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## Program Committee MANDATE

To ensure that the curriculum and school activities are consistent with the society vision and/or the school mission

1. review curriculum and other program proposals from staff,
2. deal with parental complaints about programs as referred from the principal or Chair,
3. provide advice to the principal on student placement guidelines,
4. provide advice to the principal on student Code of Conduct and discipline policy.

### MEMBERSHIP

1. one board member,
2. two to four society members, at least some of whom have children in the school,
3. one to three parents sending children who are not society members,
4. all administrators who have responsibilities related to the mandate.

### MEETINGS

1. four times a year minimum.

### REPORTS

1. January and June reports by the principal to the board regarding major program changes

An active, informed Program Committee is a distinctive feature of the Christian school movement in Ontario and an effective committee is an important feature of the school community. However, the Board has been charged with the major decision-making role and consequently assumes full responsibility for the religious and educational direction of the school.

The Program Committee is a standing committee of the Board and has as its primary responsibility the task of advising the Board with respect to the quality and religious direction of the school's program as well as such matters as the school's code of conduct and discipline policies. The committee helps the board and principal keep in touch with the parent community, and provides them with advice that responds to the sentiments in the community.

The Program Committee functions best when it views itself as a reflection of community views on the educational issues confronting the school. Experience has shown that problems arise when the committee begins to view itself as a group of educational experts appointed to judge the competence of the teaching staff or replace the decision-making authority of the board.

It is wise to achieve a balance between the work of the Board and its committees. The Board makes the decision, so the Program Committee and Principal should provide it with adequate information, but the Board should not duplicate the Program Committee meetings. Similarly, the Program Committee is an effective discussion group, but it should not implement policy or act as if the Board has no right to disregard its advice on occasion. Striking a proper balance with respect to the sensitive matters normally handled by the committee is the goal of good school management.



### **Fulfilling the Mandate**

The responsibilities and tasks of the committee can be described with respect to the board, faculty, community, and principal.

#### 1. Advise the Board

The committee shall formally advise the Board on the policies necessary for the effective operation of the school. The committee may provide policy advice in these areas:

- Program of studies;
- Student activities;
- Instructional materials;
- Curriculum policies;
- Student Code of Conduct and discipline policy.

With the concurrence of the Principal, the Committee shall formally make written recommendations to the Board concerning these matters. Such recommendations would normally come to the Board as part of a report that discusses an issue and outlines the options available to the Board. The report would recommend a particular option to the Board with a rationale. (See also Reporting below.)

Decisions concerning these recommendations remain the prerogative of the Board.

#### 2. Discuss programs and policies with the faculty

Discussing the school's programs and program-related policies is the main task of this committee, and this discussion should be carried on in cooperation with the faculty. The Committee may initiate internal discussions concerning general issues such as:

- Implementation of programs;
- Program innovations;
- Parental feedback on programs;
- General educational matters, such as, philosophy, pedagogy, assessment, grading policy, and student behaviour;
- The preferred profile for open teaching positions.

Input from the faculty comes at each meeting from the Administrators who are members of the committee. However, the committee may also ask teachers to make presentations or take part in discussions at any time to benefit from their expertise and input.

The committee may also engage in specific support activities for the faculty that will foster a school that recruits and retains a dynamic, professional teaching staff, through such actions as:

- Provide appropriate recognition for special and outstanding achievements by staff and students related to program.

The committee must be clear about the fact that its mandate does not include the supervision or evaluation of teachers or principal.

#### 3. Consult with the Community

The committee functions best when it reflects community views on the educational issues confronting the school. It brings the voice of the community to the table so it may make informed decisions about matters it discusses and makes recommendations on. It may do this by such means as:

- Interview or survey graduates, both recent and longer term;



- Consult with the next level of school that graduates attend;
- Survey parents for their opinions on the code of conduct, discipline policy, and dress code.
- Facilitate parent evenings to discuss issues on which parents may wish to give input, such as media studies, family life studies, special needs, and learning disabilities.

#### 4. Advise the Principal

The Committee may, in accordance with approved procedures, advise the Principal in his or her implementation of certain school policies. This can be especially helpful in alerting the principal to sensitive matters in the local community. The committee may take part in discussions and activities about such matters as:

- Textbook review;
- Program design and curriculum policy,
- Student dress code,
- Student code of conduct and discipline policy,
- Special programs.

In doing its work, the committee may receive reports from the principal, have conversations with teachers invited to join the committee, visit the school to see how programs are implemented, and conduct research. The Committee may encourage appropriate studies, research, or surveys designed to improve the accuracy of the information on which to base its recommendations to the Board. These studies could deal with matters such as special programs (e.g., Technological Studies, Music) and discipline policies. A survey should be approved by the Board prior to public distribution.

