

# School Council Resource Guide

Alberta School Councils' Association



This Guide replaces the Alberta School Council Resource Manual © 2006, revised 2007.

*Created for digital access, this Guide contains links to online resources and up-to-date information for school councils.*

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## School Councils in Alberta

School councils are structured groups of parents, principals, teachers, secondary students and community representatives who work together to effectively support and enhance student learning. They provide a means for members of the school community to consult with and provide advice to the principal and the school board.

School councils were legislated in 1995 under Alberta's School Act and are mandatory for all schools in the public education system, including charter schools.

The Government of Alberta recognizes the value of parents and the community to be engaged in the education of children. It is through school council that parents, community members and school staff have a means of participating in decisions that impact student learning success.

Legislation relevant to school councils in Alberta is contained in [Section 22 of the School Act](#) and further defined in the [School Councils Regulation 113/2007](#) outlining requirements.

The [Alberta School Councils' Association](#) (ASCA) is the provincial association representing parents on school council. Recognized as the voice of parents in public education, ASCA presents the parent perspective to government and education organizations in Alberta and provides resources, supports and services to enhance parent engagement and school council effectiveness.

## CONTENTS

<b>School Council</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Role</b> .....	<b>3</b>
What School Councils are Not .....	4
Advisory .....	4
<b>Responsibility</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Education Planning .....	6
School Council Planning .....	7
<b>Levels of Engagement</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Building a School Council</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Operating Procedures .....	9
Models of Governance/Operational Style .....	9
Membership .....	9
<b>Member Roles</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Committees</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Meetings</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Establishment Meeting .....	12
First School Council Meeting of the Year .....	13
Decision Making .....	13
Rules of Order .....	13
Chairing the Meeting .....	13
Minutes of the Meeting .....	14
Annual Meeting .....	14
Productive Meetings .....	14
<b>Communication and Promotion</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Code of Ethics and Conduct</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Fundraising and Accounting</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Insurance and Liability</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Privacy Legislation</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Reporting</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>School Councils and Fundraising Associations (Societies)</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>19</b>

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Look for underlined links to relevant resource documents in this Guide.

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## **School Council**

School councils are an important forum through which members of school communities play an advisory role in school improvement planning. Key factors in collaborative relationships are building meaningful, two-way communication and supporting respectful interactions among education partners.

School council is a structured group of parents, principals, teachers, secondary students and community representatives whose purpose is to advise the principal and the school board respecting matters relating to the school. It is a means for parents and community members to work together with the school to support and enhance student learning.

A school council is a vehicle to support meaningful parental involvement in decisions that affect the school and its operations. School council provides the venue for parents to reflect the wishes of the broader community for the education of its students and to actively participate in giving advice and support to the principal in the operations of the school. The actual decision-making authority of the school council is limited to:

- determining the school council operating procedures
- setting policies to govern school council activities at the school level, as described in the *School Act*
- planning engagement activities that align with school council's legislated purpose
- choosing to provide advice to the principal and school board

### **Core Activities**

- Advises the principal and board on educational issues that pertain to the school.
- Establishes and reviews school council's goals, objectives, action plans and procedures.
- Communicates and consults with parents and the school community.
- Meets regularly.

### **Annual Agenda Framework**

### **Sample Yearly Agenda**

## **Role**

A school council should review its mission, vision and goals annually to ensure they reflect the views of the current membership.

School council functions may include:

- consulting with the principal to ensure students have opportunities to meet Ministry standards, fiscal management is sound, and the community is taken into consideration during school-based planning
- advising the principal and the school board on topics as requested
- being involved in school-based planning
- sharing ideas and information with other school councils and provincial organizations
- communicating information to the school community and other school councils
- setting policies that relate to school council functions, such as:
  - location of school council meetings
  - mail, email address for school council correspondence
  - school council orientation and development
  - financial management and/or fundraising
  - communications
  - privacy
  - minutes of school council meetings
  - pertinent information unique to the school council

### **Effective School Council Checklist**

## **What School Councils are Not**

As the primary role is advisory, school councils are not eligible to incorporate as societies. It is not the primary intent of school councils to fundraise or lobby.

Roles that are not to be taken on by a school council include:

- school governance
- employment issues
- school management
- listening to complaints

## **School Act & School Councils Regulation**

### **Advisory**

The school council is a legislated structure - a forum for parents and community members to participate in an advisory capacity in their local school decision-making processes. The advisory role is intended to engage parents, high school students and the community in school decision-making for which the principal is responsible.

