



# SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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Parents Engaged in Education

## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

New year, new look!! Parents Engaged in Education wants to wish everyone involved in our schools throughout the province a very happy New Year.

As we begin the next half of the school year it is an excellent time to review the goals of the school council and assess if you are on track to accomplishing all that you set out to do. If you find that you have not made the progress you hoped, perhaps this is an opportunity to make some adjustments to your plan. Maybe you need a new creative idea to make your goal successful or identifying the challenges to completing it and reaching out to your school community for assistance might be a next step.

If your council has not created a plan, this issue will explore suggestions on creating an effective plan. Even though the school year is part way through and planning usually happens at the second meeting of the year, it is never too late to build an effective short term and long term plan for the council.

We also want to bring you up to date on some of the work that Parents Engaged in Education has been doing in the past couple of months.

Don't forget that you can sign up to receive our newsletters directly by subscribing at: [www.parentengagementconsultantsgroup.com](http://www.parentengagementconsultantsgroup.com).

# CREATING AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COUNCIL PLAN

It is important for school councils to establish priorities and set goals. Otherwise, there is a real chance that a council will not be as effective as it could be.

In order to achieve its' goals a council must plan to accomplish its' priorities. Having a written plan provides continuity of focus and purpose from year to year. This could result in meetings being more valuable to members and also increase retention of members as the council works as a team to accomplish its' goals. It also has the added benefit of being a mechanism to recruit new members as they will have a better understanding of the purpose and goals of the council.

Larger councils may consider establishing a sub-committee to work on a draft plan and present it to the whole council for amendment or vote to accept the plan as suggested.

Developing a plan does not have to be complicated. Keeping to a couple of goals that are possible to complete is far more valuable than creating several goals which do not get accomplished. This could lead to members feeling frustrated and/or feeling that their work in the council has not been of value.

## SIMPLIFIED PLANNING TIPS

1. Consider the school environment and gather input (you may wish to survey the school community to determine their priorities).
2. Decide on goals that address the input you have gathered.
3. Create strategies to achieve goals.
4. Determine resources to achieve goals.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Communicate the plan to the school community.
7. Review the plan regularly and evaluate progress or new directions.

# S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

## STRATEGY TIPS



### SPECIFIC

Goals should be written in simple language and clearly define what is to be accomplished. Simply – this is the What, Why and How of planning.



### MEASURABLE

Goals must be measurable to allow for tangible evidence that they have been achieved. It may be helpful to break the goals into smaller steps, making them easier to measure and stay on track.



### ATTAINABLE

Goals must be achievable. They should be challenging enough to keep people engaged in trying to reach them, but, not so lofty that they get frustrated on the lack of progress in trying to achieve the goals.



### RELEVANT

Goals must be related to the role of the council.



### TIMELY

Goals should be time related to create a sense of urgency to keep people focused on accomplishing them in a reasonable timeframe.

# SCHOOL COUNCIL GOAL SETTING PROCESS

*To create a plan that works for your school community you may consider taking the following steps before defining the short term and long term goals for your council.*

## RESEARCH

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Getting to know the priorities of the Ministry will help you understand the alignment of the School Board's Plan to the overall goals of the Ministry of Education.

### SCHOOL BOARD MULTI-YEAR PLAN

Understanding school board priorities for the current year and the next few years is beneficial to developing the council goals. Although council goals may be more aligned with the school goals it is helpful to have a deeper understanding of what a school board has determined as its' priorities.

### SCHOOL MULTI-YEAR PLAN

The school improvement plan is crucial to establishing an effective school council plan. The school plan is developed specifically to address student achievement data, but also takes into consideration the needs of the community and teacher and parent input.

It would be helpful to meet with the Principal or request that he/she explain the school multi-year plan in order that the council can align their goals with that of the school.

For instance, if the school's plan is to increase student's math scores by 6 % in a given year, the school council may, in discussion with the Principal, plan to host a math night for families to engage parents in working with their children at home on the subject.

### PREVIOUS COUNCIL MINUTES/WORK

Take the time to review what work has been accomplished or planned by the previous school council. Perhaps you will see work that is ongoing which could be included in the new plan. In addition, it will make clear some of the challenges they may have faced when goals were not accomplished.

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INPUT

When a school council sets out to develop a plan, it is important to understand the interests of the school community it represents including parents who normally do not attend a school council .

It might be beneficial to do a survey of the school community. There are a number of ways of ways to find out what is important to the broader community.

Develop some questions that relate to student learning, facilities, school policies and parent engagement (home and school).

Once you have selected a few questions that reflect the vision of the school council you can create a survey form and send it to all parents (indicate a please respond date or it is unlikely you will actually receive many back)

Council members can ask questions informally at community events such as sports games and coffee shops etc when they run into other parents of the school.

Seek out the opinions of parents at school events such as curriculum night, plays in response to the questions you have prepared.

You may consider creating a sub-committee to do this research who then summarize it for the members of the school council. This committee could take on the task of looking for themes or trends from the feedback provided by the school community. If a trend is identified, the school council take this trend into consideration when planning their specific goals.

