
School Community Councils

*A Handbook for
School Community Councils
and Principals*

School Community Councils: A New Way to Engage Parents and Community

i Introduction

This Handbook is designed to support the ongoing development of School Community Councils. It is based on the *Final Report of the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel* (May 2005) and the Department of Learning *Policy Directions for School Community Councils* (November 2005). The Panel's purpose was to recommend a framework for how parents and communities might be meaningfully engaged in schools. The benefits of parent support for their children's learning and community involvement in schools are well understood. And, as School Divisions in Saskatchewan were being reorganized in 2006 it was timely to look at community and school level accountability, partnerships and opportunities to participate in educational decision-making.

Provincial legislation sets out the broad framework within which School Community Councils contribute to student learning and well-being. At the School Division level, governing policies and operational procedures set out in more detail how Councils are formed, relate to the school and Division and undertake their responsibilities. This Handbook explains the legislative framework and expectations and provides guidance and support for School Community Councils and Principals.

ii How to Use this Handbook

This Handbook is written for School Community Councils and Principals. Assisting Councils to understand their role and fulfil their responsibilities is the main focus of the Handbook. Each chapter of the Handbook provides background information, suggestions and examples for School Community Councils to use as they become established as a new and important feature of public education.

- Chapter 1, "School Community Councils Background", provides an overview of the School Community Council framework. It includes a brief outline of the background that led to the creation of the School Community Council framework, a description of the vision and purpose, and roles and responsibilities of School Community Councils, expectations related to their relationships

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School Community Councils

with others involved in K-12 education in Saskatchewan and a list of general principles that may help guide Councils in their work.

- Chapter 2, “Beginnings”, with a focus on the near future includes a two-year “start-up” calendar designed to help consider what Councils might expect in their first two years of existence in Saskatchewan schools. The calendar may also serve as an advanced organizer for the Handbook itself as for each activity in the calendar reference is made to a section of the Handbook where information related to the activity can be found.
- Chapter 3, “The Work of Councils”, describes in detail how Councils might go about their “work”. Section 1 explains how Councils may fulfil each of their responsibilities. Section 2 provides a description of the elements a Council may wish to include in its Constitution and why.
- Chapter 4, “Assessing Progress” outlines various ways Councils might go about assessing progress related to their responsibilities and the healthy functioning of the Council as a whole.
- Chapter 5, “The Principal’s Role on the School Community Council”, highlights the special role and responsibilities the Principal or designate may have related to working with and supporting a School Community Council.
- Appendices include additional suggestions, procedures, forms and examples.

Users are encouraged to make their own notes in the margins to list other references and their own thinking about School Community Councils and how they can improve student learning and well-being. School Community Council Members may also wish to read the *Handbook for Boards of Education and Administrators* which provides more information about elections, relationships and administrative support.

A Word for Parents and Community Members

A parent or community member serving on the School Community Council is:

- a dedicated volunteer providing advice for educational planning and decision-making at the school level (see Section 1.2.1 and 1.2.2);
- interested in working with others (including the Board of Education, school division administrators, parents, community members and other Council members) to support student learning success and well-being (see Section 1.3);
- willing to be guided by “Principles” that support good School Community Council practice (see Section 1.3.2); and,
- able to provide a two-year commitment to the work of Council (see Chapter Two).

As a Council member you might expect to...

- Attend monthly meetings from September to June (see Chapter 2).
- Participate in building a constitution (see Section 3.2).
- Engage in the work of the Council such as:
 - creating a School Community Profile (see Section 3.1.1 and Appendix B, Section 1.0);
 - jointly developing the Learning Improvement Plan with the staff of the school (see Section 3.1.2);
 - providing advice to the school, Board of Education and other community organizations and agencies (see Section 3.1.3.1);
 - approving school fundraising activities, school fees and the student code of conduct (see Section 3.1.3.2);
 - taking action on Council initiatives to help families support their children’s learning (see Section 3.1.4);
 - reporting to parents and community on Council progress (see Section 3.1.5); and,
 - working with other Council members to learn more about the role of the Council and how to fulfil its responsibilities (see Section 3.1.6).

Your role as a Council member is to build shared responsibility among parents the community and school for student learning and well-being and to lead parent and community involvement in school planning and improvement.

Glossary:

Cross-cultural¹ is a term usually used in education to refer to a program of study or instructional method that uses information or approaches from more than one culture.

Culture¹ is the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge of a group of individuals who share certain historical experiences. Culture is dynamic and often contains elements of conflict or opposition.

