

1.0 School Community Councils Background

Chapter 1.0 of the Handbook provides an overview of the School Community Council framework. It includes:

- A brief outline of the background that led to the creation of the framework;
- A description of the vision and purpose and roles and responsibilities of Councils;
- Expectations related to Council relationships with other; Saskatchewan education organizations and individuals; and
- A list of general principles that may help guide Councils in their work.

Saskatchewan Tradition of Parent and Community Engagement

Saskatchewan has a long history of encouraging and facilitating parent and community engagement in schools. In our province's early days, local governance of schools was largely the responsibility of the parents and other community members. Over 5,000 school districts were formed across the province and each school board built and operated their own school. Schools were very close to their communities but expectations were different. Although education was valued, the pressures of needing to work either in the home, on the farm or in the cities meant most students did not go on to high school. As the population increased and schools grew in size, and as educational expectations changed, a new system of governance began to evolve. School districts in rural Saskatchewan began to join together to offer high school education. The first major reorganization of the education system came in 1944 when rural, village and town districts were amalgamated into larger units of administration. District Boards of Trustees, or Local Boards as they came to be called, were retained for each school attendance area in rural Saskatchewan. This was to maintain a supportive relationship between the school and community and to provide opportunities for parent and community involvement in school-level decision-making.

In 1978 *The Education Act, 1995* was first written to combine a number of school and education related Acts into a single piece of legislation. Our province's commitment to meaningful parent and community involvement was evident in the inclusion within *The Act* of provision for the establishment of Local School Advisory Committees in the cities to complement the District Boards of Trustees in rural Saskatchewan. When the Division scolaire francophone was established in 2001, Conseils d'écoles were put in place at each of the schools of the Division. The Conseils are very similar to District Boards of Trustees

Schools and Communities Today

Currently, in addition to those defined in *The Education Act, 1995*, there is an array of other structures in place that encourage and facilitate parent and community involvement in schools. These include Community School Councils, parent councils, and Home and School Associations. Other committees such as School^{PLUS} Facilitation Teams and Health Education Liaison Committees have also been established at the school and community level to provide support for school improvement planning and curriculum initiatives.

As our history suggests Saskatchewan's educational community has recognized the value and importance of family and community engagement. Today we can see evidence of this in the Community Schools Program and School^{PLUS} initiatives that continue to promote authentic parent and community engagement. While these initiatives are progressive, there is some concern that such efforts have not always ensured consistent practice across the province. There are also questions related to whether parents and community members are involved in activities that will have the greatest impact on student learning.

The recent School Division restructuring efforts have provided the impetus for a review of current structures for parent and community involvement in schools. In early 2005, the Minister of Learning appointed The Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel to review current practice and develop a framework for local accountability and community involvement. The Panel's primary task was to describe a framework for a local governance entity that would encourage meaningful engagement of parents and community members at the school level.

After reviewing literature, conducting province wide consultations, and much deliberation, the Panel recommended that the role parents,

Community Schools were established in communities and schools less able to support children and youth. The objective was to improve student learning success and to better engage parents and the community. Community School Councils were put in place to guide the programming and special initiatives in those schools. There are 98 Community Schools in Saskatchewan. School Divisions may want to explore any unique transition issues associated with Community Schools.

families and community members play in the education of children be supported and reaffirmed through the creation of School Community Councils, a new kind of structure at the school and community level.

1.2 Purpose and Vision

1.2.1 Purpose

School Community Councils will help to strengthen the capacity of schools to improve children's learning. By helping families to support their children's learning and by gathering the resources of the community to ensure student well-being Councils will make a valued contribution to the learning success of Saskatchewan students. School Community Councils replace all other entities as defined in legislation.

School Community Councils are established within the authority of Boards of Education to ensure alignment of accountability, authority and responsibility among the schools of the Division.

The purpose of the School Community Council 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 in school planning and improvement processes.

1.2.2 The Vision for School Community Councils

School Community Councils are an essential feature of educational planning and decision-making. They are part of the school system and are a primary link between the home, community and school. The Vision for School Community Councils guides their formation, initiatives and evaluation.

The School Community Council is an integral, purposeful and valued component of School Division governance.

