

# **PAC Meetings 101**

February 2, 2013

## **FUNCTION OF PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS**

According to the B.C. School Act, the school parents, through their elected representatives on the Parent Advisory Council executive, may consult with the principal and staff of their school "...respecting any matter relating to the school other than matters assigned to the school planning council".

### **Topics on which PACs may offer advice and assistance:**

- school philosophy and program priorities
- school regulations and general student conduct
- the curriculum, new instructional programs, facilities, equipment and learning resources
- budget, alterations and renovations to facilities
- safety programs and procedures
- alternatives for identifying, communicating and meeting unique community needs
- communicating ideas from the community to the board of school trustees and school staff.
- informing the community about decisions made at the school, district and ministry levels
- methods to ensure racial and cultural understanding and improve the sense of community within the school neighbourhood
- methods of resolving school community differences and improving relations
- methods to encourage other community individuals and groups who do not have children of school age to attend meetings to express their ideas and share their concerns.

### **How to Run a Meeting**

Chairing a meeting is a challenging experience. but with a carefully prepared agenda and a few basic organizational skills you can hold a successful meeting.

#### **The meeting agenda:**

- lets your PAC members know what to expect and how they might participate in the meeting
- provides order and direction to the meeting
- streamlines and shortens your meeting
- makes the job of the recording secretary easier, thus improving the accuracy of the minutes

An agenda is simply a brief outline of **what you intend to discuss and in what order**. A well planned agenda reflects the concerns and interest of your school community and is based on mutually defined goals.

## Agenda Tips

- Plan your time realistically- don't squeeze too many items onto the agenda. Set aside enough time for the important item, allow for the assignment and review of tasks.
- Indicate when the meeting will start and end.
- Try to stick to your schedule.
- Don't forget to make people feel comfortable and listen to their input.
- New parents may not know anyone. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone

## Sample Agenda

Summit PAC Meeting  
January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013

1pm Introductions

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes

Reports:

Chair's report

Treasurer's report

Principal's report

Follow up from last meeting

- 1) Establish 2 bank accounts (preferably somewhere with no fees)
- 2) Apply for Gaming Grant
- 3) Establish how financials will be kept.
- 4) Select Dates for General Meetings

1:30 Discussion Items

Streamlining the allotment process

The possibility of different curriculum options for second languages.

Process for making spending decisions for grant money.

New Business

2:00 Adjournment.

## Voting and Conducting Business at a PAC Meeting

Voting for elected positions is normally outlined in a PAC's constitution and bylaws. The procedure for voting on other items at a general meeting is usually not outlined but "Robert's Rules of Order" is referenced as the procedure if there is any controversy. PACs usually don't follow "Roberts Rules" to the letter, but follow the principles. See summary of Robert's Rules below:

"Provides common rules and procedures for deliberation and debate in order to place the whole membership on the same footing and speaking the same language. The conduct of ALL business is controlled by the general will of the whole membership - the right of the deliberate majority to decide. Complementary is the right of at least a strong minority to require the majority to be deliberate - to act according to its considered judgment AFTER a full and fair "working through" of the issues involved. Robert's Rules provides for constructive and democratic meetings, to help, not hinder, the business of the assembly. Under no circumstances should "undue strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation."

Please note that the intention is:

- Decisions controlled by the general will of the WHOLE membership
- Full and fair discussion (no shutting people down because they don't agree)
- Everyone gets a chance to speak
- Decisions are carried by majority vote.

Roberts Rules are the authority on conducting business in a democratic method and are necessary to use in large assembly meetings. They are however very intimidating to those not familiar with them and the terminology and formal nature of them would quickly scare off parents from coming to a PAC meeting. PAC meetings need to respect the heart of open, fair, honest communication and debate, while being welcoming, comfortable and friendly enough to attract all parent members. If things get messy, we can always fall back on Robert's rules, but day to day I would suggest a less formal approach.

Using the Sample Agenda above, I will walk through the process of running a meeting:

### **Introductions:**

This is critically important. These people have all taken time out of their day to be at your meeting. Take a few minutes to get to know them. Ask how many kids they have in the school, what their experience has been with parent groups in the past, etc.

### **Adoption of Agenda.**

The chair will say "can I have a motion to accept the agenda?"

A member will say "so moved" or raise their hand to indicate they are moving it.