### **Advising the Principal**

School council may, at its discretion, advise the principal on matters relating to the school. Some of the more common topics for discussion include:

- school's overall mission, philosophy, policies, rules and goals
- school's improvement planning, including three-year plans
- school district policies (e.g. school fees, school council policies)
- school budget
- school volunteers
- provincial achievement test results and diploma exam results
- guidelines and principles for the school resource allocations
- fundraising
- training and/or information needs of school council members
- school policy on use of facilities by the larger community
- facility renovations
- ways of reporting student achievement results to parents and public
- methods of communicating with parents and the public
- promotion of the school in the community
- programs offered in the school
- extracurricular activities offered in the school
- student attendance procedures, standards of student conduct and bullying issues
- services for students to improve learning, such as assistance from reading specialists and guidance counsellors
- school calendar and adjustments in school hours
- graduation and other school celebrations

### **Advising the Board of Trustees and Charter Boards**

School council may, at its discretion, advise the school board/charter board on matters relating to the school.

Typical topics include:

- district's three-year plan
- school district budget
- fundraising issues and methods of generating additional revenue
- school council policies
- district-wide programming priorities
- school infrastructure priorities
- safety issues that affect students/schools in the district
- advocacy for students, parents and public education
- transportation issues
- suggested criteria for hiring a school principal

### **Advising the Minister of Education**

School councils may also come together to advise the Minister of Education on matters that pertain to provincial educational policy and directions. When advice with the potential to affect change in schools across the province is given, it becomes **advocacy**. This form of advising or advocacy can be undertaken through the government recognized provincial association that represents the voice of parents in public education - the **Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)**.

**ASCA members bring forward issues, in the form of resolutions, at the annual general meeting. If a resolution is endorsed or voted in by the majority of the assembly at the meeting, it becomes a policy of the association. This policy forms the basis for advocating change to the Minister of Education.**

### **Responsibility**

While individual members of school council may have specific duties, all members are responsible for creating a culture of respect and collaboration.

Each school council must decide how to fulfill its responsibility in the school community through activities, such as:

- seeking the views of the school community (through questionnaires, informal discussions, topic-specific meetings)
- representing the views of the school community actively and accurately (through consulting as widely as possible with parents, teachers, students and community before making major decisions or providing conclusive advice to the principal or board)
- informing the school community of items, such as meetings, committee work, news and surveys (through newsletters, bulletin boards, emails)
- involving the school community (by inviting, supporting, including)
- encouraging and promoting parental engagement and support (by publicizing opportunities for ways to get involved, not just school council meetings)
- becoming well informed (by asking questions, reading, critically examining what is presented)
- focusing on the best interests of all students (by considering a wide variety of students and families when making decisions and formulating advice)
- becoming familiar with the policies of the local school board and understanding how they impact the school community
- maintaining ethical standards and setting ground rules of respect for meetings (adopting a code of conduct for school council members, rules of order for meetings)

## **Education Planning**

Accountability in the education system is an ongoing cycle that enables continuous improvement and critical reflection. Key components are measuring progress and using results to inform decision-making. Plans are developed on a three-year cycle and updated each year to respond to the past year's performance results and changes in the operating environment.

With the goal of encouraging continuous improvement in learning for children, Alberta Education mandates province-wide, three-year education planning and results reporting for school boards and schools. It is fundamental that each level of education strive to ensure the success of children and that planning is aligned.

School councils are important forums through which members of school communities play a role in school improvement planning. To increase meaningful engagement of parents, school councils should be aware of the three-year education plan of their school and consider developing a complementary school council plan.

### **School councils can participate in levels of planning and results reporting in three ways:**

- provide advice in the development of the district's plan and results report
- provide advice on the school's plan and results report
- create a school council's plan

Designing plans and results reports involves vision, decision-making, evaluation and critical thinking, all of which is done best with the participation of all those who have an interest in the success of the school.

The **Government of Alberta** outlines its goals for the future and strategies to achieve goals in a three-year business plan. Each Ministry or government department must also develop three-year plans, with goals that are connected to and aligned with those of the province.

**Alberta Education** has a three-year business plan that identifies goals aligned with the Government of Alberta's business plan. Alberta Education is required to report the achievement of its goals, on an annual basis, as part of the government's accountability to the public.

**Parents** are involved in the development of goals and a review of Alberta Education's business plan each year, through the **Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)**. The ASCA is invited, along with other education partner organizations, to send representatives to the provincial table when items are under discussion. Parents bring a valuable perspective to the establishment and review of provincial goals for education.

The **school board** develops three-year plans that must align with provincial goals as well as address local needs and issues. The school board is responsible for submitting an annual results report to Alberta Education, which provides information on the district and schools' major accomplishments and results of the past year. It includes results from surveys, provincial achievement tests and diploma exams, along with other information.

