

## **3.0 The Work of Councils**

*Chapter 3.0 describes in detail how Councils might go about their “work” and includes:*

- How Councils may go about fulfilling each area of their responsibilities; and
- A description of the elements a Council may wish to include in its constitution and why.

### **3.1 Responsibilities of School Community Councils**

School Community Councils are ideally situated to support parents and families in becoming directly involved in their children’s learning. As part of School Division governance, Councils also provide students, parents, family and community members with an opportunity to actively participate in planning and governance. The responsibilities of School Community Councils are thus specifically designed to help Councils fulfil their purpose.

By developing an understanding of their community’s economic, social and health conditions, their community’s needs and aspirations for child and youth learning and well-being and by seeking out resources and supports that might be drawn on to fulfil these needs and aspirations, Councils will create a firm foundation on which they can draw. This foundation of understanding is especially important as Councils work with the Principal and staff to develop the Learning Improvement Plan. It will also support Councils when they are asked to provide advice to the Board, the school, and other organizations and agencies. Finally, Councils may also draw upon these understandings as they make decisions regarding their approval of fundraising activities, school fees and the Student Code of Conduct.

As Councils go about the important work of contributing to the development of the Learning Improvement Plan their interactions with school staff, Council Members and others will deepen and widen their initial foundation of understanding. Drawing from this broader perspective Councils will become more confident as they consider what further initiatives they might take to fulfil their mandate. Thus, throughout the year each of the responsibilities that Councils take on should reinforce and deepen their capacity to fulfil their mandate.

School Community Councils develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth, and encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement by:

- understanding the school and its community's economic, social and health conditions and needs and their aspirations for child and youth learning and well-being and becoming knowledgeable about resources and supports for the school, parents and community;
- jointly and in cooperation with the Principal and staff of the school, developing and recommending to the Board of Education for approval a Learning Improvement Plan that is aligned with the School Division strategic plan;
- providing advice and approval on certain matters, including;
  - advice to the Board of Education to represent parents, students and community on policies, programs and educational service delivery decisions, including grade discontinuance, school closure, religious instruction, and language of instruction;
  - advice to the school on school programs and operations;
  - advice to other organizations, agencies and governments on the learning and well-being needs of children and youth; and,
  - approval of fundraising activities and school fees and the Student Code of Conduct.
  - taking action to fulfil initiatives assigned it within the Learning Improvement Plan;
  - communicating annually to the parents and community on its plans, initiatives and outcomes and on the expenditure of funds related to the operation of the School Community Council; and,
  - participating in opportunities to develop the capacity of the School Community Council to fulfil its responsibilities.

### **3.1.1 Understanding the Community**

School Community Councils can become a reliable and expert source of information about their communities by developing a “School Community Profile”. Such a Profile describes the economic, social and health conditions of their community and includes an outline of the community’s needs and aspirations related to children and youth learning and well-being. In creating their Profile, Councils develop a unique sketch of the particular community in which their school is situated that is a valuable resource for the school, the Board and the community in general.

Councils might begin developing their Profile by setting out the general areas they wish to include. For example:

- ***Economic, social and health conditions of the community:***  
By becoming familiar with the community’s economic, social and health conditions Councils can begin to understand the larger environment in which children and youth live and learn.
- ***The needs and aspirations of community members:***  
By identifying community needs and aspirations, Councils can become familiar with their community’s particular desires and expectations related to children and youth and knowledgeable about the barriers to success.
- ***Resources:***  
By becoming more aware of resources that exist right in the community, Councils can provide a clear picture of existing supports for student learning and well-being.

For each area of the profile, Councils might ask themselves:

1. What kind of information would be helpful to us?
2. Who in our community might have that information?
3. What might be the best way of gathering that information?

The Principal of the school may be able to provide the Council with a “School Profile” which describes the unique characteristics of the school. S/he will likely be able to answer some of the Council’s questions and help direct the Council as they begin developing their School Community Profile. For an example of a School Community Profile please see Appendix B.

### 3.1.2 Developing and Recommending the Learning Improvement Plan

In many Saskatchewan schools, parent and community groups, District Boards of Trustees and other planning committees have taken part in developing school improvement plans. Below you will find a template Community School Councils have used in developing, implementing and evaluating their Plans. The template has been adapted to reflect the uniqueness of the School Community Council and its focus on learning outcomes.

Steps School Community Councils and others may wish to follow as they go about jointly developing, implementing and evaluating the Learning Improvement Plan:

1. Reviewing the School Community Profile
2. Establishing Beliefs and Creating a Vision
3. Reassessing Needs Based on the Vision
4. Developing Objectives
5. Creating an Action Plan
6. Identifying Program Supports
7. Submitting the Plan to the Board for Approval
8. Monitoring/Evaluating and Communicating Accomplishments to the School Community

#### ***1. Reviewing the School Community Profile***

As Council Members, the Principal and staff prepare to work on the Learning Improvement Plan, the School Community Profile the Council has developed will provide a snapshot of the school and community “as it is today” serving as a “before” picture of the school as the process of change unfolds. In the initial stages of work on the Learning Improvement Plan, the Council may wish to highlight areas of particular interest in the Profile that they think might require special attention or that are areas of strength that can be built upon.

#### ***2. Establishing Beliefs and Creating a Vision***

The values and beliefs that guide the Council and school staff shape the learning environment for students. It is a key step for Councils to affirm and act upon their beliefs about school and learning. Tolerance, respect for others, commitment to completion of tasks and, most important, acknowledging the value and importance of learning are core values that many Councils will address in their belief statements. An early step in setting direction will be establishing the values that guide the Council. Discussion, study, review of School

Division and existing school belief statements are all a part of the Council affirming its values.

A vision is a statement describing what the Council and others want the school to look like, what is the ideal learning community and what is the ideal achievement for students. Everyone who will be affected by the vision should be involved in creating it.

There are many processes for creating a vision. There may be people who are skilled in leading visioning workshops within the school, School Division or community. Once the vision of the school has been established it is a good idea to post it visibly and find other ways to let all involved with the school know what it is.

### **3. Reassessing Needs Based on the Vision**

The jointly developed vision should provide the working group with direction regarding the school's most pressing needs. Using the jointly developed vision to reassess needs will:

- help indicate how to use resources in the most effective and equitable manner;
- help match services with needs;
- take the guesswork out of planning;
- increase accountability;
- encourage broad-based parent and community member participation; and
- raise community awareness, understanding and acceptance.

A needs assessment involves:

- Identification of needs;
- Assigning priority to needs; and,
- Identification of services, resources and strengths to address needs.

Appendix B, Section 2.0 provides a general template of a needs assessment related to a Learning Improvement Plan.

### **4. Developing Objectives**

Objectives outline the actions that must be taken to work toward the vision. The Learning Improvement Plan will set objectives related to the needs the Development Team plan to address keeping in mind the resources the school community already has and those it may wish to draw on.

*“The learning community surrounds all children and youth. It is broader than the classroom and school and signals that meaningful learning occurs in all aspects of school and community life. Learning is not restricted to lessons in a school environment, but also takes place in family and community interactions on a daily basis. Schools and communities must seek opportunities to support and foster this larger learning community to broaden the range of programs and services that meet the needs of all children and youth.”*

Saskatchewan Learning  
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/>

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The SMART test can be helpful when formulating objectives.

