

Building Learning Communities

A Handbook for
School Councils

2nd Edition

Department of Education
Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador

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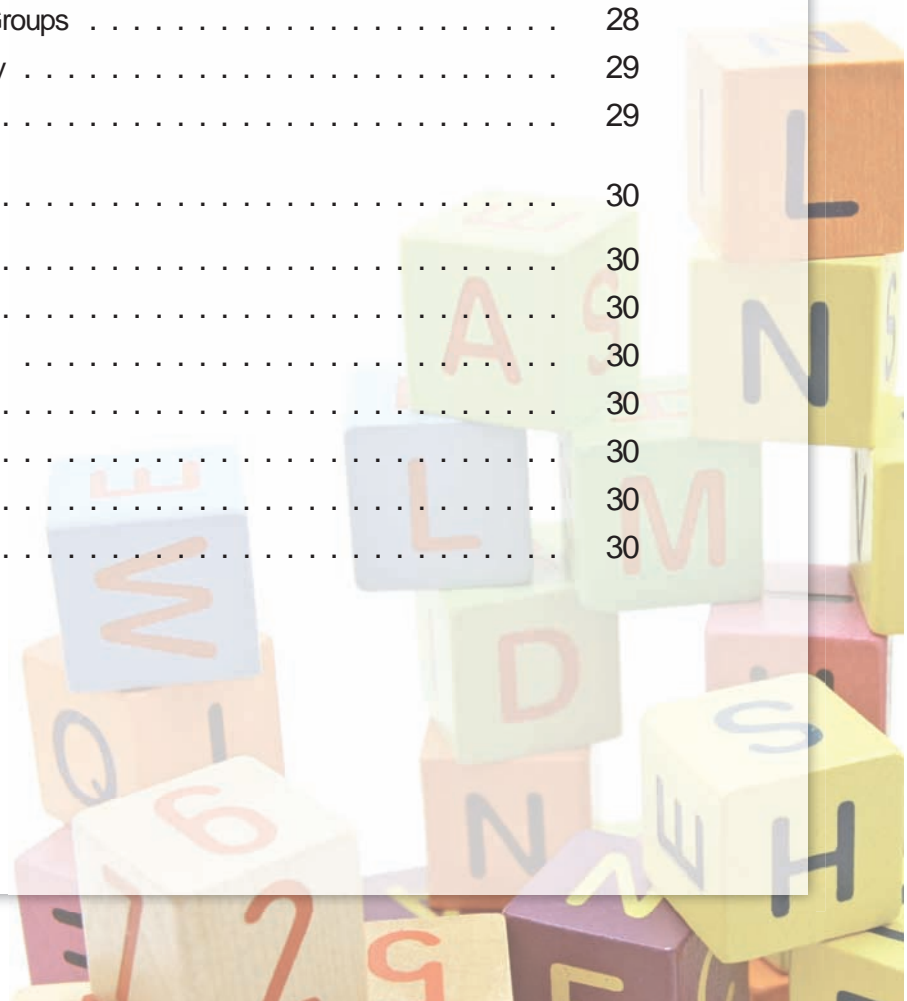


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1. Introduction

Background

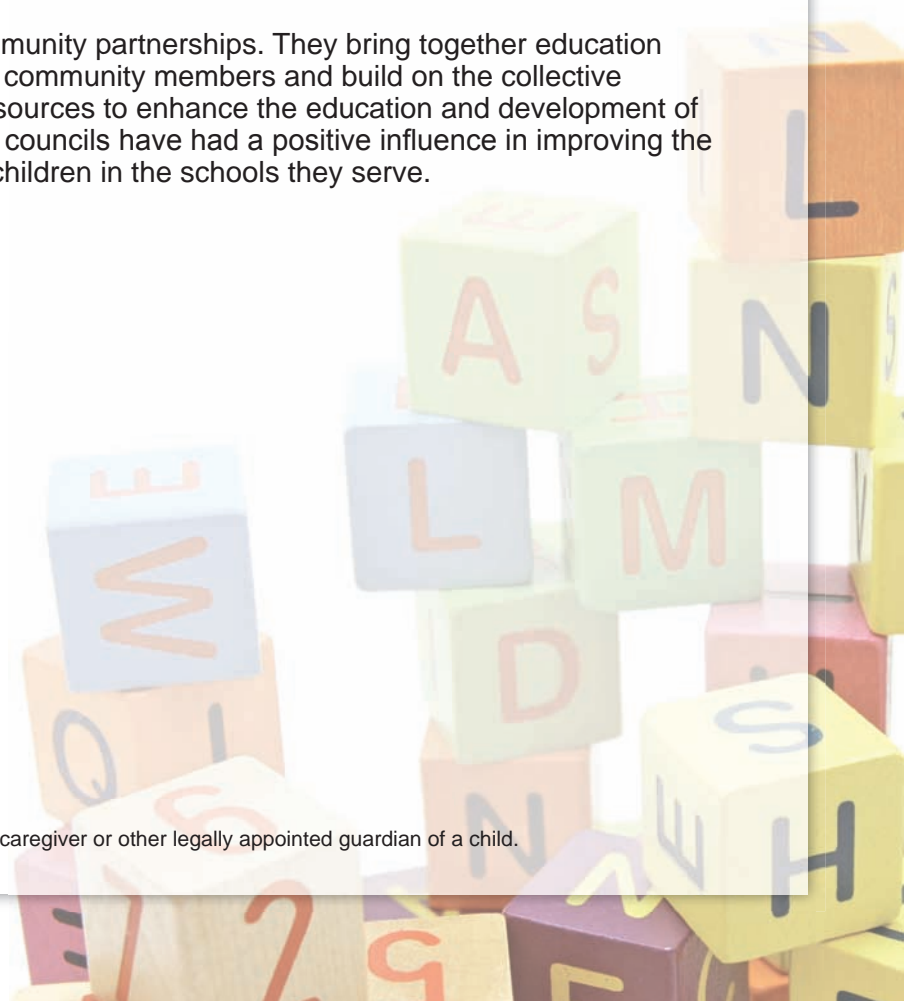
The *Schools Act, 1997* recognized and reaffirmed the right of parents and the community to have input into the education of their children through mandated school councils. This legislation provided the basis for a more responsive school system (see Appendix A).

Sections 25 and 26 of the *Schools Act, 1997* provide the legislative authority for the provision of school councils for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Section 26(2) (7) of the *Schools Act, 1997* also grants legal authority to school boards to delegate additional responsibilities to the school councils under their jurisdiction.

The concept of school councils is not new, nor is it unique. The evolution of school councils in Newfoundland and Labrador is part of a worldwide momentum to involve parents and communities more directly in the life and work of schools, and is a reflection of this province's emphasis on achieving improvement in education through local collaboration and greater accountability.

School councils are school, family and community partnerships. They bring together education professionals, parents¹, students and other community members and build on the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, interests and resources to enhance the education and development of children. The collaborative efforts of school councils have had a positive influence in improving the teaching and learning environment for the children in the schools they serve.

1 Parent refers to the natural parent, foster parent, caregiver or other legally appointed guardian of a child.



2. The School Council Model

A Definition

A school council is a legally constituted body consisting of the principal, parents, teachers, community representatives and students (where applicable) from the local school community who, while representing the interests of all students, work together for the purpose of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and improving the levels of student achievement in their school.

Purpose

As stated in the *Schools Act, 1997* Section 26(1):

The purpose of a school council is to develop, encourage and promote policies, practices and activities to enhance the quality of school programs and the levels of student achievement in the school.

A school council is a means to facilitate communication and cooperation among the principal, parents, teachers, community representatives and students (in schools with high school grades) with the goal of enhancing the quality of school programs and increasing the levels of student achievement. While the principal is responsible for the direct management of the school, school councils may assist school administration in the development and implementation of school-based policies, practices and activities which help improve the teaching and learning environment of their school.

It is important that school councils' discussions and actions are focused on improving the quality of school programs and increasing the levels of student achievement. Items that do not focus on improving the school's teaching and learning environment should not be brought to the school council table thus should not be added to the school council meeting agenda. It is the responsibility of the chair, in collaboration with the principal, to determine if a proposed agenda item is a suitable issue for the school council to address. School councils are not a forum to address individual teacher, parent, student or personal issues.

School councils are accountable to their school and to the school community. They are responsible for doing what is in the best interest of the school and what is in the best interest of all students collectively. School councils are accountable to their board and are responsible for following the bylaws of their board. Boards shall enter into a protocol agreement with their school councils, which outlines partner roles and responsibilities. A sample protocol agreement is provided in Appendix D.

School councils promote transparency as council actions and decisions are communicated to the school community through their meeting minutes. Minutes should be posted to a bulletin board in the school and to the school's website with hard copies made available upon request. Community members may choose to attend council meetings as they are open to the public and may choose, where appropriate, to speak on an issue of importance to them. Individuals and groups wishing to speak on an issue must submit a request to the chairperson and principal in advance. To encourage active participation by community members, it is important that the date/time/place of council meetings and agenda items be communicated to the school community.

Functions

School councils provide a formal structure through which all partners can come together to discuss the education of the children with the primary goal of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, resulting in improved student achievement.