*Councils of School Councils (COSC) or groups of school council representatives that have district-wide membership are ideal for providing input into the development of the district's three-year plan.*

## **School Improvement Planning**

**Schools** plan and implement three-year education plans that are aligned with the school district and provincial direction. Education plans for schools are developed by school administrators and staff, in consultation with school councils. The school's three-year education plan must complement the district's three-year plan and address the unique context and issues at the school level. The school's plan reflects the culture, opportunities, challenges and values of the school community.

Some components of a plan, such as strategies and priorities, are revamped annually. Thus, one year is completed and another is added to maintain a three-year time frame. Near the end of each year, schools must prepare an education results report for their district.

School and district plans must describe how the school council was involved in the development of the plan. *"School councils must have the opportunity to participate in the development and implementation of the school's plan and the opportunity to develop and include strategies the council intends to pursue to support the achievement of the outcomes in the school's plan."*

It is important that staff, students, parents and community members have an opportunity to provide input into a plan and have the results interpreted to encourage broad ownership of the plan and results.

### **School Council Planning**

Some school councils develop a three-year plan that supports or parallels the goals of the school. It provides continuity of focus and purpose from year to year. A school council develops a three-year plan based on goals that align with the school's plan and reflect the interests of the community. Planning begins with reviewing what's already in place:

- schools council's plan
- school's three-year plan and results report
- district's three-year plan and results report

Once a school council plan has been created and the goals accomplished, it can be shared with the school, school board and school community. The more who know and understand the work of the school council, the more the school council work will be supported.

### **School Council Planning Status Update**

### **Levels of Engagement**

Legislation created school councils, but it cannot make them work. That is up to the members, including parents, staff, principals, school boards and, in some cases, students. The experience of members, the leadership of the principal and chair and the goals of the group play a role in defining the discussions and the level of engagement of a school council. The means by which a school council defines its meaningful engagement is up to each school council.

There are different levels of engagement for school councils. It is suggested that each school council decide the preferred level of engagement at the first school council meeting of the year.

### **Types of Engagement**

## **Building a School Council**

The *School Act* and the *School Councils Regulation* provide a school council with parameters to create their own operating procedures. The following outlines what school councils should consider in their operations.

### **School Council Mission**

What is the purpose of the school council?

### **School Council Goals**

The purpose made more specific - what will school council do?

### **Governance of School Council**

What model of governance will the school council adopt?

### **Decision Making**

What will be the decision-making model for the school council? Who is permitted to vote? Does the school council need a quorum? How will the quorum be defined?

### **Meetings**

What will be the procedures for regular meetings, annual general meetings and special meetings?

### **Members of School Council**

Who are the members of the school council? Are members elected or is every parent of a student enrolled in the school a member of school council?

What will be the executive positions? What will be their term of office? Does the executive have authority beyond other school council members? How will vacancies be filled?

### **Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members**

What are the roles and responsibilities of the members and the executive?

### **Committees**

What committees, if any, will the school council have?

How will the school council create committees and their terms of reference?

### **Relationship with Fundraising Association/Society**

What will be the relationship of school council with the fundraising association, if there is an association/society?

### **Reporting**

What reporting is required?

### **Funds from Fundraising**

What is the policy of the school board regarding school council funds?

What will be the purpose of a fundraising activity? How will school council funds be managed? Who will manage the funds? Who will decide how the funds are distributed?

### **Amendments**

How and when will the school council's operating procedures be amended?

### **Policies**

Will the school council develop policy in addition to the operating procedures to assist it in its year-to-year operation? How will policy be created?

### **Code of Ethics**

What will be the code of ethics?

### **Privacy**

Who will be the school council member designated to ensure the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) and privacy issues are understood and implemented for the school council? Who will be the school council member responsible to manage the personal information of school council members and school community members involved with school council?



## Operating Procedures

A school council creates operating procedures or bylaws to assist it in functioning effectively and can decide what will be included in its operating procedures.

Operating procedures or bylaws are the guidelines that inform a school council of the expected way to conduct its business. Operating procedures are less formal and serve the same function as bylaws. Operating procedures should be aligned with government legislation and local school board policy. They typically detail items, such as:

- membership of the school council
- members of the executive of the school council; e.g. chair or co-chairs, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer
- duties of the officers, their role descriptions
- types of committees that may be established
- meeting times and descriptions
- quorum necessary to make school council decisions
- decision-making style
- when the annual meeting will be held and who should attend
- annual report details, including when it is filed and the information it should contain
- methods to amend the bylaws/operating procedures
- which officers have signing authority
- processes to deal with conflict, should it arise

[School Council Operating Procedures Checklist](#)

[School Council Operating Procedures Template](#)

## Models of Governance/Operational Style

School councils choose the model of governance that will work best for their communities and indicate the selected model in their operating procedures. Two common models are the **town hall** model and the **representative** model.

In a **town hall** model, decisions are made at regular, open meetings of the entire school community and the executive members of the school council act only to carry out the wishes of the assembly. All parents that attend meetings are welcome to participate and vote. Individuals are elected or appointed (executive and others) to manage meetings and coordinate school council business.

