



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

Your Guide to Hosting an All Candidates Meeting

Provincial Election June 2, 2022



Your Guide to Hosting a Provincial Candidates Meeting Where do your MPP candidates stand on issues affecting public education?

Provincial elections will take place on Thursday, June 2, 2022. On this day, Ontarians will elect Members of Provincial Parliament across the province. MPPs are elected to represent the views of their constituents in the legislative assembly. The education policies of government are far-reaching: the provincial government decides what is taught in Ontario schools and how much of our tax dollars are used to pay for education. These decisions affect everyone – whether or not we have children in the school system.

During provincial elections, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) advocates for non-partisan strategies to engage politicians in issues that focus on education. OPSBA has declared Wednesday, May 18, 2022, Education Day in the province of Ontario. On this day, candidates from the four major provincial parties (and others if you think appropriate) will be invited to attend Provincial Candidates Meetings in their ridings across the province.

What is a Provincial Candidates Meeting?

At a Provincial Candidates Meeting, all nominees running for MPP in a particular district are invited to gather and share their views. On Education Day, the focus is on issues affecting education. These events are non-partisan. Interested community members attend and hear from each candidate, and then the audience has the opportunity to ask questions. Local media often cover and even moderate these events. Typically, Provincial Candidates Meetings take place in locations like community centres, town halls and school auditoriums. The meetings offer the community an on-the-ground, interactive way to learn about the issues and form an opinion about those running for office. This helps voters to make informed choices on Election Day.

Why host a Provincial Candidates Meeting on Education Day?

Education is the second-largest item in the provincial budget. The public needs the opportunity to review party platforms and evaluate the various parties' promises. Provincial Candidates Meetings are ideal opportunities to assess who would be the most effective local representative and bring the candidates together to talk about the kind of issues that make a difference in education. In support of Education Day, many school board trustees and organizations are planning meetings. Not only is a meeting a chance for your community to listen to and participate in a dialogue with the provincial candidates, it is an opportunity to demonstrate the interest and concern that you or your group has for the quality of education in the community and in the province.

Planning a Meeting

May 18, 2022, is Education Day and the provincial elections will be held on Thursday, June 2. Ideally, meetings will take place on the date designated as Education Day, but another date may work better for your community. A meeting can be put together quickly – the keys are making sure there is enough time to secure attendance from all candidates and that the meeting is well organized. You may begin planning as an interested individual or you could form a planning committee or partnership with a community organization. This can be an effective way of getting diverse voters to attend and sharing meeting costs.

What follows are recommendations and helpful checklists for organizing a successful and engaging Provincial Candidates Meeting.

NOTE: Considering the current COVID-19 environment, you may want to consider hosting a virtual meeting instead of an in-person meeting. These may be easier to set up and have more attendees. There are a variety of platforms and consideration should be given to what might be the best and most accessible to your audience. The section below outlines points of consideration for an in-person meeting, following by a separate section that includes virtual meeting considerations.

Key Things to Consider – In-Person Meetings

- Find out who is running in your electoral district. Contact each candidate as soon as possible to establish their willingness to participate and their availability. Candidate information can be found at Elections Ontario at www.elections.on.ca/en.html
- Decide on a time (early evening works best), and location or option for your meeting.
- Make the meeting accessible to persons with disabilities. In choosing a location, it is important to ensure that it is physically accessible to all members of the community. Also consider the use of assistive technologies.

- Ensure the meeting is accessible to everyone and barrier free. Considerations include: sign language, multiple languages, family status/child/dependent care, all-gender language and washrooms, locations, travel and public transit, religious/faith restrictions, holy days, etc.
- Establish a set of guidelines and procedures that will govern your meeting. A sample set of guidelines is included with this guide.
- Send each candidate a formal invitation and a copy of the guidelines and procedures that will guide the meeting. Consider posting your information to the public as well. Ask each candidate for a bio that you can provide to the moderator you have selected. This will help them introduce the candidates. Invite each candidate to bring brochures or posters to the meeting and indicate these will be displayed on tables outside of the meeting room.
- Select a strong moderator. Ideally, you will secure a well-respected and prominent member of the community or media. They will have to maintain order and ensure the meeting is well-run. Given the political nature of the event, the moderator must be seen as non-partisan and capable of running an orderly meeting. Choosing to invite education reporters or other members of the media to act as moderator is a strategy that can contribute to increased media coverage and interest in Education Day from the public and political parties. In past years, student trustee have also been moderators.
- Select a time-keeper who will ensure that the candidates and those asking questions stay within their allotted time limits.
- Plan the meeting's format. A typical meeting lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours and should allow enough time for each candidate to make an opening and closing statement. The middle of the meeting can be devoted to questions and answers from the audience. You may also choose to devote the first 30 minutes to questions from the moderator. These can be general questions to the panel of candidates or include some questions directed to specific candidates. A sample meeting agenda is included with this guide.
- Create a list of questions for the candidates.

