

## **5.0 Principal's Role on the School Community Council**

### **5.1 A Focus on Relationships**

*Chapter 5.0 highlights the special role and responsibilities the Principal or designate may have related to working with and supporting the School Community Council. Included are:*

- *Relationships between the Council and Principal;*
- *Development of the capacity of the Council; and,*
- *Considerations for Principals' self-reflection.*

Within the School Community Council framework, the Principal of the school is not only a Permanent Member of the School Community Council s/he also plays an important role in developing a school climate that is open and inviting to parents and community members. While specific responsibilities associated with the Principal's role may vary among School Divisions or types of school, in general, Principals have the central role in promoting and supporting the ongoing development of School Community Councils.

Principals can promote Council development by:

- encouraging parent and community participation in the Council election process;
- providing guidance in the creation of the School Community Council Constitution; and,
- assisting Councils with the development of a communication plan.

Principals can support the ongoing development of School Community Councils by:

- providing necessary advice and information related to the school community;
- seeking the Council's advice on school-level decisions;
- providing information related to Council's approval of fundraising activities and school fees and the Student Code of Conduct; and,
- taking a leadership role in the development of the Learning Improvement Plan.

### **5.2 Promoting School Community Council Development**

#### **5.2.1 The School Community Council Elections**

It is the responsibility of the School Division to name an individual, other than the Principal of the school, as an Election Supervisor for the purpose of nomination and election of the School Community Council (please see guidelines in the *Handbook for Boards of Education and Administrators*). However, Principals may be given some responsibility for ensuring the election process runs smoothly. Such responsibilities may include arranging the Annual Meeting as well as ensuring election processes are in place.

#### **5.2.2 Arranging for the Annual Meeting**

It is important that all parents and community members are informed ahead of time of the Annual Meeting, understand the importance of their attendance and feel comfortable attending and participating in Council elections. Important details related to the Annual Meeting that Principals may wish to consider include:

- estimating participation and advising the Election Supervisor of suitable venues (a space where participants feel welcome and is large enough to accommodate all participants);
- working with the Election Supervisor to develop a strategy to encourage participation;
- working with the Election Supervisor to determine ways to publicize the meeting date (general communication avenues such as public media as well as through school communication networks); and,
- encouraging participation in the nomination process through “shoulder tapping” and networking.

Responsibilities associated with the election processes Principals may be asked to ensure are in place may include:

- providing nomination forms;
- arranging for scrutineering;
- arranging for printing and counting of ballots;
- providing a procedure for resolution of disputes; and
- explaining School Division governing policy or operational procedure on Council elections.

### **5.2.3 Guidance in Developing the Constitution**

School Community Councils may initially require guidance in the development of their Constitution. While the provincial Policy Framework for School Community Councils provides suggestions regarding what a Constitution should include, a Principal's leadership experience can be a valuable asset as Councils go about the work of creating their Council Constitution. By sitting in on initial Constitution development meetings Principals can provide moral support and common sense guidance should Councils run into difficulty. Principals may also wish to offer direct support by providing examples of School Division policy or operational procedure in areas such as conflict of interest and resolving conflict and by providing descriptions of existing groups within the school community that Councils may wish to include as standing committees.

*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:*

*Providing advice and approval on certain matters, including:*

- *advice to the school on school programs and operations;*
  - *advice to organizations, agencies and governments on the learning and well-being needs of children and youth.*
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### **5.2.4 Development of a Communication Plan**

It is crucial that the School Community Council and the Principal jointly decide upon strategies that allow for open and honest two-way communication. Principals will likely already be aware of effective communication channels that exist within the school community and may also have "tried and true" communication strategies they have found to be effective. Sharing their ideas and experiences with Councils will be of great help to Councils as they are initially forming. It is also vitally important that the Principal and the Council Chairperson develop workable communication channels and strategies. Principals may wish to meet with Council Chairpersons early in their term to determine how these can be established. Some suggestions include:

- finding a regular, mutually agreeable time during the week when the Principal and School Community Council Chairperson can meet and review issues;
- setting up school "mail-boxes" for Council and the Principal where non-urgent mail can be directed;
- establishing a plan for two-way communication of urgent information; and,
- arranging a link to the School Community Council on the school web-site.

### 5.2.5 Supporting Ongoing Council Development

#### 5.2.5.1 Providing Advice and Information Related to the School Community

Principals can help Councils develop positive relationships with the school community by providing them with information related to the policies, practices and routines of the school. Providing Councils with an up-to-date calendar of school events will help with their planning and ensure that Council events and general school events do not interfere with one another. As part of the orientation to their role, new Councils will also need to develop some understanding of the context of their school. Principals can help Councils by sharing current information on topics such as:

- school policies regarding volunteers;
- school policies regarding home-work, absenteeism, field trips, and other student-related matters;
- the roles and responsibilities of key school personnel, including the Principal, Vice Principal, janitor, lunch and playground supervisors, other support staff and interagency personnel (for example Community School Coordinators, School Resource Officers and Social Workers);
- a profile of the school including the range of programs offered in the school, the learning needs of students, school resources including facilities, number of school staff, demographic and other school community contextual variables. For more information on creating school profiles see: *Online Learning for Administrators Planning for More Successful Schools: Creating School Profiles*  
[http://www.saskschools.ca/curr\\_content/online\\_admin/successful/profiles/](http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/online_admin/successful/profiles/)
- current school goals and targets for achievement;
- expectations related to student conduct and behavior;
- school building safety guidelines including emergency plans; and,
- guidelines regarding information sharing.