A **representative** model acts like a board of directors to conduct the day-to-day business and reports back to the wider school community one or more times a year. The school community elects or appoints individuals to specific positions (representing a particular responsibility or activity area). Only individuals (parents, staff, students, community members) that are designated will have a vote and are considered to be “the school council.” All other attendees are welcome to attend, and participate in discussion at meetings but are not eligible to vote.

Many school councils have taken aspects of each model and created a **combined** model that reflects their community and serves their purposes. Some meetings, or specific agenda items, may allow for all attendees to participate and vote.

## Governance Models

### Membership

Membership in the school council is defined in *Regulation* and in the *School Act*. The majority of the members must be parents of children enrolled at the school. Other members are the principal, one or more teacher representatives and a high school student, if the school has a high school. A school council may also have *Early Childhood Services* (ECS) parents, if the school has an ECS program, and community members.

## **Executive**

The *Regulation* refers to “the executive” of a school council, and requires the school community to decide what size and which positions are to be included. Generally, the “executive” are the primary members needed to ensure the operations of the school council are managed: chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer (if required).

Other positions may be filled by individuals considered to part of the “executive committee” or apart from it (at the discretion of the school community). These individuals may be called “officers” of the school council or have a title assigned; e.g. Communications Officer, Event Organizer, Reading Club Coordinator, Volunteer Officer, Fundraising Chair.

### **School Council Executive Roles**

## **Member Roles**

### **School Council Chair**

It is expected that the school council chairperson will be a parent of a student attending the school. The chair should be someone who can work collaboratively and knows how to organize both programs and people. The chair should actively encourage others to become engaged in meaningful ways.

Typical chairing duties include:

- chair all meetings of the school council
- coordinate with the principal to establish meeting agendas
- ensure that the operating procedures are current and followed
- be the official spokesperson of the school council
- ensure there is regular communication with the whole school community
- stay informed about school board policy that impacts school council
- comply with the *School Councils Regulation* by providing the school board with an annual report that summarizes the school council’s activities for the previous school year, including a financial statement relating to money, if any, handled by the school council

### **Chair’s Relationship with the Principal**

The chair’s role is key to the success of the school council. An important responsibility is regular and ongoing communication with the school principal. This relationship of mutual trust and respect must be nurtured and supportive of common goals for the learning community.

### **Principal**

The principal is the instructional leader who manages the day-to-day operations of the school and is a key member on school council who promotes cooperation between the school and the community. As a provincially mandated member of the school council, the principal:

- may be identified as a member of the executive
- works in collaboration with the chair to prepare school council agendas
- supports the chair in running efficient school council meetings
- provides contextual information, as requested by the school council, on matters relating to the school
- seeks input from the school council, parents and community on major decisions that affect the school
- encourages and supports the formation and continuous improvement of school council
- interprets and shares results of provincial achievement tests and diploma exams
- enables the school council to provide input into the school’s education plan, policies and budget

### **School Council Participant Roles**

**Vice-Chair**

On some school councils, the role of chair is shared, either through the creation of co-chairing positions or through the chair's dependence on the vice-chair to undertake part of the work.

Typically, the vice-chair's duties are, in the event of resignation, incapacity or leave of absence of the chair, to fulfill the chair's responsibilities, and in the absence of the chair, supervise the affairs and preside at meetings of the school council.

**Secretary**

The school council secretary typically acts as a recorder at each meeting and ensures that the minutes are prepared accurately to reflect the directions agreed to at the meeting.

**Treasurer**

If the school council is handling money, through fundraising activities or donations, the treasurer keeps accurate records of all financial transactions and ensure that records are available upon request of the school board or school community.

**Teacher**

Each school council must have at least one teacher representative, as per the legislation. A teacher representative contributes to a successful school council by sharing professional knowledge with school council members and presenting the teachers' perspective.

**Parents/Guardians**

Parents of children enrolled at the school form the majority of the members of school council, and:

- encourage participation of parents and representatives from the school community
- share their professional knowledge, expertise and life experience
- encourage feedback and participation from community groups and individuals
- communicate information of interest to the school council and the school community
- share information from school council meetings with the community
- have a clear understanding of the school council objectives
- attend school council meetings and create an inviting environment
- identify possible topics for agendas and recommend training sessions on school council effectiveness

**Community Member**

School councils are encouraged to have a community member attend meetings. The community representative can play a strong role in bringing the community perspective into the school. The member helps the school and school council build partnerships with the larger community and, in many instances, acts as a resource to promote cooperative ventures between community and school to enhance student learning.

