise the profile of school board trustees and to further enhance the importance of municipal elections in our province.

**From your perspective, what parts of municipal elections in Ontario should be changed?**

As a result of our active role in promoting electoral participation throughout 2014, we offer the following suggestions:

### Pre-Election

- Close the gap between Nomination Day (January 1) and Voting Day (Fourth Monday in October). This “campaign period” is too long and our observation is that most activity ramps up in late summer.
- Develop a standard electronic nomination form that can be easily shared. As we were gathering information to populate our school trustees elections website, we found huge variances in the manner in which candidate information was collected and shared. This should all be processed electronically with consistent data collected on the nomination form and the information posted on municipal web sites. (A great many municipalities do post electronically but the available information often varies and this makes it difficult to present standard information for the public outside of the specific municipality.)
- Lengthen the period between the nomination closing date and Voting Day. As it is often not known until the closing date whether there will be an election for a particular trustee seat, candidates need to be given enough time to place orders for brochures, signs, etc., as well as develop a campaign strategy. New nominees can be at a disadvantage as the incumbents can often draw on resources already created for the last election.
- Suggest further discussion about closing the gap between Voting Day (Fourth Monday in October) and beginning of term (December 1). This has been seen as some as a “lame duck” period, while others think the timing is necessary to conclude current issues and prepare for the new term.
- Providing Population of Electoral Group reports (PEG report) from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to school boards earlier than mid-February. Based on the PEG report, a school board may alter their distribution of trustees. With the nomination date of January 1, this could result in a candidate filing nomination papers with the uncertainty of the future structure of the board, and indeed is another argument for moving the nomination date to later in the year, leaving the pre-nomination period for dealing with the necessary logistical information that will be pertinent to the elections.

### Election Day

- There needs to be a concerted effort to update and maintain the Voter List to ensure accuracy and school support identification. Many voters complain about the continued confusion that remains at polling stations even on Voting Day.
- Consider altering the Voting Day hours and allowing polling stations to be open earlier. (Currently electors can vote between 10 am and 8pm.)
- Create a mechanism to share all municipal election results in a timely manner.\* With the move to more phone and digital voting, we suggest that either the Ministry of Municipal Affairs or Elections Ontario have the responsibility for this. It is surprising to us that there currently is no central body that undertakes, as a public service, to gather and post information for the whole province.
- We would encourage the implementation of digital voting in all municipalities.
- We also suggest that the option of school boards scheduling a PA day (when students are not in attendance) to coincide with Voting Day be discussed further. During the 2014 municipal election, York Region DSB and their co-terminous board had a PA Day on Voting Day. This alleviated student/staff safety concerns and allowed for more controlled access to the school for voting. Another factor to consider is the added security costs that are not always covered.
- More support should be provided to polling station volunteers about voter identification and the pieces of identification that are valid/acceptable. We want to ensure that there are no identification obstacles in the way for people to vote, especially for students, people with disabilities, and First Nations.

*\*Note: As mentioned above, OPSBA created, for the first time, a dedicated School Board Election Website that captured school board election results (<http://elections.ontarioschooltrustees.org>). This was greatly appreciated by our membership and the media but the administrative hours and human resources to collect this information were enormous. The need is to collect both candidate and results information from all 444 municipalities and if a clear, electronic process for feeding the information to a central body were set up in advance, the onerous nature of the undertaking would be very much reduced.*

#### Post-Election Day

- Change the provision that involves school boards in the recount process. Currently a candidate can ask their school board to order a recount which places the school board in an awkward position between two or more candidates. To allow for a process that would be clearer and seen as completely impartial, candidates seeking a recount should send their request directly to the Superior Court of Justice to persuade a judge to order a recount.

