

Special
Edition

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2021

ParentsEngagedInEducation.ca

PARENTS ENGAGED IN EDUCATION



SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 59

I am so excited to present our first ever **SPECIAL EDITION** of the Parents Engaged in Education newsletter. This special edition of the newsletter was put together as a primer for parents and school councils for the upcoming school year. Included you will find many of our most popular articles that focus on helping you be a part of and build a successful school council.

We have broken down this special edition into 3 sections. The first section deals with why you should join your schools parent council. We also debunk some common myths about parent councils that may turn you away from wanting to join or participate in one.

The second section explains the roles and responsibilities of the 3 main positions within the school council. Hopefully, this will help you decide where you feel most comfortable and how you can contribute.

The third section provides information and tips for getting the best out of your school council this year. There is a focus on inclusivity by building a multicultural school council and also provides tips on how to stay organized through a school council handbook. Lastly, we look at why school council by-laws are so important and why your school council needs them.

I encourage you to visit our website, if you have not already done so, at www.parentsengagedineducation.ca. You will find more great articles like these there.

I hope you find this special edition helpful. If you do have any questions or need more information that cannot be found on our website, please do not hesitate to contact me as we love hearing from our readers.

Stay safe,

Adrian Marmara
President, Parents Engaged in Education
adrian.marmara@parentsengagedineducation.ca

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION!

WHY JOIN YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENT COUNCIL?

By Adrian Marmara

CHILDREN BENEFIT

Yes, we have heard many times that children perform better when parents are engaged in education both at home and at school. And yes, we have heard that parental involvement boosts student achievement.

By joining your school's parent council, you are providing a positive example. Your child will see firsthand the importance you place on education.

SCHOOLS BENEFIT

Parent councils provide support for administration and teachers. School parent councils strive to create a positive and caring atmosphere in the school.

School parent councils address important issues that are important to parents and school administrators. They advocate for funding and issues that affect various aspects of education and student well being.

MAKE CONNECTIONS

School parent council involvement helps you stay connected with the school and allows you to gain a broader perspective of how you can play a supportive role. You also network and make connections with other parents, business partners in your community and agencies that share a common goal of student achievement. Working in partnership together helps build a stronger foundation for students to grow and thrive.

IT IS GOOD FOR YOU

Volunteering with your school parent council allows you to contribute your skills and knowledge. Not only will it benefit your child(ren) but your school community as well. School parent councils can help you gain experience and expertise as leadership volunteer, build your resume and make lasting relationships.



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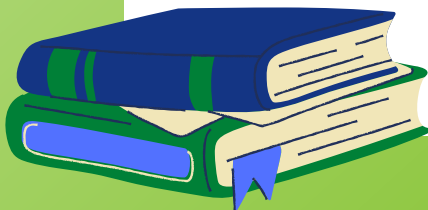
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6 COMMON SCHOOL COUNCIL MYTHS

By Parents Engaged In Education

Often it can be difficult to attract parents to join your school council. There are a lot of preconceived ideas about exactly what the council needs, and the commitment required from volunteers.

Below are some common myths, and responses, about school councils which will be helpful to address these concerns and encourage parents to participate.

COMMON SCHOOL COUNCIL MYTHS

1. MYTH: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL IS REALLY FOR STAY-AT-HOME PARENTS.

The School Council is for all interested parents!! Today, school councils work best with a diverse group of volunteers who represent all facets of the community. Whether a member is a homemaker, lawyer, accountant, designer or factory worker, the experience and input they bring to the council is vital to working to improve the educational experience of all students at the school.

2. MYTH: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL HAS ALL THE HELP THEY NEED.

Sometimes people feel better about not volunteering by telling themselves that the council has all the help they need. In fact, the more parents/volunteers the better. Most councils are in great need for parents to volunteer, if not at meetings than in assisting with events and fundraising initiatives.