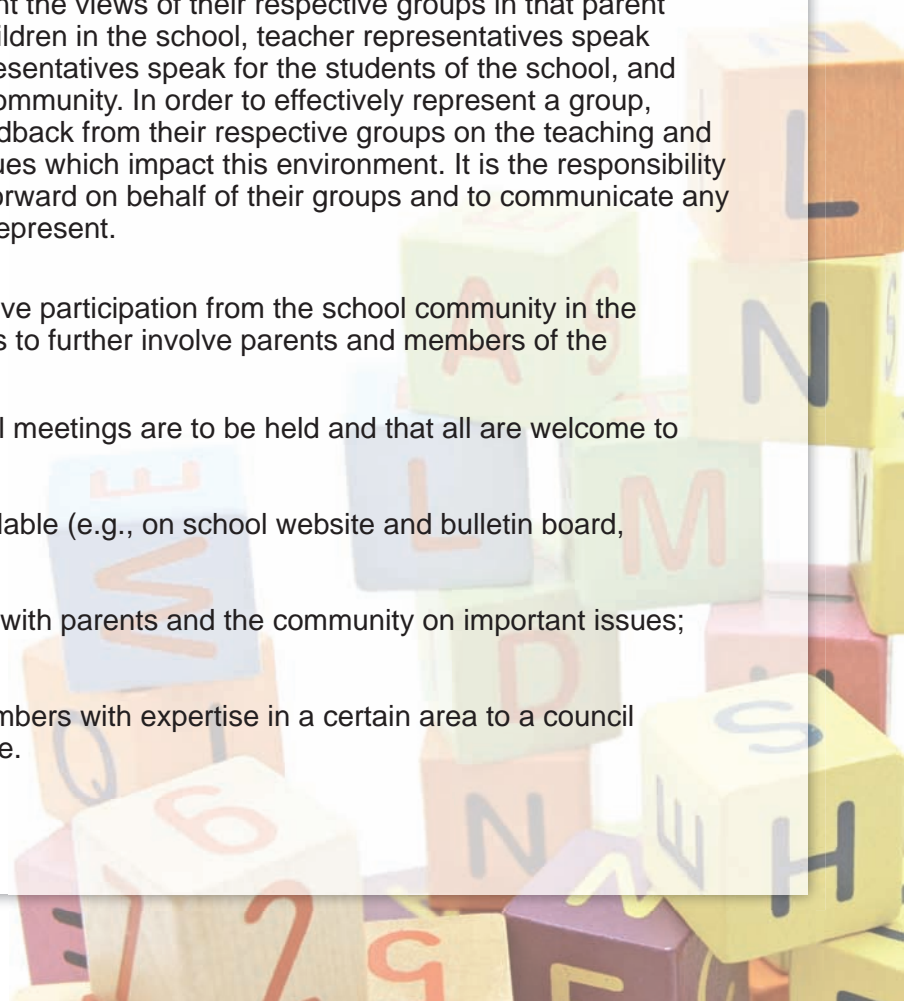
As stipulated in the *Schools Act, 1997* Section 26(2), the functions of a school council are to:

- a) *represent the educational interests of the school;*
- b) *advise on the quality of teaching and learning in the school;*
- c) *facilitate parent and community involvement in teaching and learning in the school; and,*
- d) *advise the board on matters of concern to the school and the community.*

School councils and council members represent the educational interests of all students collectively. Council members also represent the views of their respective groups in that parent representatives speak for the parents of children in the school, teacher representatives speak for the teachers of the school, student representatives speak for the students of the school, and community representatives speak for the community. In order to effectively represent a group, council members should regularly seek feedback from their respective groups on the teaching and learning environment of the school and issues which impact this environment. It is the responsibility of council members to bring these issues forward on behalf of their groups and to communicate any decisions/actions back to the groups they represent.

School councils should also encourage active participation from the school community in the teaching and learning process. Some ways to further involve parents and members of the community include:

- communicating when school council meetings are to be held and that all are welcome to attend;
- making school council minutes available (e.g., on school website and bulletin board, attached to school newsletter);
- holding meetings and focus groups with parents and the community on important issues; and,
- inviting parents and community members with expertise in a certain area to a council meeting to speak on a relevant issue.



Another important function of school councils is to advise on the quality of the teaching and learning in the school. To effectively carry out this function, school councils should actively participate in the school development process including contributing to the creation of the school development plan. Once the school development plan has been approved by the board, the school council is then responsible for monitoring and supporting this plan. It is also important for school councils to regularly review student achievement data and to recommend strategies for improving the achievement levels of students in their school.

School councils are also responsible for advising the board on matters of concern to the school and to the school community. In some cases, a specific communications protocol is outlined in the school council's protocol agreement with their board (see Appendix D for a sample protocol agreement).



3. Establishing A School Council

As stipulated in the *Schools Act, 1997* Section 25(1), the school principal is responsible for the establishment and operation of a school council. Initially the school council should be established as per the minimum guidelines. The council may then decide to add members. Members must be added in accordance with the procedures specified for each category in the legislation. When adding members, the membership balance represented by the minimum council composition should be maintained to the extent possible. No one segment of the council membership may represent more than one third of the total positions.

According to Section 25(14) of the *Schools Act, 1997*, the school principal shall formally advise the director/CEO of the school district no later than October 15 if he or she is unable to establish a school council for that school year. If satisfied that every reasonable effort has been made to establish the school council, the school board can grant either an exemption for that year or approval, for that school year, for a school council whose composition is different from that required under the *Schools Act, 1997*.

Membership

School councils are comprised of the principal and representation from parents, teachers, high school students (where applicable) and the community. Representatives are elected or appointed in accordance with Section 25 of the *Schools Act, 1997* (see Appendix A).

School councils shall, as outlined in the *Schools Act, 1997* Section 25(2), consist of no fewer than 8 members and no more than 15 members. Members are elected/ appointed such that:

- a) no fewer than 2 and no more than 4 shall be teachers elected by teachers from among the teachers of the school;
- b) no fewer than 3 and no more than 6 shall be parents elected by parents from among parents of students in the school; and,
- c) no fewer than 2 and no more than 4 shall be representatives of the community appointed by the school council members elected under paragraphs (a) and (b).

The principal of a school shall be a member of the school council for that school by virtue of his or her position.

In a school where senior high courses are taught, at least one student who is elected by students in those courses shall be a member of the school council. For continuity purposes, it is recommended that at least two high school students become members of council, one of whom is a Level I or II student.

Terms of Office

Members will serve a maximum term of three years, and will be eligible for election or appointment to one further term of three years. In order to provide for school council continuity, election and/or appointment of the school council's membership should be staggered so that no more than one third of the members are replaced in a given year. A vacancy on the school council will be filled in the same manner as the member being replaced (i.e., elected members will be replaced through an election and appointed members will be replaced through appointment).

Members' Roles and Responsibilities

For school councils to be truly effective, school council members and the school community they serve must recognize individual responsibilities. Section 26 of the *Schools Act, 1997* outlines the general role and functions of school councils.

In addition to the legislated roles, other leadership and support roles contribute to the effective operation of school councils. The following descriptions provide an overview of the specific roles of school council members.

Chair

The chair is elected by members of the school council and, with the exception of the principal, any member of the school council can be elected as chair. The chair, in collaboration with the principal, sets the school council meeting agenda (i.e., determines items suitable for council discussion). The school council chair must be very clear on the functions and responsibilities of the school council and must constantly ensure that school council discussions focus on improving the teaching and learning environment for all students rather than focusing on the specific or isolated issues of any one individual.

The responsibility of the chair is most evident when non-council members are in attendance and have requested to speak on an issue. In such instances, the chair must be prepared to tactfully focus discussion on issues rather than on individuals. The chair may choose to allot a specific period of time for discussion of an issue.

As a member of a school council, the chair:

- chairs the council meetings;
- in collaboration with the principal, schedules school council meetings and sets agenda items (see sample agenda in Appendix B);
- facilitates collaborative decision-making, seeks consensus, and resolves conflict;
- ensures council minutes are prepared and made available to the school community (e.g., posted on the school website); and,
- prepares the annual activity report of the school council for inclusion in the annual school report.

School council chairpersons may also be responsible for compiling correspondence and communicating with others on behalf of the school council. Such communication should follow procedures as outlined in the school protocol agreement and the bylaws of the board.

All correspondence and media contact should represent the consensual view of the council.

Principal

The school principal is responsible for the establishment and operation of the school council. The principal may not be chair; however, he or she may chair the first two meetings until a chair has been elected. The responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school remains with the principal under the direction of the school district.

Effective leadership is a critically important element in schools where students are successful at learning and achieving. Current literature and research support the key role of principals in determining the educational success of their school and students.

The principal is the main link between the school community and the school. The manner in which the principal fulfills his/her leadership responsibilities largely determines the attitudes which students and parents have towards the school. As educational leader, the principal is a key player in promoting and facilitating a collaborative culture and climate within the school and the school council.

As a member of the school council, the principal:

- chairs the initial meeting of the school council or, at the request of those present, a second meeting to facilitate the election of a chairperson for the school council;
- encourages active participation of school council members in enhancing the teaching and learning environment of the school, to increase student achievement;
- communicates to the school council information pertaining to school policies and practices;
- provides school councils with access to school information relevant to the functioning of the council;
- coordinates the implementation of the school development plan and gives periodic updates on the school development process; and,
- creates a positive climate within the school and the larger community to support the activities and decisions of the school council.

Parent/Guardian Representatives

Any parent/guardian is eligible to serve as a parent representative on the school council provided they have a child attending that school at the time of election and is not employed as a teacher at that school.

As a member of the school council, the parent representative:

- expresses the viewpoint of the parents they represent;
- communicates the activities of the council to the other parents;
- works collectively towards the common goal of improving teaching, learning and student achievement;
- participates in the school development process with other stakeholders; and,
- participates in and is prepared for council meetings and discussions.

Community Representatives

A community representative must be a member of the community and can be a parent of a child in the school. Community representatives are appointed by school council members. A community representative brings an additional perspective to council decisions.

As a member of the school council, the community representative:

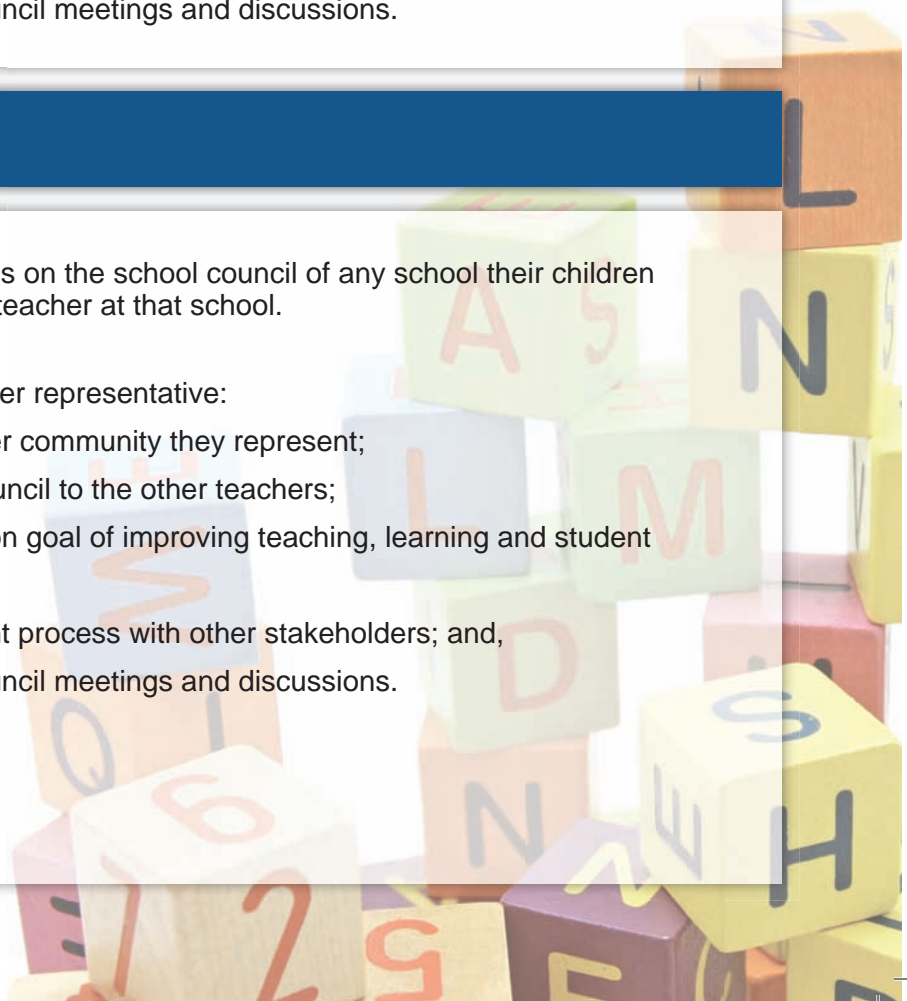
- expresses the viewpoint of the community they represent;
- communicates the activities of the council to stakeholders;
- works collectively towards the common goal of improving teaching, learning and student achievement;
- participates in the school development process with other stakeholders; and,
- participates in and is prepared for council meetings and discussions.

Teacher Representatives

Teachers may serve as parent representatives on the school council of any school their children attend, provided they are not employed as a teacher at that school.

As a member of the school council, the teacher representative:

- expresses the viewpoint of the teacher community they represent;
- communicates the activities of the council to the other teachers;
- works collectively towards the common goal of improving teaching, learning and student achievement;
- participates in the school development process with other stakeholders; and,
- participates in and is prepared for council meetings and discussions.



Student Representatives

In a school where high school courses are offered, at least one high school student must be elected to the school council. For continuity purposes, it is recommended that at least two high school students become members of council, one of whom is a Level II or I student.

As a member of the school council, the student representative:

- expresses the viewpoint of the students they represent;
- communicates the activities of the council to their stakeholders;
- works collectively towards the common goal of improving teaching, learning and student achievement;
- participates in the school development process with other stakeholders; and,
- participates in and is prepared for council meetings and discussions.

Role of the School Board and School District

It is important that school council members recognize the roles their school board and the school district officials play as members of their school community.

School boards are the governing bodies of our education system. They consider the big picture in terms of what needs to be done to improve the teaching and learning environment of the schools. School boards are comprised of a chair and elected trustees. There are currently five school boards in existence in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (see Appendix F).

School districts, under the direction of their director/CEO, are the operating bodies for school boards, and are responsible for implementing governance and operational policies developed by school boards. School districts communicate board policies and guidelines to their principals. School councils must operate under the by-laws of their board and adhere to the school protocol agreement in place between the school council and the board.

Protocol Agreement

As stated in the *Schools Act, 1997* Section 26(6), a board shall enter into a protocol agreement with each school council. This agreement shall serve as a guide and reference for school council operations. The protocol agreement is a statement of intent, on behalf of both partners, as to the obligations, and roles and responsibilities each will undertake in working to improve the teaching and learning environment of the school.

It is also the mechanism by which a school board may delegate, with the consent of the school council, additional areas of school council involvement and/or responsibility beyond those mandated in legislation. Protocol agreements should take a long-term focus and may be augmented by annual school council plans.

The main components of an effective protocol agreement should reference:

- the functions and responsibilities of the school council;
- the responsibilities of the school board;
- the goals and objectives of both partners;
- any additional areas of responsibility or special activities to be undertaken by the school council on behalf of the board;
- procedures for communications, conflict resolution and consensus building; and,
- procedures for regular review of the protocol agreement.

It is important for school councils to review their protocol agreement at the beginning of each school year. As the school council evolves, it may review its own focus and the resources necessary to support its mission. Through consultation with the school board, roles and responsibilities may change and new functions added. Therefore, it is essential a procedure for regular review of the agreement be established in order to incorporate the changes. A sample protocol agreement is presented in Appendix D.



4. School Council Activities

As legislated in the *Schools Act*, 1997 Section 26(3), school councils shall participate in the following activities:

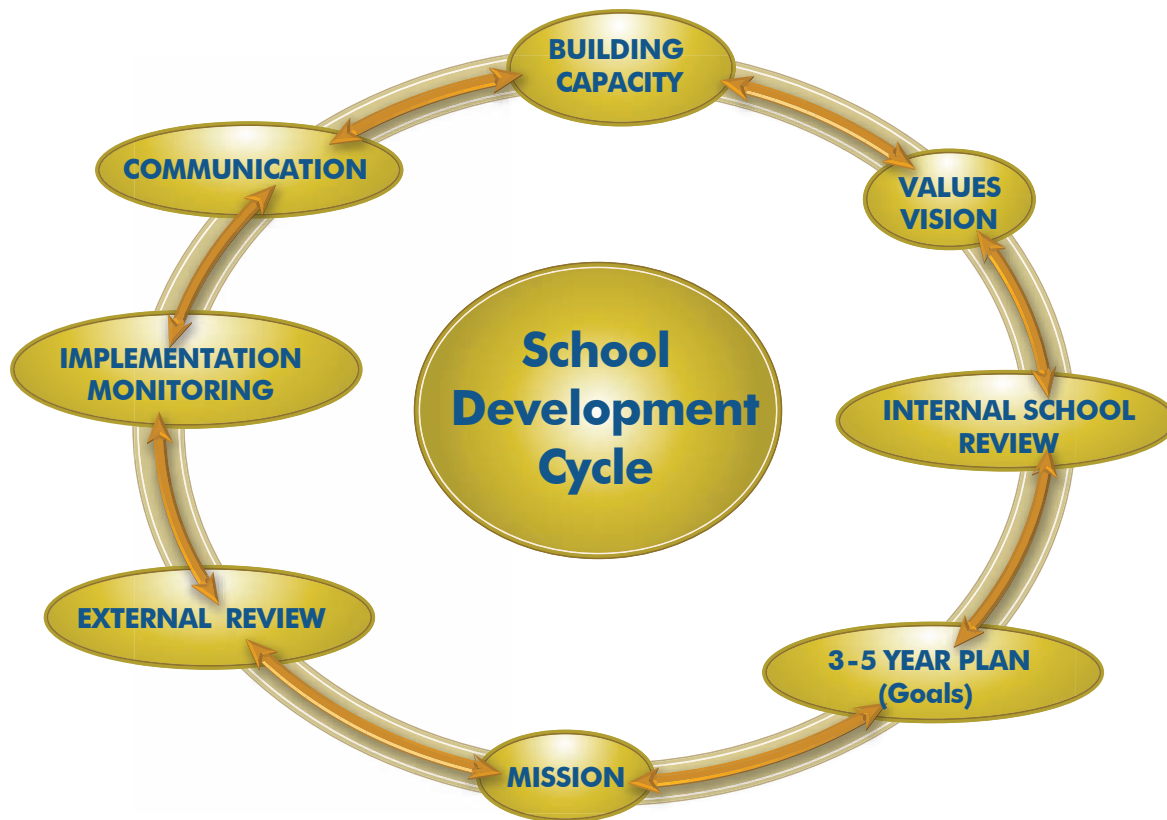
- a) *approve, for recommendation to the board, a plan for improving teaching and learning in the school;*
- b) *support and promote the plan approved by the board for improving teaching and learning in the school;*
- c) *approve and monitor activities for the raising of funds for the school;*
- d) *consider information respecting performance standards in the school;*
- e) *assist in the system of monitoring and evaluating standards in the school;*
- f) *monitor the implementation of recommendations in reports on the performance of the school;*
- g) *conduct meetings with parents and members of the community on matters within its responsibility under this section;*
- h) *ensure that the report on the school prepared under paragraph 24(3)(k) is available to members of the public; and,*
- i) *communicate concerns respecting board policies and practices to the board.*

The School Development Process

School development is a school-level strategic planning process. The provincial school development model (see diagram below) was designed to guide a school toward building a professional learning community by completing a group of interrelated components. As part of the process, a school undergoes a comprehensive self-assessment (Internal Review) that contributes to the formation of a 3-5 year school development plan.

The formation of this plan is a collaborative effort of the entire school community, including the school council. The school development plan is unique to each school but is within the context of both the provincial and district strategic education plans. A school's 3-5 year plan consists of goals, with yearly objectives and strategies. The objectives in the plan are monitored regularly, reviewed on a yearly basis, and adjusted accordingly.

For more information on the provincial School Development Model, visit the following website:
<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/proj/schdev/2005/>.



School Development Model

School councils have an important role to play in the school development process. As part of their role, school councils are responsible for helping develop, approving, supporting and monitoring the school development plan. Councils are also responsible for communicating to the school community aspects of the school development plan including school goals and objectives and keeping the school community informed of the plan's progress. Below is a list of suggestions for school council activities or operations regarding school development:

School councils should:

- participate in the development of the school's value statements and vision statement;
- participate in the formation of the school development plan through the internal review process;
- communicate the school development plan to parents and the school community;
- keep the school community informed on the progress of the school development plan through regular reports at school council meetings;
- keep the school community informed about performance standards in the school through regular reports at school council meetings; and,
- help build and foster a collaborative learning environment within the school community.

Student Achievement

An important aspect of the school council's role in helping improve academic success is its involvement in the school development process. Councils should also receive and review on a regular basis all reports resulting from any assessment conducted within the school.

As part of their role in improving student achievement, it is expected that school councils will:

- review and monitor performance standards of students in the school;
- recommend and support strategies to improve student achievement;
- communicate standards and strategies recommended to the school community; and,
- keep the school community informed of strategies implemented and student achievement results.

Fundraising Activities

School councils have a responsibility to develop, encourage and promote policies, practices and activities that enhance the quality of school programs. In terms of fiscal accountability, the *Schools Act, 1997* lists the following fiscal responsibilities of school councils:

Section 26 (3) (c) Approve and monitor activities for the raising of funds for the school

Section 26 (4) The school council may, subject to the by-laws of the board, approve a levy, the payment of which is voluntary, once in a school year, instead of, or as a supplement to, fundraising activities for the school.

