RUNNING

AN

EFFECTIVE

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

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School Council Meetings

Effective Meeting Strategies

Keeping Minutes of School Council Meetings

School Councils must keep minutes of all council meetings, and these must be available at the school for examination by anyone without charge. Minutes are usually recorded by the secretary of the School Council and are to be kept at the school for a minimum of four years.
Accurate minutes provide School Council members and the school community with a brief but clear summary of what went on at a meeting, including decisions, future plans, reports, and who is responsible for what.
School Council minutes should note discussion areas but should not include the discussions themselves.
Minutes should also include a list of those attending the meeting and those who are absent.

Preparing for and Running Meetings

Establishing Meeting Dates and Publicizing School Council Meetings

➔ Establishing a meeting schedule for the entire year should probably be done at the first meeting of the school year. Some councils find it best to schedule meetings at the same time on the same day.

➔ School Council meetings should be well advertised to ensure that anyone who has an interest in matters before the council knows that there is an open, sincere invitation for them to attend.

➔ Principals can facilitate this by communicating with parents and the community on a regular basis to keep them informed of the activities being undertaken by the council.

Meetings can be publicized within the school community in various ways:

- Circulate the year's meeting schedule as widely as possible throughout the community.
- Advertise in school and community newsletters, noting important or special agenda items.
- Post meeting dates on the hat's-on sign outside the school, if one is available.
- Use a phone-tree system to remind parents of upcoming meetings.
- Publicize meetings at community events.
- Post meeting dates on the school's website.

The Meeting Space

School Councils are entitled to hold their meetings at the school. School Council meetings must be open to the public,
The meeting space should be set up in a way that encourages participation,
The meeting space should be generous, and tables should be provided for council members.

Checklist for School Council Meetings

Before the meeting

☐ Book a meeting room.
☐ Order refreshments.
☐ Prepare an agenda. Put items on the agenda, in order of priority.
☐ Circulate the agenda.
☐ Check the room arrangements and audiovisual equipment.
☐ Ensure appropriate handouts or other materials are available.

At the beginning of the meeting

☐ Call the meeting to order at the designated time.
☐ Be certain there is a secretary present to record the minutes.
☐ Welcome everyone.
☐ Review and agree on the agenda.

During the meeting

☐ Keep the group focused on its purpose.
☐ Monitor the discussion so that everyone has a chance to speak.
☐ Clarify and summarize the discussions, when appropriate.
☐ Assist the group to use appropriate procedures for decision making and resolving conflict.
☐ Facilitate discussion to bring out all sides of an issue.
☐ Move the group toward decisions.
☐ Check for consensus.

At the end of the meeting

☐ Make sure action plans, agreements, commitments and responsibilities are clear.
☐ Announce the date, time and place of the next meeting.
☐ Identify the purpose of the next meeting and any items that will be on the agenda.
☐ Adjourn the meeting.

After the meeting

☐ Check with the secretary to be sure that the minutes are clear before distributing them to members.
☐ Help others carry out the decisions made during the meeting.
☐ Ensure minutes are placed in a publicly available place.

Planning & Running Effective Meetings

Tips for the Chair/Co-Chair

- post the council agenda several days in advance of the meeting
- the Chair is responsible for moving the meeting along and ensuring no one monopolizes the floor.
- start and end the meeting on time
- keep opening remarks brief and welcoming; introduce guests/presenters
- review the agenda; outline what is to be accomplished in the time allowed
- summarize main points before moving to the next agenda item or before making a decision
- keep to the agenda and timelines; consider using a timed-items strategy; if new business arises, record and carry forward to agenda of next meeting
- during discussions, maintain a speakers' list to facilitate all views being heard
- remind participants of rules of order as established
- ensure the action minutes are kept
- consider beginning with an "energizer" linked to agenda content to focus thinking and to allow participants to speak informally with each other
- allow for individual and small group input during discussion; work to involve all those in attendance
- remain neutral and provide alternate ways to solve problems/make decisions (see conflict resolution strategies)
- encourage decision making through consensus
- summarize the meeting by reviewing key actions and decisions; check that all members have the same understanding of any decisions
- review/announce the date, time, and location for the next meeting; include any items of new business
- Consider offering childcare to encourage parent attendance at council meetings.

CREATING AN AGENDA

A carefully planned and organized agenda is key to a successful meeting.

A good agenda briefly outlines;

- What you intend to discuss and in what order.
- A reasonable time frame, which allows sufficient time for discussion of all the agenda items,
- Items on the agenda should reflect the priorities of the school council, which should reflect the concerns and interests of the school community.

The task of developing the school council meeting agenda is usually the responsibility of the chair/co-chairs and the principal.