3. MYTH: VOLUNTEERING FOR THE SCHOOL COUNCIL TAKES TOO MUCH TIME.

Any time that you can give is appreciated by the council and will help them achieve their goals. Even if all you can give is a couple of hours a month to attend meetings or a few hours each school year to help at an event.

4. MYTH: SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERS NEED TO BE AT THE SCHOOL DURING THE DAY.

There are some volunteer positions which may take some time during the day, for instance, if

a volunteer works on the nutrition program or supervises a field trip. However, members who are part of the council can attend meetings in the evening or help at events which take place outside school hours.

5. MYTH: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL HAS THE SAME MEMBERS YEAR AFTER YEAR, AND THEY ARE ALL FRIENDS.

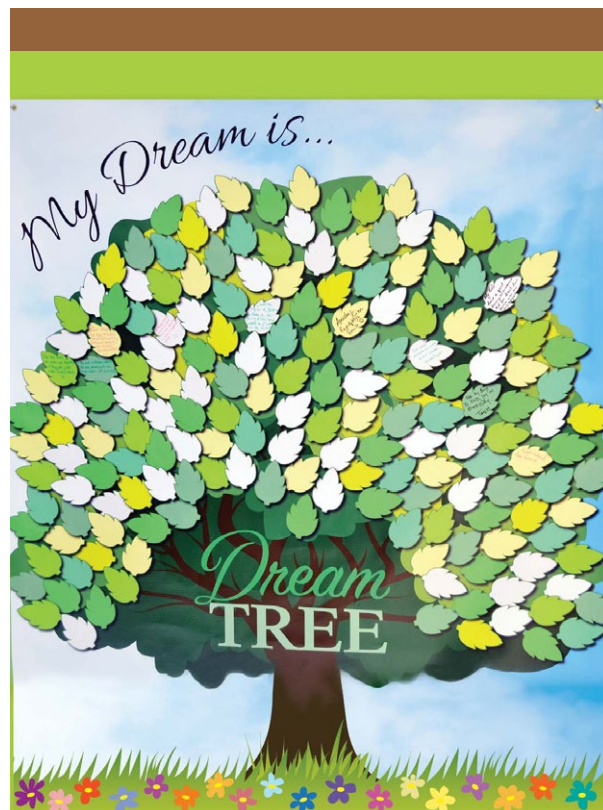
School Councils are more successful when they recruit new members on an ongoing basis to bring new ideas to their group. Making new members feel welcome and encouraging them to have a voice at the table will help the council meet its goals. The Welcome Mat is out — — all volunteers are welcome!!!

6. MYTH: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL, FROM THE LAST SCHOOL YEAR, HAS ALREADY PLANNED THEIR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS FOR THIS YEAR.

Every year is a new opportunity to plan exciting events and activities for the students and to develop new ideas on how the council can support them to reach their goals. There may be events which were very successful the previous year or a fundraising initiative that would be beneficial to continue (i.e., fundraising for a new playground). The new council will have the opportunity to vote on the events and strategies for the upcoming school year.

SHATTER THOSE SCHOOL COUNCIL MYTHS!

Get the word out to your school community on what great work your council is doing. Don't forget to acknowledge your triumphs and pitfalls. Remember to recognize those who have helped, no matter how great or how little, every bit counts. Always communicate and advertise all the work that your council does! These two items will help to dispel the many school council myths above.



Parents Engaged in Education have designed a **"DREAM TREE"** banner.

This vinyl banner is 5' x 6.5' with hundreds of blank leaves for parents and students to write their dreams.

This is a wonderful example of positive messages which will inspire the entire school community all year round.

GREAT FOR CURRICULUM OR PARENT/TEACHER INTERVIEW NIGHTS!!

Our aim is to raise enough funds this year to offer priority schools in challenged communities a **"DREAM TREE"** to encourage their communities to strive for the best they can be.

While we work on this program, if your school would like to purchase a **"DREAM TREE"** for your community you may do so by contacting
Theresa.pastore@
parentsengagedineducation.ca.

