

Adapted from Improving School Governance – a school council training package  
<http://www.schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/home>  
And Ontario Regulation 612/00 of the Education Act  
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## MODULE 5: School Council Chair

### Goal

This module serves to provide school council Chairs with a better understanding of:

- f* their role and responsibilities as a school council Chair
- f* what makes a school council effective
- f* how to lead school council meetings
- f* how to engage the community in the school and its objectives.

### Overview

The school council Chair is a parent or community member (not a Board employee) who serves as chair of school council meetings. The Chair is elected annually by all school council members.

The school council Chair (Chair) must be able to run effective meetings, work effectively with all council members and with the principal, to lead the development of the broad direction and vision of the school. An effective Chair is a key component of a cohesive school council. The Chair needs to understand the responsibilities of the role and the structure of the school council.

## 5.1 Role and Responsibilities

Why is this topic important?

All school council members should know and understand their roles and responsibilities, and the functions and objectives of the council, particularly the Chair. The Chair, with the principal, provides leadership, establishing the environment in which the council can operate effectively.

On completing this unit, the participant should be able to:

- f* understand the skills required of an effective Chair
- f* understand the roles and responsibilities of a Chair.

### The effective Chair

The role of Chair requires leadership and management skills.

An effective Chair is assertive, neutral, task-focused and aware of the big picture. A good Chair knows the boundary of their authority and the authority of the school council as a whole, and understands and respects privacy and confidentiality obligations. A good Chair knows when to delegate.

A good Chair is available to the school and to the other members of school council when needed. The Chair should have a strong and successful working relationship with the principal, and the support of all school council members.

Before being nominating for Chair, a candidate should consider what they could bring to the position. Do they have an understanding of the school, its direction and its needs, or the time and willingness to learn this? Do they have the patience and commitment to develop good working relationships? Are they prepared to be a role model in the school community for professionalism, integrity and sound judgment?

### Role of the Chair

The Chair has a strategic role to play in representing the vision, mission and purposes of the school, and ensures school council fulfils its role and functions. As the chair of council meetings, the Chair ensures relevant matters are discussed, that there is full participation at meetings and that effective decisions are made.

The Chair's duties include:

- f* arrange for meetings in consultation with the principal
- f* preparing the meeting agenda in consultation with the principal
- f* developing and working with the principal and community towards a shared vision for the school
- f* endorsing key school planning and reporting documents on behalf of the council
- f* being an effective spokesperson and advocate
- f* chairing meetings of school council

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Good governance relies on the professional leadership of the principal, the Chair, the school council and effective meeting procedures.

In an effective school, school council processes are characterized by a mutual sharing of information, knowledge and ideas. There is a focus on open communication where all members are able to exchange information, share experiences, express different perspectives, pose questions, clarify viewpoints, explore relevant research and develop a shared vision and way forward. Good governance also involves ensuring decisions are made and implemented appropriately.

What makes a school council effective?

An effective school council is one that:

- f* focuses on improving student health and wellness, learning outcomes and educational opportunities
- f* involves the community in conversations about key educational issues and challenges
- f* is actively involved in the development of the School Improvement Plan
- f* promotes meaningful parent and community participation and actively seeks the views of its community
- f* has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities
- f* includes members who represent the diverse views of the school community
- f* has a clear and consistent process for decision-making

f comply with the code of conduct for school council members and behavioural expectations set out in the Boards values.

Features of an effective school council are included in the table below:

Feature	Detail
An effective council works together	The council should be seen by all members as being greater than the sum of the individuals of which it is comprised. Discussions may be lively however the council's decision overrides individual opinion.

Members set aside tt

The key to an effective school council is the conduct of its meetings. There must be ~~at~~ least

- f* welcome and apologies
- f* minutes of the previous meeting (voted upon)
- f* business arising from the minutes
- f* principal's report
- f* reports from subcommittees including finance subcommittee
- f* general business
- f* correspondence (incoming and outgoing)
- f* close.

If a council does not have subcommittees, the chair may introduce the finance and other reports.

Usually, councils ask members to submit items for general business ahead of the meeting so they can be included on the agenda. It is for the Chair to determine if other general business matters raised at the meeting, that are within a function of the school council, will be discussed. There may not be sufficient time for the discussion. The Chair should decline to discuss any matters unrelated to a function of the school council.

When discussing the proposed next meeting agenda with the principal, the Chair should ask:

- f* Does the item fit within a function of the council?
- f* Is the item operational (and thus a responsibility of the principal)?
- f* Should the item be dealt with elsewhere?
- f* Does the item warrant council's time?

### Chairing the meeting

As chair, the Chair should open the meeting on time and call council members to order. To ensure an effective meeting, the Chair should:

- f* have a good understanding of the constituting laws
- f* have sought a briefing with the principal ahead of the meeting on any complex or sensitive issues
- f* manage the discussions during the meetings to ensure business is expeditiously addressed. For this the chair needs to understand the powers of the chair and be willing to use them judiciously to ensure that council keeps to the point. These powers include the authority to bring discussions to a conclusion and bring on a vote
- f* ensure that no member dominates a discussion and encourage members to express an opinion
- f* before calling for a vote summarize points made in the discussion
- f* be prepared to delegate contentious matters to individuals or subcommittees for more research or discussion
- f* keep an eye on the scheduled closing time of the meeting and try to pace the discussion to complete the business by that time
- f* call for a specified extension of time that is required
- f* ensure that members know the date, time and venue of the next meeting before officially declaring the current meeting closed
- f* ensure that the decisions of the council are correctly recorded. When council approves the minutes the chair presiding at that meeting signs the minutes.

