



SCHOOL COUNCIL HANDBOOK

This quick reference guide has been developed to help school council members fulfill their mandate in the most effective and efficient manner.

The guide offers a brief outline of the regulations governing school councils and what they mean for councils, principals and the Rainy River District School Board. It explains the roles and responsibilities of each partner and outlines the areas in which the Board and principals are required to consult with school councils.

Note: O.Reg.612/00 was amended by O.Reg 330/10 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees. There are no changes to the O.Reg 612/00 section of O.Reg. 330/10 so all O.Reg. 612/00 references in this document apply.

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A Brief History of School Councils

School councils play a vital role in the education system in Ontario. They provide a forum through which parents/guardians and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.

In April 1995, the Ministry of Education and Training issued *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122: School Board Policies on School Councils*, which required boards to develop policies that would establish school councils in each school in their jurisdiction by June 1996. This *PPM 122* outlined the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils.

In 1997, the *Education Quality Improvement Act* mandated that there be school councils in all publicly funded schools in Ontario.

In 1998, the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) conducted focus groups throughout Ontario and conducted research on the work of school councils. The EIC findings concluded that most parents/guardians wanted their school councils to remain advisory bodies while having opportunities for meaningful input and an ability to influence decisions that would affect their children and their local schools. As well, the feedback stated that parents/guardians wanted their advisory role to be clear, consistent and province wide. At the same time, they wanted school boards and principals to be clear about their roles and responsibilities in dealing with school councils.

In 2000-2001, the Ontario government took significant steps to ensure that parents/guardians, through their school councils, would have greater influence in their children's education. New regulations were created that confirm the advisory role of school councils and clearly state that their purpose is to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents/guardians. This regulation also clarifies the role of school councils and establishes their right to express their views on any *school-wide* issues that are important to them.

School councils are able to make recommendations to their principals and school boards on any matter (*O. R 612/00*). Principals and school boards, in turn, must consult with school councils on a variety of matters that affect student learning. They must also consider recommendations made by school councils and report back to the councils on how they plan to act on their advice (*O. R 613/00*).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education published *Parents In Partnership...A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools* that outlines ways in which the Ministry is committed to supporting the long-term development of school councils, strategies for engaging more parents in education of their children, plus funding to support this work. This resource can be found at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf

Regulations Governing School Councils: O. R612/00

This is a brief synopsis of what *O. R 612/00* means for school councils and is not meant to be inclusive of all aspects of the regulation. The regulation addresses three key areas: the purpose of school councils, operational matters, and the obligation of boards and principals to consult with school councils.

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- *School councils must consult with parents/guardians of students enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council.*
 - *Any advice provided to the principal or school board will be based on the general views of the school community and the best interests of all students in the school.*
 - *Each school council is accountable to the school community it represents.*
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1. Composition of a school council consists of the following VOTING members:

- **Parents/guardians** - who must represent the majority of voting members
- **Teacher** – who works at the school, one member only
- **Support Staff** – who works at the school, one member only
- **Student** - in the case of secondary schools, optional for elementary schools
- **Community representative** - appointed by council

NON-VOTING Members: The only non-voting member is the school principal and/or designate (vice principal).

Note: A Board employee who works at the school their child attends, is not eligible to serve as a parent member of council nor as a chair, co-chair, treasurer or secretary. A Board employee can serve as a parent member of their child's school as long as they declare their status as a Board employee, and they do not work at their child's school.

School Trustees are not eligible to be members of school councils within the Board.

2. Elections and Term of Office:

- A one-year term is stipulated within the *Act*, and the election must be held within the first 30 days of the start of the school year.
- The regulation does not restrict the number of times that a member can be re-elected or reappointed to school council.
- The first meeting of the new council must occur within 35 days of the election.
- Parents/guardians must be given 14 days' notice of the election date.

3. Incorporation and Legal Liability: *Regulation 612/00 prohibits school councils from being incorporated as the council belongs to the corporation of the Rainy River District School Board. This mandate does not require any additional legal status.*

4. **Insurance:** It must be noted that if a school council arranges activities outside the normal school day without an administrator present, the council could be held liable for any problems that might occur. If a council proceeds in this manner, the council should seek clarification about what is and what isn't covered by the Board's insurance policy by consulting the principal.
5. **Remuneration:** School council members will not be paid for their work on councils; however, each Rainy River DSB school budget has a budget line to support expenses incurred as part of school council.
6. **Fundraising:**
 - All fundraising activities must be in accordance with the [Rainy River District School Board Policy 8.24, Fundraising](#) and the corresponding [Procedure 8.24](#).
 - Any fundraising activities that involve the sale of food and beverages on the school premises must comply with the School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM 150 Nutrition Standards) and [Board Policy 2.70, Healthy School Food and Beverage](#) and the corresponding procedure.
 - All fundraising activities must have a stated purpose and should be aligned with the School Improvement Plan goal areas.
 - Students, parents/guardians, and the broader school community must be informed as to how fundraising proceeds are used.
 - Since school councils are advisory bodies and not entities with the legal capacity of a corporate body, funds collected through the school council are under the school's Generated Funds and are therefore audited and reported by the Board to the Ministry.
7. **Annual Report**, as required by [Board Policy 1.60 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committee](#), is prepared and submitted by school council chair/co-chairs, on behalf of the school council annually. This report includes the following information:
 - List of council members and positions held
 - Dates of school council meetings
 - The council's goals for the school year as well as its activities and accomplishments
8. **The School Council Financial Report** is submitted by the school by year end to be included in the Board's audit of its financial statements, as required by the Public Sector Accounting Board.