Objectives are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time-limited

### ***5. Creating an Action Plan***

The action plan turns the objectives into actions or program activities that will work toward achieving the vision. The action plan includes:

- The objectives identified above;
- Actions or programs to promote the objectives;
- Assignment of responsibility – who will do the work; and,
- Timeline or schedule for accomplishing the work.

School Community Councils will need to consider which aspects of the Action Plan may fall within their responsibility. The Effective Practices Framework is based on extensive research regarding “what works” in the education of children and youth.

The following overview of the Effective Practices Framework may help Councils as they discuss and consider the Learning Improvement Plan.

### **School<sup>PLUS</sup> Effective Practices Framework**

#### **Comprehensive Prevention and Early Intervention**

Comprehensive principles and practices apply to all children and youth regardless of their ages or life circumstances. These principles and practices lead to timely actions that include: promotion of social and emotional well-being of all children and youth, prevention of problems, and interventions that target individuals and groups.

#### **Authentic Partnerships**

Authentic partnerships find their purpose and energy in collective action. Such partnerships grow from a commitment to a shared mission and vision, develop over time and are

**School<sup>PLUS</sup> Effective Practices Framework (Continued)**

nurtured by mutual trust and respect. Authentic partnerships create a sense of community and strengthen a school's ability to provide high quality educational programs and supports.

**Adaptive Leadership**

Leadership provides a sense of direction, energy, coherence and coordination to the actions and activities going on in the school. Schools today require an alternative approach to leadership. This requires a shift from the traditional model of centralized power and control to a style of leadership that is shared. We call this adaptive leadership.

**Caring and Respectful School Environments**

Caring and respectful school environments are open, inclusive and culturally affirming. They ensure that all students have access to a barrier-free environment and benefit equally from a variety of learning experiences and needed supports and services in the classroom, the school and the community. Caring and respectful school environments create the atmosphere necessary to promote the well-being of students and families.

**Responsive Curriculum and Instruction**

Responsive curriculum and instruction is influenced by the learning environment (that is, the classroom and school climate); curriculum topics and materials; instruction; the quality of relationships among and between teachers, students, parents and community members; and the values and needs of the community.

**Assessment for Learning**

Educational assessment contributes to the ability of schools to deliver high quality education to all Saskatchewan children and young people. Assessment for learning is an early phase in the evaluation process that involves the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting information to improve student learning.

Saskatchewan Learning Website  
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/>

### ***6. Identifying Program Supports***

In order to fulfil the responsibilities they have adopted in the Learning Improvement Plan, Councils will need to consider what services, resources and strengths will be needed to support the planned actions. Some supports may be found easily and others may require some work to find or create.

Examples of services and supports include:

- Services available in the community;
- Volunteer time;
- Donations of time or money; and,
- Programs available in the community.

### ***7. Recommending the Plan to the Board for Approval***

The Learning Improvement Plan should include:

- Vision;
- A description of prioritized needs along with present and possible services, resources and strengths. The description should include an explanation of how the Plan addresses provincial and School Division student learning priorities;
- Objectives (based on the needs identified above);
- An Action Plan ; and
- Identified supports required to fulfil the Plan.

The Plan is to be recommended by the School Community Council for approval to the Board of Education. Similarly, school staff support for the Plan is needed to ensure that there is commitment to achieving the objectives. By working together to develop the Plan, the Council and Staff of the school can improve understandings and relationships and truly share responsibility for student learning and well-being.

### ***8. Monitoring/Evaluating and Communicating Accomplishments***

Once they have their Plan in place Councils will need a way to “monitor” or to check regularly on how they are progressing and whether that progress is helping meet the objectives they have identified. While school and Division staff will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the aspects of the Learning Improvement Plan that fall under their responsibility, a School Community Council may be asked to keep members of the community up-to-date on the Plan’s progress. Councils will also be responsible for monitoring and evaluating those aspects of the Learning Improvement Plan they have taken on as their responsibility.

Councils may wish to develop a plan for:

- monitoring and evaluating progress on their own responsibilities with the Learning Improvement Plan;
- keeping members of the community, the school and the Division up-to-date on progress related to Council responsibilities; and,
- communicating progress on the Learning Improvement Plan in general to the community.

### **3.1.3 Providing Advice**

#### **3.1.3.1 Advising the School, Board of Education and Others**

School Community Councils will be asked to share their understandings by providing advice to Boards of Education, the school and other community organizations and agencies and governments on various matters.

The advice Boards of Education may seek falls into three broad categories:

- advice related to general Division-wide governing policy, operational procedure and decisions including the School Division strategic plan, budget and other specific initiatives;
- advice on the educational program and its delivery and on religious observances and language of instruction within the school: and,
- advice about the formation, structure and operations of the Council itself.

The Principal may request Council's advice on extra-curricular programs, the family-life curriculum, supports and enhancements for the learning program and e-learning opportunities. A Regional Health District may seek a Council's input on wellness initiatives for children and youth. Community Recreation Boards and Library Boards may request advice regarding recreation and family literacy programs.

Councils will turn to their jointly developed Learning Improvement Plan to provide a framework for their advice giving and to the School Community Profile to provide guidance related to the school community they represent. Councils will also need to gather information about the issue or situation in question and, from time to time, will consult with other parent and community members or seek professional advice.

*“Consultation” is a process that includes seeking input and advice especially from those that may be impacted by a decision, reporting back to those consulted on the decision taken, and explaining how the input was taken into consideration as the decision was made.*

*Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, 2005*

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*In Community Schools, Councils may advise the Board of Education that the **Community School Coordinator** should be named a **Permanent Member of the Council**.*

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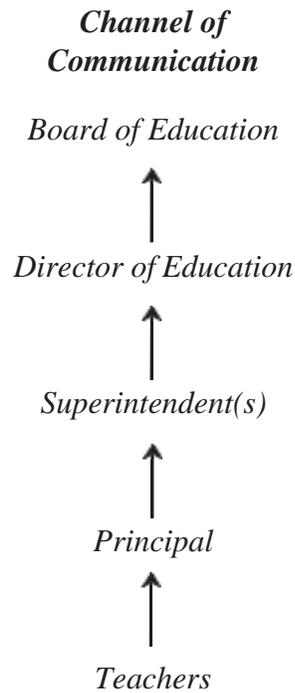
*Advocacy and lobbying should never be confused with advice giving. Self-appointed lobbyists are rarely asked for their advice. Elected and representative School Community Councils are asked!*

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In all cases, the advice provided by the School Community Council is expected to be provided at a general and school-wide level and the interests of all students must be taken into consideration. Care must be taken to ensure that a program or special initiative to support certain students does not detract from the opportunities provided for other students.

Sometimes parents or community members may ask a Council to investigate a particular incident or to advocate on their behalf for special interests. This is not the role of Councils and the Members should be careful to avoid making commitments to others before the full Council has considered the matter or if the issue lies outside the role and responsibilities of School Community Councils. Rather, parents or community members who have a concern or problem should be encouraged to address their concern to the appropriate individual and to follow the proper channels of communication. In fact, an important role that Councils can play is to help others understand what those channels are and how they are intended to work.

