

# Policy II-37 Volunteers in Catholic Schools

# Contents

- Background ..... 2
- Who Responded?..... 2
- Level of Satisfaction with Content of Policy ..... 3
- Comments Submitted ..... 3
  - Comments from Respondents Satisfied with the Changes ..... 3
  - Comments from Respondents Neutral about the Changes..... 7
  - Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes..... 9

## Background

At the Regular Board Meeting held on September 12, 2023, Trustees reviewed amendments to Policy II-37 Volunteers in Catholic Schools. !

! The policy was released for stakeholder consultation on September 15, 2023. The online form remained open until 11:59 p.m. on Friday, October 6, 2023. This report summarizes the feedback received through the stakeholder consultation process.

## Who Responded?

In total, 279





## Comments from Respondents Satisfied with the Changes

9. I believe it might be better if we could leave the students with volunteers 10-15min in case we need to be out of the classroom for few minutes.

10. This is an excellent change in order to protect the children and HCDSB resources. However, the wording about the findings from a vulnerable sector screening is not strong enough because this would just allow the director to allow criminals to volunteer.

11. The vulnerable check can be expensive. Parents who want to volunteer shouldn't be held

## Comments from Respondents Satisfied with the Changes

19. I would suggest the following for non-Catholic volunteers:

Current: Each volunteer will model caring and cooperative relationships, promote Catholic values

Update: Each volunteer will model caring and cooperative relationships, promote values in alignment with the Catholic faith

"

20. Thank you for adjusting it to a vulnerable sectors check. I would encourage both a criminal and vulnerable sector check, as when requesting on the police website, you can obtain both together.

21. Schools should be aware of any offenses as it should be a safe space for all.

22. N/A

23.

## Comments from Respondents Satisfied with the Changes

30. does a volunteer have to be at least 18 or over 18? The wording is conflicting. Also, i think the vulnerable check should be submitted to the principal within 30 days, not 120 days. And, that the checks should be every 1-2 years, not 3 years. Thank you.







## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

10. It should not be reviewed by Director - if an offense is listed they should not be eligible to volunteer

11. The volunteer must produce a valid Catholic baptismal certificate. The volunteer must not have any pending provincial, federal or international criminal offences before a court of justice. The volunteer must disclose all active social media accounts for review of content that may contravene the safe guidelines or policies of HCDSB or be found offensive and harmful. The volunteer must not have any visible markings or symbols, tattoos or clothing that would be deemed to contravene the guidelines and or policies of HCDSB

12. If a volunteer has not received an official pardon for a criminal offence they should not be allowed anywhere near children.

13. If a vulnerable sector check comes back with a list of offences, it should disqualify the person from volunteering. Why the review by director of education?

14. Are we that desperate for volunteers?! Who decides what criminal record is approved or not? Will there be community consultation around this aspect of the process or will the Director of Education decided what is and isn't acceptable (using what standards or guidelines?!). You say you want to be transparent, if this is true, outline the entire process and factors



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

a parent I want to understand: How would they be deemed qualified to make these decisions? What examples have been denied in the past that you feel justify the reason for this change? Thank you.

32. I see no reason to change the existing policy. As the school administrator, the decision regarding volunteer selection should remain with the principal. While tough, these rules exist



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

43. Police checks need to remain as mandated reports to obtain. The proposed change does not provide the same level of comfort for the children's safety. Why this proposed change? I am very confused.

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

What is the messaging to our students and the wider community?

- If you don't like how the rules apply to you, then just get the rules changed?
- So long as you have friends in places of authority, you don't need to worry about the repercussions of your actions?

These proposed changes have the Director Education as the sole arbitrator of what is a "good" or a "bad" conviction where an offense is present that hasn't been pardoned. Not only does this scream of a severe lack of transparency, but is also rife for conflicts of interest, self-dealing and cronyism. In fact, these proposed changes already seem to reek of insider connections and favouritism.

Is the Director Education going to report to the community which unpardoned convictions were deemed "acceptable" by him in his sole discretion? Will he report on the criteria he used to assess which convictions he deems acceptable for access to our children and schools? I doubt he will welcome the scrutiny – he'll hide behind "confidentiality" or another similar convenient blanket.

With the issues facing our education system the fact that the Board has spent any time or energy on something like this is laughable. It is shenanigans like this that erode faith in the Board's leadership.

I have also been told that some have been trying to couch these proposed changes under the guise of Christian values, forgiveness and second chances. This is a bunch of malarkey, in my opinion. The timing of these changes being proposed speaks to the desire to accommodate the specific circumstances of certain individuals as opposed to any altruistic desires related to Christian values.

Given the gravity of these proposed changes, I believe the minutes of the September 12, 2023



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

pictures of school events or on a trip), that they aren't permitted to share on social media platforms.