When developing an agenda, be sure to:

- ✓ provide a place on the agenda for welcoming guests and introducing new people and nonmembers;
- ✓ remember to include "declaration of conflict of interest" at the beginning of the agenda (review the minutes of the previous meeting and include items that need revisiting ("business arising from the minutes");
- ✓ determine if there is any "old business" or updates that should be included;
- ✓ include time for committee reports;
- ✓ determine what "new business" should come before the council;
- ✓ include time for brief reports from the principal and student, staff, and community representatives;
- ✓ include a period of time for general questions

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

[*Date, Time*]

[*Location*]

Sample Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions (15 minutes)
   - Icebreaker or team building activity
2. Business arising from the minutes (5 minutes)
   - Old business/updates (10 minutes)
3. New business (45 minutes in total)
   - Review of the EQAO Grade 3 and Grade 6 test results
   - Draft school council code of ethics
   - School council training workshop
4. Principal's report (20 minutes)
5. Reports (45 minutes in total)
   - Teaching/ Non Teaching Member
   - Student Representative
   - Home and School/ Parent Group
   - Community representative

Include Parent Involvement Funds ($500) initiative planning as a regular agenda item

General information updates (maximum 5 minutes)

Next meeting date, time, and location

Steps in Developing a Communications Plan – School Councils

To Determine this:	**Ask this…..**
Content	WHAT needs to be communicated?
Reason for communicating the content	WHY is it being communicated?
Communication vehicle	HOW will it be communicated?
Communication process: design, development, assessment	WHO will create, edit, deliver and assess the effectiveness of each item?
Audience selection	WHO will receive each item?
Timelines	WHEN will the communication be delivered?
Value/effectiveness of communication	WHAT was the effectiveness of the communication? Did it reach the intended audience in the required item? Was it clear and concise? What feedback has been received from the audience (may use a survey, telephone or written, to sample audience response or use tear off and return part at bottom of information)?

Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness

School Councils should consider putting a process in place twice yearly to assess how effective council has been. This reflective process and planning for improvement may be described in the Operating Norms part of the council by-laws. Some ideas to consider for reflection may be accomplished by all members in a group session or individually by each member with the Chair providing a summary of the input for the following meeting of council.

Are council meetings effective? Rarely/sometimes/mostly/consistently

How could council meetings be improved?

Are we on track with our goals? Not at all/somewhat/mostly/consistently

What is the next step in our council's goal setting/strategic plan?

What is going well?

Do we need to change any of our processes or operating norms?

How do we want to improve?

Staying Focused on the Mandate

It is important that all council members clearly understand the regulations and policies so that they know where the boundaries lie in terms of what is and what is not within the scope of their duties. There is an important distinction to be made between providing advice and acting as an advocate on a specific issue.

Council's role is to maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of a school-wide concern.

From time to time, a School Council may encounter the particularly difficult situation in which a council member demands that council devote all of its attention and energy to a single issue. In some cases, the member's passion for the issue may be counterproductive to the council's efforts to achieve its goals.

Some areas of the School Council mandate requiring energy and attention are as follows:

- Setting goals to improve the school's learning environment in collaboration with the principal, teachers, parents and community members
- Setting operating norms, that is, ways in which members dedicate themselves to working together
- Participating in the development or review of the School Improvement Plan

As specified in the regulation, School Councils can provide advice to the Principal and the Board on any matter. It should be noted that they are not authorized to perform managerial or administrative responsibilities that belong to the Principal or to other school administrators. For example, assessing teacher performance in the classroom is the responsibility of school administrators and Superintendents who are granted this authority under the *Education Act*.

***It is important for council to take time to periodically discuss and evaluate what it has been doing and how effective the council has been.*

Successful School Councils

Though participation in a School Council requires hours of volunteer time, the rewards are many and significant. The personal and professional satisfaction that results from contributing to an effective School Council involves the following:

- Focus on student learning and the *best interests of all students*
- Promote meaningful parental and community involvement
- Are inclusive and include members with the diverse views of their school communities: strength through differences!
- Actively involved in setting school priorities for improving student achievement
- Utilize clear and consistent processes for decision making
- Communicate regularly with the community
- Foster mutual respect, trust and understanding
- Understand clearly the roles and responsibilities of council and school administrators
- Share a common vision for student success
- Keep well informed about school and Board policies and procedures
- Maintain high ethical standards

Roles & Responsibilities of Council Members

School Councils have been created to enhance students' learning through the cooperative efforts of parents, students, staff members and others in the community. Your School Council is an advisory body of volunteers who work together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal and sometimes the school district, make the school a better place for learning. Accepting the role of School Council member carries with it certain responsibilities.

The following roles and responsibilities for specific positions are suggestions only. A School Council's operating by-laws may outline other specific duties for the Chair/Co-Chairs as well as for other officers of the council, such as a secretary or treasurer.