While school councils have no legal authority to raise funds in the school or hold monies, they are responsible for ensuring any fundraising activities are planned and approved in advance and conducted in a manner consistent with board and school policies and the provisions of the *Schools Act, 1997*. When approving fundraising activities, it is important for school councils to consider the educational needs of the school and the number of fundraising requests.

School councils are also responsible for the approval of any levy that is charged by the school. In such cases, the school council must ensure parents are informed the levy is a voluntary payment.

A primary consideration for the school board, school council and school is that fundraising activities should always be undertaken based upon extensive dialogue and discussion by all members of the school community to ensure that decisions benefit all. This will result in greater consensus around fundraising.

School-Community Relations

The intent of the establishment of school councils was to bring together principals, teachers, parents, community members and students (where applicable) for the purpose of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and improving the levels of student achievement in their school. Each member effectively carrying out his/her roles and responsibilities will ensure input from the whole school community into the education of their children. It is important that school councils implement strategies to increase parental and community involvement in their school as such involvement can result in improved student achievement. Strategies implemented must be comprehensive, well-planned, and long-term.

5. Effective School Councils

School councils can be an effective means of including all stakeholders in improving the teaching and learning environment for all children. Effective school councils are ones where:

- meetings are conducted efficiently;
- there is open communication between council members, council and the school community;
- decisions are reached by consensus;
- there is minimal conflict; and,
- members recognize and effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Sub-Committees of Council

The work of school council sub-committees is important to school-based decision-making. School councils should determine the size, makeup and responsibilities of each committee based on the issue under review. Sub-committees submit recommendations to the school council for consideration.

All members of the local school community may be participants in school-based decision-making through participation on council sub-committees. Sub-committees may be appointed by a school council to address the functions chosen by the school council and are useful in terms of helping to increase public participation and enabling the council to accomplish its goals. Topics discussed by sub-committees should reflect the priority activities identified in the school development plan. The composition of sub-committees should reflect members' interests and knowledge.

Sub-committees may take various forms including standing or ad hoc committees.

Standing committees are those which continue throughout the year and from year to year. Standing committees focus on long-term school council matters such as fundraising, school development and communications.

Ad hoc committees are those established for a specific purpose and at a specific time. Ad hoc committees may be established to address an issue such as school traffic or to plan for a special project or event. The ad hoc committee's tenure should be short, yet long enough to complete a project or address an issue. If a longer-term project is created as a result of the work of an ad hoc committee, responsibility should be transferred to one of the standing committees.

All sub-committees should have a Terms of Reference or a set of operating guidelines which clearly establish their purpose and the council's expectation for the work to be done. The following are some tips to help ensure successful sub-committees.

Recommendations for Establishing Successful Sub-committees

- Create a sub-committee only if there is significant work for the sub-committee to do.
- Identify the sub-committee's purpose, terms of reference, operating guidelines and target dates for the completion of activities. Make this information available to all members.
- Select a sub-committee chair with leadership abilities who is able to motivate, delegate, and coordinate activities.
- Identify members' strengths and interests and match them to tasks on the sub-committee.
- Follow up with the sub-committee and request regular progress reports.

The Agenda

The creation of the agenda is a joint responsibility of the school council chair and the principal. School councils should stipulate that items being submitted for inclusion in the agenda and requests from interested parties to speak at a meeting be received by the chair and principal at least one week prior to the meeting. Such stipulations could be included in a set of school council meeting norms.

During school council meetings, the chairperson should ensure that the agenda is followed and concluded in the time allotted. It is important that councils keep discussion relevant and focused. If time runs out, defer items not addressed to another meeting. If a certain topic or issue is taking more than the allotted time to discuss, the school council may decide to strike a sub-committee, who would be responsible for the particular topic or issue. The sub-committee would then provide the school council with a report outlining their activities/ decisions/ recommendations.

Strategies for Effective Meetings

Announce Meeting

- Indicate time, date and location of school council meeting and sub committee meetings and that all are welcome to attend
- Send meeting announcement home with children, via email, or post to the school website and/or in the same school location
- Indicate that items being submitted for inclusion in the agenda must be received by the principal and chair one week prior to the meeting
- Provide a contact number for information

Agenda

- Distribute agenda to council members which lists topics to be addressed and time allotted to each topic
- Where appropriate, include a brief description highlighting any issues, concerns or questions

Communication

Communication is the sending and receiving of information, ideas, facts, opinions, data, or suggestions. Communication is a vital key to ensuring a strong and successful partnership between the school council and its stakeholders. To be effective, communication must be two-way, timely, clear, consistent, frequent, and varied.

A school council must maintain visibility and connection with parents, students, school staff and the community. In the absence of this connection, it is difficult for the school council to be effective as a medium for collaboration among these groups for the advancement of the school. Visibility is directly associated with *getting the message out*. It is more likely a connection will be achieved when the message contains something of value to those who receive it.

To ensure the message is received by the greatest number of people, school councils should use a variety of means for communication and try to strike a balance between those that are internally generated (requiring the direct involvement and resources of the school council) and those that are external to the council, such as media coverage. The next section provides examples of the varying types of communication that school councils may engage in.

Suggested Methods of Communication

Written Communication

The recording, keeping and dissemination of school council minutes in a clear and consistent manner are critical to promoting, encouraging and maintaining the interest and participation of the various stakeholders in the work of a school council. Using a range of visual and written communications to provide information, including posters, public notices, newsletters, memos and information pamphlets can be effective. All written communication should provide a contact name and number for follow-up enquiries. Posting information to the school website and e-mailing via a distribution list are other effective avenues. Keep in mind that not all stakeholders have access to the Internet; therefore alternate ways to distribute information should be arranged.

Verbal Communication

Presentations are an excellent means of providing information that is complex or requires some form of response or interaction. Presentations can be a regular part of school council meetings; however, in order to reach the broadest possible audience, councils may need to speak to a variety of groups. In addition, the power of individual dialogue is an excellent way of communicating messages. School council members and other well-informed school volunteers can keep family, friends and others well informed simply by speaking with them regularly about school events or educational issues.

Media

Most radio stations, cable television networks and community newspapers provide public service announcements free of charge. In addition, local radio stations and community newspapers report on issues and events of community interest. When using such resources, the key is to focus on how the information about the school is of interest to the community at large. In communities served by a number of schools or in the case of a regional newspaper, school councils could consider approaching the media source as a group and discussing the possibility of establishing a regular column or some other type of coverage.

Increasing Public Participation and Input

School council participation is largely dependent on two factors: (1) the availability of information about school councils and elections; and (2) the level of interest generated within each stakeholder group. For maximum effect, written information should be provided directly to parents, teachers and students, and should be augmented with presentations, discussions and individual contact by parent, teacher, student and community representatives.

It is important to recognize that without public participation, it is difficult for a school council to perform their role effectively. The participation and involvement of non-school council members in school council activities is strongly encouraged. Various opportunities exist and a number of creative strategies are available to facilitate increased participation by parents and community members to consistently attend and participate in school council activities. School councils are encouraged to create their own strategies to involve parents and the community in improving the teaching and learning environment of their school.

It is important that school council members recognize that their role on council is to represent their respective group. If members are unaware of their respective group's views, then they cannot represent them effectively. By providing the opportunity for groups to voice their opinions, members may generate interest from others to join the school council. School councils are required to ask for input from the entire school community. Suggestions to gather input include:

- sending out surveys or newsletters with tear off response forms to be returned;
- holding focus group meetings at various times to ensure that all have the opportunity to participate;
- holding town-hall-style meetings to discuss issues and present information;
- posting information and requests for feedback on a school website; and,
- setting up an information booth at a school function (school play, parent/teacher night) and asking for input through surveys, conversation, etc.

Sharing Information with the School Community

School council and sub-committee meetings are open to the public. School councils are not a forum to address individual teachers, parents, students or personal issues, therefore there is no need for closed meetings. Minutes provide an account of the school council discussions and decisions. It is essential an account of meetings be provided for the public record. School councils should convey by word and action to all stakeholders that they are approachable, accessible and accountable.

School councils are intended to be the formal mechanism for stakeholder participation in policies affecting the school, and all those who make up the school community. In order for councils to undertake this role effectively, people must know who the school council members are and how to contact them. Councils must ensure that mechanisms are in place for people outside the school council to learn about school council discussions and provide feedback. Equal consideration must be given to determining what issues are appropriate for discussion by the school council and which issues are not within the mandate and roles of the school council. Appropriate mechanisms relating

to how communication is to occur and how conflict is to be resolved must be clearly established and communicated to all stakeholders.

Questions or disagreements about specific decisions by individual teachers or administrators are to be dealt with in normal parent-teacher or parent-administrator interactions. On the other hand, issues of a policy nature can be submitted to the chair and principal for placement on the agenda for discussion. For example, requesting a discussion about the discipline of a particular child is not permitted; however, requesting a discussion about the discipline policy of the school is permitted. This issue could be addressed in a school council's Code of Ethics (see Appendix C).

Managing Conflict and Solving Problems

Wherever and whenever decisions have to be made, actions taken or choices selected, there always exists the potential for conflict. From time to time there will be differences of opinion among school council members.

Disagreements can occur on anything from simple procedure to large-scale or sensitive issues. In dealing with these situations, it is important to focus on the matter at hand and not place blame on individual members. Conflicts most often stem from the caring and commitment of individuals who are trying to work toward a common goal.

At all times, council members should:

- strive to work in a climate of trust and cooperation;
- develop open and honest communications with parents, school staff, the school board and the community;
- deal with conflicts quickly and in an effective manner;
- be open and creative when solving problems;
- seek to understand others and listen carefully to different points of view;
- be courteous and respectful, especially in dealing with sensitive topics; and,
- deal with issues rather than personalities.

Collaborative Problem Solving

It is vital for a school council to address sensitive issues in a straightforward and responsible manner. To achieve this, school councils can use problem-solving processes or conflict management models that assist members in getting all the facts and centering on the issues that need to be addressed.