#### **Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience with municipal elections?**

- Suggest there be discussion between school boards and local municipalities (early in an election year) to discuss logistics on voting and advanced voting days.
- Suggest more communications to the general public about advance polling dates to encourage voter participation.
- Suggest there be more education about Municipal Conflict of Interest both pre and post-election.
- We recommend more opportunities for the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to connect and share in promotional communications and activities. An example of this would be Local Government Week, held in mid-October to promote municipal elections and the officers who hold positions in municipal government.
- Building on the above point, we would suggest Professional Development between school boards and municipal staff who oversee or are involved in elections (clerks and board services).
- To build common awareness of municipal elections, we suggest standard content (logos, Q&A, etc.) be placed on both municipal and school board web sites.
- Suggest more dialogue and support for municipal all candidates meetings to include trustee candidates.
- Finally, it is important to note that OPSBA has enjoyed successful partnerships with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). These relationships were vital to our capacity to host a successful school boards election website.

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#### Campaign Finance Questions

#### **Q If you were a voter, candidate or supporter of a candidate, what was your experience with financing an election campaign? What areas might be improved, and how?**

- In the last election review, we recommended effective public communications about requirements for filing financial statements. We continue to ask that all candidates receive regular information about important election and campaign dates.
- We recommend that effective communication measures are in place to provide all candidates with knowledge of the processes and procedures involved for applying for extensions and the consequences of missing the deadline.

- We know that municipalities have the ability to send renewal/reminder notices for various licenses; we suggest the same be done so all candidates are reminded that the deadline for filing financial information is imminent.
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### Third Party Advertising Question

**Q Should there be rules for third party advertising? If so, what should these rules require?**

- We suggest there be more discussion about any regulation regarding third party advertising. The discussion should be guided and should consider, in a proportionate way, any provisions currently put in place with regard to third party advertising rules applicable for provincial and federal elections.
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### Accessibility Question

**Q Have you experienced accessibility challenges or barriers related to voting or running for office? If so, what were those challenges and what would help overcome those barriers?**

- We were very pleased to see that before the 2010 municipal election, the government ensured that the revised provisions concerning accessibility were addressed (Bill 212, Good Government Act, 2009).
- Our feedback from school boards with regard to school sites as polling stations indicates that there is a high awareness of accessibility issues and collaboration between school board staff and municipal staff to select most suitable sites and address accessibility for voting purposes.
- On occasion, the location of the accessible washroom is not in close proximity to the polling stations in schools and the Returning Officers provide staff to escort the public if the washroom is needed. Our members have not received any complaints from the public or school staff with regards to this arrangement.
- Returning Officers should contact school boards with plenty of lead time to discuss the possibility of using school premises for upcoming elections. The Returning Officers can then visit schools and assess their suitability, including accessibility, for voters. These visits would include a review of accessible parking, entrances, route of travel from the school's main doors, washrooms, etc. Schools often undergo the same audit by Returning Officers each election year, so a coordinated process to reduce the need for repeated assessment could improve efficiencies.
- We would like to see stronger support (from Elections Ontario and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario) to help communities advertise and hold fully accessible all candidates meetings.

*\*Note: School boards are continually working to address accessibility challenges and barriers related to operating older facilities. These include: inaccessibility of parking, exterior routes of travel, main entrance, and interior routes of travel. Additional funding would be helpful, although temporary adjustments can be made to address these challenges on Voting Day.*

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## Enforcement Question

### Q Do you feel that municipal election rules are effectively enforced? Why? Why not?

- We still feel that a potential fine of \$25,000 for one individual is extremely harsh. This penalty related to an office that attracts at maximum an honorarium of \$26,000 (with the average being closer to \$10,000) is difficult to understand. School board trustees come from a variety of different backgrounds and run for office not for remuneration but because of their strong commitment to promoting student achievement and well-being. Although an honorarium is provided, which varies according to the size of the Board from approximately \$6,000 to \$26,000, this is not a salary and many trustees are either parents who are not in the paid workforce or individuals who work at other jobs and careers.
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## Ranked Ballot Public Consultation Questions

- We understand this current review is looking at allowing municipalities – not school boards – the choice of using ranked ballots at the next election in 2018. We will be monitoring the implementation of this to see the participation for this option. If successful, it may be something for school boards to consider for future elections.



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.*