The cost is \$200.00 plus shipping

(This is cost recovery only, we do not charge in excess of our cost)

WHAT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES MAKE UP A GOOD SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR

By Theresa Pastore



The role of chair is critical to the running of a successful school council. Here is everything you need to know and more about how to be an effective school council chair.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR:

- A desire to serve the students, the council, the school and the board
- Understanding of the purpose of a school council
- Good communication skills
- A good listener
- Team builder and effective delegator
- Good organizational skills
- A motivator

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Prepare meeting agendas in collaboration with the Principal
- Preside over council and executive committee meeting
- Serve as the primary contact to the Principal and others at the board, if needed
- Conduct meetings in a respectful manner for all members

- Serve as an ex-officio member on sub-committees
- Retain all official documents
- Take training opportunities offered by the board or others

TYPICAL TASKS:

- Prepare for council and executive meetings
- Conduct meetings according to the agenda
- Work with the Treasurer to be current on all financial matters of the council
- Provide a report to members at each council meeting updating them on any activities or new information that comes your way. This report should be attached to the minutes of each meeting.
- Have regular check-in meetings with the Principal.
- Thank all volunteers and school council members for their efforts.

REMEMBER – A GOOD SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR DOES NOT NEED TO BE PERFECT, JUST WILLING TO DO THEIR BEST.

WHAT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES MAKE UP A GOOD SCHOOL COUNCIL TREASURER

By Theresa Pastore

A lot of people have asked if you need to be an accountant to be a school council treasurer. The simple answer is no. Having an accounting background can be helpful, but it is not necessary. Here is everything you need to know and more about how to be an effective school council treasurer.

QUALITIES:

- Desire to serve the students, the council, the school and the board
- Understanding the role of the school council
- Basic computer skills such as Excel, Quicken or similar would be helpful for preparing financial statements and budget
- Strong organizational skills
- Good at keeping files
- Appreciate the value of a balanced budget
- Understand the need for a good paper trail i.e., Invoices, cheque requests etc.
- Enjoy working with numbers
- Willing to be responsible for school finances

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Work with council to prepare the annual budget
- Process and record all financial transactions on behalf of the council
- Prepare a monthly financial report and present at each meeting

- Remind council members to adhere to the budget when considering new ideas
- Complete any financial documents required by the council, school, board or Ministry
- Complete any financial documents required by the council, school, board or Ministry

TYPICAL TASKS:

- Count money received by the council (along with one other member)
- Prepare bank deposits
- Complete cheque requests as required
- Adhere to financial control policies of the school board
- Prepare monthly financial reports
- Prepare annual financial reports
- Participate in all executive and council discussions and voting

It really helps when the person who held the job previously will give you some good guidance.



WHAT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES MAKE UP A GOOD SCHOOL COUNCIL SECRETARY

By Theresa Pastore

The school council secretary's role is more than just taking minutes and posting the meeting agenda. At first glance, the role of school council secretary seems straightforward: You type up the meeting agendas and prepare minutes from each meeting. But school council secretaries are often assigned additional responsibilities that make the job more interesting, more creative, and more challenging. Here is everything you need to know and more about how to be an effective school council secretary.

QUALITIES:

- Desire to serve the students, the council, the school and the board
- Understanding the role of the school council
- Good listening skills
- Effective communication skills
- Strong organizational skills
- Basic computer skills (word processing)

RECORDING SECRETARY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Distribute meeting agendas
- Distribute draft minutes from previous meeting

with agenda

- Record minutes for all executive and council meetings
- Maintain a complete file of all approved minutes, agendas and reports/materials distributed to members at meetings
- Attend executive and council meetings and participate in discussions and voting

CORRESPONDENCE SECRETARY RESPONSIBILITIES (MAY BE A SEPARATE POSITION OR THE ELECTED SECRETARY WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL TASKS)