Collaborative problem solving is an example of an effective strategy for dealing with conflict. In collaborative problem solving, individuals join together to find a solution that is acceptable to all. This entails redefining the problem, discovering alternatives and focusing on overlapping interests. Neither person capitulates or dominates the other. No one loses or gives in because both parties

benefit. This is often called a win/win way of dealing with conflicting needs. The six steps in collaborative problem solving include:

1. defining the problem in terms of needs not solutions;
2. brainstorming possible solutions;
3. selecting the solution that will best meet both parties' needs and checking possible consequences;
4. planning who will do what, where, and by when;
5. implementing the plan; and,
6. evaluating the problem-solving process and at a later date, assessing how well the solution worked out.

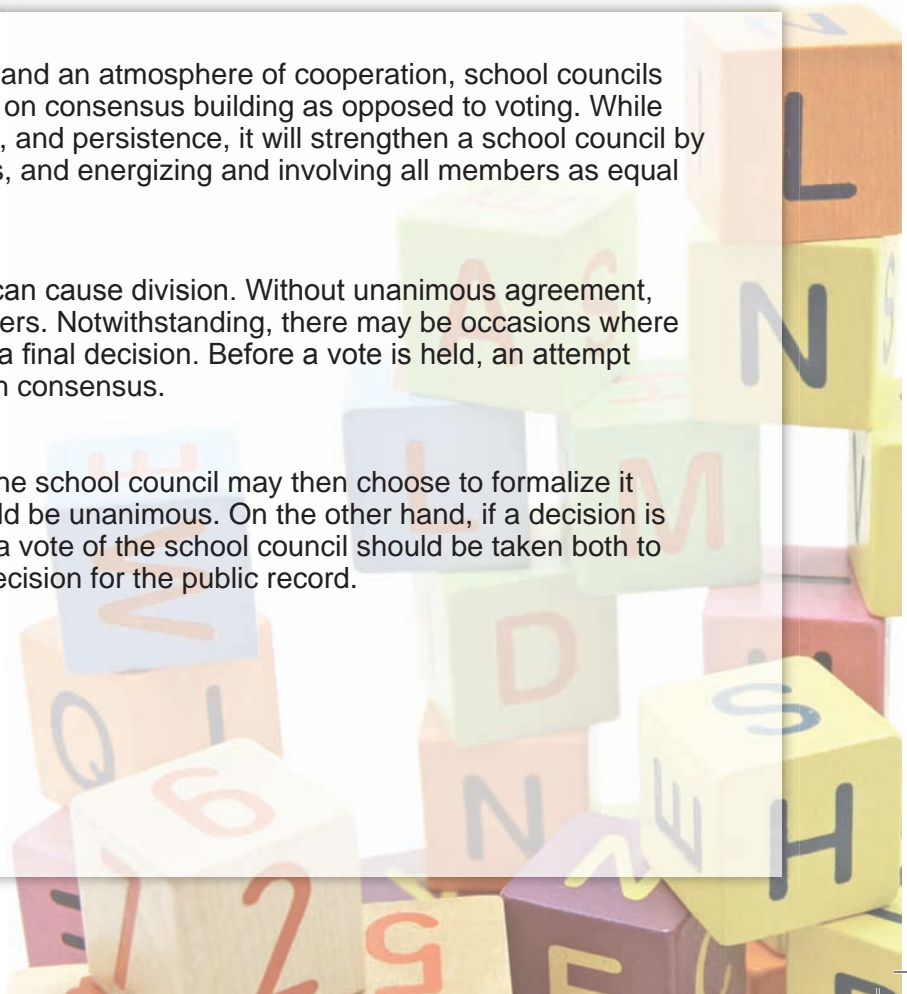
Regardless of what issues and challenges a school council is discussing, it is important to remember that *how* the school council does something can send as many messages as *what* it does. If a school council is perceived as operating in a closed and irresponsible manner, then this is likely to become the reality. Or, if the school council is seen as only serving the interests of a particular group, then others will likely be alienated. Alternatively, if a school council is seen as acting in an open, fair and responsible manner, others will respond in the same manner.

Decision-making

In the spirit of building a sense of community and an atmosphere of cooperation, school councils should endeavor to arrive at decisions based on consensus building as opposed to voting. While consensus takes time, commitment, patience, and persistence, it will strengthen a school council by building trust, valuing the diversity of opinions, and energizing and involving all members as equal participants.

Voting on difficult issues, on the other hand, can cause division. Without unanimous agreement, there may be a perception of winners and losers. Notwithstanding, there may be occasions where voting on an issue will be required in making a final decision. Before a vote is held, an attempt should be made to reach the decision through consensus.

If a decision is reached through consensus, the school council may then choose to formalize it through a motion. The result of the vote should be unanimous. On the other hand, if a decision is required and consensus cannot be reached, a vote of the school council should be taken both to legitimize the decision and to formalize the decision for the public record.



Building Consensus

Building consensus is a process used to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to provide input into a decision. Consensus is finding the highest level of agreement without dividing members into factions or groups. It is needed by those who must act together to carry out a plan or address a problem and is a useful tool in helping councils work together on goal-setting, planning, implementation, problem solving and decision-making.

Consensus means:

- all group members contribute;
- the opinions of all are encouraged and acknowledged;
- differences are viewed as helpful;
- those who disagree express a willingness to experiment for a certain period of time;
- all members share the final decision; and,
- all members agree to take responsibility for implementing the decision.

Consensus does not mean:

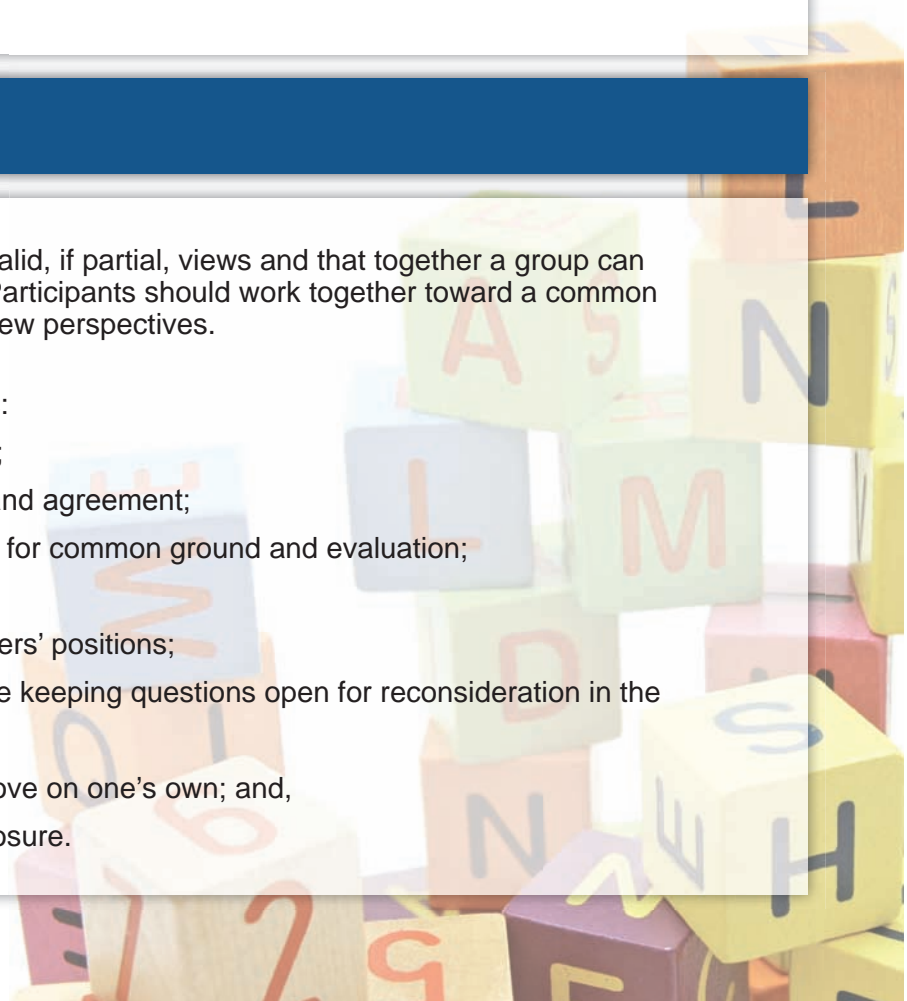
- unanimous agreement;
- the result is everyone's first choice;
- excluding anyone;
- majority vote; and/or,
- giving up.

Reaching Consensus

Consensus assumes that there are many valid, if partial, views and that together a group can develop a better view than anyone alone. Participants should work together toward a common understanding by examining and building new perspectives.

The following are ways to reach consensus:

- focus on exploring common ground;
- listen to understand, find meaning and agreement;
- reveal assumptions as a foundation for common ground and evaluation;
- re-examine all positions;
- search for strength and value in others' positions;
- make a decision by consensus while keeping questions open for reconsideration in the future;
- admit that others' thinking can improve on one's own; and,
- discover new options, don't seek closure.



Conflict of Interest

Normally, a conflict of interest exists when a member of an organization participates in a discussion, decision or action which results in them, a family member or relative benefiting in some manner, not necessarily financial. Conflict of interest can be actual, perceived or potential. Situations can arise in which the personal interests of a member may be in conflict with his or her role and responsibilities as a member of the school council.

Conflict Resolution

With individuals having a different philosophy and perspective, it is only natural and expected that differences of opinion will exist. School boards have an appeals process in place to deal with disputes which cannot be resolved at the school level. School councils are encouraged to review the bylaws of their board to obtain information concerning the appeals process.

Activity Reporting

The school council should submit an activity report to the school's administration to be included in the annual principal's report. In most cases, the chair of the school council completes this piece before the end of the school year. The school council report could include:

- membership details – including names and positions of school council members;
- number of meetings held;
- school council objectives and goals for the year;
- a review of activities undertaken by the school council; and,
- identification of upcoming activities for the new school year.

Orientation and Training

To help new school council members become acquainted with their roles, a school council might prepare an orientation package, choose an experienced school council member to be a mentor, or seek training.

Training new school council members is an integral piece in developing an effective school council. Ongoing training for all members is useful to continuously improve the capacity of the school council. As school council members change from year to year, fundamental skills such as taking minutes, running efficient meetings and understanding communication protocols need continuity to ensure effective operation of school councils.

6. Building A Collaborative Learning Community

Building a collaborative learning community is vital to our children's education. A collaborative learning community consists of the principal, parents, teachers, students and the community, where all provide input into the teaching and learning process and where collaboration is key – collaboration between the school council and the principal, with other school-based groups, with the broader school community and with the school board. Within this community, it is important for all stakeholders to recognize each others' strengths and that participation from all is required to ensure a successful teaching and learning environment for our children.