It is also important to understand that some information and especially that about individual students and staff is not available to Councils. School student and staff records contain much sensitive and confidential information that is not intended to be shared with any individual or group for purposes other than those for which it was collected and then only with individuals, usually professionals, who require it to fulfil their obligations to students, staff or the Board of Education.



School (Advisory Committees) Community Councils do not discuss, consider or provide advice about complaints or about personal, confidential information about students, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, 2005

### **3.1.3.2 Approving Fundraising Activities, School Fees and the Student Code of Conduct**

School Community Councils provide approval for fundraising activities, school fees and the Student Code of Conduct within the limitations of Board of Education governing policy and administrative operational procedure. Where no formal policy or procedure exists, Councils are encouraged to consult with their Board for guidance.

### ***Fees and Fundraising***

A recent Saskatchewan School Boards Association research report<sup>1</sup> outlines five broad issues, related to school fees and fundraising relevant to Saskatchewan schools that Councils may wish to consider.

Briefly the issues are:

1. **Monitoring:** Who is keeping track of the monies collected through school fees and fundraising? Who is monitoring how much is collected or raised and how the money is being spent?
2. **Transparency in Reporting:** Are students and/or parents/guardians consistently made aware of what they are paying for, how much they are paying and the reasons for payment, both in terms of time and money?
3. **Barriers to Learning:** Are costs and/or practices associated with school fees and fundraising creating a barrier to equitable learning opportunities for some students?
4. **Educational Benefit:** Are the school programs' learning objectives, beliefs and goals in harmony with fundraising practices or other activities requiring the collection of fees?
5. **Governance:** Do the Board of Education and the school recognize their responsibilities and their authority regarding accounting for costs associated with school fees and fundraising activities? How are the funds administered?

<sup>1</sup>Fees, Fundraising and Fairness: A Guide for Schools. April, 2003.  
Research Report 03-06.

### ***Student Fees***

*School Community Councils may wish to consider the difference between “mandatory fees” and “optional fees”. Greater caution should be addressed to the number and amount of the former although optional fees can restrict opportunities to participate.*

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In approving fundraising activities and school fees, Councils may wish to provide a brief explanation that supports their approval. Close contact should be maintained with the School Division office when considering fee and fundraising approvals. Although the “ends” required of each School Division (being accountable, accounting and reporting requirements) are the same, procedures to accomplish those ends will likely differ in each Division.

School Division operational procedures may also set monetary limitations or other constraints on Council decision-making. Boards of Education may establish certain limits on student fees such as for:

- General classroom consumables or supplies such as notebooks;
- Classroom activities such as fieldtrip transportation or skating fees;
- Curriculum project supplies such as wood, metal, or fabrics;
- Textbook caution;

- Student Representative Councils (SRC); and
- Extra-curricular activities.

Fundraising initiatives may also be limited in terms of purpose for which the funds may be used, type of initiative and amount to be raised. Keeping records is also important. For example:

- The Division may require written receipts to be given where that is practical. Where that is not, as in the case of a hotdog sale, a simple statement signed by at least two people describing how much total sales were for the event may satisfy the Division's needs. Those records would always have to be available;
- For disbursements, they should be done as much as is reasonable by cheque, with at least two signatures. In the case of cash, a receipt should be signed by the recipient and kept with the records of the activity;
- Any Bank accounts should be set up with the knowledge of the Division office. Every bank account should require two signatures;
- Cash should be held in a secure location;
- Records should be able to describe the source of the funds and the use of the funds; and,
- The records should be in such a condition that a report can be provided whenever one is required by the Division or by an auditor. A Board may describe a format that they require for reporting on fees and fundraising.

Although this area of responsibility may appear complex, School Division Administrators can provide a good deal of assistance and in many School Divisions the system of accounting and reporting is well established. The central concern for School Community Councils should, however, be on what they approve and why. The Learning Improvement Plan and School Community Profile provide Councils with a valuable local context as they go about their deliberations.

Appendix B, Section 4.0 provides an example a School Division's policy and regulations related to fundraising.

### ***Student Code of Conduct***

Most schools will have already established a Student Code of Conduct. Usually parents and students have provided a good deal of input to the Code's development and support the articles of the Code. School Community Councils should seek the Principal's advice about the need to review the Student Code of Conduct as it may be

satisfactory in its present form. On the other hand, the Principal and Council may believe this would be a good time to undertake a review and updating of the Code. Such a project takes time but does provide an opportunity for student and parent engagement in the life of the school. In either case, the Council will need to discharge its responsibility to provide its approval for the Student Code of Conduct.

### **3.1.4 Taking Action on School Community Council Initiatives**

School Community Councils take action to engage parents and community, to develop shared responsibility for child and youth learning and well-being, and to fulfil their responsibilities within the Learning Improvement Plan. The central purpose of School Community Councils is to encourage and support the involvement of parents and community as partners to improve student learning and well-being. For example, by engaging parents in their children’s learning the Council can enhance the family’s contribution to student success; by developing shared responsibility for well-being the Council can mobilize the community’s contribution to student health and social development; and, by responding to student personal needs the Council can remove barriers to students’ access to learning opportunities.

*School Community Council action plans focus on:*

- *each area of Council responsibility; and,*
  - *the Council’s part of the Learning Improvement Plan*
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The actions that Councils take focus on their areas of responsibility. In the initial years or as communities change, Councils will take action to better understand their community. It may take a full year of work to develop and refine a School Community Profile. Gathering information and consulting with others about what it means and how it can be used to improve learning and well-being of children and youth is challenging work that takes time. Similarly, as the Learning Improvement Plan is developed Councils will take action by seeking the input of parents, community members, and agencies that work with the school. The same is true as Councils prepare the advice they may be asked to provide to the Board of Education.

As well, School Community Councils may take on specific implementation responsibilities within the Learning Improvement Plan. These might be to inform parents about ways they can contribute to their children’s environmental awareness or reinforce at home the numeracy skills learned at school, to establish a family literacy program, or to support community agencies in the development of recreation opportunities for disabled youth.

Achievement of the Learning Improvement Plan, however, is a shared responsibility. For most components of the Plan the

responsibility will rest with the staff of the school. However, for those initiatives that may be more appropriately undertaken by the School Community Council and which, in consultation with the school and Board, it has been agreed can be undertaken by the Council, the Council should take responsibility. Those initiatives that might be shared with the school could include provision of parenting classes, establishing student tutoring support among community members, assisting families with Internet access, arranging for e-learning sites in the community and finding student summer work or community service opportunities. The School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative presents a broad range of possible learning and well-being supports that might be shared by School Community Councils.

A key action component for Councils related to the Learning Improvement Plan is determining progress. The Council should keep track of how they are progressing on their initiatives within the Plan carefully and assist to focus attention on the agreed upon outcomes. Where a sense of shared responsibility has been established, information about progress can be used effectively to refine and improve the Plan and to make adjustments in the contribution the School Community Council might make. Similarly, the staff of the school relies on the data to inform their decisions and achievement of their responsibilities within the Learning Improvement Plan. It is in taking action on the Plan that improvement in learning and well-being will result. Keeping track of progress ensures that everyone pays attention to the directions and commitments included in the Plan.