What is the Rainy River District School Board Parent Involvement Committee and how does it support school councils?

The Rainy River District School Board Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) is a parent-led advisory committee working within the Rainy River District School Board. The main purpose of the PIC is to encourage, support and enhance meaningful parent involvement to improve student achievement and well-being. By providing a direct link between parents/guardians, school councils, the Director of Education and the Board of Trustees, the PIC works to:

- consider broad parent/guardian interests in all committee activities to support and enhance meaningful, inclusive, and constructive parental/guardian engagement in all our schools;

- undertake activities to help parents/guardians support their children's learning at home and at school;
- promote and support school councils in their advisory role;
- provide feedback to the Board from a parent/guardian perspective.

Note: School councils are invited each year to appoint a representative to the Parent Involvement Committee, if they do not already have one, with representatives typically serving a two-year term.

Staying Focused on the Mandate

School councils will provide a forum through which parents/guardians and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance by:

- focusing on student learning and the best interest of all students;
- acting in an advisory capacity to the school's principal;
- making recommendations to the school principal and the Board on any matter they see impacting accountability and academic excellence; and
- serving as a communication and information channel between the school and school community.

Policy 1.60 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committee

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

The school council's role is to maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of a school-wide concern. This mandate is also found within [Policy 1.60 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committee](#).

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

Some areas of the school council mandate requiring energy and attention are as follows:

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

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

It is important for council to take time to periodically discuss and evaluate what it has been doing and how effective the council has been. School council should schedule time to review the School Improvement Plan and the school council's identified action items to support the work of the school.

Roles and Responsibilities of Council Members

School councils have been created to enhance students' learning through the cooperative efforts of parents, students, staff members and others in the community. Your school council is an advisory body of volunteers who work together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal and sometimes the school district, make the school a better place for learning.

Accepting the role of school council member carries with it certain responsibilities. Each school council will define the roles and responsibilities of its members in its constitution and by-laws. The following roles and responsibilities for specific positions are suggestions only. A school council's operating by-laws may outline other specific duties for the chair/co-chairs, as well as for other officers of the council, such as a secretary or treasurer.

• **Chair/Co-Chairs:**

- Arrange for meetings, minimum of four per school year, and prepare meeting agenda, in consultation with the principal, ensuring that the agenda is sent to members at least two days prior to the meeting.
- Chair or co-chair council meetings.
- Regularly keep up to date with information on the Board website at www.rrdsb.com and share at council meetings.
- Report regularly on the status of council recommendations.
- Communicate regularly with school principal, on behalf of the school council, as well as with school council members and the school community.
- Facilitate the resolution of conflict within the school council.
- Participate as ex-officio member of all school council committees.

• **Other Roles:** Treasurer and Secretary

- The treasurer, if one is elected, should request and review monthly transaction records (if required) for school council funds held by the school in the school generated funds account. If a school council does not have a treasurer, this would be the role of the chair.
- The secretary, if one is elected, ensures that the school council minutes are recorded and provided to the chair and principal for review before distribution.

The remaining members of school council have the following responsibilities in participating on the council:

• **Parent Representatives:**

- Bring a wealth of experience and diversity to council and help create a culture of sharing, communicating and dealing with issues and challenges.
- Participate on any committees established by the school council.
- Contribute to the discussions of the council.
- Maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of a school-wide concern and seek to achieve consensus.
- Solicit views of other parents and members of the community to share with council.
- Observe the council's code of ethics and established by-laws.
- Encourage other parents/guardians to participate in school council and to be involved in the schools' activities and events.

- Participate, if appointed, for up to two years, as a representative on the Board's Parent Involvement Committee.

● **School Principal:**

- Non-voting member of council
- Distributes material from the Ministry of Education and the Board to council members
- Ensures that the minutes are kept for four (4) years and posted to school website once they have been approved.
- Acts as a resource to council on laws, regulations, and Board policies
- Attends all council meetings unless a vice principal has been so designated
- Considers each recommendation made by council and returns to council with the action taken in response to a recommendation
- Support, promote and communicate council's activities
- Solicits views on matters pertaining to establishing or amending school policies/guidelines relating to student achievement, accountability of the education system to parents and the communication of those plans to the public.
- Assists council with annual goal setting and the establishment of operating norms

● **Staff Representatives (teaching and non-teaching representatives):**

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

The **Community Representative** (e.g. a daycare representative if one is located within the school) represents an organization, social service agency or other group present in the community and is a person not employed at the school or if employed by the Board, has declared this to council members before being appointed. The community representative does not have children attending the school.