### SPECIFIC GOALS

Now that you have all the above information, you can get down to the business of setting realistic goals for your school council this year, next year and even the year after that. To be successful at achieving goals, concentrate on just a few at a time. This will prevent the council from becoming overwhelmed and fractured by trying to do too much at once.

- **First, consider these questions:**
  - Where are we now?
  - Where do we want to go?
  - How will we accomplish the goal?
  - How will we assess when we consider the goal completed.
- Prepare a list of possible goals based on the information gathered from the answers to the above questions.
- Aim for goals that are S.M.A.R.T.
- Finally, select a few goals that could be achieved both short term and longer term.

### STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS

- Analyze the strategies, in relation to available human and financial resources, and attainability within the school council's timelines.
- Select the most appropriate strategies based on member's abilities and the school environment.
- Create a timeline for each strategy. Be realistic, school council members are volunteers and sometimes they are stretched by other work or challenged by emergency family situations. School council work should not be a cause for stress, it should be something that people look forward to and enjoy doing.

- Determine a measure of success for each strategy. If your goals are clear it is easier to define when you have accomplished them.

### SHARE, IMPLEMENT AND REPORT

- When the plan is completed, share it with the school community.
- If the community are aware of exactly what the council hopes to accomplish they may be able to support the work by volunteering in a specific area or providing resources that will assist the council.
- Launch the plan by assigning tasks.
- Ask members what role they wish to play in accomplishing the agreed to goals.
- Monitor progress toward the goals.
- Report progress to the school community on regular basis. Make it part of the school council agenda every couple of months.

### ANNUAL REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS

- Update the plan formally on an annual basis.
- Once the annual review is completed, add another year to ensure that a three-year plan is always in place.

### REPORT ON THE RESULTS

It is worthwhile to prepare a report annually for the school community to keep them informed of the goals that have been accomplished by the council. This may help increase parent involvement as people can see the value of becoming a member of the council.

You may wish to use some of the following methods of communicating the plan and results to the greater school community.

- A letter to the parents of the school. You may wish to include a copy for the Superintendent or the Parent Engagement staff (if there are specific staff at your board) at the school board with the plan attached.
- Speak to the plan at school year end events.
- Summarize a version of the plan results and include in the school newsletter.
- Post a copy of the plan on the school website.

# SAMPLE OF SCHOOL COUNCIL GOALS

- Support student achievement at school and home.
- Increase understanding of the role of the school council throughout the school community.
- Enhance council member's understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Coordinate and implement successful community events.
- Research and share strategies for parents to engage with their children at home.
- Ensure transparent meetings and operations of the council.
- Create a welcoming environment for all parents, especially parents whose first language may not be English.
- Increase parent involvement.

## TEMPLATE FOR SCHOOL COUNCIL 3 YEAR PLAN

SCHOOL NAME	SCHOOL COUNCIL 3 YEAR PLAN				
GOAL	STRATEGIES	TASK ASSIGNMENTS	CURRENT YEAR	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE

## PARENTS ENGAGED IN EDUCATION



Although Parents Engaged in Education is a newly formed not-for-profit organization in the province of Ontario, we are proud of what we have been able to accomplish to date.

Some of you may be receiving our newsletter for the first time, however, there have been monthly issues since September 2015. In addition, we offer a series of school council related brochures (currently 8 are available) each on a specific topic relevant to the operations of a council.

On November 30, 2015 we hosted a successful event for school councils at the University of Toronto. This event provided speakers on “Building Strong School Councils” and “Math, Past, Present and Future – Basics to Inquiry based learning.”

At present we are working to develop partnerships with organizations that support parent engagement in schools and who will work with us to offer these free events in the future.

Parent Involvement Committees, School council members and Principals are our focus in providing free resources. We would appreciate any input you may have to assist us in providing resources and skill building opportunities that would assist you in accomplishing your goals.

We encourage you to consider using Parents Engaged in Education’s skilled presenters/trainers to assist in fulfilling your Parent Reaching Out Grant (PRO) in the direction of school council training and engaging parents (home and school). With the 2016-17 round of PRO grants opening in February for applications, a Parent Involvement Committee may wish to conduct a half or full day training for their board school councils or engage our speakers as keynote at a major event. Local school councils may wish to do the same on a smaller scale. There has never been a time, like the present, where involving parents as true partners in our schools has been so important!

We have prepared a video with clips from the presentation on “Building Strong School Councils” which has been posted to YouTube. You can access it at the following links:

**Introduction to Parents Engaged in Education**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7dlsRYIMU4>

**Recruiting Members for School Councils**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D95hCTUjhJw>

**Retaining Members - School Councils**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_EFGbBGqovU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EFGbBGqovU)

**Recruiting Members for School Councils - Secondary Panel**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1ec2UakV4>

**Succession Planning for School Councils**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4UhHk27bC>

# ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO



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## FIXER LA NORME POUR UN ENSEIGNEMENT DE QUALITÉ

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*Parents Engaged in Education is a not-for-profit organization formed by experienced school council members to provide resources and skill building opportunities for parent leaders across the province.*

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