### ***3.1.5 Reporting to Parents and the Community***

School Community Councils are an important part of school division governance and a critical connecting link between the school and community. The strength of the connection depends heavily upon Councils' communications or their "reporting" practices. Many Boards will have a communication plan, including strategies and communication channels in place and Councils will want to make sure they are aware of the Boards expectations in this area. In their everyday activities Council members and Council as a whole will also want to consider how they will speak and listen to parents and community. At every meeting and in every decision Councils must ask themselves, "How will student learning or well-being be improved by the decision we make?" They may also wish to ask themselves:

- Do we understand the interests of parents and community members in the issue before us?

- What do parents and community members need to know about this decision?

### **3.1.5.1 Effective Communications**

While School Community Councils are responsible for providing parents and community members with an Annual Report (see below “Reporting on Progress”), Councils also keep parents and community members informed of progress related to Council initiatives throughout the year.

Effective communication is crucial as Councils work towards developing shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of children and youth and in achieving increased involvement of parents and community members in school planning and improvement processes. Effective communication is also important to the successful operation of the Council itself.

In order for Councils to function well, Members will need to communicate their ideas to others. By developing a climate of open, honest communication where everyone feels his or her views are respected, Councils can create a positive communication environment. Councils can also support effective communication by developing their communication channels and implementing a communication plan.

### **3.1.5.2 Channels of Communication**

Developing effective communication channels will benefit Councils in a least two ways. Firstly, as channels are used and refined Councils will spend less time on routine matters of communication. Secondly, well-developed channels of communication mean that Councils can be more confident that the information that they wish to communicate is reaching the desired audience. As mentioned above Boards may provide Councils with support in this area. Examples of some important communication channels are also described below.

- *Among Council Members*

It is important to ensure that the School Community Council Chairperson, Members of Council committees and individual Council Members are accessible to each other. Committee Members or Council Members with questions, issues, or simply agenda items to add to the next meeting’s agenda will need to know how to contact the Chairperson. It is a good idea to develop a list of contact numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses for all Council Members at the

beginning of the year and to distribute the list to all Members. As Council committees form, a similar process may be followed.

- ***With the Principal***

The Principal of the school is not only a valued member of the School Community Council but also plays a key leadership role within the school. It is therefore important that School Community Councils establish a good working relationship with the Principal of the school. To accomplish this, the School Community Council Chairperson and the Principal may need to develop an effective way to communicate outside of regular meetings. Important areas to consider include how each would like to receive routine information and a procedure for what is to happen when a response to a question or matter is needed quickly.

- ***With the Community***

It is essential that School Community Councils create channels of communication between the Council and the community they represent. Councils may wish to consider a number of routine ways that they believe will be the most effective means to communicate with the community. Councils might also consider what types of communication channels they wish to have available in the event that they need to provide the community with information on an urgent basis and what channels might be most effective when they want to receive immediate feedback.

- ***With other Councils, Organizations and Agencies***

Councils may wish to develop a network that allows them to share information and ideas and connects them to new developments in the larger community. Networking can occur in a number of ways – for example, through meetings, teleconferencing, or e-mail. There may be existing networks that Councils can join. At the beginning of the school year, Councils may wish to explore what networking opportunities they would like to explore.

- ***With the Board of Education***

The Board of Education of the School Division is responsible for establishing a School Division Senior Administrative Contact for each School Community Council in the Division and, as mentioned previously, Boards may also have an established communication plan, including preferred channels and strategies. However, Councils

may also wish to consider what other channels of communication might be created to allow Councils routine access to general information they may require to function. For example, some Boards have websites where news, notices, policies and other educational data are available. Others may send routine e-mails to Councils to keep them up-to-date. Boards may also want to listen to Councils and seek their advice on major governing policy questions.

### **3.1.5.3 Communication Planning and Strategies**

School Community Councils need an overall communication plan, including strategies that will provide direction in all areas of communication. To create a plan Councils might consider the following<sup>1</sup>:

- The audiences they wish to communicate with;
- Issues that require consultation;
- Key messages the Council wants to send;
- Communication strategies and processes that will be most effective;
- Ways of dealing with feedback from the community;
- Who will develop the plan; and,
- How the plan will be shared with others.

Possible communication strategies include:

- Posting Council minutes on the school website;
- Hosting special events that bring the community into the school;
- Making use of regular mailings to include School Community Council information;
- Encouraging Members of Council to speak at school functions and functions in the community;
- Making personal contact with parents and community members by phone or at special meetings;
- Making use of public service announcements and other forms of free radio, TV and newspaper advertising; and,
- Posting notices in churches, community centers and local businesses.

To determine the communication strategy or process that would be most effective for a given situation planners should ask themselves:

- Who needs to know this? Which community members or groups need to be informed?
- Are there any gaps in our plan? Are there some groups or individuals we are missing that we should be communicating with?
- Are there some existing communication networks we can tap into?

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *School Councils: A Guide for Members*, 2002.  
Ontario Ministry of Education

You may wish to include in your plan:

- Specific strategies to involve family and community members who are generally missed using other strategies;
- Ways of obtaining feedback from parents, community members, the Principal, school staff and the Board on communication strategies/processes/practices that might be improved or other strategies that might be included in your plan;
- Two to four communication priorities for the current year; and
- Ways of assessing the effectiveness of your Council's communication strategies and revising the plan for the following year.

### 3.1.5.4 Reporting on Progress

Steven Covey suggests that our effectiveness in any given activity often depends upon our understanding of the outcomes or ends we hope to achieve by engaging in that activity.

*“Begin with the end in mind.”*

Steven Covey, 1989.  
*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.* New York, New York: Fireside Press.

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Councils can focus on what they want to achieve, their “end in mind”, by beginning to create a working draft of their Annual Report during the early days of their term. Some broad categories Councils might take into account include:

- Efforts/initiatives undertaken related to each of the responsibilities of the Council including:
  - An outline of the Learning Improvement Plan including initiatives Council has undertaken as part of the Learning Improvement Plan and intended outcomes of these initiatives;
  - An outline of initiatives taken outside of the Learning Improvement Plan and intended outcomes of these initiatives; and
  - Advice provided by the Council related to school fees, fundraising and the Student Code of Conduct.
- A description of participation in consultative processes undertaken by the Council; and,
- Expenditure of funds related to the operation of the School Community Council.

As the year progresses Council's can amend their “working draft” to reflect the circumstances they encounter.

A sample format for an Annual Report is provided below.