The School Council and Principal as a Team

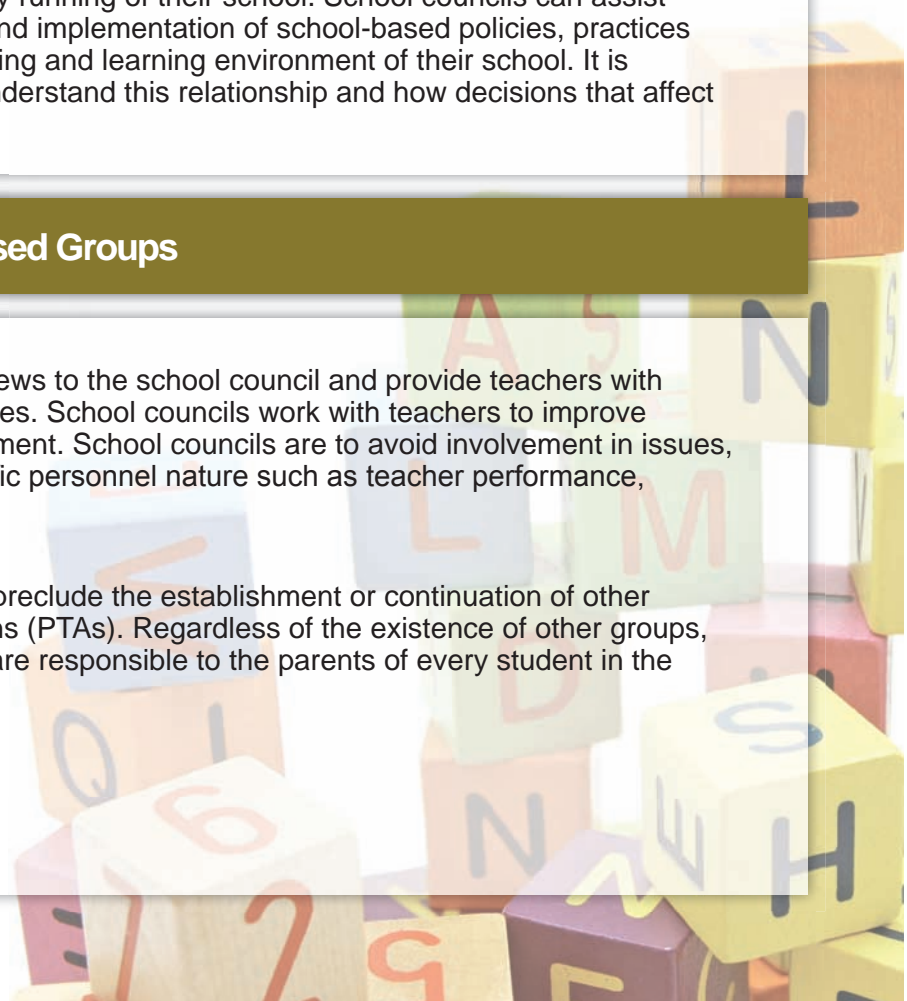
The school council and the principal have an important relationship. Together they help set the overall direction of the school and help develop, approve, support and monitor the school development plan.

Principals are responsible for the day to day running of their school. School councils can assist school administration in the development and implementation of school-based policies, practices and activities which help improve the teaching and learning environment of their school. It is important for parents, staff and others to understand this relationship and how decisions that affect their children are made.

Relationship with Other School-based Groups

Teacher representatives present teacher views to the school council and provide teachers with information regarding school council activities. School councils work with teachers to improve teaching and learning and student achievement. School councils are to avoid involvement in issues, discussions, and responsibilities of a specific personnel nature such as teacher performance, assessment and evaluation.

The existence of school councils does not preclude the establishment or continuation of other groups such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Regardless of the existence of other groups, parent representatives on school councils are responsible to the parents of every student in the school.



Relationship with the School Community

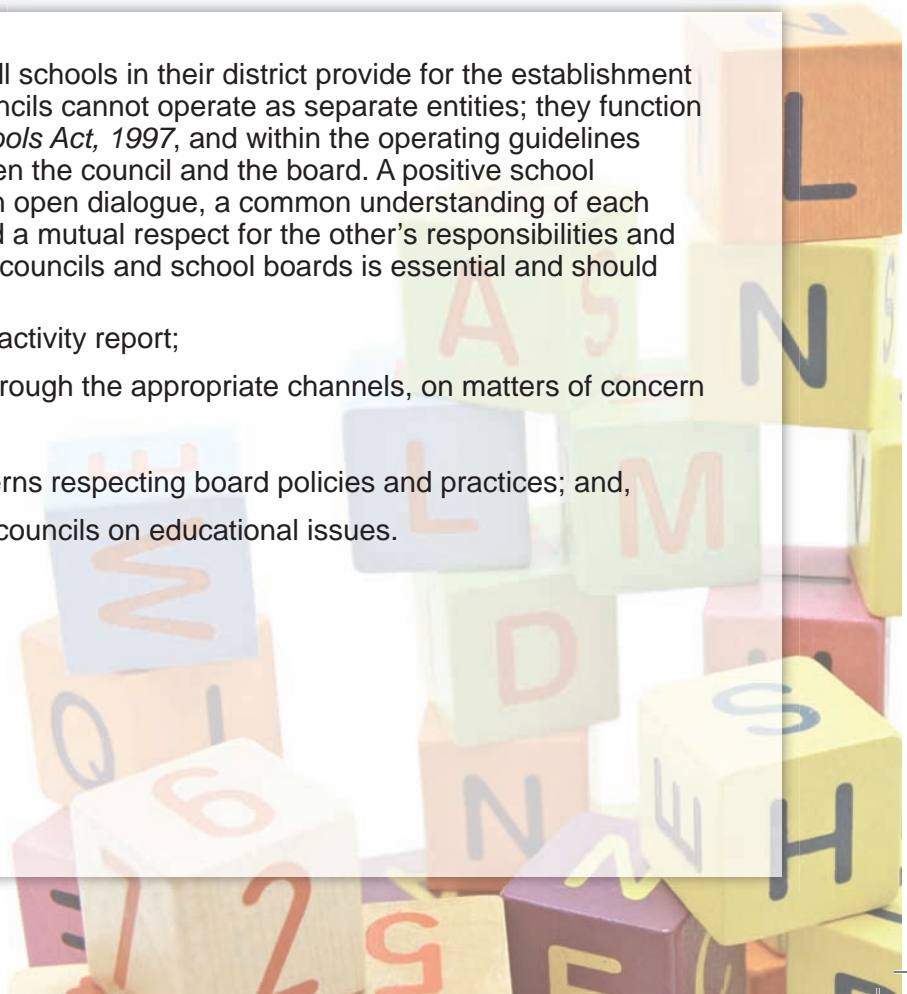
School councils are expected to communicate with their stakeholders. Councils can make meeting minutes and information regarding current issues, council discussions and actions available to the school community in various ways, including:

- setting up an information booth at a school function (school play, parent/teacher night);
- setting up a school council display in the school lobby or on a bulletin board;
- creating and distributing a school council newsletter that could include the council's meeting minutes or writing a school council section to be included in the school's newsletter;
- posting school council minutes from meetings and other information on the school's website;
- hosting special events that bring the school community into the school;
- having the school council chair and vice-chair, or delegate(s), speak at various school functions (e.g., school assemblies);
- making personal contact with parents;
- using public service announcements and other free media advertising (e.g., community information section in the weekly/daily paper); and,
- posting notices in local churches and community halls.

Relationship with the School Board

School boards are responsible for ensuring all schools in their district provide for the establishment and operation of school councils. School councils cannot operate as separate entities; they function within the legal framework set out in the *Schools Act, 1997*, and within the operating guidelines of the protocol agreement established between the council and the board. A positive school board-school council relationship is built upon open dialogue, a common understanding of each partner's role in the education enterprise, and a mutual respect for the other's responsibilities and capabilities. Communication between school councils and school boards is essential and should include:

- school councils submitting an annual activity report;
- school councils advising the board, through the appropriate channels, on matters of concern to the school and the community;
- school councils communicating concerns respecting board policies and practices; and,
- school boards consulting with school councils on educational issues.



7. Appendices

- A. Schools Act, 1997**
- B. Agenda**
- C. Code of Ethics for School Councils**
- D. Protocol Agreement**
- E. Nomination Form for Election**
- F. Additional Resources**
- G. Glossary**



Appendix A:

Schools Act, 1997

School Councils

CHAPTER S-12.2

(An Act to Revise the Law Respecting the Operation of Schools in the Province)

25. (1) A principal of a school shall establish a school council for the school.
- (2) A school council shall, in accordance with the by-laws of the board, consist of no fewer than 8 members and no more than 15 members, including members under subsections (4) and (7), of whom
 - (a) no fewer than 2 and no more than 4 shall be teachers elected by teachers from among teachers of the school;
 - (b) no fewer than 3 and no more than 6 shall be parents elected by parents from among parents of students in the school; and
 - (c) no fewer than 2 and no more than 4 shall be representatives of the community appointed by the school council members elected under paragraphs (a) and (b).
- (3) Where a school council consists of more than 8 members, those members shall be elected and appointed in a manner consistent with the representation of members under paragraphs (2) (a), (b) and (c).
- (4) The principal of a school shall be a member of the school council for that school by virtue of his or her position.
- (5) A parent of a student in a school who is a teacher in that school shall not be eligible to be elected to the school council for that school under paragraph (2)(b).
- (6) Notwithstanding subsections (2), (3) and (9), a school with fewer than 4 teachers, including the principal, shall appoint all of its teachers to the school council.
- (7) In addition to the requirements of subsection (2), in a school where senior high school courses are taught, at least one student who is elected by students in those courses shall be a member of the school council.
- (8) A school council shall elect a chairperson from among its members but the principal is ineligible for election.