### **Appointing Members**

The Program Committee should have a balance of representatives of the parents, board, and faculty. This may include non-member parents if the school has a significant number of such parents; their voice ought to be heard in this committee as well. The recommended composition is at least six members as follows:

- one board member (this person is not a liaison to the Board);
- one to three parents sending children who are not society members;
- all administrators who have responsibilities related to the committee's mandate. This would include the curriculum coordinator, but not the development director.
- All members vote on all resolutions except in cases where there is a personal conflict of interest.
- Each administrator has a place on the committee by virtue of position and expertise and hence has voting rights.

The Board should not appoint certain classes of people because of potentially significant conflicts of interest that could arise and community distrust in the impartiality of either the committee or the Board. These include:

- Spouses of faculty members;
- Spouses of Board members.

The members appointed to the committee should be able to articulate the wisdom and experience of the Christian school community in the context of the realities of school life and student behaviour.



- There is a heavy representation of the parents, because of their personal involvement in the nurturing and education process. There is no substitute for experience in dealing with children and adolescents. This is also why there should be representation from parents who are not society members if the school has a significant number of such parents.
- The Board should not appoint individuals who are known to have a particular personal agenda. Members do not and may not represent their own interests, or their own children, or special agendas or interests. Members must be able to represent the interests of the whole community.
- The Board should not appoint members with less than five years participation in OACS or similar Christian schools where this is feasible.

It is normal in many societies to appoint committee members for three-year terms, with a member being eligible for a second three-year term upon completion of the first term. This is usually done at a stated time each year that is normally defined in the Bylaws. The Board should also consider re-appointing all committee members annually. This makes it easier to deal with any problems in committee membership.

### **Conducting Meetings**

It is absolutely essential that the business of the Program Committee be conducted in a formal and ethical manner with strict adherence to policies since the discussions and recommendations of the committee affect the learning of the community's children and the professional careers of Christian teachers. It is vital that the committee:

- Carry out all its actions in harmony with the Committee Code of Ethics (see appendix).
- Formulate decisions and recommendations (with supporting grounds) in writing.
- Keep concise and brief minutes and not write detailed commentary and individual opinions.
- Not deal with matters for which it does not have proper information.
- Follow proper communication channels so as not to prejudice issues before they come to the Board.

### **Agenda**

The Program Committee should plan a yearly agenda to be discharged in no more than four to six regular meetings.

- A regular meeting is one that deals with the tasks outlined in the mandate and with the normal routines of the school year.
- A special meeting deals with only one designated matter.
- Meetings should only deal with items that are within the Committee's mandate and are on the agenda sent out by the chair in consultation with the principal.
- The conduct of meetings should follow normal rules for Canadian parliamentary procedure.
- Officers should be elected by the committee itself at the meeting that follows the new committee appointments. The three necessary positions are: Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary. It is wise not to have the administrators serve as officers.
- The agenda, minutes, and any support materials necessary for any particular meeting should be in the hands of the committee members at least three days prior to the meeting.



## Minutes

The minutes of the meeting should be typed up and distributed only as follows:

- One copy to each Board member unless the Board has decided otherwise.
- One copy to each committee member.
- One copy to be kept at the school for the official record in the school file. This should not be the principal's copy.

## Time

Meetings need to be time-limited. Discourage late night adjournments. The chairman should observe the following rules:

- Start meetings promptly at the stated time.
- Arrange for a midway break.
- Adjourn the meeting at a standard time.
- Extend the meeting only upon unanimous approval, and then only to deal with a specific item for an agreed-upon time period.

At its regular meeting the committee should have available for reference the current school policies. The key to a good school is the existence of up-to-date and clear policies to guide the normal decisions that the principal and teachers have to make in order to provide quality Christian education. Without good policies it is impossible to set clear standards and directions in the school.

At the first meeting in September, the chair should make available the following:

- The standard agenda for the meeting.
- The general agenda for the year showing expected meeting dates and the general matters for those meetings.
- A copy of policies and procedures in which the committee members are expected to participate, such as program reviews.
- The school handbook, the OACS Board Handbook, and the OACS Program Committee Manual.
- The schedule for devotions.

## Making Reports

### Regular reports to the Board

The Committee shall report to the Board via the principal twice annually (January and June) concerning major program changes. The June report shall comment on the implementation of the society's goals as expressed in curriculum perspectives, policies, and programs of study for the school.

### Recommendations

Recommendations should come to the Board through the Principal. The matter would be entered into discussion at the Board table as a motion from the committee, seconded by the Board representative on the committee. These recommendations would normally come as part of a report to the Board that discusses an issue and outlines the options available to the Board. The report would normally recommend a particular option to the Board with a rationale.

### Reports to the Staff

Reports to the staff should be made by the Principal or his or her designate, such as the Vice-Principal or Curriculum Coordinator.