Ethnic group¹ is a group of people who have lived together as a single cultural group for many generations and have an identifiable combination of beliefs, language, religion, territory of national origin, customs and history in common.

Family² can be defined as any combination of two or more persons bound together by ties of mutual consent, birth, and/or adoption/placement and who, together, assume responsibility for variant combinations of some of the following: physical maintenance and care of group members; production, consumption and distribution of goods and services; and affective nurturing.

Minority¹ is a group with a certain set of characteristics that set it apart from the dominant group in a society – the group is usually aware of itself as having a depressed status relative to the majority and may be subjected to unequal and differential treatment. This group may be a numerical majority in the community or in world terms.

Parent² is used to refer to a child's significant caregiver. This may include a child's mother, father, grandparent, uncle, aunt, sister, brother, foster parent or other guardian. At times we use the terms "parent" and "family" interchangeably.

Race¹ is the physical features – skin colour, stature, head shape and hair type – that characterize a group of people. Persons of a particular race may vary individually, but they are characterized as a group by a combination of measurable features which have been derived from a common ancestor.

¹ Definitions adapted from *Partners at School*, Saskatchewan Education, 1988

² Definitions adapted from *Final Report of the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel*, Saskatchewan Learning, 2005.

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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.

School Community Councils

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,

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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

School Community Councils

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...

.....
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.

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.

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 out-reach 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.

2.0 Beginnings

Chapter 2.0 focuses on the near future and includes:

- A two-year “start-up” calendar designed to help Councils consider what they might expect in their first two years of existence in Saskatchewan schools; and
- The calendar may also serve as an advanced organizer for the Handbook itself as for each activity in the calendar reference is made to a section of the Handbook where information related to the activity can be found.

School Community Councils are a new entity at the school and community level and there may be some “growing pains” as Councils first form. This section includes a *Two-Year Calendar* designed to provide Councils with an overview of what they may expect in their first two years in operation.

The calendar describes a possible schedule School Community Councils may follow as they are initially formed. It is provided only as an example and is not meant to be prescriptive. Different Councils may follow different paths as they form and go about important tasks associated with laying the initial groundwork that will sustain them in future years. Section and page numbers indicate where information related to the item can be found the Handbooks.

School Community Council Two-Year Calendar

In the following calendar Handbook #1 refers to the *Handbook for School Community Councils and Principals*. Handbook #2 refers to the *Handbook for Boards of Education and Administrators*.

School Community Councils

May

- The Annual meeting – School Community Councils are elected. Chapter 2, Section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 Handbook #2

June

- Council members get together for their first meeting and decide upon Officers. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1 Handbook #1
- Council connects with School Division Administrative Contact to identify communication channels and strategies. Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.5.1, 3.1.5.2, 3.1.5.3, 3.2.3 Handbook #1
- Council Chairperson meets with Principal to develop a communication plan. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.2 and Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4 Handbook #1
- Meeting schedule for coming school year is developed. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2 Handbook #1

September

- The Chairperson calls the first meeting of the School Community Council. Initial agenda items include:
 1. Constitution development. Chapter 2, Section 2.7 Handbook #2 Appendix A, Section 1.0
 2. Planning for Parent Community Engagement Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4, Section 3.2.3 Handbook #1 Appendix B, Section 5.0
 3. Development of the School Community Profile. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 and Appendix B, 1.0 Handbook #1

October

- Updates and discussion at monthly meeting of continuing work on Constitution and information gathering for the School Community Profile. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.0 Handbook #1
Chapter 2, Section 2.7 Handbook #2
Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 and Appendix B, 1.0 Handbook

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- Chairperson begins to develop communication networks with other School Community Councils. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.2
Handbook #1

November

- Discussions/decisions related to providing advice regarding the recruitment of Permanent School Community Council Members to provide advice. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1
Handbook #1
- Draft of Constitution sent to Board for approval. Chapter 2, Section 2.7
Handbook #2

December

- Learning about the development of the School Division Continuous Improvement Plan. Chapter 5, Section 5.2.5.4
Handbook #2

January

- Welcome and orientation of Permanent Members. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4
Handbook #1
Chapter 2, Section 2.2.8
Handbook #2
- Review/evaluation of Council operations to date. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.1, 3.1.6.5 and 3.2.9 ,
Chapter 4, Handbook #1
- Discussion/decisions regarding School Community Council capacity building opportunities. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6
Handbook #1