A **Student representative** is appointed by the school principal; this is mandatory for secondary schools and optional for elementary schools.

Overall, all school council members have the following responsibilities:

To demonstrate **accountability** by:

- attending school council meetings and when unable to, sending regrets in a timely manner;
- being prepared for each meeting;
- being clear, concise, and respectful of the time of others;
- remaining flexible and open to change.

To demonstrate **respect** by:

- recognizing the equal right of all council members to be heard and respected
- valuing the diverse expertise, experience and knowledge that exists among council members

- encouraging a positive environment where diverse opinions are shared freely and treated with respect
- ensuring that discussions are constructive and non-judgmental
- avoiding personal or group criticism of individual parents, students, Board employees, trustees, or other council members, both in discussions and through innuendo
- arriving at decisions through consensus
- recognizing the responsibilities Board employees, including the recognition that some school business is confidential
- acting in accordance with the Board and school's Code of Conduct

To act with **integrity** by:

- considering the best interests of the school and all students, at all times
- being guided by the Board's mission and vision focusing discussions on school-wide issues, rather than individual concerns
- practicing the highest standards of honesty, accuracy, and truth
- accepting responsibility for council decisions and for your actions as a school council member

To demonstrate **openness** by:

- identifying, disclosing, and acting appropriately on all council agenda items and/or issues that might involve you in a conflict of interest
- being transparent in providing all reasons and supporting rationale for decisions made by council or committees

Establishing a Constitution and By-Laws

School councils are not required to develop lengthy constitutions since *O. R 612/00* sets out the mandate and roles and responsibilities for school councils. In effect, the Regulation serves as the constitution for the school council. Similarly, school boards are not required to develop policies on the operation of school councils; however, the Rainy River District School Board established a policy which governs the role and responsibility of school councils, Policy 1.60, School Councils and Parent Involvement Committee.

School councils must develop certain bylaws to provide them with direction for the operation of council business and to help the council work effectively.

Regulation 612/00 **requires** council to develop bylaws to address the following areas:

- election procedures
- filling vacancies
- conflict of interest
- conflict resolution procedures

A school council **may wish** to develop bylaws related to the following:

- a code of ethics
- general expectations regarding attendance at meetings, other operating norms, (e.g., promptness at meetings, decision making method, etc.)
- the number of meetings (must be a minimum of four) and the scheduling of meetings
- the number of parent members on council and the number of members required for a quorum
- the number, description, and duties of the executive officers
- any requirements regarding signing officers
- the establishment and role of committees
- a process for seeking input from the community

Remember:

O. R 612/00 REQUIRES A MINIMUM OF FOUR (4) MEETINGS OF COUNCIL

Hint:

ACCORDING TO O. R 612/00, ELECTIONS MUST TAKE PLACE AT THE SAME TIME EACH YEAR – WITHIN THE FIRST 30 DAYS OF EACH SCHOOL YEAR. SINCE SEPTEMBER IS A BUSY TIME OF THE YEAR FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS, SCHOOL COUNCILS MAY WANT TO PREPARE AN ELECTION PLAN IN JUNE FOR EXECUTION IN SEPTEMBER.

Planning and Running Effective Meetings

Tips for the Chair/Co-Chair

Before the meeting:

- meet with the principal several days in advance of the meeting to plan the agenda
- ensure that the agenda is sent out at least two days prior to the meeting
- consider offering childcare to encourage parent attendance at council meetings

During the meeting:

- start and end the meeting on time
- keep opening remarks brief and welcoming: introduce guests/presenters review the agenda; outline what is to be accomplished in the time allowed
- move the meeting along, ensuring no one monopolizes the floor and that every voice is heard
- keep to the agenda and timelines; consider using a timed-items strategy; if new business arises, record and carry forward to agenda of next meeting
- during discussions, maintain a speakers' list to facilitate all views being heard
- summarize main points before moving to the next agenda item or before a decision is made by the school council
- encourage decision making through consensus
- remain neutral and provide alternate ways to solve problems/make decisions (see conflict resolution strategies)
- remind participants of rules of order as established

As the meeting ends:

- conclude the meeting by reviewing key actions and decisions, checking that all members have the same understanding of any decisions
- review/announce the date, time, and location for the next meeting
- ensure the action minutes are kept

Quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of a school council that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid. School council meetings without quorum may continue; however, no decisions can be discussed or made as the meeting is informational only. Typically for school councils, the chair/co-chair, the principal, and a majority of voting members must be present for quorum.