**Student**

The student is the centre of the education system and, in high school, has an important role to play as a participant on school council. A student presents the student perspective on issues, helps with school policies, seeks other students' views to share with school council and communicates school council's information to fellow students.

**Education Community**

When everyone has a clear understanding of roles on school council, it fosters mutual respect and collaboration. Others have distinct responsibilities in the education environment, which school councils should be aware of and support as well.

## **Superintendent**

The superintendent, as the chief executive and educational officer of the board/charter board, is responsible to the board/charter board and to the Minister of Education for the overall achievement and success of the students within the district.

## **School Boards and Charter Boards**

The school board consists of elected community members (trustees) who determine policy and set goals and directions to guide education in the school district. A charter board consists of members that are appointed or elected to the board. The board member can bring the board's perspective and information, as an invited guest, at school council meetings.

## **Minister of Education**

The Minister of Education determines the general direction for education policy and is responsible for legislation governing the formation of school councils. In addition to the Province of Alberta's *School Act*, the Minister sets:

- funding levels for education
- guidelines for curriculum and student assessment
- reports annually about education in the province

## **School Council Relationships: Who's Who?**

### **Committees**

Members who attend school council meetings cannot do everything themselves. Sometimes, it is necessary to delegate to a committee. Parents, teachers or members of the community who are unable to attend regular council meetings may be willing to serve on a short-term specific-task committee.

Effective committee work helps make school council meetings brief and effective. Committees also enable the school council to accomplish much more.

- Committees are formed after initial school council discussion.
- Items requiring more lengthy discussion or research are assigned to a committee.
- Committees make decisions or recommendations, according to the mandate provided by school council.
- Standing committees operate on an ongoing basis, with specified lengths of terms for members.
- Ad hoc committees are formed as necessary and are to work within a specified time period.

### **Creating Committees-Best Practices**

### **Meetings**

If a school had a school council the previous year, the school council is **renewed** (not re-established) at the beginning of the next school year, as per the *School Councils Regulation*, or at a time agreed upon by members.

### **Establishment Meeting**

In schools where there is no school council, the principal arranges an establishment meeting, following the process outlined in the *School Councils Regulation*. The *Regulation* identifies who the principal must notify, when the notification must occur, and who is to act as the chair and as the secretary. The agenda for the establishment meeting must include discussion about the:

- school council membership
- size of the school council and the executive positions

- term of office of each member of the school council
- model of governance to be followed
- preferred decision-making model, including who is able to vote
- frequency of school council meetings
- operating procedures
- any other matters that require clarification
- election of executive members of the school council

### **First School Council Meeting of the Year**

The agenda for the first meeting should review the relevant legislation, allow discussion of the work of school council and help set the focus for the coming year. Ideally, the agenda is set through collaborative efforts between the principal and chair.

Suggested topics for the first meeting may include one or more of the following:

- review of the legislation, operating procedures
- roles and responsibilities of school councils, principals, teachers and school board
- mission, vision and code of ethics for school council and/or school
- school council's previous year's report to the school board
- rules of order that the school council will use throughout the year, including voting procedures
- school and/or school council's three-year plan and activities
- minutes of the last school council meeting and how to access minutes from previous meetings
- potential school council committees and their responsibilities
- meeting dates and times for the year
- review of the governance model used in previous years, including how decisions are made

### **Decision Making**

The way school councils make decisions may vary, depending on the issue. Two typical models for making decisions are **consensus** and **majority vote**. School councils may combine both strategies to seek consensus from the school community and then confirm the decision by a majority vote.

When making a decision by majority vote, it is necessary to provide ample time for school council members to become informed on the issue and to discuss it thoroughly. Majority vote is effective when it is not likely that a compromise will be reached.

### **Rules of Order**

Rules of order help school councils operate effectively. School councils can establish rules of order, according to their culture and needs. Rules of order help manage and direct discussion, debate and decisions for the group. It is important that the school council follows a set of rules and that the chair knows the rules and adheres to them. There are complex official rules, such as *Robert's Rules of Order*, as well as simplified versions better suited for school councils.

### **Sample School Council Rules of Order**

### **Chairing the Meeting**

It is expected that a parent will chair school council meetings. An effective chair or co-chairs will have an agenda that is focused on the business of the school council. The chair should start the meeting on time, encourage or allow opinions on each topic, sum up each discussion item with a view to closing the item and moving on, and end the meeting on time.

### **Tips for School Council Chairs**

## Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes are usually recorded by the secretary of the school council as per the *Regulation*. The minutes should be recorded using a template that matches the agenda in one of three ways:

- verbatim minutes – word for word record of what was said (***not recommended for school council***)
- decision-only minutes – motions or decisions only – no discussions recorded
- anecdotal minutes – decisions and concise discussion summaries (***recommended for school council***)

Accurate anecdotal minutes provide school council members with:

- a clear objective summary of what went on during the meeting
- an historical account of the group's decisions and the rationale behind them, including:
  - objective comments, rather than opinions
  - decisions about action items
  - highlights, rather than narrative accounts
  - motions and resolutions recorded verbatim

The minutes must be consistently recorded, retained at the school (for at least seven years) and made available to the board and/or the public, on request.

