

Chapter 5

School Community Council Constitutions

5.1 – General Guidelines

1. Each council shall develop and adopt a constitution within six months of their initial Annual Meeting and forward a copy to the Board for final approval. (legislation)
2. A working outline for developing a constitution is found in Section 5.2: A Guide for Creating a School Community Council Constitution.
3. A constitution outline is found in Appendix 5.2.1: Outline for a School Community Council Constitution.
4. A constitution may be amended by council motion and submission to the Education Centre.
5. Constitutional amendments become effective after receiving Board or designate approval.

5.2 – A Guide for Creating a School Community Council Constitution

This section details a comprehensive guide for creating a School Community Council constitution. It is recommended that councils consult this guide from time to time, even in situations where the constitution is well established and particularly when undertaking a review of council operations.

1. Mission Statement

An organization’s mission helps members and others understand its “reason for being”. Organizations regularly review and adapt their mission statements to reflect current circumstances. In developing their mission statement, councils may wish to ask:

- Why do we have a School Community Council at our school?
- What does our School Community Council expect to achieve in the foreseeable future?
- How can our School Community Council contribute to the educational well-being of students?
- How can our School Community Council contribute to educational matters on a large scale, beyond the local school?
- How might the Mission Statement developed by this council align with the school and School Division mission statement?

2. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles align with the mission statement and serve as a compass for how council should operate. Examples of guiding principles are outlined below.

- a. School Community Councils as a Representative Body – Councils are an integral component of School Division governance. Through their membership and actions, they strive to be representative of all students attending the school.
- b. School Community Councils are Inclusive – Councils recognize that all members of the school community can make a difference in the learning success and well-being of children and youth. In their activities, councils engage in processes to ensure all voices in the school community are heard and all perspectives are taken into account.
- c. School Community Councils Operate in a Respectful Manner – Councils understand school communities are complex environments. Councils recognize the importance of both community and professional perspectives and strive to appreciate all viewpoints.
- d. School Community Councils Operate in a Trustworthy Manner – Councils conduct their affairs in an open and transparent manner. Councils honour the right to privacy of individuals and treat all information they receive with appropriate discretion and sensitivity.
- e. School Community Councils are Responsive – Councils make every effort to respond to the needs and aspirations of the school community they represent. They regularly consult with students, parents, community members, the Board, the school principal, school staff and others. In addition, councils respond to request for guidance and direction, by the Board, school principal and other community agencies and organizations that support children and youth.
- f. School Community Councils are Effective – Councils focus their attention and efforts on key matters that make a difference in student learning and well-being. Keeping in mind their own unique school communities, councils align their work with provincial and School Division goals and initiatives related to student learning and well-being.
- g. School Community Councils are Committed – Councils are committed to fulfilling their role as a vital link in school level governance. Councils evaluate their performance regularly, take advantage of opportunities to build their capacity and account for their progress to the Board and public they represent.

3. Membership

- a. Representative Members – Council must elect five to nine Representative Members. (legislation) Representative Members are elected at the Annual Meeting, held before November 30.

- b. Student Representative Members – Council is to have one or two Student Representative Members from the secondary level where practical. (legislation) Options for choosing student members are noted below:
 - i. **Option 1** – Students are selected from among those selected to the executive of the school Student Leadership Council (SLC), or its equivalent, where they have been elected to the SLC for the expressed intent of serving on council.
 - ii. **Option 2** – Students elected by the student body who are enrolled in Grade 10, 11 or 12 to represent student view on council.
 - iii. **Option 3** – Students elected in a specific manner as defined in the constitution of council.
- c. First Nations Representative Members (legislation) – Council shall request representation from First Nations groups in the vicinity of the local school.
- d. Permanent Members (legislation) – Council must appoint the school principal and a teacher representative as Permanent Members. The constitution may address the means by which teacher permanent members are selected.
- e. Other Representative Members – A constitution may address Other Representative Members. Examples of such memberships are as follows:
 - i. A member of the Chamber of Commerce or business person.
 - ii. Aboriginal representation in addition to First Nations representation.
 - iii. A member of a visible minority or advocate for a specific group of students.
 - iv. Representation from an organization, or organizations, in a community.
 - v. A representative from the Town or RM Council.
 - vi. A member of the clergy.
 - vii. A senior citizen’s representative.
 - viii. Representations from service providers such as:
 - Health
 - Community Organizations
 - Justice/Police

4. Officers (legislation)

The constitution must define council officers to be selected annually from among the Representative Members (parent, community, student and First Nations members).