### **School Community Council Annual Report**

*Name of School*

*Date of Submission*

1. Begin with a positive opening statement addressed to parents and the school community, including an open invitation to attend all School Community Council meetings.
2. List the names and positions of the Council including their representation (parents, students, First Nations, staff, community) and whether they are Officers of the Council.
3. Name, identify, and acknowledge the efforts and commitment of outgoing School Community Council Members from the previous year.
4. List the dates of the previous year's Council meetings, as well as any information about upcoming meetings.
5. Attach a copy of the Learning Improvement Plan and describe progress to date. Acknowledge involvement of community members and others related to each of the initiatives falling under the School Community Council's responsibility.
6. Describe progress on other initiatives undertaken by the School Community Council.
7. Describe any fundraising activities and/or school fees the School Community Council has approved. Provide a financial statement related to these activities.
8. Include a copy of the Student Code of Conduct and note any changes that Council has approved.
9. Include a financial statement describing all monies spent by Council.

### **3.1.6 Building School Community Council Capacity**

#### **3.1.6.1 Planning to Improve**

Like other levels of governance, School Community Councils are largely responsible for their own growth and improvement. Creating processes that allow Councils to assess their ongoing operations throughout the course of the year can help them keep track of opportunities for growth as well as areas that may need future attention. Councils may wish to create generic evaluation forms that can be adapted to help them evaluate their progress on each of the initiatives they undertake.

A sample evaluation form follows.

## **School Community Council Evaluation Form**

*Name of School*

*Date*

### *Reporting to Parents and the Community*

The purpose of School Community Councils is to develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth, and encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement. As one way of fulfilling our purpose the \_\_\_\_\_ School Community Council reports to parents and the community.

We are interested in your opinion about ways we are reporting that are working, areas we could improve and opportunities you think there may be for growth.

Keeping in mind our purpose:

Please describe things that you think are working well:

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Please describe areas where you think there could be improvement:

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Please describe what you see as opportunities for growth:

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Thank you for comments!

If you would like a Council Member to contact you please fill in your name, phone number/or e-mail address below:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone# and/or e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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or

If you wish to contact a Council Member regarding your comments or another matter, we can be reached at:

Councils may also wish to ask for feedback less formally such as:

- Including some time at the end of each meeting or other Council-sponsored initiative for parents and community members to comment;
- Placing a School Community Council “suggestion box” in a prominent area in the school; and,
- Creating a Council committee whose role is to routinely call parents and community members to solicit feedback on Council operations and initiatives.

After collecting feedback Council Members to may wish to ask themselves:

- What is working well?
- What areas need immediate attention?
- What areas need do we to attend to in the future?
- What opportunities are there for growth?

A chart, such as the one below may help Councils keep track of feedback and planning.

***Planning to Improve***

	<b>Immediate</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>Action Planned</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Working Well</b>				
<b>Areas Needing Attention</b>				
<b>Opportunities for Growth</b>				

A third way Councils may wish to assess their ongoing operations is by considering how their operations compare to the following characteristics related to school council effectiveness.

***Representative<sup>1</sup>***

The election process is designed to ensure that the School Community Council membership is representative. However, it may

also be necessary to take special measures to recruit Council Members that represent different segments of the school population or to create *ad hoc* committees or task forces in order to ensure that all voices have the opportunity to be heard.

### ***Clear Understanding of Purpose***

An effective School Community Council keeps to its purpose:

- to develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth; and,
- to encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes;

when conducting all Council activities.

### ***Well Defined Roles and Responsibilities***

Each School Community Council Member is aware of his/her responsibilities. Ongoing training in areas such as effective practices and teamwork are a priority.

### ***Action-Oriented Meetings***

School Community Councils are guided by well-conceived agendas. Decisions are made and plans of action developed and implemented. Actions provide evidence to Council Members and parents and community members that Council meetings are worth their time and effort.

### ***Recognition of Council Members and Others***

Each School Community Council Member has a personal sense of accomplishment and receives public recognition for his/her contributions. Council Members make sure parents and community members, school staff and others are also recognized and thanked for their contributions.

### ***Evaluation***

The School Community Council continually keeps track of its operations and evaluates contributions of all initiatives it undertakes.

Adapted from Barbara Hansen's *School Based Improvement: A Manual for Training School Councils* 1999.

### **3.1.6.3 Learning from Others**

School Community Councils may wish to look for opportunities to network with other Councils in their School Division. Networking allows Councils to share best practices, to find out about new opportunities for growth, and to feel supported and connected to others who are working towards the same aim. Networking might occur in a number of ways such as through e-mail, teleconferencing or face-to-face meetings.

The responsibility for developing networks may fall to the School Community Council Chairperson. Early in the school term, the Chairperson of the Council might send a letter to other Council Chairpersons in the area expressing the Council's wish to exchange information. Councils may also invite other Council's in their area to participate in workshops of mutual interest. Sharing information regularly with other Councils can help build mutually beneficial relationships.

### **3.1.6.2 Opportunities to Build Capacity**

Building capacity is about enhancing the ability of the School Community Council to fulfil its role and responsibilities. It is about understanding responsibilities and learning how to work together. More specifically, by being better at their job, Councils can better support improvement of student learning outcomes and the well-being of children and youth.

Councils can build capacity by attending workshops, participating in community forums and by taking time to read and discuss what they have learned. Councils can also review the feedback they have received to help them decide which opportunities may be most worthwhile.

Councils have a special responsibility to be knowledgeable about their communities and the children and youth that are served by the school. Community groups and agencies, municipal council committees, Health District programs and business community initiatives will all be of interest to School Community Councils and may be considered as learning opportunities.

### **3.1.6.4 Council Member Succession, Recruiting and Mentoring**

With the exception of the first year Councils are in operation, the term of office for School Community Council Members is two years.

In order to maintain continuity Councils will likely wish to give some thought to succession planning.

Early in their mandate Councils may wish to think about how they might go about recruiting parents and community members to fill Council vacancies that come about during a term or to stand for election the following year. One way to begin such a process is to review the current needs of the school and consider the knowledge and skills that Council Members might require to fulfil their responsibilities related to those needs.

Succession planning for School Community Council Officers is also important. These positions often include extra responsibilities and the learning curve for those new to such a position can be quite steep. Councils may wish to begin by creating a short “job description” (see “Structure and Officers” section 3.2.1) that outlines what the Officer positions entail. Current Council Officers may also consider “mentoring” those who they think may be interested in holding such positions. Mentoring might include describing their experiences related to the role and responsibilities and encouraging possible recruits to “shadow” them as they go about their duties.

The Board or School Division Administration may already have a recruitment plan and that may be of help to Councils. Councils may also wish to consider creating a general recruitment plan that describes how they will go about finding Members who are representative of the school community. The Principal of the school may be able to help the Council by providing a description of the diversity within the student body of the school. Council Members may also wish to ask themselves:

- Who belongs to our school community?
- What is the racial and ethno-cultural composition of the community?
- How will we encourage those from minority cultures or groups to consider sitting on Council?
- What might be some of the barriers community members feel related to sitting on Council?
- How will we lower those barriers?

Another way to encourage parents and community members to consider a Council position is to invite them to sit on a Council committee. This can provide them with an introduction to the way Council works and help them see what they may have to offer.