When planning an agenda, the following chart outlines various activities that regularly occur at the school and Board level that need school council feedback and action:

September	October	November/December
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elect officers • Appoint a community member • Brainstorm on ways of recruiting (if required) • Review By-laws • Identify any sub committees required for the year • Provide input on draft school fundraising plan and propose any school council fundraising endeavors (if applicable) • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team building • Develop a communication plan • Review school council budget • Plan school fundraising (if applicable) • Review school achievement results and school climate survey results • Review of action plan goals • Designate a Parent Involvement Committee representative • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback • Consider recognition activities of school members (e.g., October has World Teachers’ Day, Early Childhood Educator Day, and is the month that Principals are recognized nationally, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on school calendar survey • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback

January/February	March/April	May/June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Principal Profile • Provide feedback on Board budget • priorities for next school year • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish school council election sub committee • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize annual report • Submit nominations for Volunteer of the Year, Employee of the Year, Bus Driver of the Year, and Community Partner of the Year • Review policies out for stakeholder feedback

Sample School Council Committee Agenda

School Council Name
 Month/Day/Year - Time
 Location (include links, teleconferencing info, etc.)

Agenda Items:	Who?	Notes
Call to Order & Welcome	<i>Chair</i>	The Chair should note the time that the meeting is called to order. If new a guest is attending, add introductions. Note: The Election of the Chair would be item #2 at the first meeting after the elections and the Principal would begin the meeting.
Approval of Agenda	<i>Chair, with School Council</i>	If agenda is amended to postpone or to add items, consensus of the entire council required. Agenda items should be communicated to the Chair and/or Principal prior to the agenda being sent out.
Confirmation of Minutes	<i>Chair, with School Council</i>	The minutes should be reviewed by members in advance of the meeting. If minutes are corrected/amended, there needs to be consensus by the school council on what is changed.
Declaration of Conflict of Interest	The <i>Chair</i> asks if anyone who has a conflict of interest to declare it at this time or as they see fit.	
Unfinished Business	Include this only if there is unfinished business from the last meeting.	
New Business/Updates		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council Members' Updates 	<i>Principal, staff representatives, student</i>	Updates come from the principal and may come from

		<i>representative</i>	the staff representatives and the student representative (if applicable).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent Involvement Committee Update/Minutes 	<i>PIC representative</i>	If the school council has a PIC representative, then an update is provided and/or minutes are shared.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe School Team – Community, Culture, Caring Goal 	<i>Principal</i>	The Principal leads this discussion to look at anti-bullying and safe school initiatives for the school as outlined in the school improvement plan.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action Plan items 	<i>School Council</i>	
7.	Correspondence	<i>Chair</i>	Include any policies for stakeholder feedback and/or consultation items (e.g., Board budget survey info).
8.	Next Meeting Date	<i>Chair</i>	
9.	Adjournment	<i>Chair</i>	The time of adjournment should be noted by the Chair.

Conflict of interest means and includes a situation in which financial or other personal considerations have the potential to compromise or bias a school council member's judgment and objectivity. An apparent conflict of interest is one in which a reasonable person would think that the school council member's judgment is likely to be compromised.

An example:

Any time the school council does business with the potential for monetary gain/loss with any person, agency, or company and a member of the school council has a vested interest in any way with that particular person, agency, or company, that member shall declare a conflict of interest and shall not discuss or vote on any such decision relating to the matter.

Effective Meeting Minutes

A school council secretary is both a participant and a recorder of the meeting's actions and information. A best practice is to have one consistent person act as school council secretary, for consistency of reporting.

As the secretary, this person has several key tasks:

- Keeping track of school council members' attendance,
- Listening actively,
- Briefly recording every item of business listed on the agenda,
- Being fair and impartial in reporting the meeting's business,
- Keeping focused on key information and action, recording all consensus decisions and motions, and summarizing key understandings and expected follow-up.

Best practices for minutes include the following:

- Avoid attributing comments to individuals.
- Do not use jargon or acronyms.
- Be aware of privacy issues for students and staff.
- Organize the minutes according to the agenda, with numbering or bulleting, headings, and bold or italic font to aid those reading the minutes.
- Share the draft minutes with the chair and the principal to review before circulation.
- Complete and circulate the draft minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, rather than right before the next meeting. Any corrections to minutes are to occur at the next meeting.

Some phrases to help in summarizing the business of the school council are provided below for your reference.

- *The meeting was called to order at . . .*
- *The agenda was approved by consensus. OR The agenda was amended to include . . . and was approved, as amended.*
- *No conflict of interest was declared.*
- *The minutes of the last meeting on . . . were approved by consensus.*
- *Corrections were made to the minutes to . . . and with these corrections, the minutes were approved by consensus.*
- *The school council discussed . . . and decided by consensus to . . .*
- *Discussion took place regarding . . . and it was decided by the school council that . . .*
- *School council members provided various options on . . . and it was the council's consensus to . . .*
- *Some questions were asked of . . . and after discussion, the council . . .*
- *The issue was examined, and the school council agreed to . . .*
- *Clarification was provided on . . .*
- *Principal/Council member . . . indicated that they will report back on . . . at the next meeting.*
- *While there was general support for . . . concerns were raised regarding . . .*
- *Following a discussion on pros and cons, the school council agreed to . . .*

Action Plan

Your goals and objectives support your school's *School Improvement Plan* and determine the direction and focus of your council activities during the year. Your action plan supports your goals and objectives by outlining the most efficient and effective ways of achieving your targets.