- Determine with the executive committee or the council the frequency and most effective method of communicating with members and the parent community
- Manage communications and related materials for the council including, but not limited to:
 - Correspondence
 - Newsletters
 - Emails



- Website articles or updates
- Social media posting
- Bulletin board postings

TYPICAL TASKS:

- Set up a filing system at the school and on your computer
- Use email to send out meeting reminders, agendas, flyers for upcoming events and to distribute newsletter, if parents have given the council permission to email them directly.
- Prepare notes of thanks, sympathy, inquiries etc. as need on behalf of the council and executive committee
- Take concise and accurate meeting notes on all relevant decisions made by the council or executive committee
- Prepare and distribute minutes to the council for approval.
- Post minutes on school website

The school council secretary's role is one of the most important for keeping the business of the school council running well, and for communicating all the group's important work to its members.

TIPS ON BUILDING A

MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL COUNCIL

By Theresa Pastore



A School Council works best when it is fully representative of the school community. Building a multicultural school council means giving the opportunity for both parents and students to share their experiences, beliefs and celebrations. This helps the council plan activities and events which will engage the whole community.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO HELP BUILD A MORE DIVERSE SCHOOL COUNCIL.

- Remember that not all cultures view parent involvement in school the same way. It is important to communicate the value and opportunity for parents in the school to partner with the principal as part of the school council.
- English may be a challenge for some parents. You may want to translate information sheets, agendas, minutes etc. in the key languages spoken by parents. In addition, providing interpreters at events and/or meetings will also make all parents feel respected and welcomed at the school.
- Offer culturally relevant programs to parents on ways that they can support their children and the school.
- Host a multicultural night which includes students and parents. Invite the school community to host tables or pavilions that provides information, demonstrates customs and perhaps offers a sampling of food from their countries. Use this evening to encourage parents to come to a meeting and consider joining the council.
- Be open to the new ideas that diverse parents bring to the table. Maybe some of the strategies used at previous schools can bring exciting new ways to work on enhancing the education experience of all students at the school.
- Encourage current members to engage others who can translate for parents and make them feel welcomed in the school council. This may help these parents feel they can contribute to the work of the school council.
- The Ministry of Education (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/>) provides most information for parents in many languages. Support your community by providing copies of these types of resources in the various languages spoken by your school community.

**REMEMBER:
REGARDLESS OF OUR
DIFFERENCES, WE ARE ALL
THE SAME. AS PARENTS
WE WANT THE BEST FOR
OUR CHILDREN AND
THEIR EDUCATION. BE
AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL
COUNCIL BY ALLOWING AND
ENCOURAGING EVERYONE'S
VOICE TO BE HEARD AND
FOR ALL CULTURES TO BE
REPRESENTED.**

HOW TO CREATE A SCHOOL COUNCIL HANDBOOK

By Theresa Pastore



A good school council handbook is a valuable tool for all members of the council. It is a living document for current members and a great resource for new members coming onto school council each year.

When compiling your school council handbook, you may wish to include the following information:

1. An overview of the school. This is good information for members to use when making decisions in their role as school council members. This overview could include:
 - Grades, including split grades
 - Number of students at the school
 - Special programs (i.e., French, gifted, art etc.)
 - Makeup of the school community – diverse languages spoken by the community
 - History of the school
2. List of council members and contact information
3. Copies of previous year's agendas and minutes (this gives members information on topics raised and voted on by the previous council)
4. Previous year financial statements
5. Copy of Regulation 612 (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/000612>)
6. Copy of the School Board Policy relative to School Councils
7. Description of School Council Executive and parent member roles and responsibilities
8. List of volunteer opportunities at the school
9. Other resources that are relevant to school council operations or parent engagement

Bonus Tip: Use a binder for the handbook so that members can add to it throughout the year.



IS THERE A NEED FOR SCHOOL COUNCIL BY-LAWS?