52. I do not understand how someone with offences for which they have not received a pardon



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

72. These changes don't make sense. What is prompting these changes? What are they hoping to accomplish? I have been a council member in the past so not sure why this needs to be done? By putting in these changes it will create a negative impact to those who want to volunteer. Making them do this seems like an overkill. It's like ridiculous barriers for volunteers that are needed and who care about the school and the students. I do not support such changes to the policy and would be disappointed if these changes were accepted

73. Making It Easier to Understand: Some parts of the policy use complex language that might not be clear to volunteers who aren't familiar with educational or legal terms. Simplifying the wording could make it more accessible to all

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

consider explaining how these parents can actively take part in discussions, especially if they involve students during these meetings.

74. The policy was fine the way it was. Don't allow anyone with a criminal past to volunteer in school with my children.

75. The term "review" alludes to the possibility of permitting volunteers who have not received pardon on a case by case basis. For the protection of the children, the assessment of whether it is permissible to volunteer under this state should fall under the discretion and responsibility solely of a judge and not the director of education. The board should not incur such risk and liability. As a parent, I do not feel that this is the best strategy to move forward.

76. Hmmmmm - let's put together the puzzle pieces:

[REDACTED]

June (approx) 2023 - Toward the end of the school year, [REDACTED] parent council member [REDACTED] tries (unsuccessfully) to push through changes to the [REDACTED] parent council bylaws to eliminate [REDACTED]



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

impetus behind this proposed policy change and it is ridiculous to suggest a "work-around" to allow convicted criminals proximity to our children within our schools.

80. Keep as is now.

81. 'Full disclosure of Criminal status is required, why are we changing this, to accomodate someone?

82. If I'm reading this right it seems as though you want the ability to override our national policy of volunteering to allow someone who has a criminal record to be approved by a committee or board. This is ridiculous and who gives you the right to decide over the police that someone is suitable to go into our schools and our classrooms to be with children when they've broken the law. To me it seems like there's an underlying loophole that you are trying to bypass for someone who has been denied access. I asked myself under what circumstances has this been an issue before and why is it that it needs to be changed now? Has this really been an issue that we need and must have someone who has a police record to get into our schools? I volunteer for four different

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

those with vulnerable sector checks convicted of an offence (for which there is no pardon) cannot be a volunteer period. Why the changes to the policy would be interesting to know?

89. The primary concern of CPIC is finding the balance between making volunteering at school accessible and free of unnecessary roadblocks, while still ensuring the safety of HCDSB students. Finding parents to volunteer is already a challenge under the current policy, so it is imperative that HCDSB ensures that any changes to the policy do not result in a reduction in the number of volunteers as such a reduction would impact the ability of schools to run

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

- Charges unrelated to schools or volunteering with children should not necessarily hold anyone back from being able to volunteer
- If there is any flag on a VSC, regardless of offense, that will exclude someone from participating at school (council or otherwise) then that needs to be transparent and explicitly stated

What flags on a VSC would exclude someone from being able to volunteer? Is there a list of charges/convictions that would deem someone to be excluded? Is it fair to leave it up to solely the discretion of the Director?

- What is the appeals process for a rejection?

### On obtaining the VSC

HCDSB needs to provide a standard template letter for requesting the check and VSC, particularly if the letter enables the \$30 fee to be waived

- When you fill out the VSC you have to select "employment" and pay \$30, or select "volunteer" and provide a letter; some councils have written their own letters but a standard from HCDSB should be available to keep things proper and consistent
- If there are no minors present at council meetings, why is a VSC required for only sitting on council but not volunteering at the school?

Is there a process for volunteers who would struggle with the \$30 fee? We cannot assume that the fee is within e's financial means, particularly if we are going from requesting it once to every 3 years

### On the VSC frequency

Why are checks not transferable between schools (regardless of graduating to a high school or changing schools within the board)?

How often are HCDSB staff required to provide a new VSC (teachers, support staff, principals, board staff)? It would seem logical to align parent volunteers with the frequency of HCDSB staff checks

Three years is going to cause unnecessary roadblocks for retaining volunteers; finding people to volunteer is already a huge challenge for most schools and requesting every three years (regardless of cost) is going to further reduce the number of available individuals

-









## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

107. The policy should aim, among other values, at improving the safety of our kids, not compromising it by lowering the standards with respect to the background checks of the volunteers. If eventually, the background records are at the discretion of one individual, why ask for it in the first place? It will only increase costs with no associated benefit. Please remove (or at least minimize) the possibility that someone with criminal offences on record could be around our schools.

Furthermore, you are asking the Director of Education to reject or approve volunteers base on his/her impartial discretion and without any guidance or training on criminal offences. Why put this individual in such an awkward position? I will require that, if you proceed with these policy changes in spite of my suggestion, these such decisions made by the Director of Education, get on record for further accountability.

