



## **P062, Alternative Schools Policy Review – Phase 1**

**To:** Governance and Policy Committee

**Date:** 24 April, 2019

**Report No.:** 04-19-3628

### **Strategic Directions**

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Work Plan for review of the Alternative Schools Policy (P062), as presented in this report, be approved.

### **Context**

The Alternative Schools Policy (P062) (the “Policy”) (see Appendix A) was adopted on June 27, 2007 and most recently revised in March 2012. The Policy is being reviewed in accordance with the Policy Review Schedule and the policy review process approved by the Board of Trustees on February 6, 2019. The proposed content changes as outlined in the Policy Review Work Plan (see Appendix B) include the following:

- Ensure that the pathway to alternative schools programming is reflective of the principles of equity and inclusion as stated in the Equity Policy (P037).
- P062 – Section 4.5: Before enrolling, parents and students shall make a commitment, in writing, to acknowledge and support their chosen alternative school’s philosophy, mission, mandate, and unique pedagogy.
  - Clarify the meaning of unique pedagogy and what makes an alternative school unique
  - Elaborate on the above provision by including staff and defining their responsibilities in supporting this pathway
  - Clarify the above provision to ensure equitable access.

As part of the Policy Review Work Plan, staff completed a jurisdictional scan of similar policies from other school boards (see Appendix C).

The Policy Review Work Plan is presented for the Committee's consideration and approval.

## **Action Plan and Associated Timeline**

Subject to the Governance and Policy Committee and Board directions, staff will implement the review of the Policy in accordance with the Policy Review Work Plan. Extensive public consultations with stakeholders, including all Community Advisory Committees, are contemplated as part of the review. The revised draft Policy is expected to be presented to the Governance and Policy Committee for consideration in early 2020.

## **Resource Implications**

No additional resources will be required for the review of this Policy.

## **Communications Considerations**

The Policy will be communicated in accordance with the Policy Review Work Plan.

## **Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)**

- Alternative Schools Procedure (PR584)

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A: Alternative Schools Policy (P062) - current
- Appendix B: Policy Review Work Plan
- Appendix C: Scan of Selected School Boards

## **From**

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# Toronto District School Board

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Policy P062

Title: **ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**

Adopted: June 27, 2007

Revised:

Reviewed: 2009, March 2012

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVE

To identify the Board's commitment to alternative schools that provide unique pedagogy, forms of governance (see 4.4 below) and staff involvement, and strong parental and/or student involvement.

## 2.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Director Strategy and Planning

## 3.0 DEFINITIONS

*Alternative school* Sites that are unique in pedagogy, forms of governance (see 4.4 below), and staff involvement, and have strong parental and/or student involvement; environments vary and provide an educational experience suited to individual learning styles/preferences and/or needs

*New alternative school* A stand-alone school with a Ministry-issued Board School Identification Number

## 4.0 POLICY

- 4.1. The Board is committed to developing and promoting alternative schools as viable pathway and program choices.
- 4.2. The Board recognizes and values the unique contributions of students, parents and staff in the success of alternative schools both at the local school level and at a system level and is committed to fostering this involvement.
- 4.3. Alternative schools, while retaining their unique nature, shall operate in a way that is reasonably consistent with the operational practice of schools within the Board and in compliance with the *Education Act*, regulations, and Ministry of Education guidelines.

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Alternative Schools Policy (P062)

- 4.4. Alternative schools shall develop clear mission statements and governance<sup>1</sup> models that support and define the role of student and parental involvement in each school and that define the fundamental philosophical underpinning of the school. Related support for students, parents and staff shall be provided.
- 4.5. Before enrolling, parents and students, shall make a commitment, in writing, to acknowledge and support their chosen alternative school's philosophy, mission, mandate, and unique pedagogy.
- 4.6. A process for philosophical reaffirmation, including a review of the unique needs of students, parents and the community, shall be undertaken by each alternative school no less than once every five years.
- 4.7. A procedure for the evaluation of requests for new alternative schools will be clearly articulated as a Board procedure.

## 5.0 SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

The Director of Education is authorized to issue operational procedures to implement this policy.