By Theresa Pastore

Some school councils prefer to not have by-laws because they feel it will formalize their meetings. They prefer a more social meeting structure. By-laws are simply a tool to assist in making effective decisions for your school council. It doesn't have to change the social atmosphere of meetings.

According to Regulation 612 (15.1) school councils may establish by-laws but does not say that they shall establish by-laws. School Board policies vary from board to board and may require every council to have by-laws.

If a school council does have by-laws, they must include the following according to Regulation 612 (15.2):

- A by-law that governs election procedures and the filling of vacancies. The election procedure clause must comply with Regulation 612 S.4.

The vacancy clause must state if vacancies will be filled in one of two ways:

1. by "appointment", meaning council members can simply appoint new parents to fill vacant positions.
 2. by "election", meaning new parents can only be added to the council by the same election procedure used to establish the council at the beginning of each school year.
- A by-law that establishes rules respecting participation in school council proceedings in the case of conflict of interest. This clause would require a council member to declare any personal connection they have to an item being discussed or voted on.
 - A by-law that in accordance with any applicable policies established by the Board that established the council provides a conflict resolution process for internal school council disputes.

WHY DO SCHOOL COUNCILS NEED BY-LAWS?

PROTECTION

Strong by-laws help protect councils from internal and external conflicts. If the method used to arrive at a decision is questioned, being able to point to the by-law regarding the process of presenting and voting on a motion (provided it has been followed) is valuable to settle inquiries.

CONSISTENCY

Rules and policies take the emotion and personalization out of how to do things year after year.

EFFICIENCY

Having procedures for making decisions allow more business to get done by the school council every meeting. For instance, you may place a time restriction on how long a member can speak on any one topic/motion being considered by the council. This prevents one person from taking over a meeting.

LEGITIMACY

By-laws can provide a sense of importance for a school council. It gives community members a better understanding that important decisions are made by the school council, since many people see them as just a “social group” who plan events at the school.

PROCESS FOR AMENDING BY-LAWS.

1. Make sure that everyone understands the by-laws as they stand at present. If there seems to be some uncertainty by several members it would be helpful to run a session on by-laws. Invite a staff person or other expert on the topic to educate members on what needs to be included by regulation, as well as other standard or board required clauses. Even members who have been part of a council for years get accustomed to seeing the standard

clauses included in their by-laws but may not have a full understanding of how they would apply in certain circumstances. A full review of the by-laws may be beneficial for all when this is the case.

2. School council by-laws should state a process for amendments to be made. This would include when, why and how revisions are made to the existing by-laws. This clause, or as a separate section under the main clause, should include the percentage of votes (Robert's Rules of Order requires 2/3 of votes to approve a revision to a by-law) required to pass an amendment to the by-laws.

Note: this clause should also include the method and timing that the community will be notified that the council will be considering by-law revisions.

3. The revision should be presented in the following format:
 - The proposed amendment exactly as written.
 - The current by-law.
 - The by-law as it will be read if the amendment is adopted.
4. Notice should also include the proposer's names and the rationale for offering an amendment.
5. The amendment cannot exceed the proposed by-law that the notice applied to. Simply this means that if a motion is made to amend the by-laws to increase the number of voting members from 8 to 12; the council cannot decide to increase it to 15 instead while dealing with this specific amendment. That would require a separate notice of amendment.

If you are on a council that has by-laws take this time to review them. Make sure that they still apply to the makeup and work of your school council. If you do not have by-laws, now is a good time to learn and consider implementing them for your school council.

Learn about educators' professional boundaries

The Ontario College of Teachers exists to safeguard students. We also provide teachers with advice to help their daily practice. Our latest advisory focuses on professional boundaries, and includes:

- a list of watch-for behaviours
- a framework for action and self-reflection, and
- pointers to applicable decisions and helpful resources.

Read the advisory and watch our webinar at:

oct.ca/resources/advisories/professional-boundaries



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- Share the organization's resources with their school community.
- Work to engage other parents with their children and their school.
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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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