The chair will ask for a seconder.

A different member will second the motion

The chair will ask "All in favour" - a majority show of hands means motion passed

A member may request something be added to the agenda or removed during the process before the agenda is passed. The majority would have to agree. The agenda may have been prepared by the chair, but it is not the business of the day until approved by the members (parents)

### **Adoption of Minutes**

Use the exact same procedure as Agenda. A member may bring a correction to the minutes before they are approved if the majority agrees with the correction.

### **Reports**

Each PAC meeting should hear reports from the Officers (at least President and Treasurer) as well as any ongoing committees (such as Playground Committee or Fundraising committee) if there has been any activity since the previous meeting. The Principal may also give a report of what is happening in the school. At the end of each report there should be an opportunity for questions from the members (parents)

### **Follow-Up** (or items arising from the minutes)

I always include this section to address incomplete items from the minutes of the previous meeting. Did we do what we said we would do? Why or why not? It keeps us accountable.

### **Discussion**

Up to this point in the meeting, the members (parents) have heard from the PAC Executive, committees and the principal. During the discussion, the goal is to hear from the members. It is helpful to guide the discussion or have a topic of concern brought forward. Hopefully as President you have an idea of the ideas or concerns parents are talking about. The trick here is to know how to keep people on track and how to summarize and wrap-up discussion. Always be listening for opportunities to take discussion towards a solution or action. For example, discussion may include parents concerns around kids being bored during “inside days.” Another parent might say “we should get the kids some good games to play with for inside days.” Then under “New Business” a parent can make the motion. “I move that the PAC pay up to \$500 to buy some interactive games for indoor days” Try to summarize the discussions and encourage members to make a motion under “New Business” if an action is identified.

### **New Business**

This section of the meeting should be for motions being made, discussed, and voted upon. Motions are mostly made around spending money but may also be for:

- Making changes to the constitution or bylaws
- Adopting a budget
- Form a special committee (eg- playground committee)
- Make a request of the Principal and staff, the District Administration, or the School Board. (eg- “I move that the Summit PAC write a letter to the School Board Trustees requesting a policy change to allow parents to coach at school without a sponsor teacher.”)

In short, motions made are for actions that represent the whole parent membership.

**Making a motion:**

It may be helpful at this point to follow the structure of Robert's Rules. Once a motion is made it needs to be seconded by another member before it goes to "Discussion." The motion itself does not explain the "why" questions, rather it states what the mover wants as the outcome. (eg- "I move that the Summit PAC write a letter to the School Board Trustees requesting a policy change to allow parents to coach at school without a sponsor teacher." After the motion has been seconded, the mover is the first person to speak to it for the "Discussion" and they can fully explain their reasons. After that the Chair guides the discussion ensuring everyone has a chance to speak, no one speaks twice to it until all members have had a chance to speak, and then the mover has the right to speak last before a vote is called for. During the process, the members may ask questions of the mover, through the chair. eg, "Madame Chair, I would like to ask the mover (or person's name) what qualifications she thinks a parent should have to coach sports in school?" The chair would then allow the mover to answer the question. Once the mover finishes the final comment, a vote is held (usually by a show of hands at PAC meetings) and the majority rules (unless your bylaws specify something different like 2/3 majority.)

Does every decision in a PAC group require a vote?

Yes and No.

In order to function and to do daily business, you must empower people in your PAC to make some decisions For example, most bylaws allow an Executive to spend up to a certain amount without membership approval (\$100-\$300 in most schools), though they are required to report these expenditures at the next general meeting. A "hot lunch committee" when formed will choose lunch options, set prices, etc. at their own discretion, but will also report at general meetings. A fundraising committee may choose fundraising options and events without a vote, because it is their mandate to fundraise. So No, these decisions are not all voted on by the membership, but Yes, the Executive is voted in, committee members are voted in or appointed by the Executive. In that sense, when you vote for an executive or to form a committee, you are voting for the decisions that will follow within their area of responsibility. In any case, executives and committees are accountable at the general PAC meeting where any member can ask questions or give input.

**Adjournment**

When all the "New Business" is concluded, the chair may call for a motion to adjourn. It is then seconded and voted upon. Now your meeting is concluded.

I hope this guideline helps you conduct open, fair, and inclusive meetings that are productive in improving all of our schools.

Scott Young, DPAC President.