- a. Chairperson (required).
- b. Vice Chairperson (required).
- c. Secretary (required).
- d. Treasurer (optional).

- e. Committee Chairs (optional).

Note: Councils may wish to include role definitions for each of the above positions in their constitution.

5. Committees

Depending on local circumstances and initiatives, council may choose to designate committees (legislation) and appoint Representative Members as committee chairs. Council may wish to include these committees into their constitution, particularly where they wish to promote stable ongoing operations.

6. Meetings

The constitution must address council meetings in terms of their general purpose and operation. Some considerations are noted below.

- a. Annual Meeting – The Annual Meeting is held once each year (legislation) with the central purpose being to hold council elections for the coming or current school year. This meeting must be held before the end of November. During the Annual Meeting council will typically:
 - i. Elect members
 - ii. Select officers
 - iii. Provide an annual report¹³
 - iv. Include any other business determined by council
 - v. Provide a forum for dialogue with parents and the community
- b. Regular Meetings – Regular meetings allow council an opportunity to conduct business throughout the school year. The constitution should address how often council meets during the school year. Councils must meet at least five times in addition to the Annual Meeting. (legislation) It is recommended that council meets once a month during the school year.
- c. Meeting Governance – The constitution should address a governance model upon which meetings will operate. Two examples of meeting governance models are outlined below:
 - i. Representative Governance Model – in this model, council represents the wider school community. Meetings are open to the public, but only members of the elected council may decide upon matters at hand. In addition to having all meetings open to the public, council reports to the community using a communications strategy.
 - ii. Town Hall Model – in this model members are elected to council but its meetings are always open to the community at large and allows anyone at the meeting may participate in the discussion and play a role in the decision making process.
- d. Decision Making Models – In addition to a governance model, council may want their constitution to address decision making models.¹⁴ Two commonly used decision making

¹³ The Annual Report is a summation of the council activity from the past school year, along with a financial report.

¹⁴ Providing a description of a council's preferred decision making model will help guide members.

models are outlined below. Depending on other positions council has adopted, it may use one or both of these models.

- i. Majority Vote Model – in the majority vote model, an issue is discussed and a vote is taken. A majority vote determines the outcome. This system has the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- there is opportunity for modification of ideas during discussion
- a clear decision is made
- decisions can be made relatively quickly and efficiently

Disadvantages

- this system requires that council members (and the Chair in particular) understand proper rules of order¹⁵ for voting.
- this system can negatively affect team building
- this system can create a “win-lose” scenario and leave some participants dissatisfied

- ii. Consensus Building Model – in a consensus building model, all members listen to all opinions and try to find solutions to differences.¹⁶ Consensus will almost always involve compromise and can release a group to move beyond individual wants to determining and pursuing shared needs. This system has the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- ensures all council members have an effective voice
- builds on differing perspectives and values
- allows for flexibility in arriving at solutions
- can build respect for differing values and viewpoints
- can lead to better informed decisions
- ensures the final decision has the support of the entire council
- if unsuccessful, it allows for decision-making by vote

Note: if both models above are used, councils may wish to outline within their constitution under what circumstances each of the models is employed. Only Representative Members may vote on matters requiring a formal vote. Where a formal vote is required, a quorum is defined as a majority of the Representative members present.

Disadvantages

- requires time, a clear process, skill on the part of the facilitator of discussion and full participation of all members
- if council is operating by pure consensus, the status quo will continue whenever there is a stalemate

7. Code of Conduct (legislation) – The constitution must include a code of conduct that provides council members with clear direction on how they are expected to fulfill their responsibilities. An example is included in Appendix 2.2.1: School Community Council Code of Conduct.
8. Methods for Communication and Consultation (legislation) – Council may choose to include information in their constitution regarding how they will communicate and consult with various

¹⁵An example of such rules or order would be “Robert’s Rules of Order” for small organizations.