## 6.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Operational Procedure PR584, Alternative Schools

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative school's governance model must be developed in recognition of the roles and responsibilities of the Board and its employees as ordered by legislation such as the *Education Act* and its regulations, and by the Board's collective agreements with its employee groups.

## POLICY REVIEW WORK PLAN

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Date: [April 2019](#)

All policies will be reviewed to ensure consistency with the TDSB's Mission, Values and Goals Policy (P002), the Equity Policy (P037) and the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

### POLICY INFORMATION

Policy Title and Policy Number: **Alternative Schools Policy (P062)**

Review during fiscal year: [2018/2019](#)

Last reviewed: [2009, 2012](#)

Director's Council member responsible for this Policy review: [Associate Director, School Operations and Service Excellence](#)

### Phase I. PLANNING AND OBTAINING TRUSTEES' DIRECTIONS

This Policy Review Plan has been discussed with the Policy Coordinator:

- Yes  
 No

This Policy Review Plan will be discussed at the Governance and Policy Committee meeting held on: [April 24, 2019](#)

### Phase II. REVISIONS

#### Formatting Changes

The Policy will be reformatted to ensure alignment with the current Policy Template (Operational Procedure PR501, Policy Development and Management):

- Yes  
 No

#### Content Changes

The Policy requires content revisions:

- Yes  
 No

The content changes are due to the following reason(s):

- Legislation
- Government directives/policies
- Board decisions
- Multi-Year Strategic Plan requirements
- Operational requirements
- Simplify and/or update using plain language
- Alignment with Equity Policy

Detailed information on the proposed content changes, including findings of the policy equity assessment:

- Ensure that the pathway to alternative schools programming is reflective of the principles of equity and inclusion as stated in the Equity Policy (P037).
- P062 – Section 4.5: *Before enrolling, parents and students shall make a commitment, in writing, to acknowledge and support their chosen alternative school’s philosophy, mission, mandate, and unique pedagogy.*
  - Clarify the meaning of unique pedagogy and what makes an alternative school unique
  - Elaborate on the above provision by including staff and defining their responsibilities in supporting this pathway
  - Clarify the above provision to ensure equitable access.

A review of leading practices for similar policies across jurisdictions has been completed and is included with this Work Plan.

### **Phase III. INTERNAL REVIEWS AND SIGN-OFFS**

The Policy review will include TDSB divisions affected by the Policy:

- Leadership, Learning and School Improvement
- School Operations and Service Excellence
- Business Operations and Service Excellence

In addition, the following departments will be required to sign-off on the proposed Draft Policy:

- Legal Services
- Governance and Board Services
- Government, Public and Community Relations

A sign-off from the Director of Education will be obtained before proceeding with external consultations and/or Committee/Board approval.

Director of Education

#### Phase IV. EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS

Are external consultations applicable to this Policy?

Yes

No (*Ministry of Education mandated policy or corporate policy without external stakeholders*)

Mandatory external consultations will include, at a minimum:

1. Posting of the working draft Policy on TDSB website for public feedback (45 days minimum): [45 days](#)
2. Extending invitations for consultation to:

Student Senate

and

all Community Advisory Committees of the Board and conducting consultations with the Community Advisory Committees that expressed interest (either individually with each interested committee or collectively with representatives of all interested committees): [September-November 2019](#)

- Aboriginal Community Advisory Committee
- Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee
- Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee
- Community Use of Schools Community Advisory Committee
- Early Years Community Advisory Committee
- Environmental Sustainability Community Advisory Committee
- Equity Policy Community Advisory Committee
- French-as-a-Second-Language Community Advisory Committee
- Inner City Community Advisory Committee
- Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC)
- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

In addition to mandatory consultations, other external participants and projected dates of consultation(s) include:

- School Councils
- Professional Associations and Unions
- Other:

The following methods will be applied in the external consultations:

- Public meeting
- Facilitated focus group
- Call for public delegations
- Expert panel discussion
- Survey
- Posting on the TDSB website
- Other:

#### **Phase V. COMMITTEE/BOARD APPROVALS**

Following external consultations and revisions, the working draft Policy will be presented to the Governance and Policy Committee on the following date: [Spring 2020](#)

Following recommendation by the Governance and Policy Committee, the revised Policy will be presented to the Board on the following date: [June 2020](#)

Once approved, the revised Policy will replace the existing policy on the TDSB website.