Functions of School Councils

26. (1) The purpose of a school council is to develop, encourage and promote policies, practices and activities to enhance the quality of school programs and the levels of student achievement in the school.
- (2) The functions of a school council are to:
- (a) represent the educational interests of the school;
 - (b) advise on the quality of teaching and learning in the school;
 - (c) facilitate parent and community involvement in teaching and learning in the school; and
 - (d) advise the board on matters of concern to the school and the community.
- (3) The school council shall:
- (a) approve, for recommendation to the board, a plan for improving teaching and learning in the school;
 - (b) support and promote the plan approved by the board for improving teaching and learning in the school;
 - (c) approve and monitor activities for the raising of funds for the school;
 - (d) consider information respecting performance standards in the school;
 - (e) assist in the system of monitoring and evaluating standards in the school;
 - (f) monitor the implementation of recommendations in reports on the performance of the school;
 - (g) conduct meetings with parents and members of the community on matters within its responsibility under this section;
 - (h) ensure that the report on the school prepared under paragraph 24(3)(k) is available to members of the public; and
 - (i) communicate concerns respecting board policies and practices to the board.
- (4) The school council may, subject to the by-laws of the board, approve a levy, the payment of which is voluntary, once in a school year, instead of, or as a supplement to, fund raising activities for the school.
- (5) A school council may recommend that the principal of a school provide for a religious observance in the school.
- (6) A board shall enter into a protocol with each school council which shall serve as a guide and reference for school council operations.
- (7) The board may with the consent of the school council delegate responsibilities to the school council in addition to those set out in subsections (2) and (3).
- (8) The school council shall operate in accordance with the by-laws of the board.

Appendix B:

Agenda

Sample Agenda

[date]

1. **Welcome/Call to Order**

(The meeting is called to order by the chairperson. The secretary records the date, time and place and who is in attendance.)

3. **Minutes of Last Meeting**

(Chairperson asks if there are any errors or omissions in the minutes and if clarification is required on any items.)

4. **Business Arising**

(updates and/or discussion on items requiring follow-up from previous meeting)

5. **Reports**

- **Principal's Report**

(provides updates on the School Development Plan and school activities. Student achievement data to be presented/ discussed should be added to the agenda.)

- **Other Reports** *(e.g., sub-committee reports)*

6. **Individuals/Groups wishing to address the Council**

(Individuals and groups are invited to speak before Council. Speaker's time should be limited. Questions, issues and items requiring clarification should be noted.)

7. **New Business**

(New items are raised for discussion. Discussion should be limited to those identified in the agenda. Discussion should be summarized with action items noted.)

8. **Date and Time of Next Meeting**

(Set date for next meeting; 6-8 meetings recommended per school year)

(Note time when meeting ends)



Appendix D:

Protocol Agreement

Sample Protocol Agreement

PROTOCOL AGREEMENT BETWEEN _____ **SCHOOL COUNCIL** AND
_____ **SCHOOL BOARD**

This agreement, required under section 26(6) of the *Schools Act, 1997*, defines the roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines of the two partners, _____ **School Board** and _____ School Council granted either in legislation or by the **School Board**.

The parties to this agreement acknowledge that the relationship is built on an open dialogue, a common understanding of each partner's role in the educational enterprise, and a mutual respect for each others' responsibilities and capabilities.

This agreement between the above stated partners becomes effective _____.
The agreement will be reviewed in accordance with Section VI of this agreement.

SECTION I: PARTNER ROLES

- 1.1 The functions of the **School Council** are to:
 - (a) Represent the educational interests of the school;
 - (b) Advise on the quality of teaching and learning in the school;
 - (c) Facilitate parent and community involvement; and
 - (d) Advise the **School Board** on matters of concern to the school and to the community.
- 1.2 In undertaking these functions, the **School Council** shall:
 - (a) Approve for recommendation to the Board, a plan for improving teaching and learning in the school [school development plan];

- (b) Support and promote the plan approved by the Board for improving teaching and learning in the school;
- (c) Ensure that the report on the school prepared under paragraph 24 (3) (k) of the *Schools Act, 1997* is made available to the public;
- (d) Consider information respecting performance standards in the school;
- (e) Assist in the system of monitoring and evaluating standards in the school;
- (f) Monitor the implementation of recommendations in reports on the performance of the school;
- (g) Conduct meetings with parents and members of the community on matters within its responsibility;
- (h) Communicate concerns respecting Board policies and practices to the Board; and
- (i) Approve and monitor activities for the raising of funds for the school.

1.3 As a partner to this agreement, the **School Board** shall:

- (a) Ensure that principals provide for the establishment of School Councils;
- (b) Develop policies to facilitate the establishment of School Councils;
- (c) Provide the School Council with access to information relevant to their functioning;
- (d) Create a positive climate, which facilitates **School Board** and School Council activities and decisions;
- (e) Respond to the recommendations of the School Council;
- (f) Provide training, administrative support, and other support as necessary; and
- (g) Provide procedures which enable the School Council to access **School Board** Services.

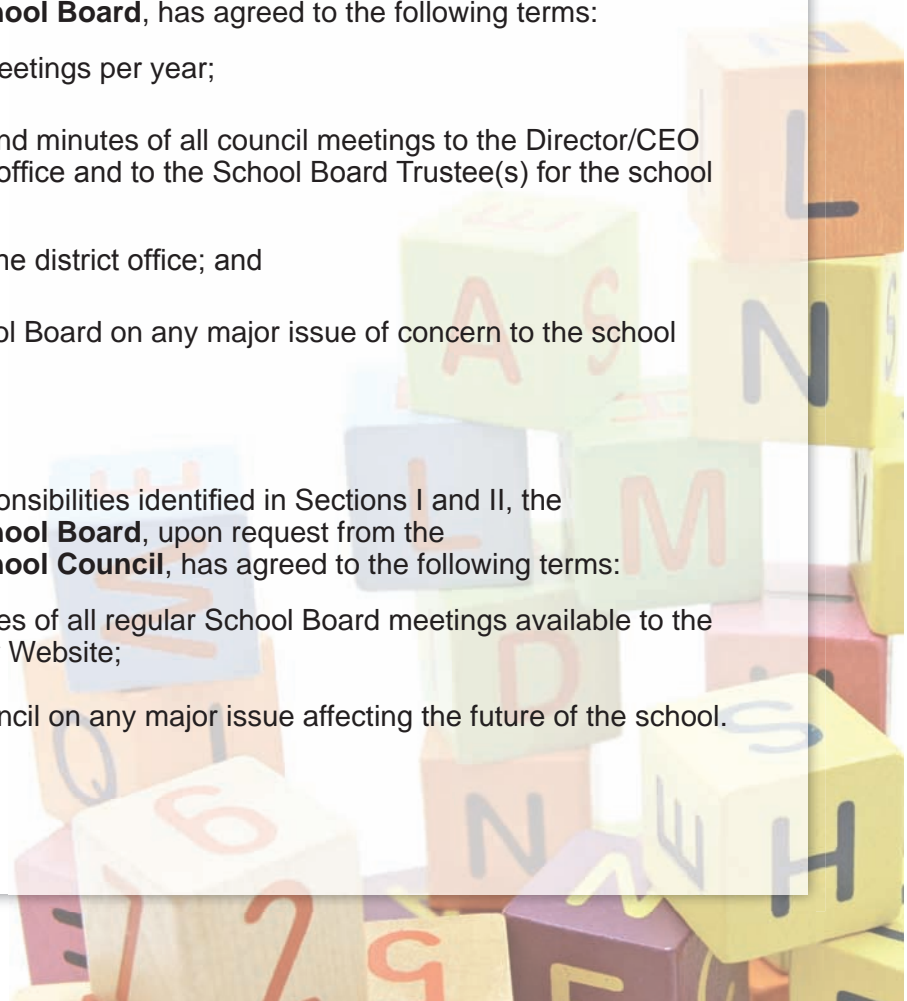


SECTION II: COMMON GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHOOL COUNCIL AND THE SCHOOL BOARD

- 2.1 The common goals and objectives of the _____ **School Council** and the _____ **School Board** are to:
- (a) Promote policies to enhance student achievement;
 - (b) Support the maintenance and enhancement of school programs;
 - (c) Enhance school-community relationships;
 - (d) Promote collaborative relationships among parents, students, teachers, community members, and the School Board;
 - (e) Oversee a site-based school development process;
 - (f) Promote learner-centred schools; and
 - (g) Establish effective communication methods and procedures.

SECTION III: ADDITIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

- 3.1 In addition to the roles and responsibilities identified in Sections I and II, the _____ **School Council**, upon request from the _____ **School Board**, has agreed to the following terms:
- (a) Hold a minimum of six (6) meetings per year;
 - (b) Submit a copy of agendas and minutes of all council meetings to the Director/CEO (or designate) at the district office and to the School Board Trustee(s) for the school zone;
 - (c) Submit an annual report to the district office; and
 - (d) Communicate with the School Board on any major issue of concern to the school community.
- 3.2 In addition to the roles and responsibilities identified in Sections I and II, the _____ **School Board**, upon request from the _____ **School Council**, has agreed to the following terms:
- (a) Make the agenda and minutes of all regular School Board meetings available to the School Council through their Website;
 - (b) Consult with the School Council on any major issue affecting the future of the school.



SECTION VI: PROCEDURE FOR REVIEW OF PROTOCOL AGREEMENT

- 6.1 Either party may request changes to this Protocol Agreement.
 - 6.2 Changes must be submitted in writing to the Director of Education and the School Council Chairperson.
 - 6.3 A committee representing both parties will review the requested change.
 - 6.4 Changes resulting from a review will be implemented within thirty (30) days.
-



Appendix E:

Nomination Form for Election

Sample Nomination Form

SCHOOL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

All schools in the _____ School District are now accepting nominations for Parent representatives on School Council. To be eligible for election, you must be the parent/guardian of a student for the school you wish to represent. Only parent/guardians can nominate and vote for parent/guardians. Additional forms may be picked up at the school. Nomination forms must be returned to the school secretary on or before Monday, _____, 2____. By Friday, _____, a list of candidates and details of the voting process will be sent to all parents/guardians. Voting will take place during the week of _____ to _____.