#### 5.2.5.2 Seeking Advice

As School Community Councils go about fulfilling their responsibilities, their understanding of the school and the school community will deepen. Councils will then be able to provide Principals with valuable information related to the needs and aspirations of the community regarding student learning and well-being as well as possible available resources and supports that exist

within the community. Principals may wish to encourage information sharing by providing Councils with examples of avenues or areas of advice that they believe would be helpful. Examples include:

- advice related to extra-curricular programs of the school;
- advice related to certain aspects of the curriculum such as family-life;
- advice regarding supports and enhancements to the learning program; and,
- advice related to e-learning.

Principals may also wish to encourage Councils to share information and advice related to the learning and well-being needs of children and youth with organizations, agencies and governments by:

- providing Councils with contact information related to key individuals in agencies, organizations and government; and,
- requesting that Council Members be included in meetings with key individuals within organizations, agencies and government.

### **5.2.5.3 Providing Information related to Council's Approval of Fundraising Activities, School Fees and the Student Code of Conduct**

The Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel suggested in their Report to the Minister that including approval of fundraising activities, school fees and the Student Code of Conduct within the School Community Council's responsibilities may be seen as a means to enhance transparency and public accountability. It is understood that approval is provided within the context of Board of Education governing policy and administrative operational procedure. In this regard Principals may wish to provide Councils with information related to:

- Division policy and operational procedure on school fees and fundraising;
- a history of fundraising initiatives and how they relate to school goals and objectives;
- a history of school fees and how they relate to school goals and objectives; and,
- a copy of the existing Student Code of Conduct including the reasoning that is behind inclusion of each item of the Code.

*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 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.*

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### 5.2.5.4 Taking a Leadership Role in the Development of the Learning Improvement Plan

In 2006, the Provincial Government identified four educational priorities believed to be critical to the Province's future and created a framework, the Continuous Improvement Framework, to assist School Divisions in achieving positive outcomes in each of these areas. The four provincial priorities are:

- Higher levels of literacy and student achievement;
- Equitable opportunities for all students;
- Smooth transitions into and through the system; and,
- Strong system-wide accountability and governance.

At the school level, it is expected that the School Community Council will collaborate with the school Principal and school staff in the development of a local Learning Improvement Plan. The Learning Improvement Plan will align with the Division Continuous Improvement Plan and address Provincial and Division priorities while enabling local flexibility.

It is expected that Principals will take a leadership role in the development of the Learning Improvement Plan. In order to familiarize Councils with the process of developing a plan such as the Learning Improvement Plan, a description of processes that might be assist in developing and approving the Learning Improvement Plan is included in this Handbook (see Section 3.1.2). Other school improvement plan guides, developed especially for Principals can be found at:

- On-Line Learning for Administrators: *Planning for a More Successful School - School Goals Workshop*  
[http://www.saskschools.ca/curr\\_content/online\\_admin/leadership/goals/index.html](http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/online_admin/leadership/goals/index.html)
- *A Significant Journey: A Saskatchewan Resource for the Principalship.*  
[http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/leg\\_school\\_admin/administrators/principalship/intro.shtml](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/leg_school_admin/administrators/principalship/intro.shtml)

### 5.3 Self-Reflection for Principals

Successful educational practitioners reflect on their practices and actions. The following questions may help Principals reflect on their leadership role and practices in their work with the School Community Council. The questions below are sample questions<sup>1</sup>. Principals are encouraged to create their own chart using questions that are meaningful to their particular circumstance.

***Self-Assessment***

***Reflections***

1. Am I sharing and reviewing the school's expectations and standards with parents and the community?  
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2. Am I involving parents and the community in developing and amending or modifying the expectations, standards and policies for the school?  
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3. Am I honest and forthcoming in sharing information about the school's challenges?  
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4. Am I encouraging school council discussions and reflections aimed at developing strategies to address challenges faced by the school?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
5. Am I encouraging and providing resources to parents so that they can participate in meaningful activities that assist them in better supporting their child's learning?  
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6. Am I using effective two-way communication methods?  
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7. Am I making allowances for the language and cultural barriers facing some of the parents?  
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8. Am I listening carefully to parents and community members?  
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9. Am I doing all that I can to engage the community?  
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10. Am I reaching out to those who are not often involved in the school and its activities?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

***Self-Assessment***

***Reflections***

- 11. Am I sharing leadership and decision-making appropriately?
- 12. Am I giving community members a true voice at the decision-making table?
- 13. Am I encouraging parents to become meaningfully involved in their child 's learning?
- 14. Am I connecting students and their families to the health and social services they need?

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*<sup>1</sup>Alberta Learning. A Principal's Guide to Working Effectively with Your School Council*  
[http://www.teachingquality.ab.ca/resources/PrGuide\\_SchCouncils.pdf](http://www.teachingquality.ab.ca/resources/PrGuide_SchCouncils.pdf)