4.0   Assessing Progress

Chapter 4.0 addresses Council self-assessment and outlines:

- *Various ways Councils might go about assessing progress related to their main responsibilities; and,*

- *Means to evaluate the healthy functioning of the Council as a whole.*

Assessing progress is an important part of the work of School Community Councils. Knowing how well the Council is performing is a part of public accountability and the most direct route to improved contribution to student learning and well-being.

Examples of questions that might guide School Community Council self-assessment:

- Membership: Is the Council reasonably representative of the student composition of the school? Are the interests of all parents voiced as decisions and plans are made?

- Internal Council Functioning: Are Council meetings well attended? Do all Members express satisfaction with their involvement? Is the Council able to resolve difficult issues?

- Inclusion and Communication: Does the Council include the larger community in its work? Do parents and community members ask for time to make presentations to or meet with the Council? Are parents aware of the Learning Improvement Plan?

- Gathering Support: Has the Council compiled a profile of community resources that could contribute to learning improvement? What resources have been made available to parents as they support their own children's learning?

School Community Council evaluation consists of two main parts; a focus on outcomes or "Are we achieving success in accomplishing our role and responsibilities?" and a focus on procedure or "Are we working well as a team?" The first focus is about measuring the results of Council participation and initiatives while the second focus is on satisfaction with the processes and relationships enjoyed by the Council.

It is important to understand, as well, that Councils are responsible for their own evaluations. The Handbook refers to this as self-assessment and it involves Council Members reflecting individually and collectively on information they may gather about the success of their initiatives and about their functioning as a Council. The goal of self-assessment is improvement.

4.1   Focus on Outcomes

The highest order of outcome for School Community Councils, families, teachers and all other partners in education is student learning and well-being. Ultimately, the success of each depends upon the success of students. The information gathered about student learning and well-being within the school, where they are strong and where improvement is needed, is the key determiner of Council success.

However, Councils don't directly teach the children. This is the work of parents and the school staff. But Councils have the important responsibility of supporting student learning. The roles of Councils provide a helpful framework for self-assessment. The Council should ask itself and others about how well it is achieving each of these roles and where there are concerns what might be done to resolve them.

Understanding the School and its Community:

The Council might ask what they know about the economic, social and health conditions and needs of their community and about the aspirations for child and youth learning and well-being of families and community members? Is the Council fully aware of the resources and supports that are available for the school, parents and community?

Developing and Recommending a Learning Improvement Plan:

The Council might ask if the development and recommendation process was joint and undertaken in cooperation with the Principal and staff of the school? Is the plan aligned with provincial and School Division plans?

Providing Advice and Approval:

Has the Council extended advice on important issues to the Board of Education, the Principal and others? Is the Council confident about its advice? Does the Council feel its advice was heard? Has the

We can choose to be a "watchdog," to focus on monitoring and controlling; we can choose to be confrontational, to focus on fault-finding and negativity; or, we an choose to be respectful and trusting; to focus on appropriate roles and decision-making practices and to hold the contributions of both lay and professional participants in high regard.

Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel Final Report, 2005.

Council established a framework for its approval of fundraising initiatives and fees? Are Council initiatives consistent with School Division policy and operational procedure? Has the Council considered providing advice to other agencies such as the Regional Health Authority, municipal council or family service organizations? Has the Student Code of Conduct been reviewed and approved by the School Community Council?

Taking Action:

Has the Council followed through on responsibilities assigned to it within the Learning Improvement Plan? Are the responsibilities of the Council and Constitution regularly reviewed to ensure Council obligations are being addressed? Is the success of Council initiatives measured and reported to the Council?

Communicating and Reporting:

Has the Council reported to parents and community on its plans, initiatives and the outcomes attained? Are parents and the community generally aware of the learning achievement and state of well-being of the students in the school? Has the Council reported on the expenditure of funds related to the operation of the School Community Council? Has an audited report of the school fees collected and revenue generated through fund-raising activities been compiled and made publicly available. Does the audited report include an explanation of the reasons for the fees and fund-raising initiatives and an account of the application of those funds?

Developing Capacity:

Has the Council participated in learning opportunities to improve its functioning? Do all Council Members participate in these activities? Has the Council developed a plan for its own growth and development?

4.2   Focus on Council Procedure

School Community Council Members might ask themselves:

Do I conduct myself in a manner that:

1. Supports the vision, beliefs and goals of the school?

2. Serves the overall best interests of the school rather than any particular constituency?

3. Brings credibility and good will to the school?

4. Respects principles of fair play and due process?

5. Demonstrates respect for individuals in all manifestations of their cultural and linguistic diversity and life circumstances?

6. Respects and gives fair consideration to diverse and opposing viewpoints?

7. Demonstrates due diligence and dedication in preparation for and attendance at meetings, special events and in all other activities on behalf of the school?

8. Demonstrates good faith, prudent judgment, honesty, transparency and openness in my activities on behalf of the Council and school?

9. Ensures that the financial affairs of the Council are conducted in a responsible and transparent manner?

10. Avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest?

11. Conforms with the constitution approved by the Council and in particular the Code of Conduct?

12. Publicly demonstrates acceptance, respect and support for decisions legitimately taken in transaction of the Council's business?

Adapted from the Canadian Institute on Governance
http://www.iog.ca/

The importance of self-evaluation cannot be overstated. Time should be set aside regularly to assess progress as a Council. Even a small investment in improvement of processes and especially communication and external relationships can return substantial dividends to the success of the Council and more importantly to student learning and well-being.