



CL/ACL DEPARTMENTAL RELATIONS: A PROTOCOL

The protocol articulated below is a working document. It offers guidance to members for successful, departmental practices by stressing collegiality, professionalism, and democratic governance.

The protocol comprehends four areas: A) Department Meetings; B) Roles and Communication; C) Contingent Considerations; and D) Personality.

DEPARTMENT MEETINGS

The ideal department meeting is a single event that happens seldom. In other words, department members, led by their CL/ACL, have a clear understanding of the day-to-day, week-by-week business of their department and need meet only occasionally as a matter of convenience for sharing information, planning a particular event, and so on. In such departments, meetings may occur every two months and last 60 to 90 minutes.

The re-organization of subject-based positions of responsibility, or department headships, into inter-subject “silos” of “curriculum leadership” has presented significant challenges. Physical Education, for example, may have responsibility for Art; English for French. In such cases, “department” meetings are more complex and may indeed need to be split into parts. (French teachers, for example, are not particularly interested in English exams.)

Other silos or departments will have a more natural unity, e.g., a Creative Arts Department comprehending Art, Music, Dance, and Drama. In such cases, a single “department meeting” remains both possible and desirable.

Smaller subject-specific meetings or full department meetings with only a few members may function well informally. Broader department meetings, meetings with larger numbers, or meetings with a complex agenda and/or potential for disagreement require greater formality. It is therefore recommended:

1. That full department meetings be held on a from-time-to-time basis, either as necessary on a roughly bi-monthly basis, or as scheduled to specific dates
2. That smaller meetings may occur from time to time informally (e.g., by memo, e-mail or in person) to address routine or minor points of business only
3. That the agenda for full department meetings, initiated by the CL/ACL, be developed consensually (e.g., “Do you have anything for the agenda?”) and that such agenda be circulated at least two days in advance of the meeting

4. That consideration be given to informal discussion of agenda items ahead of time, and that this information be shared with the CL/ACL and other department members as appropriate
5. That items on the agenda be timed and/or prioritized to ensure that important items are covered and that meetings are not over-long
6. That the CL/ACL chair the majority of the meetings, but consider delegating the role occasionally to give meetings a different flavour and members practice in the role
7. That decisions be made as far as possible consensually, and where differences of opinion exist, votes be taken or matters deferred pending further consideration
8. That minutes be recorded for each meeting and copied or otherwise maintained in a department minutes book accessible at all times to members of the department

ROLES & COMMUNICATION

The central principle in successful workplace relationships is that of collegiality. By this is meant a respectful regard for the work of others, a clear understanding of one's own and others' roles in the department, an equitable distribution of tasks, and ongoing communication that is courteous and professional at all times.

Collegiality – or democratic professionalism, as it might also be called – is especially important in school settings. Teachers rightly regard themselves as professionals, insofar as they possess an expertise for which they have a largely *independent* responsibility, in respect both of the classroom and their students. Teachers experience their collegiality mainly in their peripheral activity: at Staff Meetings, in department meetings, in their shared office space, and in their many informal encounters with their colleagues.

In these secondary settings, teachers are, therefore, in a slightly contradictory position. On the one hand, they look for support against the isolation and stress of their primary workspace. On the other hand, they keep guard over their right to manage and control that space. The challenge for a good department is to negotiate this particular divide well.

THE ROLE OF THE CL/ACL – While all members share responsibility for the collegiality of a department, the main responsibility falls upon the CL/ACL.

1. The CL/ACL has greater responsibility than the regular department member, and the CL greater responsibility than the ACL
2. The CL/ACL's responsibilities, while not outlined in a formal job description, can reasonably be characterized as including the following: scheduling meetings; building the agenda; keeping records; managing the budget; informing or reminding members of Ministry, TDSB, or school deadlines or other pertinent information; coordinating departmental activities (as the ordering of supplies or the preparation of exams); representing the department at school meetings and events; organizing to solve departmental problems as they arise; and so on
3. In addition to such routine responsibility, the CL (or ACL) also acts as a mentor and guide to department members in general and upon request, or when an individual member appears to be in particular need of support

4. The CL may also articulate a vision for the department, inviting other members to participate, each at his or her own discretion, in the realization of such vision
5. The CL therefore leads by example, establishing by manner, knowledge, and democratic skill the tone for the department; thus fostering its capacity for success
6. The CL's "responsibility" is not to be confused with actual authority, which belongs solely to the Administration
7. The CL remains a colleague, mentoring and guiding, giving direction, but not managing, "directing," or ordering (i.e., the CL is not a "boss")
8. The CL's communication is therefore cordial and collegial in tone – modestly directive, but not authoritarian
9. Written memos are likewise modest; they are neutral, clear, occasional, and short

THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT MEMBERS – Department members have, at minimum, the following responsibilities:

1. To attend meetings as scheduled, or give notice ahead of time when unable to attend
2. To follow the direction of the Chair and the procedures set out for the good conduct of the meeting
3. To ensure that actions assented to from the business of the meeting are carried out in a timely way
4. To accept the advice and direction of the CL/ACL on matters of routine business, and to give due consideration to ideas, proposals, or new initiatives
5. To propose questions as they arise and to communicate concerns in a timely way, either at the meeting, after due consideration, or informally as appropriate
6. To maintain decorum at meetings and in private conferences alike, ensuring that communication with the CL or other department members is courteous and respectful
7. To keep the CL (or other members) informed of unusual activities or other events that might conceivably have an impact on the department or other members

PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

1. Where problems arise within the department, the CL's responsibility is to identify, objectify, strategize, and consult – both members of the department and others as appropriate – prior to deciding on a course of action
2. The CL (or ACL) does not otherwise intervene against the professional judgment of a department member in his or her own (classroom) activity; nor does a department member seek to undermine the judgment of the CL beyond the processes described above (e.g., by clandestine complaint, open ridicule, or other unseemly behaviour)
3. Where a particular member is perceived to be – in spite of all of the above – a problem within the department, the CL (or other member) has a responsibility to consult and advise with others as appropriate, including the member affected

4. Where a matter is perceived to be intractable or deeply concerning, with potential for corrective action by the Administration, the CL or other member has the responsibility, when advising the Admin, to advise the OSSTF Branch President also
5. The Branch President, after consultation with the Admin as appropriate, will make his or her own assessment and inform, if necessary, the school's D12 Executive Officer