- Promote the meeting. Send invitations to your contacts – ensure your messaging considers the diverse groups in your community; display posters in libraries, schools and community centres. Post meeting details on your website. Be sure to take advantage of social media.
- Get the media involved. Consider sending a note to your local media.
- If the meeting is in-person, confirm the logistics. When choosing a location, ensure you will have ample seating, good acoustics and the ability to make refreshments available for the audience. Consider whether or not you will need insurance. Candidates should be seated at tables at the front of the room with name signs and plenty of water. The moderator and candidates will need microphones along with one for audience questions and answers. A podium for the moderator would be helpful. You may also set up a registration desk to gather guest information and ask for written questions.
- After the meeting, you may consider sending thank you notes to each candidate and the moderator. You may also send a follow-up media release that highlights key issues and quotes from the meeting.

Key Things to Consider – Virtual Meetings

These suggestions are to help ensure a virtual meeting runs smoothly. Consider:

- Before the meeting, test your meeting connection, your video and audio (ensure all participants do this, including the moderator and the candidates.)
- Screen sharing an opening/welcome slide with the name of the meeting, the participants and start time.
- Screen share the Traditional Territory Acknowledgement for the lands on which the host is running the meeting.
- Reminding all participants – presenters and listeners – to mute their microphones when not speaking. Some platforms allow the moderator/host to control (mute) microphone and video options. (Be ready to provide advice to participants about their use of their video and audio controls.)

- Deciding in advance how questions should be posed – directly to the moderator or using a “chat” function. (Consider muting/restricting the chat function.)
- Deciding in advance if the cameras of listeners should be on throughout the meeting or not. Sometimes internet connections and bandwidth can affect camera functionality.
- Recording the meeting and posting for those that were unable to attend. Inform all participants and candidates if you are doing this so they are aware.
- Other?

Key Things to Consider – Accessibility

The following was extracted from [The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association \(OMSSA\)'s GUIDE TO Conducting Accessible Meetings](#).

There are two main areas you need to consider when planning a meeting or event.

- Physical access to the meeting space
- Access to the content and proceedings of the meeting

Physical access to the meeting includes accessible spaces for parking, accessible entrances and washrooms, and meeting rooms that are large enough to accommodate participants who use wheelchairs, scooters and service animals. Access to the content and proceedings of the meeting includes making background and presentation materials available in accessible, electronic formats as well as alternate formats such as large print and Braille. People with disabilities have different needs.

Be Prepared: Even if you receive no advance requests for accommodation, you may receive last-minute or on-the-spot requests for accessibility supports. Know what options are available to you if this happens.

Guidelines and Procedures

An effective and well-run meeting will follow a set of guidelines. Here is a sample set of guidelines and procedures you can tailor to your meeting. These guidelines offer a good starting point and can be adapted to suit your meeting format.

Ensure that each candidate and the moderator receive a copy of your guidelines in advance of the meeting. Also have the moderator read the guidelines at the meeting itself. This will set the tone and let participants as well as the audience know that the meeting has a planned structure and that the guidelines will be followed.