#### **Phase VI. IMPLEMENTATION**

Following Board approval, the final revised Policy will be communicated through:

- Posting of the revised Policy on the TDSB website through the Policy Coordinator
- Sharing with staff through the System Leaders' Bulletin
- Informing departments at staff meetings and channeling information to the school principals through respective superintendents
- Implementation of a broad communication plan for internal and external audiences, include summary of policy revisions and expected outcomes

Policy implementation will include:



- Conducting information/training sessions to TDSB staff affected by the Policy
- Review of associated procedures or initiate development of new procedures
  - [Alternative Schools \(PR584\)](#)
  - [Admission to Specialized Programs \(PR612\)](#)

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### Scan of Selected Ontario School Boards and Other Jurisdictions: Alternative Schools Policy (P062)

The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Alternative Schools Policy (P062) was adopted on June 27, 2007 and last updated in March 2012. The Policy reflects the Board's commitment to alternative schools which, according to the TDSB web site, "...offer students and parents something different from mainstream schooling. Each alternative school, whether elementary or secondary is unique, with a distinct identity and approach to curriculum delivery. They usually feature a small student population and a commitment to innovative and experimental programs." Alternative schools are a different type of school which provide a unique learning environment (sometimes better recognized as a community) – responsive to the needs of students and offering an opportunity to fulfil academic and personal goals that would otherwise not generally be met in the regular system.

The TDSB's alternative schools, which offer various pathway and program choices, currently include the following:

Elementary	Secondary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Africentric Alternative School</li> <li>▪ ALPHA Alternative Junior School</li> <li>▪ ALPHA II Alternative School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Avondale Elementary Alternative School</a></li> <li>▪ Beaches Alternative Junior School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">City View Alternative Senior School</a></li> <li>▪ da Vinci School</li> <li>▪ Delta Alternative Senior School</li> <li>▪ Downtown Alternative School</li> <li>▪ East Alternative School of Toronto</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Equinox Holistic Alternative School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Hawthorne II Bilingual Alternative Junior School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">High Park Alternative Junior School</a></li> <li>▪ Horizon Alternative Senior School</li> <li>▪ Mountview Alternative Junior School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Quest Alternative Senior School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Scarborough Village Public School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Spectrum Alternative Senior School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">The Grove Community School</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ALPHA II Alternative School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Alternative Scarborough Education 1</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Avondale Secondary Alternative School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">City School</a></li> <li>▪ Contact Alternative School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Delphi Secondary Alternative School</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">East York Alternative Secondary School</a></li> <li>▪ Etobicoke Year Round Alternative Centre</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Inglennook Community School</a></li> <li>▪ North East Year Round Alternative Centre</li> <li>▪ North West Year Round Alternative Centre</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Oasis Alternative Secondary School</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Arts and Social Change Program</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Triangle Program</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Skateboard Factory</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Parkview Alternative School</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">School of Experiential Education</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">School of Life Experience</a></li> <li>▪ SEED Alternative School</li> <li>▪ South East Year Round Alternative Centre</li> </ul>

Elementary	Secondary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Subway Academy I</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Subway Academy II</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">THESTUDENTSCHOOL</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">West End Alternative School</a></li> </ul>

## Summary of Policies in Other Jurisdictions

This scan looks at policies on alternative schools and programming. The TDSB currently has one of the most comprehensive offerings of alternative schools (both elementary and secondary) as well as alternative programming across its Learning Centre schools as compared to other jurisdictions. This can largely be attributed to the overall size of the City of Toronto.

Within Ontario, no other school board had a single policy specifically on alternative schools. One school board (e.g., Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB) had a combined policy on alternative, adult and continuing education. Many school boards scanned, however, had some form of alternative school program (e.g., Durham DSB, Halton Catholic DSB, Peel DSB, Thames Valley DSB) or what one school board (York Region DSB) called “personalized alternative education.”