Developing an action plan involves making decisions about who will do what, where, how, why and at what cost. A sample action plan template is provided for you in the Appendices.

Getting started:

- Set your goals and objectives for the year.
- If some of the activities seem large, break them down into smaller sections.
- Go through the list of activities and prioritize each item from very important to not urgent.
- If too many tasks have high priority, try to make some less important.
- Then reorganize that list in priority order and enter it into your action plan.
- Make sure that all activities and tasks still reflect your goals and, objectives and support the *School Improvement Plan*.

Creating a plan:

Once you have all the activities listed in your plan, you should:

- Assign a person or team of people to each activity or task. These people will be responsible for making sure that the activity is completed properly and on time.
- Set a deadline for each activity. Make sure the deadlines are realistic and achievable and these deadlines will help build future school council agendas.
- Identify the resources you need to complete the activity (specialized skills, equipment, number of volunteers, etc.).
- Determine how you will measure or evaluate the activity, to make sure it is carried out correctly and that it has achieved the results you expected.

Here is an example of an effective action plan:

Goal: To raise funds to buy book bags for the Primary Reading programs					
Objective: By the end of November, we will raise \$400 to buy bags with the school's logo to support the nightly reading program for Primary students.					
Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Deadline	Expenses	Resources Required	Measurement
Fundraiser	Mr. Orange	December 1	Poinsettia fundraiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local nursery arrangement • Promotion in school newsletter 	<p>Funds raised: \$\$ raised</p> <p>Community support: # of bags purchased</p> <p>Program supported: Book bag program, part of the school improvement plan's literacy goal</p>

Successful School Councils and Evaluating Meeting Effectiveness

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

- A focus on student learning and the *best interests of all students*
- The promotion of meaningful parental and community involvement
- The involvement of members of the school community with different views and diverse backgrounds
- Support of the school in improving student achievement and the sharing of a common vision for student success
- The use of clear and consistent processes for decision making and the presence of high ethical standards
- The building of a team, through the development of mutual respect, trust and understanding
- The understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the school council
- An opportunity to learn more about school initiatives and programs and Board policies and procedures

School councils should consider putting a process in place once or twice a year to assess how effective council has been. This reflective process and planning for improvement may be described in the Operating Norms part of the council bylaws. Some ideas to consider for reflection may be accomplished by all members in a group session or individually by each member with the chair providing a summary of the input for the following meeting of council. A sample school council evaluation is provided below; this “ticket out the door” can be utilized at the end of each meeting, with members completing the evaluation as a reflective exercise or with members signing and handing the form into the chair/co-chairs for review and follow-up.

Sample School Council Evaluation

<i>Did the meeting have purpose?</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Were different views or opinions encouraged and discussed?</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Did the meeting stay on track – was the agenda followed?</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are we on track with our goals?</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>What is the school council doing well?</i>			
<i>What should be the school council’s next step(s)?</i>			

Conflict Resolution Strategies

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

Each school council must have a bylaw regarding conflict resolution as per Ontario Regulation 612/00. The following is a four-step approach to resolving internal conflict and other difficult matters.

- **Acknowledge the conflict.** As a group, acknowledge when a conflict exists and determine the source of the conflict. For example, is it related to facts? Goals? Processes? Values? Personal preferences? Communication?
- **Plan how to deal with the conflict.** Once the source of the conflict is defined, decide how to deal with it. This may be done with the Chair/Co-Chair or with the entire school council. If with the entire school council, all school council members should reflect on the problem and be prepared to state their concerns and viewpoints.
- **Provide time for discussion.** The Chair or whoever is facilitating the discussion should introduce the problem and ask each member for input, so that the nature and the source of the conflict are clear. Acknowledging each person by listening attentively sets the tone for problem-solving and opens the school council to a variety of solutions. Emotions should be accepted and dealt with since they are a part of conflict.
- **Seek the best solution.** As viewpoints and solutions are described, the individual facilitating the discussion deals with them one at a time. Following the discussion, the person facilitating the discussion may use a process for building consensus to arrive at a new solution. Council members may be asked the following questions: Can you live with this solution? Will you support the solution? Depending on the nature of the conflict, it is sometimes best for council members to have time to reflect on the proposed solution with the decision to be finalized at a future meeting.

If after following the above steps, the school council still feels strongly that the situation requires further consideration, the Director of Education's office may be contacted. The matter will be reviewed and may be directed to a staff member for action.



How to Prepare an Annual Report and Financial Statement

At the end of its term (by the end of June), the school council must prepare and submit an annual report to the school community (posted on the school website under the School Council page) and noted in the school newsletter. The report should be received by the Director's Office no later than August 31 so that this report can be shared with the Board through its Parent Involvement Committee.