The School Community Council is:

- created through an election process;
- integrated into the Board of Education decision-making processes; and
- guided by common standards included in legislation. Boards of Education address flexibility through policy and procedure.

School Community Councils align with Saskatchewan's vision of School^{PLUS}, and current provincial initiatives in education.

They are an integral, purposeful and valued component of School Division governance.

Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, 2005

The School Community Council is inclusive of the community and representative of the students in the school.

The School Community Council:

- Membership is representative of students in the school; and
- advisory positions are included to support the implementation of School^{PLUS}.

The School Community Council roles are clear and well understood.

The School Community Council:

- develops shared responsibility for learning success and well-being of children and youth;
- encourages and facilitates parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes; and,
- provides guidance and direction from a lay perspective to the school, the Board and community organizations and agencies.

The School Community Council responsibilities address key matters that make a difference in student learning and well-being.

The School Community Council:

- focuses its attention on the areas of the Learning Improvement Plan where the parent/community perspective and efforts are most appropriate and needed; and,
- monitors its activities to support continuous improvement in the areas of student learning and well-being.

The School Community Council aligns its work with Provincial and Division goals and initiatives.

The School Community Council:

- aligns its work with the Provincial overarching accountability framework and focuses on related Division goals and initiatives; and,
- aligns its work with Provincial and Division learning and well-being outcomes for students.

The School Community Council is accountable, transparent and responsive in its relationship with parents and school community.

The School Community Council:

- actively engages parents and community members in matters of concern related to public education;

- reflects the nature of the community in which it is situated by collecting and sharing appropriate information with others; and,
- regularly reports on its activities to parents, the school, and the community.

1.2.3 School Community Councils at a Glance

- Advisory bodies established at each school focused on enhancing student learning and well-being.
- Membership includes:

Representative Members:

- 5 – 9 Parent and community members
- First Nations representative(s)
- 1 or 2 high school students

Permanent Members:

- Principal or designate
- Teacher
- Designated others

- Responsibilities include, to:
 - **Understand** parent, student and public economic, social and health conditions and needs and their aspirations for child and youth learning and well-being and to become knowledgeable about resources and supports for the school, parents and community;
 - **Develop and recommend** a Learning Improvement Plan, jointly and in cooperation with the Principal and staff of the school, for approval to the Board of Education;
 - **Provide advice and represent** the parents and community to:
 - the Board of Education on policies, programs and educational service delivery decisions, including grade discontinuance, school closure, religious observances and language of instruction;
 - the school on its programs and operations;
 - 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.
 - **Take action** to engage parents and community, to develop shared responsibility for child and youth learning and well-being, and to fulfil initiatives assigned it within the Learning Improvement Plan;

- **Report** 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
- **Participate** in opportunities to develop the capacity of the School Community Council to fulfil these responsibilities.

School Community Councils are advisory bodies focused on student learning and well-being and always on the best interest of all students. Success will hinge on their ability to engage all parents in the education of their children.

1.3 Working Together: Roles and Relationships

The Council itself...

Responsibility for student learning success and well-being is shared among the home, community and school. The role of the Council is to support each in making their contribution to student learning.

As a valued and integral component of School Division governance, School Community Councils attend to their relationships with others who work within the system. In respect to their relationships with others, Councils will likely want to consider how they will relate to the Principal of the school, School Division Administrators and Members of the Board of Education.

Councils can also ask themselves how they will develop a culture of trust and respect where the contributions of both lay and professional participants are held in high regard. As prime contributors to the culture of the school, Councils may wish to consider how they can foster positive student focused and forward looking relationships among parents, the school and the community.

The School Principal...

School Principals play a vital role in the establishment and ongoing success of School Community Councils. By demonstrating through their interactions with staff, students, parents and others that they believe in and support the development of an open and inviting school climate, Principals are positive role models. Councils may also look to Principals to identify issues or problems and to address and provide information to support Council decision-making.

Relationships among parents, schools and communities are important. Ken Leithwood, a Canadian researcher and teacher, recently suggested these educational partners “co-produce” student learning.

K. Leithwood, 2004.
The Road to Success. Orbit
Vol. 34, No.3, p 1.

The Board of Education...