Suggested Guidelines & Procedures

1. Candidates should present themselves to the moderator 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the meeting. This will allow time for them to draw for order of speaking.
2. Meeting to be called to order promptly. The moderator will explain that the meeting is an inclusive and safe space that allows for respectful discourse and zero tolerance for any harassment based on OHRC prohibited grounds, hate and violence.
3. If the meeting is in-person, candidates will be seated alphabetically at the speakers' table and will be introduced in this order.
4. Each candidate will be allotted 3-5 minutes to make an opening statement. The order of these statements will be determined in advance by draw.
5. Candidates will be asked not to interrupt other candidates' opening or closing statements.
6. During the Question and Answer period, questions will be received from the floor in either written or oral form or submitted via the chat function (if your platform permits) directly to the moderator – not to all participants. Another option is to consider having questions sent to the moderator by email. The moderator will have the responsibility of making sure that questions are directed to the appropriate candidate and that the questions are balanced among candidates.
7. The moderator will rule out of order any questions deemed inappropriate, offensive and derogatory or that would seem to attack the integrity of the candidate.
8. The moderator will rule out of order any person who attempts to use the question period for making a speech rather than asking a question. The moderator will also ensure diverse voices are heard and not allow one or two questioners to dominate.
9. Questions from the floor will be limited to one per individual to ensure the widest possible participation from the audience. If everyone who wishes to ask a question has had the opportunity to do so and there is still time left in the Question and Answer period, a second question from a member of the audience will be entertained.

10. Answers to questions should be limited to 2-3 minutes to ensure as wide a discussion as possible.
11. Allow 3-5 minutes for closing statements. The order should be the same as opening statements.

Sample Provincial Candidates Meeting Agenda

A well-run meeting will follow a defined format. Here is a sample agenda you may follow. The key is to ensure that each candidate has enough time to make a prepared opening and closing statement and, more importantly, to make sure there is plenty of time for a Question and Answer period.

Sample Agenda

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| 6:30 p.m. | Doors Open /Virtual Link Opens for Candidates Only. This can be an opportunity to test microphones and video quality. |
| 6:45 p.m. | Candidates present themselves to the moderator to draw for order of speaking. If virtual, consider candidates presenting in alphabetically order. |
| 6:50 p.m. | If virtual, moderator allows guest to enter meeting and posts a screen with meeting protocols. |
| 7:00 p.m. | Call to order and deliver a Traditional Territory Acknowledgment. A representative of the group that has organized meeting welcomes the community and introduces the moderator. Moderator delivers remarks and reads the guidelines and procedures. |
| 7:10 p.m. | Introduction of the candidates in alphabetical order. |
| 7:15 p.m. | Each candidate to be given 3-5 minutes for their opening presentation. |
| 7:45 p.m. | Break for Refreshments/Time for audience to write/submit questions for candidates. |
| 8:00 p.m. | Question and Answer period. |
| 8:45 p.m. | 3-5 minute closing statement by each candidate. |
| 8:55 p.m. | Moderator's concluding remarks. |
| 9:00 p.m. | Adjournment. |

Sample Provincial Candidates Meeting Questions

After each candidate has addressed the audience, it will be time for a Question and Answer period. The moderator will ask the audience to pose their questions to the candidates. It is often helpful to have a list of questions prepared in advance to help the question and answer session get off to a strong start should the audience be slow to ask questions. No doubt many of the questions will be specific to the current issues within your riding.

Your meeting could also include more fun and engaging sections such as a “speed round” of fast Yes/No questions or something such as a round of “Hot Seat” questions where candidates answer many questions briefly in a short amount of time. Will these questions help the audience learn about the candidate personally or their platform (or both)? Will they all be serious or will some be lighthearted?

The questions below have been shared with each of the major political parties. Additional questions that focus on local issues should also be considered.

What distinguishes your party's education platform from those of the other parties?

As schools transition from the COVID-19 school experience, how does your party plan to address the heightened realities of mental health and well-being, student re-engagement, learning recovery and issues of equity, diversity, inclusion and human rights to ensure student readiness to learn the skills, attitudes, values and knowledge necessary in today's complex global context?

Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet unique local cost pressures and needs. Will your party consider re-establishing the Local Priorities Grant to allow specific local board initiatives, meet funding challenges and support the achievement and well-being of all students?

Knowing and acknowledging that many First Nations students already face significant gaps in learning outcomes and achievement, often two to three year gaps by comparison to their non-Indigenous public school counterparts, and knowing the impact the pandemic has had on remote learning for students, what would your party propose to do to mitigate learning loss specific to the unique challenges and needs face by many First Nation students across many Indigenous communities in the province particularly those in remote areas?

What concrete actions will your party take to promote and facilitate the elimination of systemic racism and oppression within the policy, practices and structures in our public education system?

How would your party work towards maintaining labour peace in our school system?

Is your party committed to working together with public school boards and do you support the current form of school board governance?