¹⁶Consensus does not mean that all parties agree, rather it means that all parties “can live with” a decision so that the group can move forward.

affiliates ranging from the Board to members of the public. Suggestions for communication and consultation are found in Section 2.4: School Community Council Communications.

9. Conflict of Interest – It is recommended that council consider a clause in their constitution that addresses conflict of interest. A council member may occasionally be in a conflict of interest position in terms of an issue being considered by council. When this happens, the member(s) should declare a conflict of interest, leave the room for that portion of the meeting, and not vote on the issue.
10. Dealing with Complaints or Grievances (legislation) – Councils must include a section that addresses how council, as a working body and as individual members, will deal with complaints or grievances. More information on this topic is included in Chapter 2: Section 2.5 – Complaints or Grievances Brought to Council.
11. Assessment of Council Operations – Council may want to evaluate how effectively they operate. In such cases, it is recommended that their constitution outline effective and ethical methods for conducting an evaluation or appraisal. Further guiding points for considering the inclusion of this topic in a constitution are as follows:
 - a. Council will evaluate their initiatives and operations focusing on procedures and outcomes.
 - b. Council may wish to use the following general roles as a guide for self-assessment and inclusion:
 - i. Understanding the school and community
 - ii. Developing and recommending an SCC activity plan that supports the school’s Learning Improvement Plan
 - iii. Providing advance and approval
 - iv. Taking action
 - v. Communicating and reporting
 - vi. Developing capacity
 - c. Samples included in Forms and Templates.
 - i. Form A – School Community Council Evaluation
 - ii. Form B – Council Member Self-Assessment
12. Conflict Resolution (legislation) – Council must include a conflict resolution process¹⁷ in their constitution. These processes will address conflicts that may occur among council members and external conflict that may arise between council and individuals or community groups. A sample conflict resolution process is found in Appendix 2.2.2: Processes for Conflict Resolution.
13. Amending the Constitution – Any constitution is subject to change as local conditions evolve. It is important that clear procedures are in place for making amendments to the constitution. The following points must be recognized within a constitutional statement dealing with this topic:

¹⁷ If the topics of conflict resolution and code of conduct are included in a council’s constitution, council must ensure that these areas work together.

- a. Constitutions and constitutional amendments are approved at two levels:
 - i. Council level
 - ii. Board level. Note that the Board's authority to approve SCC constitutions is delegated to the Director of Education/CEO as per Board Policy 3.1: Delegation of Authority.
- b. Council may amend its constitution by first approving changes as a council and then receiving Board or designate approval for those changes.
- c. Constitutional amendments are not official until they receive Board or designate approval.

SCC Operations Manual Appendix (5.2.1)

Outline for a School Community Council Constitution

The information below provides a general outline and for recommended components of a typical School Community Council constitution. See Chapter 5 – Section 5.2 for a more detailed guide.

1. **Mission Statement**
Insert mission statement here ...

2. **Guiding Principles**
Listing guiding principles here ...

3. **Membership**
Define or list the number of representative members (five to nine), and all other representative members on council.

4. **Officers**
List officers and consider noting key roles or responsibilities.

5. **Committees**
List any standing committees and council wishes to establish.

6. **Meetings**
Annual Meeting – note stipulations council wishes to follow for the timing and conduct of annual meetings, staying within legislative and Board parameters.

Regular Meetings – note when and how often council will hold regular meetings.

Governance/Decision Making – note how decisions will be made in council meetings and what system of meeting management will be used.

7. **General Operations**
Code of Conduct – address how council members conduct themselves in relation to their role on council on internal and external levels.

Consultation – describe the means by which council will communicate with the school, school community and School Division.

Conflict of Interest – highlight the need for council members to declare a conflict of interest when certain matters come before council and opt out of discussion and decision making.

Complaints or Grievances – describe how council (as individual members and as a whole) will deal with complaints or grievances toward council.

8. Assessment of Operations – council may wish to build formal assessment of operations into their annual routine. If so, it is recommended that this be part of their constitution. Supporting documents for assessment of operations are found in Chapter 7 of this manual.
9. Amending the Constitution – describe when and how amendments can be made to the constitution.