### ***Term of Office***

*The Term of Office for Members of Council is two years with no limit on the number of consecutive terms that may be served.*

*Approximately one-half of the Representative Parent and Community Members are elected each year. In the first year, one-half of the Representative Parent and Community Members should be elected for two-year terms with the remaining Representative Parent and Community Members being elected for one-year terms.*

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**Involving Hard to Reach Parents  
and Community Members<sup>1</sup>**

- Collaborate with other agencies that work with parents and community members of the population sector your Council wants involved.
- Involve grandparents and extended family members, encourage parents to bring a relative or friend to a Council meeting.
- Hold events outside the school building in accessible, non-threatening locations.
- Identify key community leaders and invite them to assist in communicating with parents and others.
- Provide translators for non-English speaking parents and community members at meetings.
- Serve refreshments at events.
- Have the school open for activities and events after hours.
- Provide a room in the school for parents and community members to get together.
- Deliver School Community Council newsletters to the home.
- Invite elders and resource people to the school and hold cultural events.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from:

L. Decker et.al. 1994 Decker, L.E. Gregg, G. A., & Decker, V.  
“Developing parent partnerships in education: The community education philosophy in action. *Community Education Journal*. 12-16.

Saskatchewan Education. 1996. Building Communities of Hope: Best practices for meeting the learning needs of at risk and Indian and Metis students: Community schools policy and conceptual framework.

Saskatchewan School Trustees Association. 1993. SSTA:  
*Indian and Metis education: 1993 forum.*

### **3.2 Building a Constitution**

One of the first steps School Community Councils will take in order to fulfil their responsibilities is to begin the process of building a Constitution. The Constitution will support them in conducting their day-to-day affairs and become a structure that provides direction for their ongoing work and how they will relate to others. Submitting their Constitution to their Division Board of Education for approval, will provide Councils with a valuable opportunity for feedback as well as contribute to the development of an open and transparent relationship between Board and Council that is based on mutual understanding.

The provincial Policy Framework for School Community Councils suggests what a Council's Constitution should include. Information about each of these areas that may be of interest to Council Members as they develop their Constitution follows. A template for building a School Community Council Constitution is included in Appendix A, Section 1.0.

#### **3.2.1 Structure and Officers**

The Provincial Policy Framework for School Community Councils states that a Council's Officers are to be elected from among its Representative Members (Parent, Community, Student and First Nations Members). Officers will include, at a minimum, a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary.

#### ***School Community Council Constitution***

- *Structure and Officers*
  - *Schedule of meetings*
  - *Means of Public Consultation and Communication*
  - *Code of Conduct*
  - *Decision-making Processes*
  - *Complaints and Concerns Procedures*
  - *Evaluating Council Operations*
-

**Guide for Roles and Responsibilities  
of Council Officers<sup>1</sup>**

The **Chairperson** will:

- conduct meetings of the Council;
- ensure that all members have input to discussion and decisions;
- prepare meeting agendas in consultation with the Principal and other Council Members;
- oversee operations of the Council;
- establish networks that support the Council; and,
- act as a spokesperson for the Council.

The **Vice-Chairperson** will;

- support the Chairperson in his/her duties, taking over when the Chairperson is unable to attend;
- perform responsibilities assigned by the Chairperson; and,
- normally become the Chairperson the following year.

The **Secretary** will;

- take minutes at Council meetings;
- receive and send correspondence on behalf of the Council;
- take charge of any official records of the Council;
- maintain a membership list of all the Members of the Council; and,
- ensure that appropriate notice is given for all meetings of the Council.

*Saskatchewan Education. 1997. Building Communities of Hope: Best practices for meeting the learning needs of at risk and Indian and Metis students: Implementation Handbook.*

Councils may also wish to include various committees within their structure. Committees can be internal and composed of School Community Council Members exclusively or be external and include other parents, community members or interested and knowledgeable individuals. By using external committees School Community Councils can encourage more general parent and community

involvement, draw on expertise of those within the school community and lighten the workload for individual Members of Council. If operated effectively, committees can make Council more productive and its decisions more representative of the school community. In all cases, committees are advisory to the Council. They should never be empowered to make independent decisions that would impact on the work of the Council and committee members must know that Council may or may not accept their advice.

Councils may wish to have longer-term committees (standing committees) such as a fundraising committee, parent volunteering committee or committees that are created to address some aspect of the Learning Improvement Plan. Councils may also wish to create shorter-term committees (ad hoc) committees to address immediate issues.

Councils should develop a committee communication/reporting strategy that ensures the valuable work committees do on behalf of the School Community Council is taken into account.

### **Making Committees Effective**

#### **Do**

- provide committees with clearly specified operating guidelines or terms of reference
- ensure committees have an action plan with target dates for completion of activities
- request regular progress reports, and provide for Council involvement at key decision points
- evaluate the committee's performance
- recognize members' efforts

#### **Do Not**

- create committees for work that can be more effectively done by one person with expertise in the area
- make the committee too large to work effectively
- arbitrarily change a committee's mandate part way through its work plan

Vista School District Handbook for School Councils

<http://www.k12.nf.ca/vista/schoolcouncils/councilhandbook/operationofsc.html>

For more information related to supporting individual Council Members please see Appendix A, Section 2.0.

### **3.2.2 Schedule of Meetings**

School Community Councils must meet at least five times annually as well as hold an Annual Meeting. Most Councils will find that they should meet once a month during the school year to conduct their business and deal with requests for advice in a timely manner. Allowance should also be made for special meetings including any that may be called by the parents of students in the school.

For information on running effective meetings see Appendix A, Section 3.0.

### **3.2.3 Means of Public Consultation and Communication**

School Community Councils will need to decide what methods they will use to consult with and inform their public regarding relevant Council issues. Boards and their administrative officers may provide Councils with policy or operational procedures in this respect. Some examples<sup>1</sup> of communication avenues follow:

#### ***Written Communication***

Information that requires no clarification or discussion can be presented through posters, web-sites, public notices, e-mail, newsletters, memos and information pamphlets. All written communication should provide a contact name and number for follow up questions.

#### ***Verbal Communication***

Presentations are the best form of providing information that is complex. You may wish to include presentations as a regular part of a meeting. If you wish to reach a broader audience consider selecting knowledgeable Council Members to speak to a variety of audiences or organizing special meetings where specific issues can be presented.

#### ***Media Coverage***

Many radio stations, cable television networks and newspapers provide public service announcements free of charge. In communities served by a number of schools, Councils could consider approaching media as a group and discussing the possibility of regular coverage.

### *Information Networks*

Informal networks made up of people who talk to each other regularly and exchange information should also be considered. The key is to make sure the information you wish to communicate is clear and readily available. More formal networks such as telephone trees are also useful for spreading information about events or activities.

<sup>1</sup> Vista School District Handbook for School Councils, Clarenville, Newfoundland  
URL <http://www.k12.nf.ca/vista/schoolcouncils/councilhandbook/makingcouncilwork.html>

### **3.2.4 Council Code of Conduct**

School Community Councils will need to develop a Code of Conduct that fosters positive, cooperative, student focused and forward-looking relationships among parents, the school and community. Ideally, the Council's Code of Conduct should outline the Council's expectations of its Members and guide behavior. Councils may also wish to include reference to a guideline regarding Conflict of Interest in their Code of Conduct.

