

Councils tackle opportunity to help select school principals

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

They can't hire them or fire them, but parents have a say in determining the qualities they want in their child's principal.

Through individual school councils, parents can participate in the development of a principal profile, the kinds of personality traits and experience they believe would most benefit their school and their children.

Parents have always had the right to input; in fact both York Region boards have had a process in place for several years.

But under regulation 612, councils are now required to develop a principal profile and school boards must consult parent councils in the selection process and the criteria used in the hiring of principals and vice-principals.

Parents can't grade sitting principals, but if a principal is retiring or being moved, councils can develop a profile to aid board hiring committees in making their decision.

"It's not who they want, it's not a matter of names, it's strengths we're looking for," explained Ken Thurston, superintendent of public schools with responsibility for school councils.

That profile is then used for principal selection and principal placement. There are other factors of course, but the profile is pretty high on the list.

"Councils are very pro this idea," said Josie Parlagreco, co-chair of the regional school council chairs committee at the York Catholic District School Board.

The feedback has been very positive, councils want very much to be involved and are using the opportunity.

Catherine Ophelders, a member of the Catholic regional chairs council, is also past chair of the Kateri Tekakwitha Elementary School Council in Markham.

That committee took advantage of the opportunity in picking a new principal last year.

"We had a lot of changes at the school, we had mould problems and a principal who became ill," she explained.

"So we wanted someone who was prepared to stay four or five years. We wanted stability."

The council met with parents and teachers to determine what traits should be deemed priorities.

They included a good leader who worked well with parents and teachers, a person who supported special needs kids and someone who believed in the new curriculum as well as school sports programs.

"As parents we have a responsibility to ensure our kids have the opportunity to learn in a good environment," she said.

"It was a very positive experience. But that's not always the case," according to Phil Craig, a former candidate for school trustee and past chair of W.J. Watson Public School in Georgina.

He has gone through the process twice at with the York District School Board, for Watson and for Keswick High School.

At Keswick High, a new school, the parents of students at the elementary feeder schools held a forum to outline what they wanted to see in their new principal, including experience with technology, flexibility, someone who was community-minded with good

organizational skills and who believed in old-fashioned respect and discipline.

Craig said Georgina schools have special needs — they consistently rank below the board and the provincial average in standardized testing, and changes in the community as it grows are presenting challenges to schools.

Watson ended up with an excellent principal, Craig said, one who motivated students and staff and improved the school rankings.

But Craig said the board didn't listen to the community in the selection for Keswick.

"Knowing that at the end of this, the board still makes the final decision, the question is: are officials listening to everything we said?" Craig questioned. "The choice was made and that was it. We had no say."

But Thurston said the board values community input — it's just not easy to

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AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Minutes of Previous Annual Meeting
3. Chair's Report
4. President's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Nominating Committee Report*
7. New Business
8. Recognition Awards
9. International Year of the Volunteer - presentation
10. Adjournment

*For an advanced copy of the Nominating Committee Report, call (905) 472-7084

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