An annual report should include:

- School name
- Date of submission
- Welcoming statement
 - Usually written by the chair
 - Addressed to parents and school community
 - Uses warm, welcoming tone
 - Includes an open invitation to attend council meetings
- Activity summary
 - A brief summary of the number of meetings as well as the activities addressed by council during the year, with particular emphasis on the activities related to the school improvement plan
 - An acknowledgement of the efforts, commitments, and achievements during the year
- Names and positions of council members, including the group each one represents (e.g. parent, teacher representative, support staff representative, etc.)
- Dates of council meetings held during the year
 - Include any available information on future meetings (tentative dates, etc.)
- Financial statements if council held any fundraising events
 - Executive summary of finances, outlining the opening balance, detailed breakdown of revenues and expenditures, balance forward

Questions to consider

Here are some questions that may help you to prepare the annual report:

- Were you successful in setting and accomplishing the goals and objectives for the year?
- Did your efforts contribute to the School Improvement Plan and benefit students? If so, in what way?
- Do you plan to focus on the same priorities in the upcoming year or will you establish new ones?
- Did council members participate in any Parent Involvement Committee, Board or school-based training or information sessions this year?

Consultation with Councils by Board & Principals

In the spirit of the regulation regarding school councils, there are clear expectations that all partners be consulted:

- The Board and the principals are to seek advice from their school councils and report how this advice has been considered.
- School councils are to seek input from the parents/guardians of the school community about matters under their consideration and to report back how council has acted on the input provided.

This table outlines the **mandatory areas** in which the Board and principals are required to consult with school councils. There are many other **optional areas** where school council input may be sought by the Board and/or school principal.

Mandatory Areas of Consultation with School Councils	By Board	By Principal	How?
Policies under development and/or review, specifically policies related to:			
All initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents/guardians	√	√	Policies are reviewed on a 5-year cycle or sooner, as required. Stakeholder feedback is requested of all school councils as part of the consultation process.
Student Code of Conduct	√	√	
Appropriate dress policy, if applicable	√	√	
Fundraising activities by school council	√		
Planning for Student Achievement and Well-Being:			
Board and School Improvement Plans for improvement based on the reports of EQAO test results and other relevant data	√	√	All school improvement plans are developed from the framework of the Board Improvement Plan; school council members provide input into these plans through school councils.
Development of communication plans regarding the Board's and School's Improvements Plans	√	√	The Board's Budget survey annually seeks input into the best methods to communication with parents regarding the Board Improvement Plan and other important Board matters. Principals work with their school councils on communication strategies to reach all parents/guardians.
The criteria and process for the selection and placement of school administrators known as the Principal Profile	√		Input into the Principal Profile is collected at the Board level each year through a form sent to school councils.

Optional Areas of Consultation with School Councils	By Board	By Principal
school year calendar	√	
scheduling special school events		√
Board policies regarding field trips for students	√	
Safe Arrival policy and implementation plan (elementary)	√	√
use of volunteers in schools	√	√
student homework policies (if applicable)	√	√
school accommodation	√	
review of school boundaries	√	
capital improvement plans for schools	√	√
school/classroom organization		√
school budget priorities		√
naming of new schools (where applicable)	√	
other topics specific to a school		√

Recruiting Council Members

Effective school councils are continually seeking responsible volunteers. As part of this process, the school council Chair/Co-Chairs and Principal are on the lookout for dedicated people from the school community to take on new responsibilities.

The following are some strategies for consideration:

- Ensure a welcoming and open school environment.
- Invite interested parents/guardians and family members to participate, volunteer, and attend a council meeting to observe.
- Encourage participation from various and diverse groups in your school community.
- Host a school council information/get involved event, (e.g. high school council can host parents of incoming Grade 9 students in the spring and share council accomplishments, issues being worked on, etc.).
- Publicize council's activities via newsletter message, the school's website, or social media page.
- Provide a list of meeting dates for the coming year.
- Provide information on elections, bylaws, decision making and conflict resolution process.
- Establish childcare services to assist parents/guardians with council attendance; local high school students may look for this opportunity to earn their required 40 hours of Community Involvement.)
- Be explicit about involvement – some families may not consider involvement if fundraising is a requirement.
- Consider other platforms to involve attendees (e.g., teleconference, videoconference), where possible.
- Many companies and organizations encourage their employees to be involved in community related volunteerism; advertising council participation as an excellent way to make a difference by supporting student learning and achievement is an important message for the business community to hear.

Communication Plan

The school council is required to keep members of the school community informed about its activities. Effective communication is an essential component of a successful school council. This is an ongoing process that requires a school council to develop a communication plan. At the beginning of each new council term, serious consideration should be given to developing a school council Communication Plan to recruit further members (if required), to inform the school community of the school council plan action plan goals, to invite parents/guardians to provide feedback on school and Board consultation items, and to promote school events.