#### **A School Council Member shall<sup>1</sup>:**

- Be guided by the overall vision and purpose of School Community Councils.
- Practice the highest standards of honesty and integrity.
- Recognize and respect each member of the school community.
- Encourage a positive atmosphere where individual contributions are encouraged and valued.
- Contribute to consensus building.
- Consider the best interests of all students.
- Use the appropriate communication channels when questions or concerns arise.
- Declare any conflict of interest.
- Endeavour to be familiar with school and Division policies and operating practices and act in accordance with them.

<sup>1</sup> Revelstoke School Planning Council,  
[http://www.sd19.bc.ca/pac\\_spc](http://www.sd19.bc.ca/pac_spc)

### A Suggested Practice for Establishing a Code of Conduct

- Read examples of School Council Codes of Conduct.
- Individually write your suggestions regarding principles that describe your expectations of School Community Council Members and that might help guide Council Member's behavior.
- Record all suggestions on a flip chart.
- Identify common ideas or themes.
- Translate these themes/ideas into statements to create a draft of your Council's Code of Conduct.
- Review your draft making any changes Council Members think necessary.
- Approve a motion to adopt your Code of Conduct.

For examples of Codes of Conduct/Ethics please see Appendix A, Section 4.0.

### 3.2.5 Conflict of Interest Guideline

A conflict of interest for a School Community Council Member is any situation in which the individual's private interests may be incompatible or in conflict with his/her Council responsibilities.

Conflict of interest guidelines are often directed towards situations in which a member of a decision-making group may be in a position to make decisions that would be of financial benefit to the member or his or her relatives. While these situations are not likely to occur in the operation of School Community Councils, a conflict of interest may exist whether or not a monetary advantage has been or may be conferred on the Council Member or his or her family.

If a School Community Council Member finds him/herself in a situation where members of their family, or business entities in which they have an interest, stand to benefit either directly or indirectly by a decision made by the Council that Member could be considered to be in a conflict of interest position.

A conflict of interest may be actual, perceived, or potential:

- *Actual:* When a School Community Council Member has a private interest that is sufficiently connected to his or her duties and responsibilities as a Council Member that it influences the exercise of his or her duties and/or responsibilities.

- *Perceived:* When reasonably well-informed persons could reasonably believe that a Council Member has a conflict of interest, even where, in fact, there is no real conflict of interest.
- *Potential:* When a Council Member has a private interest that could affect his or her decision about matters proposed for discussion.

School Community Councils will want to decide what kind of guideline they wish to include in their Constitution regarding conflict of interest.

### **3.2.6 Decision-Making Processes**

The School Community Council will be called on to make many kinds of decisions in the course of its operation. Two common decision-making models are Majority Vote and Consensus. Councils may wish to use one model for one set of circumstances and another for another set of circumstances. Providing a description of your preferred decision-making model or models in your Constitution will guide Council Members in their decision-making. The chart below provides a short description of each model.

## School Community Councils

Type of Decision-Making	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>Majority Vote Model</b></p> <p>The issue is discussed and a vote is taken. The majority vote decides the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some opportunity for modification during discussion.</li> <li>• Clear decision is made.</li> <li>• Can be a quick and efficient way to decide a clear-cut issue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can create a “win/lose” situation and some participants may be dissatisfied.</li> <li>• Requires Council Members, and especially the Chairperson, to understand the “Rules of Order” for voting.</li> <li>• Can negatively affect team building.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consensus Building Model</b></p> <p>Consensus does not necessarily mean that all parties agree, but that all can live with a decision for the sake of the group’s ability to move forward. It requires that all Members listen to each other’s opinions and try to find solutions to problems and differences. Consensus will almost always involve compromise and can release a group to move beyond individual wants to determining and pursuing shared needs. Consensus does not necessarily mean that all parties agree, but that all <i>can live with a decision</i> made for the sake of the group’s ability to move forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures all Council Members have an effective voice.</li> <li>• Builds on differing perspectives and values.</li> <li>• Allows for flexibility in arriving at solutions.</li> <li>• Can build respect for differing values and viewpoints.</li> <li>• Can lead to better informed, more creative, balanced and enduring decisions.</li> <li>• Ensures the final decision has the support of the entire Council.</li> </ul> <p>If unsuccessful, it allows for decision-making by vote.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires time, a clear process, skill and the full participation of all Members.</li> <li>• If Council is operating by pure consensus, the status quo will continue whenever there is a stalemate.</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from Saskatchewan Education. 1997. <i>Building Communities of Hope: Best practices for meeting the learning needs of at risk and Indian and Metis students: Implementation Handbook.</i></p>

It is very likely that Councils will need to make some decisions by majority vote. A decision will need to be made about which Council Members vote, what constitutes a majority of votes and how abstentions will be counted. School Division operational procedure may set this out for all Councils in the Division but, in the absence of procedure, Councils may wish to set their own rules for voting. It is advisable that the Principal, teacher and other Council Members who may be employed by the School Division not vote. They should, however, be expected to participate in the discussions and provide their advice.

For more information on decision-making models see Appendix A, Section 5.0.

### **3.2.7 Addressing Complaints/Concerns and Resolving Conflict**

School Community Councils will need to consider how they will go about dealing with complaints or concerns and how they will resolve conflicts. The two sections below are designed to help Councils to consider what guidelines they may wish to include in their Constitutions regarding these situations.

#### **3.2.7.1 Complaints and Concerns Procedures**

School Community Councils are new. How they will work, what impact they will have and how they will fit with the other parts of the “system” are questions that don’t have immediate answers. However, Councils can begin to shape the answers positively by paying close attention to their interactions with others and especially within the school and community.

The Principal, Vice Principal, teachers and other staff in the school all have carefully developed roles and responsibilities. For example, the Principal is responsible for assigning students to classrooms. This is a legislated responsibility; no one else including the Board of Education can make these decisions. The Board, Director of Education, parents and certainly individual teachers have ideas about how the decision should be made, and they should be listened to and their suggestions considered, but ultimately the Principal must decide which children will be in what classrooms.