Personalized alternative education refers to educational alternatives that have grown from the grassroots in each school and can be distinguished from main stream programming due to their frequent use of unconventional classroom settings and altered timetables in order to serve the individual needs of students. There is a focus on developing a skill set required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, which includes:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving;
- Collaboration across networks and leading by influence;
- Agility and adaptability;
- Initiative and entrepreneurialism;
- Effective oral and written communication;
- Accessing and analyzing information; and
- Curiosity and imagination.

Choice and flexibility are the predominant themes for alternative schools. Alternative education programs vary but can range from structured to less structured; quadmester or semester; experiential or community-based; or work-based (e.g., York Region DSB). According to one school board (Vancouver School District), by using teaching methods which incorporate a youth’s individual strengths, learning style and life experiences, and by placing a strong emphasis on building community connections and developing positive, supportive and healthy relationships, these programs are not only providing an arena where youth would otherwise be out of school, but they help students attain

positive educational outcomes and provide an environment in which the students feel valued, supported and engaged.

Looking more broadly, specifically the United States, some school boards (e.g., Chicago Public Schools) had policies on a comparable alternative education model. While the US Department of Education describes the goal of American alternative schools as an opportunity to educate students “whose needs have not been met in traditional schools”, the research shows that US alternative schools have primarily served very high risk students such as those who have dropped out and also students with special education needs. One key finding when looking at the Chicago Public Schools’ policy is that this school board gives students choice to attend different types of schools using various methods of admission. Charter schools (requiring an application) and magnet schools (specializing in a certain area) would be most similar to alternative schools in the TDSB. From an equity lens, in these examples, lotteries were the most prevalent form of admissions process other than standardized testing. In terms of equality, a randomized lottery ensured that there is no bias and every student has an equal chance of being selected. Many schools in this district also conducted variations of the randomized lottery, such as where children of staff or existing sibling enrolment will take precedent.

### **A TDSB Report: Overall Challenges to Alternative Schools**

According to the TDSB’s [Review of Alternative Schools: Research Analysis 2016-17](#) by Dr. Robert Brown, six themes frequently raised by the community about Alternative Schools (AS) included resources, access, staffing, communication, diversity and flexibility:

- **Resources and Support**: smaller budgets, limited courses, limited administrative support, limited special education needs and technological support (although many students in AS have special education needs).
- **Access**: questions about who gets access and what neighbourhoods get access; waitlists and the challenges of applications; equity admissions in lottery process.
- **Staffing**: challenge of ‘buy in’ for new staff to the schools, and finding teachers who are committed to alternative schools.
- **Communication**: difficulty in communicating the school philosophy with parents, staff, students; need for more information on waitlists, sizes, and abilities of schools to grow; better promotion with the public; better communication and outreach to diverse communities; easier access to information on making applications to alternative schools.
- **Diversity**: not reflective of the racial and cultural diversity of Toronto. For example, at the time of the report, data showed that alternative school students are predominantly more likely to be born in Canada and much more likely to speak English only at home.
- **Flexibility**: the flexibility of programming and teaching in an alternative school setting **brings** great benefits to many students, both at elementary and secondary levels, as it relates to their desired pathway.

In addition, the TDSB [Structured Pathways](#) Report (2013) by Dr. Gillian Parekh also presented two key findings related to alternative schools:

- Secondary school students attending alternative schools were much more likely to be at-risk: they were twice as likely to be taking non-Academic courses in Grades 9 and 10, had much lower graduation rates and much lower post-secondary access, compared to other TDSB students. This finding is similar to the outcomes of the most recent cohort study outlined in Dr. Brown's report.
- At the same time, students attending TDSB alternative schools had a sense of belonging that was much higher than other school structures - 72% of students in alternative schools had a sense of belonging, a rate approximately the same as students attending Arts programs.

### **School Boards Scanned**

School Boards Scanned (10): Chicago Public Schools, DSB of Niagara, Durham DSB, Halton Catholic DSB, Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB, Peel DSB, Thames Valley DSB, Toronto DSB, Vancouver School Board and York Region DSB.