Boards of Education can help Councils develop strong relationships with others by providing clear expectations, practical support and guidance. By establishing avenues for communication and responding in a clear and timely fashion to Council requests, Boards can help create a positive working relationship. Boards are also responsible for providing ongoing orientation, training, development and networking for School Community Councils. This includes providing members of the school leadership team with professional development and networking opportunities, administrative release time and clerical support as they work on the establishment and operation of School Community Councils. It is also the responsibility of each Board to establish a School Division contact with the Senior Administration for each Council. This School Division Administrator will help ensure the successful implementation and operation of the Council and provide advice, support and communication assistance.

1.3.1 Educational Relationships in Saskatchewan

In December of 2002, the Joint Committee on Good Practices and Dispute Resolution published their report to the Parties to the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Department of Learning and Saskatchewan School Boards Association). In their report, the Committee set out a number of guiding principles, values and beliefs related to the ongoing development of positive relationships between educational partners in Saskatchewan. The Committee's work may provide a helpful understanding of the desired relationships that School Community Councils might strive for.

Good Practice and Dispute Resolution Principles and Values

*Report of the Joint Committee of the Parties
to the Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2002*

The following principles and values undergird public education in Saskatchewan. (It is encouraged)...that all of the educational stakeholder organizations do everything within their power to promote an approach to leadership and school administration that is consistent with a Community School philosophy that:

- *seeks to be collaborative, rather than adversarial;*
- *seeks to promote the development of staff rather than merely exercising control;*
- *seeks to share power and value team work;*
- *possesses negotiating and mediation skills;*

The committee recognizes that the human part of the educative process, the daily face-to-face contact with myriad players, reflects the way results may be achieved, the way participants in the enterprise perceive their value to an organization, and their perceptions of the way they themselves are valued by others.

*Report of the Joint
Committee of the Parties to
the Provincial Collective
Bargaining Agreement, 2002*

Strategies that support families include:
demonstrating active School Division support; honouring all families' hopes and aspirations for their children; acknowledging commonalities and differences among students and families; strengthening the capacity of school staffs to work well with families; making outreach a priority so that all families can be involved at school as well as at home; and, recognizing that it takes time to build trust.

A.Henderson, and K. Mapp, 2002. "Annual Synthesis. A New Wave of Evidence: The impact of school family and community connections on student achievement", Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas.

- *seeks the common interest base in an attempt to resolve conflict;*
- *values morale and organizational climate;*
- *finds ways to meaningfully consult student opinion and attempts to adapt the school program in light of this input;*
- *values parents as partners in the education of children; and*
- *sees the community as a resource and seeks ways to incorporate these resources in the life of the school.*

1.3.2 School Community Council Guiding Principles

In light of the work done by the Joint Committee on Good Practices and Dispute Resolution, and taking into consideration the roles and responsibilities of School Community Councils, the following "guiding principles" are suggested for School Community Council consideration.

School Community Council Guiding Principles

Representative

School Community Councils are an integral component of School Division governance. They strive through their membership and their actions to be representative of all students attending the school.

Inclusive

School Community Councils recognize all members of the school community can make a difference in the learning success and well-being of children and youth. In their activities, School Community Councils engage in processes to ensure all voices in the school community are heard and all perspectives are taken into account.

Respectful

School Community Councils understand school communities are complex environments. Councils recognize the importance of both lay and professional perspectives within the community and strive to appreciate all viewpoints.

Trustworthy

School Community Councils conduct their affairs in an open and transparent manner. Councils honour the right to privacy of individuals and treat all information they are privy to with appropriate discretion and sensitivity.

Responsible

School Community 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 of Education, the school Principal, school staff and others. In addition to this, Councils respond to requests for guidance and direction, by the Board of Education, school Principal and other community agencies and organizations that support children and youth.

Effective

School Community Councils focus their attention and efforts on key matters that make a difference in student learning and well-being. Keeping in mind their understandings related to their own unique school communities, Councils align their work with provincial and School Division goals and initiatives related to student learning and well-being outcomes.

Committed

School Community 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 to the public they represent and the Board of Education on their progress.