Please note, that principals, as agents of the Board within each school, are the primary contacts as sources of information for the school community.

A Variety of Ways to Communicate

- Mass produced, non-personal, information letters
- Brochure or pamphlet (e.g., how to volunteer at the school, information about the role of the school council)
- A table at Open House or at other school events
- Regular item in your school newsletters
- Promotion through the school's social media page
- Electronic distribution (e.g., through SeeSaw and/or Edsby)
- Bulletin Board/ Council Corner within the school
- Surveys/questionnaires
- Workshops for parents on identified topics of interest

For items to be included in the school newsletter, on a school bulletin board, on the school webpage, or on the school's social media page(s), the school council must first have the approval of school principal.

Hints for Getting Your Notices Read

- Keep message brief and straightforward
- Develop a distinctive, consistent format for recognition
- Keep articles/items short
- Use bullets and **boldfaced** type
- Headlines help
- Leave lots of white space for ease of reading and to draw reader attention
- Publish often
- Highlight using a box format

Checklist of School Council Commitments

Throughout the school year, councils must meet certain commitments to their school and to the Ministry of Education. The following checklist outlines those commitments and their respective due dates.

Commitment	Action/Deadlines
Elections	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish election committee 	<p>By the last council meeting of the school year, the date, time, and location of next school year's election should be determined. This information should be published in the June newsletter and on the school website. Consider holding the election on the same night as an open house as voting must be done in person.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set election date 	<p>Schools must have elections each school year. The election must be held in the first 30 calendar days of the school year. Schools must hold an election only if more parents come forward than there are parent member spots for on council. The number of parent positions is dictated by school council by-laws. The number of parent/community members should exceed that of the total of staff representatives, (e.g., teacher, principal).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nomination form sent home 	<p>Schools must send home forms by the end of the second week of school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notification of election 	<p>14 calendar days before the election, the Principal must provide written notice of the date, time, and location of the election to the parents and guardians of all students at the school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nomination of members standing for election 	<p>At least one week before the election, the Principal must provide a list of parent nominees, plus brief biographies, to the parents and guardians of all students at the school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold election 	<p>Elections must be held in the first 30 calendar days of the school year. Parents/guardians must vote in-person. Both parents can each vote once.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notification of election results 	<p>Within 30 calendar days of the election, the Principal must publish the names of the elected parent representatives.</p>

- Election of school council chair Must be elected **within 30 calendar days** of the first school council meeting. Unless otherwise stated in the school council by-laws, the only required executive position is that of chair.

School Council Meetings

- First meeting of the year Must be held **within the first 30 calendar days** of the school year, after the council elections, on a date chosen by the Principal of the school.

At the first meeting, the Principal should provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of school council, share norms of collaboration, and discuss the School Improvement Plan and how the council supports this work.

The Principal would then facilitate the election of executive positions among parent representatives who have been elected to school council. The executive positions available would be dictated by school council by-laws. The position of Chair is the only required role. All school council members, excluding the Principal or designate, vote on who they wish to hold executive positions. Rainy River District School Board staff members cannot be elected chair. Once a Chair is elected, he or she should lead the rest of the meeting.

- Regular Meetings A minimum of four school council meetings must be held in each school year, unless otherwise indicated in the school council by-laws. The Principal must notify the school community of the dates, times and locations of all regular school council and committee meetings **within 30 calendar days** of the election.

Agendas & Minutes

- Agendas Timed agendas must be prepared by the school council chair, in consultation with the Principal. Agendas should be shared with members of the school community a **minimum of two days prior** to the scheduled meeting. Agendas can be shared through newsletters, the school’s website, etc.
- Minutes Minutes must be **formally approved by the next school council meeting**. Minutes may be approved by consensus by committee members via e-mail after the meeting but formally approved at the next meeting. They must be made available to anyone who requests them immediately after the meeting at which they were approved. They should be posted on the school’s websites, and copies should be stored in the office for **at least four years**.

Financial Statements

- Monthly transaction records The treasurer, if one is elected, must request and review monthly transaction records for school council funds held by the school in the school generated funds account. If a school council does not have a treasurer this would be the role of the Chair.

Annual Report

Must be submitted to the office of the Director of **Education no later than August 31st of each year**. Annual reports should be posted on school websites, and copies should be stored in the office for at least four years.

Annual reports must summarize all school council activities from **September 1 to August 31**, inclusive. Reports must also include a year-end financial statement, showing all activities that involve financial transactions from September 1 to August 31.



Sample School Council Bylaws

[Name of School] - School Council Bylaws

The mandate of the [School Name] School Council is to work in cooperation with the school administration, teaching staff, and the parent community to support and enhance student learning.

The School Council of [Name of School] operates in accordance with the Ontario Regulation 612/00 and the Rainy River District School Board Policy 1.60 School Councils and Parent Involvement Committee.