[Minutes Template](#)      [Sample Minutes](#)      [Making Motions](#)      [Sample Agenda Template](#)  
[Three Types of Minutes](#)

## Annual Meeting

The annual general meeting (AGM) of the school council will be held within 20 school days after the start of the school year or at an appropriate time during the school year as determined by the school council. The meeting will be advertised throughout the school and the community until the date of the AGM. The business of the AGM may include:

- election of school council members and/or executive members
- proposed operating procedures amendments
- motion to accept a financial statement of the previous year
- plans and budget for the upcoming year
- discussion of major issues in which parents should have input, such as:
  - changes to the vision or mission statement of the school
  - major changes in the school program or focus
  - formal evaluation of the school council

## Productive Meetings

One way to ensure school council members feel positive about their role on school council is to have productive and effective school council meetings. Here are five signs of a productive meeting.

1. The meeting has an agenda and is chaired effectively. People know why they're there, what they're hoping to accomplish and feel it's a valuable use of their time.
2. Members understand meeting expectations and participate actively.
3. All participants feel welcome and that their participation is valued.
4. The participants generate creative ideas and solutions and are committed to the decisions and actions they reach.
5. Participants are willing to work together again. Feeling positive about the meeting and maintaining mutual respect is important.

## Making Meetings Meaningful

## **Attendance**

Communication is the most useful tool to get people interested in the work of school council. Letting parents and community members know about school council meetings and sharing information about school council decisions, directions and activities helps keep them interested.

- Collect and maintain a list of parents' names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.
- Use email to send meeting notices, event announcements, requests for help and updates on school issues.
- Use the school's outdoor sign to advertise and promote school council meetings and events.
- Ask local businesses if they will post school council meeting information and/or distribute the school council newsletter. Ask local churches, seniors' facilities, daycares or community leagues as well.
- Send parents and others the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting several days before each school council meeting.
- Call people a few days before each meeting and encourage them to attend.
- Translate important notices and information into the main languages of the school, when possible.
- Create a school council newsletter.
- Make sure the community knows and understands the goals of the school and school council.
- Thank and recognize participant efforts often and publicly.

## **Increase Meeting Participation**

### **Participation**

School councils are forums through which members of school communities play important roles in school improvement planning. It is important that school councils make an effort to reflect the diversity within the school community.

Educators recognize the crucial role that school councils, parents and community members have in enhancing student learning. **Studies identify the benefits of parental involvement in education**, which include:

- higher student achievement
- better student attendance
- more positive student attitudes and behaviours
- higher student graduation rates

Effective recruiting needs to be an ongoing, year-round activity. As with any group, it is important to support the participation of existing participants and to invite newcomers to ensure continued success into the future. Having skilled and committed school council leaders assume key organizing and chairing roles also enhances the success and sustainability of a school council.

Recruitment is about approaching those who may have an interest in school council and matching their skills with the work that needs to be done. Everyone should be encouraged to identify opportunities to involve school community members in the school decision-making process on school council. Parents, teachers, students, administrators, community leaders and trustees may know people who can make positive school council contributions.

It is important to develop and use a variety of methods to encourage involvement on school council.

### **Engagement Opportunities**

### **Why Participate on School Council**

### **Engagement**

Once new school council members have been recruited, efforts need to be made to keep them involved. Developing and implementing procedures to create an environment of inclusion and involvement is essential.

**Orienting, mentoring and training** new members promotes a sense of belonging that immediately involves them in the school council. Running productive meetings, **recognizing** participants and **succession planning** for the future are ways to retain school council members.

### **How to Recognize Participants**

### **Ideas to Engage the School Community**

## Communication and Promotion

A school council is representative of parents and others from the broader school community. It is important that the school council identify ways and means to check the pulse of the school community and ensure the community's wishes, goals and aspirations for its school are articulated through the school council.

It is also important that the work of school council - its advice to the principal on school decisions, the strategies school council uses to enhance school climate and culture, and the ongoing support it gives the principal, staff and students in the school - is shared with the school community.

Open and clear communication is essential in helping everyone feel included as part of the school community.

One of the keys to an effective school council is the ability of the members to communicate well with each other. A responsibility of a school council is to communicate with the parents of the school community. There are several ways to communicate the work of the school council. Outlined below are some suggestions that may be useful.