SCHOOL COUNCIL PARENT NOMINATION FORM

I, _____, hereby nominate _____
(name of nominator) *(candidate's name)*

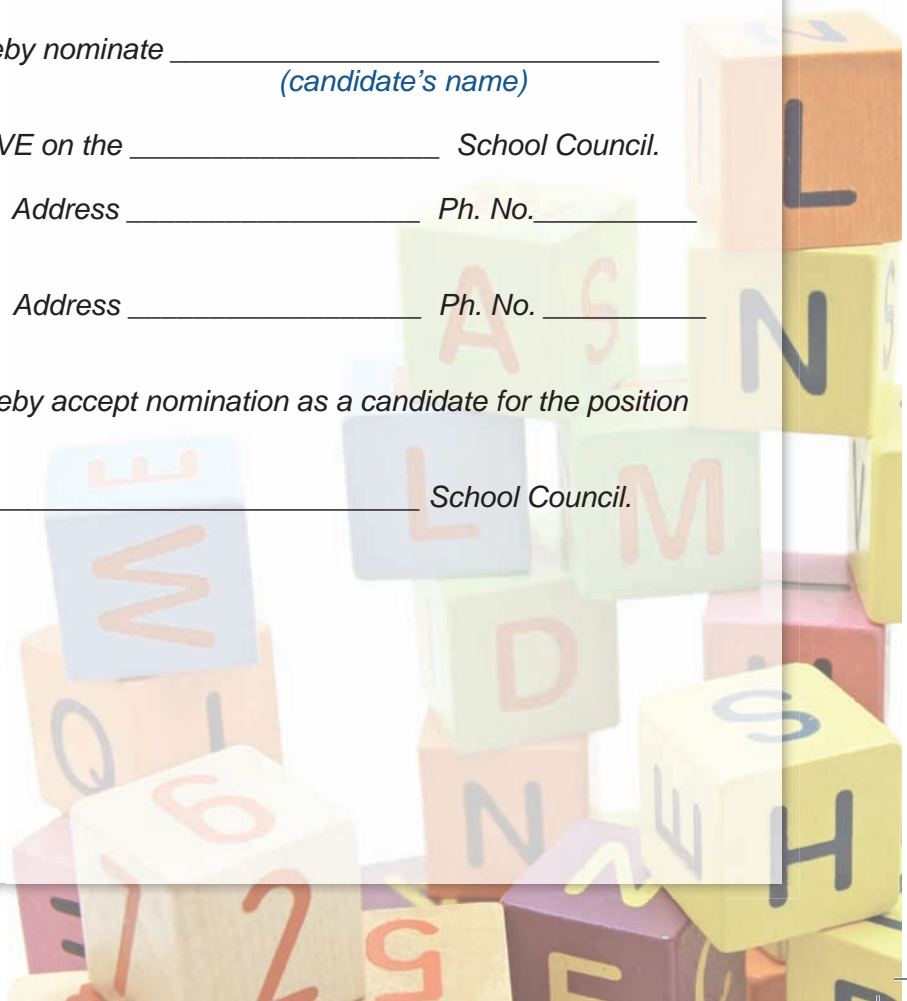
for the position of PARENT REPRESENTATIVE on the _____ School Council.

Proposer's Signature: _____ Address _____ Ph. No. _____

Seconder's Signature: _____ Address _____ Ph. No. _____

I, _____, hereby accept nomination as a candidate for the position
(candidate's name)

of PARENT REPRESENTATIVE for the _____ School Council.



Appendix F:

Additional Resources

Provincial Resources

Video

Working Together for Educational Excellence: Establishing School Councils (1995). St. John's, NL. Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (20 min.)

Training Manual

School Councils: A Vision for Excellence (1995). St. John's, NL. Total Quality Leadership for Learning Project, Faculty of Education, Memorial University and the Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Planning and Assessment Guide

Ensuring Quality in Education: School Assessment Handbook for Internal Teams (1995). St. John's, NL. Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Learning Outcomes Guide

Key Stages: A Parent Guide to Learning Outcomes (1997). St. John's, NL. Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

Labrador School District

P.O. Box 1810, Stn. B
16 Strathcona Street
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL
A0P 1E0
Telephone: (709) 896-4097
Fax: (709) 869-3480
www.lsb.ca/labrador

Eastern School District

Suite 601, Atlantic Place
215 Water Street
St. John's, NL
A1C 6C9
Telephone: (709) 758-2372
Fax: (709) 758-2706
E-Mail: feedback@esdnl.ca
www.esdnl.ca

Western School District

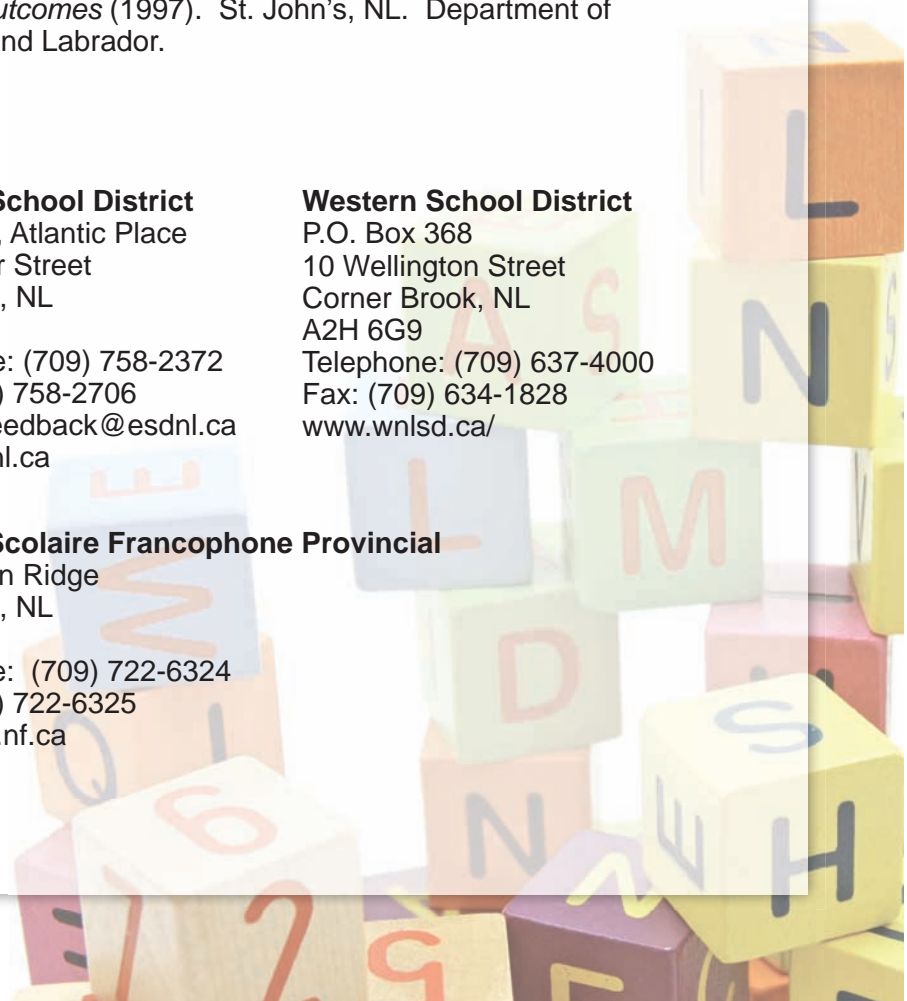
P.O. Box 368
10 Wellington Street
Corner Brook, NL
A2H 6G9
Telephone: (709) 637-4000
Fax: (709) 634-1828
www.wnlsd.ca/

Nova Central School District

203 Elizabeth Avenue
Gander, NL
A1V 1H6
Telephone: (709) 256-2547
Fax: (709) 489-2168
www.ncsd.ca

Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial

65, chemin Ridge
St. John's, NL
A1B 4P5
Telephone: (709) 722-6324
Fax: (709) 722-6325
www.csfp.nf.ca



OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

Department of Education

P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6
Telephone: (709) 729-3000
E-mail: webmasteredu@gov.nl.ca
www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils

P.O. Box 23140
St. John's, NL A1B 4J9
Telephone: (709) 834-7300; 1-877-739-4830
E-mail: nlfsc@cdli.ca
www.nlfsc.ca

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Alberta Teachers Association (1995). *Making Change: School Councils*. Part of the Associations Newsletter, ATA News.

American Association of School Administrators (1995). *Local School Councils...Where We Stand*. Arlington, VA: Author.

Baldwin, F. (2000). The Family-School Connection. *Appalachia*, 33(1), 2-7.

Canadian Education Association (1997). *The Entrepreneurial School: Raising Additional Resources*. Toronto, ON: Author.

Canadian School Boards Association (1995). *Parent Involvement and School Boards: A Partnership*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Mansfield, J. (1995). *Effective Beginnings: A Guide to New Partnerships in Schools*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation.

Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation (1995). *Partnerships in Schools: A Variety of Structures*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation (1995). *Removing the Barriers*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation and Canadian Association of Principals (1995). *Parents are Partners in School*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Chavkin, N. (2000). Family and Community Involvement Policies: Teachers Can Lead the Way. *Clearing House*, 73(5), 287-90.

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (2002). *The Essential Link: A Parent Resource Binder*. St. Johns, NL: Author. <http://www.nlfsc.ca/docs/documents/EssentialLink/EssentialLink.asp>

Faris, R. (2003). Learning Community by Community: Preparing for a Knowledge-Based Society. *Education Canada*, 43(1), 6-7, 42-43.

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Matthews, D. and Menna, R. (2003). Solving Problems Together: Parent/School/Community Collaboration at a Time of Educational and Social Change. *Education Canada*, 43(1), 20-23.

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Appendix G:

Glossary

Definitions of Terms

Agenda:	A point form plan of the order of a meeting.
Assessment:	The systematic process of gathering evidence.
Code of Ethics:	A guide to behavior based upon the acceptable morals, values and principles that set a standard.
Consensus:	A widespread agreement in opinion that is reached only when all members involved in the decision-making process are in agreement.
Evaluation:	The process of making judgements and decisions based on the interpretation of evidence gathered through the assessment process.
Parent:	The natural parent, foster parent, care giver or other legally appointed guardian of a child.
Parent-Teacher Association:	A voluntary organization of parents and educators involved in the current education and development of children.
Protocol Agreement:	A statement of intent between the school council and school board as to the roles and responsibilities each will undertake in working to improve the teaching and learning environment of the school.
School Community:	Parents, educators, students and other community members who have a vested interest in improving the education of the students of the community.
School Council:	A legally constituted body consisting of the principal, parents, teachers, community representatives and students (where applicable) from the local school community who, while representing the interests of all students, work together for the purpose of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and improving the levels of student achievement in their school.
School Development:	A systematic approach to change at the school level that involves collective reflection, problem-solving, and continual renewal and improvement. It is a results-oriented process leading to the development, implementation, and attainment of specific goals identified in a school's Development Plan.