Section 1 – Membership

- 1.1 School council membership is to consist of ___ parents/guardians. OR Parent membership shall be not less than ____ and no more than _____.
- 1.2 Terms of membership shall be one year.
- 1.3 There is no maximum number of terms a parent may serve.
- 1.4 Officers of the School Council will elected/acclaimed and will consist of the following: Chair/Co-Chair and/or Vice Chair and may also include Secretary and/or Treasurer.

Section 2 – Elections

- 2.1 Prior to the end of June each year, Council will strike an Election Committee.
- 2.2 The Principal, in consultation with the Election Committee, will establish procedures for the election/appointment of parents/guardians.
- 2.3 Election Committee will assist in the preparation of a package to be sent home the first week of the new school year. Packages will include information about school councils and their responsibilities, invitations for parents/guardians to declare their intent to run for election, and the date of election.
- 2.4 Written notice of date of election must be given to every parent 14 days prior to the election.
- 2.5 Elections must be held if number of parents/guardians wishing to serve on Council exceeds maximum as set by By-law 1.1.
- 2.6 Vacancies, which occur during the school year, may be filled by election or appointment, at the discretion of the Council.

Section 3 – Meetings

- 3.1 First meeting must take place within the first 35 days of school. (Ontario Regulation 612/00)
- 3.2 Officers will be elected or appointed at first meeting of school year.
- 3.3 By-Laws will be reviewed by Council members at the first meeting of school year.
- 3.4 Meetings will be held a minimum of 4 times per year.

- 3.5 A quorum of the school council is required for any decision-making, including discussion on pending decisions.
- 3.6 Minutes will be taken at each meeting and shall be retained for four years.

Section 4 – Conflict and Conflict Resolution

- 4.1 Any member of Council who has a private interest in a matter before Council will:
- Immediately declare the conflict,
 - Refrain from influencing the decision-making or voting by removing themselves from the discussion.
 - Refrain from participating in any decision making and/or voting,
- 4.2 Council members will strive to work as a team and have respect for the opinion of others.
- 4.3 The Chair shall attempt, with the support of Council, to resolve conflicts within the Council.
- 4.4 If Council is unable to resolve the dispute, the Chair and Principal will contact the Director of Education’s office for assistance.

Section 5 – Sub Committees

- 5.1 The following sub committees will be established annually:
- Election
 - (other sub committees to be listed here)
- 5.2 The Chair, in consultation with the Principal, will strike additional committees as deemed appropriate.
- 5.3 All sub committees will report at Council meetings.
- 5.4 Committees must obtain School Council and Principal approval for all expenditures.
- 5.6 Sub committees must include at least one parent member of Council.
- 5.7 Participation on sub committees is not restricted to School Council members. The School Council encourages all parents to participate.

Section 6 – Financial

- 6.1 All proposed expenses by sub committees must be approved by the Principal *and* the School Council.
- 6.2 All invoices for approved expenses related to Council’s activities must be submitted to the Treasurer and signed off by the Principal as per Board policy.
- 6.3 The Treasurer will present the updated financial statements at each School Council meetings.
- 6.4 The financial records will be audited annually by the external auditor retained by the Board.
- 6.5 A financial statement shall be included in the year-end Annual Report to the Board.

Section 7 – Fundraising

- 7.1 All fundraising activities of Council will be conducted in accordance with the Board Policy and Procedure 8.24, Fundraising Activities.
- 7.2 All funds raised by Council will be used in accordance with Board Policy.
- 7.3 If fundraising activities are to occur, all fundraising activities will be reviewed and approved by the Principal and the School Council prior to the activity commencing.
- 7.4 Requests for the use of the revenues raised by the School Council will be, whenever possible, summated in writing and reviewed by the Council, in consultation with the Principal.

Section 8 – Roles and Responsibilities

- 8.1 Chair/Co-Chair (or Vice Chair, in the Chair's absence):
 - prepares agenda in consultation with Principal;
 - communicates any information from Ministry of Education and the Rainy River District School Board;
 - facilitates conflict resolution within Council;
 - represents Council at school/Board functions and events.
- 8.2 Secretary (if position exists)
 - attends and participates in meetings;
 - records and maintains accurate minutes of Council meetings;
 - distributes minutes to all Council members via email, after initial review by Chair and Principal;
 - manages all Council correspondence;
 - prepares any Council information for the school newsletter.
- 8.3 Treasurer
 - attends and participates in meetings;
 - presents an accurate and up to date financial records of Council's funds;
 - supports the school secretary in following Procedure 8.25 School Generated Funds.

Section 9 – By-Laws

- 9.1 By-Laws have been established in accordance with our Ministry of Education (Ontario Regulation 612/00) and Rainy River District School Board policies.
- 9.2 By-Laws have been drafted in order to help guide the Council in its business throughout the year.
- 9.3 The review of current By-Laws will be done annually, by Council at its initial meeting.
- 9.4 Any changes, additions and/or deletions must be passed by a 2/3 majority vote.



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