

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

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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.

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## 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, establishes 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 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 nominated for Chair, a candidate should consider what they 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
- f promoting the school to the community
- f ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and maintained
- f facilitating the resolution of conflict
- f participating as ex officio members of all committees established by the school council
- f communicate with the school principal on behalf of the council
- f representing the school in public forums with the principal

The Chair and the principal have distinct responsibilities as outlined below. They are to:

### The principal

- f* provide council with timely information and seek advice about educational and other matters
- f* prepare the council's agenda in consultation with the Chair
- f* report regularly to council about the school's performance against its strategic plan
- f* ensure council decisions are acted on
- f* provide adequate support and resources for the conduct of council meetings
- f* communicate with the Chair about council business
- f* be a signatory on school council financial accounts

### The school council Chair

- f* effectively chair council meetings (ensure everyone has a say in meetings and decisions are understood and recorded)
- f* be a signatory on financial accounts
- f* preside at the annual public reporting meeting
- f* ensure council stays focused on improving student outcomes
- f* with the principal, be council's spokesperson and official representative on public occasions
- f* when council votes are tied, have the second or casting vote
- f* monitor mail and emails
- f* ensure the School Statement of Needs is updated annually

### Building relationships

The Chair needs to build strong working relationships with the principal and the community. The Chair supports the principal in their role.

To build the relationship with the principal, the Chair can:

- f* upon being elected meet the principal to discuss key aspects of the school
- f* with the principal, develop a shared understanding of the school's direction and its priorities, as stated in the School Improvement Plan
- f* arrange to meet the principal on a regular basis ahead of every school council meeting to discuss the agenda, issues to be tabled and any background information that needs to be circulated
- f* keep up to date with school matters that may affect school council and the community
- f* inform the principal of community matters that may be relevant to the school
- f* introduce the principal to key members of the school community as necessary, particularly if the principal is new to the school
- f* be available if the principal needs to discuss matters relevant to the school
- f* understand the role of the principal and those matters of the school that are operational and therefore not the responsibility of the school council
- f* respect



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 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 membmb

The key to an effective school council is the conduct of its meetings. There must be ~~at least~~ <sup>at least</sup> meetings a year and at least one every term. The school council Chair, as the chair, is responsible for the conduct of meetings.

Many school councils have ~~sub~~ <sup>sub</sup>committees and working groups that also meet regularly. ~~These~~ <sup>These</sup> committees make recommendations to the council. Their conduct should be no less effective than those of school council

At the end of this unit, participants should be able to:

- f* recognize the features of an effective meeting
- f* confidently chair successful school council meetings.

Features of an effective meeting

Meetings are held to allow council to make decisions related to its funcckx5DC ( ) Tj 0755 TjC

- 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.

### 5.3 Chair





- 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. e t