Chair/Co-Chairs:

- Arrange for meetings, minimum of four (4) per school year
- Prepare meeting agenda in consultation with the principal
- Chair council meetings
- Use technology effectively, e.g. establish e-mail distribution list etc. to stay connected with council members
- Ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and kept; not applicable to minutes and records that are more than four (4) years old
- Report regularly on the status of council recommendations
- Communicate regularly with school principal, council members, school community
- Facilitate the resolution of conflict
- Participate as ex-officio member of all school council committees
- Communicate with school principal on behalf of the council

Parent & Community Representatives:

- Bring a wealth of experience and diversity to council and help create a culture of sharing, communicating and dealing with issues and challenges
- Participate on any committees established by the School Council
- Contribute to the discussions of the council
- Maintain a school-wide perspective on School Council issues and seek to achieve consensus
- Solicit views of other parents and members of the community to share with council
- Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws

Staff Representatives (teaching, non-teaching):

- Contribute to the discussions of council
- Solicit views from their staff groups to share with council
- May participate on any committees established by council
- Communicate information back to their staff groups
- Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws

Student representative(s;) are appointed by the school principal; this is mandatory for secondary schools and optional for elementary schools

School Principal:

- Non-voting member of council
- Acts as a resource to council on laws, regulations and Board policies
- Attends all council meetings unless a vice principal has been so designated
- Considers each recommendation made by council and returns to council with the action taken in response to a recommendation
- Support, promote and communicate council's activities
- Assists council with annual goal setting and the establishment of operating norms

Recruiting and Sustaining Council Membership

Effective School Councils are continually seeking responsible volunteers. As part of this process, the School Council Chair/Co-Chairs and Principal are often on the lookout for people from the school community to take on new responsibilities. The following are some strategies for consideration:

- Ensure a welcoming and open school environment
- Invite interested parents to participate, volunteer, attend a council meeting
- Encourage participation from various and diverse cultural groups in your school community
- Host a School Council information/get involved event, e.g. high school council can host a barbeque for parents of incoming Grade 9 students in June and share council accomplishments, issues being worked on etc.
- Publicize council's activities via e-mail, newsletter message, brochures, no-cost ad in local community paper advertising council meeting, etc.
- Provide a list of meeting dates for the coming year
- Establish childcare services to assist parents with council attendance
- Be explicit about whether participation on committees is expected
- Many companies encourage their employees to be involved in community-related volunteerism; advertising council participation as an excellent way to make a difference by supporting student learning and achievement is an important message for the business and parent community to hear.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Disagreements and challenging issues will arise in council. Viewing disagreements as a strength and an opportunity for a meaningful problem solving dialogue requires a well established conflict resolution process as outlined.

1. **Acknowledge that there is a problem.**

2. **Commit to finding a solution.**

3. **Suggest a strategy for resolving the conflict.**

4. **Listen to each person's views. Make no judgments.**

5. **Attack the problem, not the person. Give "weight" or importance to the person. Avoid labeling the person.**

6. **Communicate how you feel and your views.**

7. **Allow the others involved to state their needs and concerns. Use active listening strategies.**

8. **Share your needs and concerns.**

9. **Invite others to suggest ways to resolve the conflict.**

10. **Agree on a solution. Follow up to ensure the solution happens.**

School Council Checklist

The following checklist is to be used in conjunction with procedures as outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education – School Councils "A Guide for Members" and the Ontario Regulations 612/00 & 613. This checklist is not intended to be used as a replacement for the procedures outlined in the above referenced material. It is to be used as a template to help keep you on track. You may add to this list and customize it for your own council. The items listed below are a summary of tasks performed in past years with approximate time frames for your reference.

September/October

Actions to be taken within the first 30 days after the new school year commences (enter results and contact information):

Principal – Post notice of election at least 14 days before the election will take place. Post in school and send notice home to parents.

Elections

The council is to elect:

- Chair or Co-Chairs
- Vice Chair (optional)
- Community Representative(s)
- Secretary/Treasurer
  - Budget details should be discussed at every meeting
    a. current balance
    b. spent to date (itemized)

These respective groups are to elect:

- Teacher Representative
- Non-teaching Representative
- Student Representative (if applicable)
- Ontario Federation of Home and School Association Representative (if applicable)

Goals

Set goals of School Council for the upcoming year (include plans for the $500 Parent Involvement Fund)

Establish timelines for reviewing the following:
(a) School Council By-laws/Constitution – date to be reviewed
(b) School Code of Conduct – date to be reviewed
(c) School Council meeting dates – dates to be reviewed

Outstanding Items

Review outstanding items from the prior school year.

Communications

Determine method of communication to parents and community (ie. website, email, paper, newsletter, phone, etc)

Sub-Committees

- Review previous year's sub-committees. Determine if new ones are necessary and if previous ones should be continued based on goals and/or review material.

November / December

• Review your School Council budget information.
• EQAO Results
    1. Discuss EQAO results
    2. Establish School Improvement Plan
• Plan Christmas activities.

January / February

• Principal Profile
    Review profile and school profile
    Submit revised/new profile no later than the end of February
• Budget Review
• Review September - December projects
• Plan February – June projects

March / April

- Review current budget.
- Continue January - June plans.
- Start planning for next year's PRO Grant proposal

May / June

- Review and set election and nomination procedures for next year.
- Prepare documents for next year's School Council (see previous year's "Outstanding Items").
- Prepare School Council Annual Report