108. Volunteers are great to have , but they need to be crystal clean without a criminal record of any kind. There needs to be a strict screening process.

109. Is this change to bring [REDACTED] back? The spirit of this amendment seems innocent enough; giving convicted felons a chance to work in our schools who (at the discretion of the director) have shown they have mended their ways and can now be an asset to children. However, in the real world, it is often not the repentant who benefit from such clauses, but rather others. Our courts go to great lengths to protect our children. Please let them do their job and not place that burden of responsibility on the discretion of our director of education.

110. I believe that a Criminal Record Check should also required as well as a Vulnerable Sector Check. And if there are some offences that were not pardoned for a volunteer applicant, then that person cannot be a volunteer in this school board. It should not be up to the principal's review whether that person should be allowed to be a volunteer or not.

111. I would like to petition that the present amendment regarding volunteer checks may result in creating an unsafe environment for our children.

112. I am not satisfied with the newly added point "Volunteer applicants who submit a Vulnerable Sector Check that lists any offences for which an official pardon has not be received will have their application reviewed by the Director of Education".

This is too subjective. How will the Director of Education base the review and decision as to whether or not a stakeholder is allowed to volunteer? How will HCDSB ensure decisions are equitable and consistent across all circumstances?

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

Will this policy include committees (ie. CPIC and SEAC) as well as volunteers?

113. What was wrong with the previous policy that the new policy changes were deemed necessary? It is not (nor should it be) the responsibility of the Director of Education to pass judgement on the fitness of volunteer applicants who have not received an official pardon for past criminal offences (that is what the previous Board policy was designed to deal with in the first place). The power to approve or disapprove of such applications should not be arbitrarily vested in the hands of any one single individual. I strongly object to any new policy or policy changes that would make this so.

114. Convicted felons whether pardoned or not should not have contact with the children of our school system. It is simply beyond the pale that such a move should be made. It opens the doors for sex offenders to be allowed into direct contact with vulnerable students. It is amoral and unconscionable. To do so would be a complete violation of our roles as guardians of the students. It is a complete rejection of the Catholic virtue of Prudence.

115. [REDACTED]

116. How can anyone, calling themselves Catholic, allow potentially dangerous persons convicted of offences anywhere to have contact with the most vulnerable members of our society, and the most valued treasures of our rate payers. This policy is evil!

117. I would prefer for the criminal check to continue being required.

118. The voice of a parent should strongly be considered when such a proposed policy change is considered. The HCDSB holds the best interest, safety and the integrity of our children in its hands, daily. As a parent, I strongly oppose the proposed policy change to the Volunteer Policy. I strongly disagree with the review of an offence that is not pardoned to be considered. Whether or not an offence is connected to vulnerable persons, in this case school children, it is associated with the children and their everyday learning environment. Any offence against the law is a threat to our students and their families and the most important advocate for the children of the HCDSB, are their parents. I do not feel comfortable not knowing who is walking the property of our school buildings and I do not agree with this policy change.

119. The requirement for an updated vulnerable sector screening every three years is a definite improvement over the current "one and done" policy, however this improvement is weakened by the proposal to allow the Director, in their sole discretion, to overlook the results of a vulnerable sector screening and allow someone with a criminal record to volunteer in HCDS cm BT1043 Tm /1 1 Tf bd to 1 Tf b11 Tc f bds the

## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

additional measures that should be taken to ensure the safety and security of our children, staff and board assets. This would include a requirement for volunteers to self-report any charges, guilty pleas or convictions that arise between the vulnerable sector screening and annual declaration(s), with consequences (such as a permanent ban on HCDSB volunteering) for failing to do so.

While the requirement for a vulnerable sector screening every three years is an improvement, a lot can happen in three years. While any additional self-reporting would be based on an honour system this is no different from the current annual declaration requirement. A possible failure of volunteers to self-report is a very weak reason not to proceed with this requirement; the same argument could be made for the existing annual declaration and there is certainly no harm from having this additional requirement which is also cost and (other) barrier free.

The provision of "veto power" to be given to the Director of Education, potentially allowing individuals with a criminal record to volunteer in close proximity to children and board



## Comments from Respondents Dissatisfied with the Changes

volunteers. Do you really expect principals to instruct lead volunteers as to which specific activities their fellow volunteers may or may not undertake...which also becomes a violation of privacy?

While the safety of students and staff is paramount, consideration must also be given to board assets and the many ways in which they can also be compromised.

A periodic vulnerable sector screening and annual declarations would be strengthened by mandatory reporting of instances that would otherwise appear on a vulnerable sector screening, with significant consequences for failing to report or reporting that is fraudulent.

If Trustees are truly concerned with the safety of students and staff, and protecting board assets, they will ensure that only individuals with a clear vulnerable sector screening are permitted to volunteer at HCDSB - no exceptions.