

April 2026

To: the Central Okanagan Board of Education

RE: Review and Revision of the Current Board of Education Policy Manual

Thank you for your dedication and the many hours you invest to strengthen public school education in our community. At the March Board Policy Committee meeting, I was impressed by the diversity of opinions; this is a vital component of a healthy democratic organization.

I am writing to you regarding the April 22 Meeting, **Agenda Item 11.2** and to concerns about the process that has been undertaken to revise Board policies and administrative procedures. While broadly, this is important work for any organization; policies should reflect community values, and procedures should support effective implementation; However, the current process raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and the long-term strength of governance.

The work of the Board is fundamentally about *accountability and effective local governance* rather than efficiency. Governance is not simply about streamlining operations but about ensuring accountability and reflecting and reinforcing community values¹.

After reviewing the policies proposed for transfer to admin procedures, I have concerns about the “sorting” process and would urge the Board to re-evaluate the process, ensure transparency, and ensure that partner groups **and** the public are more meaningfully included. Oversight policies should be clearly defined before any decision to move existing policies into admin procedures, and each policy should be carefully divided into policy and administrative components, not simply moved wholesale to admin procedures.

Transferring policies to procedural matters risks the board giving up its ability to be accountable to the electorate; to families. Without an effective policy foundation, they could be changed or removed without Board oversight. When policy oversight is reduced, boards (you) risk losing the ability to guide and monitor the system you were elected to govern².

I can appreciate the complexity of many aspects of governance, but it is *my* experience that the tediousness of this process is what safeguards it from being undermined.

During the policy committee meeting it was suggested that *old policies are inherently bad policies*. While policies should certainly be reviewed and updated, in some cases, policies endure because they have proven effective over time.

It was suggested that moving policies to Admin procedures insulates them from future hostile board takeovers, but this overlooks the importance of *public* oversight. Concentrating decision making authority within administrative structures creates a different accountability risk; decisions being made without direct community input and oversight.

¹ Randy Quinn, Linda J. Dawson, *Good Governance Is a Choice*

² Randy Quinn, Linda J. Dawson, *Good Governance Is a Choice*

The claim that educational decisions should be left to the professionals overlooks the role of the Board. This is exactly *not* the point of democracy; the entire endeavor is built on a notion of ordinary people having input into a system that is for everyone. The community, through elected representatives, must establish oversight frameworks for professionals to operate within. Ideas should be considered and debated by regular people, and it takes time for non-experts to work through issues, *that is what democracy is*.

Although delegating tasks can improve efficiency, certain governance responsibilities must remain with the Board to ensure oversight, community representation, and democratic integrity. The work of the Board is the work of the community; it is meant to be public and demanding.

This revision process lacked steps that would increase clarity and accountability. Governance frameworks depend on strong policy guardrails set by the Board. Without these guardrails established first, democratic oversight is reduced and may unintentionally weaken Board authority.

In addition to process concerns, several policy transfers raise issues for Board accountability and district-wide consistency, three of which merit attention:

Policy 455 – DISCIPLINE

This policy sets district-wide expectations, roles, and limits on how discipline is applied, such as including ‘progressive discipline’ and parent notification. “*Progressive discipline*” for example, is not only operational, it is a fairness principle and should be anchored in a policy commitment.

By moving it into admin procedures, these standards become internal and changeable, and the Board potentially loses the framework it relies on during an appeal process. This may create a governance gap and possible legal risks.

If you remove the policy structure regarding discipline:

- What anchors the school-level codes of conduct?
- What ensures consistency district-wide?

Secondly,

POLICY 220 – PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS: SELECTION, APPOINTMENT AND TRANSFER

If this moves to an Admin Procedure:

- The Board loses its formal voice in how school leadership is selected
- The Superintendent could change the process without Board approval
- Trustee involvement could be reduced or removed
- Community consultation could disappear

Policy 220 defines the Board’s role in the selection and movement of school leadership. This is a governance function, not solely an operational one, and it should remain anchored in Board policy.

Principal appointments and transfers are not solely HR moves, principals impact school culture and the leadership structure of public education in our community.

Lastly -

Policy 704 – PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

This policy is not only procedural, it recognizes PACs as democratic partners and establishes how PACs relate to the Board and the schools.

- It recognizes PACs as partners and reinforces democratic principles
- **Policy 704** reinforces the rights of PACs that are recognized under the School Act at the **local level**. In a time when you are indicating a commitment to authentic parent engagement, this may be viewed as the Board stepping back from formal or meaningful commitment to PACs. While Administration *may* uphold these principles and practices, without a policy, it risks becoming inconsistent across the district.

These policies demonstrate a consistent issue in this process; more time should be spent separating the policy elements and the operational components, ***prior*** to moving the entire policy into an admin procedure or you risk losing the Boards authority and transparency in hiring senior leadership in our district.

These policy examples reflect a broader issue: policy and operational elements are not being clearly separated before transfer, which risks eroding Board authority and public trust.

I urge the Board to pause the transfer of policies to administrative procedures until:

- Governance policies supporting administrative procedures are clearly established
- The public and partner groups are more meaningfully engaged with an opportunity to review the proposed changes
- Policy and operational elements are carefully distinguished
- The criteria and process for changes are transparent.

Strong democratic governance is deliberate, anchored in debate by ordinary people, and is often slow work, but in my view, that is what protects it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cadre Simpson

Kelowna, BC