### Within Council

- Utilize a Permission to Contact form distributed to parents/guardians, maintained securely (in keeping with privacy legislation) to send out school council notices, agendas and minutes.
- Research and develop a list of relevant and interesting website addresses, companies and organizations for distribution to school council members.
- Set up a school council email account, either through the school, or separately (e.g. gmail). Check regularly for messages. Since chairs change from year to year, it is recommended that the email address be generic rather than an individual's name (e.g. *chair@yourschoolname.ca* or *schoolnamechair@gmail.com*).
- Network and communicate with other school councils, through a Council of School Councils (COSC) district group, or provincially, through the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA).

### In the School Community

- Include highlights of school council meetings in the school newsletter or on the school website.
- Seek opportunities to translate school newsletters and other forms of communication into the languages commonly used by parents in the community.
- Send school council bulletins (meeting notices, other important dates) home with students on a regular basis.
- Ask the local newspaper to run an article about your school council.
- Ask a local ethnic newspaper to translate and run an article about your school council.
- Seek networking opportunities within your community - make a presentation to city council or to service clubs about the work of the school council.
- Keep the lines of communication open between your school council and your school board - invite your local trustee/charter board member to your meetings or attend a board meeting.

Effective communication by school council builds support for the success of its goals. It demonstrates that parents and school council are serious about the school, children's learning and engagement as partners in helping create a successful learning environment for students.

### Strategies to Raise the Profile & Awareness of School Council

## Code of Ethics and Conduct

Having a code of ethics for the school council and a code of conduct for members can dispel misunderstandings about the school council, what it does and how it deals with issues. When those involved in discussion and decision-making at a school embrace both a code of ethics and conduct that speak to collaboration, cooperation, continuous improvement and understanding, conflicts can be dealt with more effectively. [Sample School Council Code of Ethics](#) [Sample Code of Conduct for School Council Members](#)



## **Fundraising and Accounting**

A school council **cannot** be incorporated under the *Societies Act* or Part 9 of the *Companies Act*. Although a school council may fundraise, subject to school board policies, it cannot undertake fundraising endeavours that require a gaming license from the *Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC)*, such as bingos, casinos or raffles.

Some school councils that choose to fundraise have banking procedures with signing authority and maintain records on the use of fundraised dollars. Some school councils choose to fundraise and use the school's accounting procedures. Other school councils choose not to fundraise. While each school council may decide what is best for itself and the school community, school councils must follow the policies, expectations and use of accounting procedures established by their school board/charter board.

## **Insurance and Liability**

School councils are covered under the school board's liability insurance. The *School Act* states that a board must maintain an insurance policy or policies that indemnify the board, its employees and school councils. A school council chair is encouraged to check with the superintendent or school board/charter board chairperson to determine the details of coverage. Limitations are identified in the policies.

## **Privacy Legislation**

Two separate statutes govern the use of personal information within schools:

1. **FOIP**- School boards and school employees operate under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)*. FOIP legislation defines the amount and nature of personal information that can be shared and for what purposes. All district staff are subject to FOIP regulations when handling personal information.
2. **PIPA**- School councils and fundraising associations/societies operate under the *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)*. PIPA legislation governs the collection and use of personal information for organizations that are not public bodies.

These acts, in their respective ways, govern an individual's right of access to records and how personal information is collected, used and disclosed in school communities.

## **Recommendations for School Councils in Relation to PIPA**

- Each year, designate a person responsible for responding to questions about the use of personal information by school council.
- Review school council's privacy policy.
- Obtain consent to collect, use and/or disclose personal information from parents, students, school council members or others from the school community.
- Collect only the essential personal information required to fulfill its role in the school.
- State the purpose for and intended use of personal information when consent is sought.
- Use personal information only for the purpose stated when it was collected, unless consent is obtained for an alternative use.
- Ensure that all personal information is protected from unauthorized access and destroyed safely once it is no longer needed.

[PIPA School Council FAQs](#)

[Sample PIPA Policy](#)

[Sample Permission to Contact Form](#)

## Reporting

Apart from a responsibility to report to the larger school community, school councils have a duty to submit an annual report to the school board/charter board. This report helps boards measure and be accountable for parent and community involvement within the district.

The chair of a school council must prepare and provide to the board by September 30 of each year a report:

- summarizing the activities of the school council in the previous school year, and
- including a financial statement relating to money handled by the school council in the previous school year, if any, and how the funds were used

A school council must retain at the school, a copy of the minutes for each meeting of the school council (for at least seven years) and make them available to the board or the public on request.

[Sample School Council Annual Report](#)

[Sample School Council Financial Statement](#)

## School Councils and Fundraising Associations (Societies)

School councils evolved from or replaced Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), advancing the role of parents and others in the community from volunteers supporting the school, usually through extensive fundraising, to collaborative participants in school decision-making. This change raised new questions about how to handle fundraising issues and continue providing enhanced resources and support to the school.