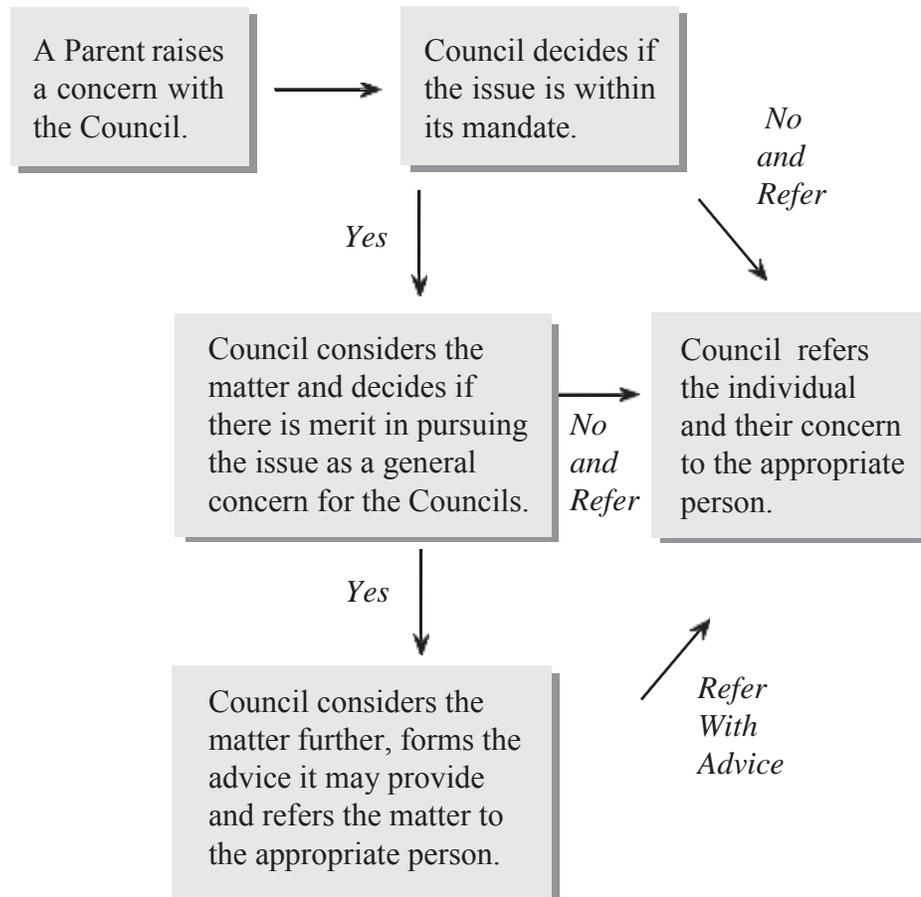
Similarly, teachers decide about the instructional approach to be used in their classroom. Principals and parents have valuable ideas about instructional approaches and they should be considered but the classroom teacher must make the final decision. This is one of their

professional responsibilities. The duties of Principals and teachers are set out in legislation, may appear in collective agreements and may be guided by School Division governing policy statements and operational procedures.

And of course parents are appropriately responsible for the vast majority of decisions that affect their children. There is also no shortage of advice for parents but, in the end, they must make the decisions in their view of their children’s best interest.

These different responsibilities must be respected. But from time to time individuals may express concern about the decisions that are made. These concerns may be expressed to the School Community Council and once there the Council must sort through how it should be dealt with, if at all. The flow chart on the following page sets out questions the Council might ask itself to decide how the matter should be addressed.

***Dealing with a Parent Concern***



How things fit together is important. More information about the system as a whole can be obtained from Saskatchewan educational websites of the Department of Learning, League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, Saskatchewan Association of School Councils, Saskatchewan School Boards Association and Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

The questions below are designed to help Councils think about what kind of guidelines they wish to include in their Constitution to direct them in dealing with complaints or concerns.

- What kinds of complaints/concerns does the School Community Council have the authority and responsibility to deal with?

*Sample guideline on Handling Complaints or Concerns:*

Any matter concerning an individual student or staff member must be directed to the teacher or Principal. It is not the responsibility of the School Community Council to deal with concerns or complaints about individuals other than to direct the concern to the appropriate individual.

- How will Councils deal with informal and more formal complaints or concerns regarding the operation and responsibilities of the School Community Council?

*Sample guidelines on Handling Complaints or Concerns:*

Members of the School Community Council need to exercise flexibility when responding to concerns and complaints related to the operations and responsibilities of Councils. Generally, complaints and concerns fall into two categories:

*Informal Complaint or Concern Procedure*

Provided Council Members are comfortable in their knowledge and feel at ease expressing themselves, concerns or questions about Council initiatives or activities expressed informally to members of the Council may be addressed immediately by the Council Member. If Council Members are unsure of the appropriate response, they should say so but indicate that they will check and get back to the individual. If such a commitment is made the Council Member must follow through. After responding to the complaint or concern Council Members should always ask if their response has been satisfactory. If the individual is not satisfied with the response, the Council Member should explain how the

*“Conflict is a natural part of human existence. In a structured environment, where mutual trust and respect prevail, it can be a positive force. It can encourage people to find creative solutions, clarify an issue, increase involvement of members, encourage growth, and strengthen relationships. However, conflict also has an ugly side. Left uncontrolled, it can divert energy from the group, destroy morale, polarize individuals, deepen differences, obstruct progress, and create suspicion and distrust.”*

Ontario Ministry  
of Education. 2002.  
*School Councils: A Guide  
for Members*

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concern or complaint could be brought to the attention of the Council in a more formal manner.

Councils may wish to keep a record of informal complaints or concerns as patterns may provide them with valuable information in evaluating their operations.

### *Formal Complaint or Concern Procedure*

Concerns or complaints can be brought to the attention of the School Community Council in a formal manner in writing or by presenting the concern/complaint at a School Community Council meeting. Council will provide a written response regarding how they have or will address the concern or complaint.

### **3.2.7.2 Conflict Resolution**

A formal conflict resolution procedure can provide School Community Councils with a tool to address both internal conflict, which may occur among individuals within the Council, and external conflict that may occur between the Council and individuals, groups or organizations outside of the Council. Below you will find some guidelines that may help Council Members develop an effective conflict resolution procedure.

#### *Conflict Resolution Guidelines<sup>1</sup>*

Any conflict resolution procedure:

- Puts the interests and welfare of children and youth above all other issues;
- Is structured to ensure that both parties have a fair opportunity to present their point of view; and,
- Is as simple and inexpensive to administer as possible.

Councils may wish to coordinate its conflict resolution procedures with that of the School Division. For more information on steps to resolve conflict, see Appendix A, Section 6.0.

Adapted from Saskatchewan Education. 1996. *Building Communities of Hope: Best practices for meeting the learning needs of at risk and Indian and Metis students: Community schools policy and conceptual framework.*

### **3.2.7.3 Evaluating Council Operations**

Evaluation of an organization’s operations helps them focus on what is needed, what they are doing well, and what they are now doing that needs to be improved. Evaluation doesn’t have to be complicated.

Councils can focus on both informal and formal methods as they consider what to include in their evaluation process.

Formal methods:

- Evaluation forms distributed to Members of Council, students, parents, school staff, Board and community members. Comments might be encouraged in a number of broad categories related to general Council meeting operation such as, encouraging parent and community involvement, use of committees, Council Communication channels and decision-making.
- Set aside a specific time to discuss Council operations in each area included in the Constitution. Address *pro's* and *con's* of current practice and identify suggestions for the future.

Informal methods:

- Council Members take a few minutes at the end of each meeting to review Council operations and comment on positives and areas that may need attention.
- Listen to the comments of parents, school staff, students, community members and Board of Education Members. You might ask, “How are we doing? What do you like? What concerns do you have?”

Regardless of the approach, Councils must not become defensive. Councils can expect to have critics and this should be taken in stride. Sometimes critics have good ideas that can be used to improve operations. But they are not always right and sometimes don't have all of the information needed to make a good judgment about a situation. Councils can strive be respectful of parents and community members, take what they say into consideration but always make their decisions in the best interests of all students and their learning.

An example of an evaluation form for evaluating Council operations can be found in Appendix A, Section 7.0