### Stages of the meeting



School council meetings should follow a consistent format. An agenda should be prepared and distributed with draft minutes from the previous meeting and any reports from the principal and Chair, finance and other sub-committees, to council members no less than five days before the meeting.

#### Minutes of the meeting

Accurate minutes should be made of every meeting of school council, and of its subcommittees. Minutes form a record of the council's activities and decisions and actions that need to be taken. Councils should appoint a minutes taker at the beginning of each year.

When school council minutes are submitted for confirmation, only questions regarding their accuracy are to be raised. The chair of that meeting must sign the minutes once council has accepted them as being a true and accurate record of the meeting.

The minutes should be sent to the principal and Chair as soon as possible after a meeting for comment, and then distributed, by the principal, to all members of council before the next school council meeting, where they are considered and accepted.

The school council should keep the community informed about its operations by publishing a report following each meeting in the school newsletter and/or on the school website or posting the minutes by keeping a binder of minutes in the school office.

#### Managing conflict and the conduct of meetings

At times, some school councils may experience members expressing strong conflicting views. There may be occasions where individual members are not working cooperatively with other members. It is the Chair's responsibility, as chairperson, to manage any conflict or conduct issues that arise during the course of a meeting.

The principal is responsible for managing any matters that extend beyond the meeting.

Some strategies for the chairperson dealing with difficult situations include:

- f* dealing respectfully with all comments and contributions
- f* using clearly understood protocols to ensure all views are represented
- f* stopping one individual dominating the meeting
- f* bringing the discussion back to school council's core objectives, which include: assisting in the efficient governance of the school; ensuring that decisions affecting students of the school are made in students' best interests; enhancing the educational opportunities of students of the school; and ensuring the school and the school council complies with its legal obligations
- f* delegating the discussion to a subcommittee, or to a future school council meeting
- f* anticipating matters that might result in conflict between members and introducing them in a way which seeks to minimize tension
- f* being prepared to let an aggrieved member express their view, but then being prepared to close the debate
- f* reminding members of the code of conduct for school council
- f* not taking sides and treating an individual's grievance as legitimate
- f* The Chair should be mindful of council members acting contrary to the code of conduct or speaking against council decisions to members of the community. The principal and the Chair may need to meet the individual separately and remind them of their obligations under the code of conduct.

### 5.3 Chair Online learning activity B How to run effective school council meetings

#### Goal

To enable school council Chairs to test their understanding of the role of the school council Chair, the requirements for an effective school council meeting, and how to run an effective school council meeting.

#### Steps

Review the scenarios and provide responses.

Compare your responses to the suggested responses.

#### Situation One

One council member continually dominates school council meetings, no matter what item on the agenda is being discussed. You are aware that some other members hardly speak at meetings.

Enter answer here:

#### Situation Two

You receive a letter from a parent upset at how the principal has handled a situation that resulted in her son being suspended for three days. The parent believes the suspension was not warranted and the principal victimizing her son. The parent wants this matter raised at school council and plans to attend the next council meeting to see that it is.

Enter answer here:

#### Situation Three

You are about to close the school council meeting when a council member indicates he wishes to have a matter discussed. He starts by saying some parents are concerned about the behaviour of a teacher outside school hours.

Enter answer here:

#### Situation Four

Your council has been considering a contentious issue for several meetings. Finally a motion has been put and the voting sees five votes for and five votes against. As Chair and chair, your vote went for the affirmative. Now what do you do?

Enter answer here:

SituationFive

The finance subcommittee has recommended that council not rene



- f* at information nights for prospective students and their families. The Chair may be called upon to explain the role of council and its activities and to seek expressions of interest from parents willing to join council
- f* at graduation ceremonies. The Chair may take this opportunity to thank families for their support of the school and the students
- f* at special ceremonies, such as the opening of new school buildings or the dedication of new facilities

In this role, the Chair is a key asset for the school in engaging with the community.

#### Consultation with the community

School council should be prepared to consult with the school community and, as needed, with the local community. School council is legally required to inform itself and take into account any views of the school community for the purpose of making decisions related to the school and its students. There are some issues, such as the school dress code, into which the school community must have input.

However, consultation with the community does not mean the community makes the decision. Council seek the opinion, advice and views of the community and then makes its decision.

Consultation shows the community that:

- f* opinions, ideas and contributions of others are valued
- f* the matters discussed are not always straightforward
- f* assistance is sought and welcomed
- f* people have different points of view about the best way forward.

Community forums or focus meetings allow interested community members to contribute to the council's decision on the [4(is)] TJe to th

and opinions heard. On key issues, school council should seek direct input and e