

What do you think about your school's homework policy? Do you have strong feelings about the school's dress code? Have you good ideas for recruiting volunteers to coach teams? You would be a great candidate for the school council.

Purpose

School councils are elected to advise principals and boards on ways to improve student achievement to make the education system more accountable to parents.

By law, they must be consulted on:

- The process and criteria for selection and placement of principals and vice-principals,
- Board codes of conduct and dress,
- Policies for fund-raising by school councils, and
- Action plans for student improvement based on standardized test results.

School councils may also make recommendations to their principals and school boards on any matter from improving the school yard to changing the length of the lunch break to discussing school closings. Principals and school boards are required by law to consider recommendations made by school councils and to report back to them on how they plan to act on their advice.

School councils in turn, are responsible for sharing information with parents and the community and seeking their ideas and views about matters under consideration by the council. For example, if the school is planning to develop a policy on homework, council members should try to consult with as many parents as possible.

Membership

Every school is required by law to hold school council elections within the first 30 days of the school year.

Members must include:

- the principal (or vice-principal), who is a non-voting member,
- one teacher,
- one non-teaching employee,
- one student in secondary schools (optional for elementary schools),
- one or more community representatives appointed by the elected council, and
- as applicable, a representative from the recognized parent associations in the School Council Handbook.

Principals and School Councils

Principals are supposed to support the work of the council by providing information and by notifying the school community about school council meetings and elections, and publicizing the names of council members and annual reports of council activities and financial statements.

Fundraising

School councils may lead fundraising activities as long as they are in accordance with board policies and guidelines.

Any funds raised by the school council (and any assets purchased with those funds) belong, legally, to the board. All fundraising activities conducted by the school council must be included in the annual report prepared by the school council.

For more information go to the Ministry of Education, School Councils, A Guide for Members
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/council02.pdf

Encourage participation

It's often a challenge to find enough committed volunteers to join the council and attend meetings.

- Set up a phone or email tree to inform parents about meetings and hot issues,
- Keep parents informed with a newsletter or website,
- Provide translation,
- Offer child care,
- Provide orientation or a "buddy" for new members,
- Introduce everyone at the beginning of every meeting,
- Feed your members with pot luck or pizza,
- Engage a guest speaker to talk about topics such as reading, parenting, homework, or sex ed.



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