School councils and fundraising associations are completely different entities. School councils are forums through which members of school communities play an important role in school improvement planning.

Fundraising associations are groups of people who have incorporated under the *Societies Act* or Part 9 of the *Companies Act*. Under current legislation, school councils may raise money, but cannot register as fundraising associations. By appreciating the differences between school councils and fundraising associations, school councils can improve their effectiveness to meet the needs of the school community.

Fundraising associations have been directly or indirectly connected with schools for decades. They are often program specific and go by many names, such as *Friends of Neighbourhood School* or *Neighbourhood School Band Society*. Prior to the legislation that created school councils in Alberta, some PACs and Home and School Associations also registered as incorporated societies.

## Making the Distinction

School councils and fundraising associations provide two separate and distinct contexts for parent and community involvement in the school.

**School councils** provide a means for parents and community to work together with administration, staff and high school students to promote the well-being and overall effectiveness of the school community. The main role is advisory.

**Fundraising associations** provide a means for parents and community members to provide additional financial resources and support to the school. Their main role is fundraising.

Members who serve on a school council can also serve on a fundraising association, and vice versa, unless the operating procedures/bylaws of either organization prohibit it.

Fundraising associations are responsible for reporting on their activities and fall within the statutes of the *Societies Act*, *Alberta Corporate Registry* and *Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission*, depending on the group's fundraising activities.

Due to the potential confusion when school communities have both a school council and a fundraising association, membership in each organization should be clearly defined and communicated to parents and guardians.

[School Council & Fundraising Associations Comparison](#)

[School Council & Associations Distinctions](#)

[School Council & Fundraising Associations Societies Checklist](#)

[Joint Annual Planning](#)

## **Resources**

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) website offers additional resources and information for school councils (*links below*), as well as a calendar of events, latest news, Ministry updates, online community, member benefits, annual conference, education resources, publications and parent links.

[www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca](http://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca)

## **Tutorials**

- Parents 'n Education Series (*all about the education system in Alberta in four short videos*)
- Introduction to the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- School Council Chair Basics
- Effective School Councils
- School Council Members
- School Councils & Fundraising Associations: Similarities and Differences

## **Templates and Samples**

- Sample Social Media Policy for School Council

## **Tip Sheets and Checklists**

- Insurance Information for School Councils
- Parent Engagement Checklist
- PIPA Summary for Organizations
- School Council Chair Responsibilities
- School Council Executive Transition Checklist
- School Council Web Pages
- Tips for Directing Meeting Discussion

## **Promotion Materials**

- School Council Recruitment Poster
- School Council Meeting Notice Tent Card

## **Effective School Councils**

### **Webinars**

- School Council Purpose
- School Council Chair Basics
- Meeting Management
- Masterful Minutes
- Tools for Effective School Councils

### **Workshops for School Councils**

### **Conversation Starters for School Councils**

### **Provincial Advocacy**

### **School District Services**

### **Fundraising Association Resources**

## **Alphabetical listing of Resource Links in this Guide**

[Annual Agenda Framework](#)  
[Creating Committees-Best Practices](#)  
[Effective School Council Checklist](#)  
[Engagement Opportunities](#)  
[Governance Models](#)  
[How to Recognize Participants](#)  
[Ideas to Engage the School Community](#)  
[Increase Meeting Participation](#)  
[Joint Annual Planning](#)  
[Making Meetings Meaningful](#)  
[Making Motions](#)  
[Minutes Template](#)  
[Personal Information Protection Act \(PIPA\) School Council FAQs](#)  
[Sample Agenda Template](#)  
[Sample Code of Conduct for School Council Members](#)  
[Sample Minutes](#)  
[Sample Personal Information Protection Act \(PIPA\) Policy](#)  
[Sample School Council Annual Report](#)  
[Sample School Council Code of Ethics](#)  
[Sample School Council Financial Statement](#)  
[Sample School Council Rules of Order](#)  
[Sample Yearly Agenda](#)  
[Sample Permission to Contact Form](#)  
[School Act & School Councils Regulation](#)  
[School Council & Fundraising Associations Comparison](#)  
[School Council & Fundraising Associations Distinctions](#)  
[School Council & Fundraising Associations Societies Checklist](#)  
[School Council Executive Roles](#)  
[School Council Relationships: Who's Who?](#)  
[School Council Operating Procedures Checklist](#)  
[School Council Operating Procedures Template](#)  
[School Council Participant Roles](#)  
[School Council Planning Status Update](#)  
[School Improvement Planning](#)  
[Strategies to Raise the Profile & Awareness of School Council](#)  
[Three Types of Minutes](#)  
[Tips for School Council Chairs](#)  
[Types of Engagement](#)  
[Why Participate on School Council](#)

*For information contact:*

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