



General Role and Responsibility of Association Representatives

The Association Representative, or Association “Rep” has been called many names over the years. But the role has now changed. The Association now uses the title **Association Representative**.

WHY THE ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE DESIGNATION?

There have been many models of selecting such “Representatives” at schools or other work sites such as board offices or curriculum support field offices. In the past representatives may have been elected, appointed by principals, chosen from all employees at a site or simply survived through a process of attrition and emerged as the only volunteer. Since the advent of Bill 160 (January 1, 1998) and the inception of teacher bargaining under the Ontario Labour Relations Act (OLRA), the Association Representative is so named to guarantee fair representation for members at a site, and to represent the Association to these members.

The other terms – school representative, staff representative, shop steward, union representative – all have inherent drawbacks or are not appropriate for the role. The “Association Rep” title transcends schools and board offices, but more importantly it emphasizes that this person represents the Association which is the “bargaining agent” in the workplace.

PRESENTING ASSOCIATION POLICY

In general, the policies of the Association are determined through a democratic process at the Annual General Meeting of OECTA. The Provincial Executive is also charged with directing the Association between annual meetings to ensure accuracy in presenting policies and procedures.

In order to keep members informed on OECTA policy matters:

- Rely on written materials produced by the Association.
- Familiarize yourself with the content of all material distributed by the Association.
- Contact unit officers for the context and rationale of policies and positions.
- Keep a record of questions and comments which arise during discussions – refer these to unit officers.
- Always provide a forum for all opinions – the Association is a democratic forum.
- Avoid personal or value judgments regarding policies and positions.

Assisting Members at Meetings

From time to time the Association Representative may be asked to attend a meeting with a colleague. The meeting could be with a principal or vice-principal and the role of the Association Representative

would be that of a witness/recorder. If the meeting is scheduled with a superintendent and/or outside agency, or the member has been notified that the meeting could be disciplinary in nature, the Unit President is to be notified immediately! The Association Representative may advise the member not to attend a meeting until the President is able to attend.

The following points are presented as assistance for the Association Representative in facilitating the meeting process and clarifying issues.

1. QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF THE MEMBER

- Have you been advised of the purpose of the meeting?
- Has the meeting been scheduled within reasonable time limits?
- Is the principal/vice-principal aware that the Association Representative will be attending?
- Has there been any reporting to, or involvement of, outside agencies?

2. POSSIBLE ACTIONS DEPENDENT UPON THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

Purpose	Association Representative actions
General 'in' school concerns: supervision attendance, timetables, interpersonal etc.	Attend and take notes
Parent concern	Attend and take notes
Illness or stress	Attend and take notes
Contractual issues: leaves, transfer (Have relevant document available)	Attend and take notes
Teaching performance	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Disciplinary action	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Allegations of inappropriate conduct	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Denomination issues	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Meeting with superintendent/Director	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Meeting with supervisor and parent	Contact the Unit President for advice/action
Meeting with any outside agency	Contact the Unit President for advice/action

The Association Representative may be asked to attend the meeting with the member after the Unit President has been contacted. If this occurs, the Association Representative should make inquiries if there are any specific directions regarding additional questions or concerns to be addressed. Once again, the Association Representative's prime role is to act as a witness and note taker at the meeting.

Whenever a member is informed of the involvement of outside agencies, such as the Police and/or

Children's Aid Society, the unit office should be contacted immediately. If a member is directed by a principal/supervisor to attend such a meeting without representation, no statements are to be made and the Unit President is to be contacted immediately. Members may need to be reminded of their rights from time to time. No one should be forced to attend any meeting without representation if he/she feels representation is required.

Before a meeting, members should also attempt to determine the agenda or purpose, especially with parents and/or guardians. If such meetings become confrontational, aggressive or threatening, the member has the right to end the meeting immediately.

The basis for the above suggestions and following "hints" have been developed upon submission of various unit documents addressing the changing role of the Association Representatives. The Association is grateful to local units for their efforts and sharing of information.

3. HINTS FOR ASSISTING MEMBERS AT MEETINGS

The traditional role of Association Representative is now enhanced under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. The individual Association Representatives in each work site will now be asked to perform specific functions by the Provincial Office and the local bargaining unit.

The following information is presented as a guide to further assist the Association Representatives in the performance of their duties when asked to assist a member at a meeting with their supervisor.

1. The member always has the right to ask the nature of the meeting.
2. The member has the right to OECTA representation at meetings, if he or she deems necessary.

Step 1 – Call of the meeting

If a colleague approaches the Association Representative to request attendance at a meeting with the principal or supervisor, the Representative should consult "Assisting Members at Meetings" – Sections 1 and 2 above – for suggested questions and actions. The Association Representative should ensure that the member has notified the principal that the Association Representative will be attending the meeting. If the principal or supervisor attempts to block the attendance of the Association Representative, or if it would be more appropriate for the president to attend, the unit president should be contacted immediately.

Step 2 – Preparation for the meeting

Discussion between the member and the Association Representative on the role of the Representative at the meeting is necessary prior to any meeting. In many cases, the OECTA members are best advised to listen and gain information without responding in the meeting.

Step 3 – The meeting

At the beginning of the meeting, the Association Representative should indicate his or her function at the meeting. The Representative will provide the member with a summary and a copy of any notes, which may also be filed with the unit office if necessary.

The principal/supervisor should be expected to outline the purpose and structure of the meeting. The OECTA members may feel the need for a break/caucus during the meeting. If so, a time limit could be

identified for the resumption of the meeting.

The member should also be able to ask to end the meeting and resume at another time mutually agreeable to the parties. If possible, reasons for the adjournment should be given and specific agenda items for the subsequent meeting discussed.

Notes taken should be specific to the issues as outlined, actions being contemplated by the principal and possible outcomes.

The principal/supervisor may conclude the meeting with a summary of ideas and/or actions. Make sure that notes reflect this summary and direction.

The member should always feel free to ask questions seeking clarification. If necessary, you may ask for a clarification from the principal/supervisor for the purpose of note accuracy. The Association Representative should ask for all documents to be disclosed to the member, and the unit office, to protect privacy and promote consistent practices across the board.

Step 4 – Following the meeting

The member and Association Representative should meet to summarize the meeting and decide on further actions or meetings. If there has not been previous contact with the Unit President up until this time, it will be necessary to make the contact now.

Following this “debriefing,” the Association Representative should prepare the copy of the notes and summary for the member. The notes should be dated and signed by both parties after they have been reviewed.

Association Representatives are reminded of the confidentiality of these matters. The Association Representative should ensure that the member is aware of the importance of confidentiality. General staff discussion of meetings, issues and outcomes is not to be undertaken. If issues are presented that will have ramifications for other staff members, or perhaps the entire staff, the Unit President must be apprised of these issues.

In all cases, the Association Representative should discuss the involvement of the unit officers in the matter.

IN CONCLUSION

All members do have the right to representation. The Unit President can act as a resource if a question arises regarding attendance at meetings. It is important that a record be kept of all meetings, even if the member feels there is no need for representation and attends on his/her own. The Unit President should be aware of all such meetings.

There are many instances where a Unit President or an Association Representative may meet with a principal to review a specific policy or contract matter, which does not bear directly on a single member. Any such meeting should be an option, which has been reviewed and accepted by both the unit office and the Association Representative at the school.