February

- Establish School Community Council Committees. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 and
Appendix A 6.0 Handbook #1
- Continue School Community Council capacity building activities. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6
Handbook #1

March

- Continued Committee work, updates at monthly meeting. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8
Handbook #1
- Draft of Annual Report. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.4
Handbook #1

School Community Councils

April

- Continued Committee work and updates at monthly meeting. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- School Community Council Members consider whether they wish to renew their commitment to Council for the upcoming year and actively recruit new members. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4 Handbook #1
- Decisions related to approval of school fees and fundraising. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3.2 and Appendix B, 4.0 Handbook #1
Chapter 6, Section 6.1 and 6.2 Handbook #2

May

- Annual Meeting – presentation of Annual Report, election of new School Community Council Members. Chapter 2, Section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 Handbook #2
- Orientation of new School Community Council Members. Orientation includes but is not limited to: review of Constitution, Annual Report, Council responsibilities. Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.1 (all) Handbook #1

June

- Council Members get together for first meeting and elect officers. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1 Handbook #1
- Council connects with School Division Administrative Contact to review communication channels and strategies. Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.5.1, 3.1.5.2, 3.1.5.3, 3.2.3 Handbook #1
- Meeting schedule for coming school year is developed. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2 Handbook #1
- Council Chairperson meets with Principal to review communication plan. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.2 and Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4 Handbook #1

September

- Chairperson of Council calls first meeting of the current year of the School Community Council. Initial agenda items include:
 1. Review of Council Code of Conduct. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.9.4 and Appendix A, 1.1,1.2. and 1.3 Handbook #1
 2. Council Committee set-up. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4 and Appendix A, 4.0 Handbook #1
 3. Council Committee set-up. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 and Appendix A 6.0 Handbook #1
 3. Review and update of communication plan, including meeting with Principal to discuss communication options. Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.5.1, 3.1.5.2, 3.1.5.3, 3.2.3 and Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4 Handbook #1
- Meeting of Learning Improvement Plan Development Team Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2 Handbook #1
Chapter 5, Section 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 Handbook #2
- Planning for Parent/Community Engagement Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4, Section 3.2.3 Handbook #1
Appendix B, Section 5.0

October

- School Community Profile reviewed and sections to be updated identified. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 and Appendix B, 1.0 Handbook #1
- Jointly recommend the Learning Improvement Plan.
- Advice to School Division regarding recruitment of Permanent Council Members. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 and Appendix B, 3.0 Handbook #1
- Review Student Code of Conduct and provide suggestions where appropriate. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3.2 Handbook #1

November

- Continued committee work with updates at monthly meeting. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1

School Community Councils

- Welcome and orientation of Permanent Members. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4 Handbook #1
Chapter 2, Section 2.2.8 Handbook #2

- December**
- Continued committee work with updates at monthly meeting. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- Draft of Annual Report, including sections relating to Council responsibilities associated with Learning Improvement Plan. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.4 Handbook #1

- January**
- Learning Improvement Plan presented for recommendation. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2 Handbook #1
Chapter 5, Section 5.2 Handbook #2
- Review/evaluation of Council operations to date Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.6.1, 3.1.6.5, 3.2.9 and Chapter 4, Appendix A, 5.0 Handbook #1
- Discussion regarding School Community Council capacity building opportunities Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6 Handbook #1

- February**
- Continued committee work and updates at monthly meetings. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- School Community Council capacity building opportunities. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- Continue work on activities associated with responsibilities within Learning Improvement Plan. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1, and 3.1.2 Handbook #1

March

- Continued committee work and updates at monthly meetings. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- Annual Report draft reviewed and updated based on committee reports and activities associated with the Learning Improvement Plan Chapter 3, Section 3.1.5.4 Handbook #1

April

- Continued committee work and updates at monthly meetings. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.8 Handbook #1
- School Community Council Members consider whether they wish to renew their commitment to Council for the upcoming year. Council Members actively recruit new members Chapter 3, Section 3.1.6.4 Handbook #1
- Formal draft of Annual Report submitted to Board.

May

- Annual Meeting – presentation of Annual Report, election of new School Community Council Members. Chapter 2, Section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 Handbook #2
- Orientation of new School Community Council members. Orientation includes but is not limited to: review of Constitution, Annual Report, Council responsibilities. Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.1 (all) Handbook #1
- Prepare for implementation of ongoing activities related to School Community Council responsibilities within the Learning Improvement Plan.

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.

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“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/>

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^{PLUS} 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^{PLUS} 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.

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"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

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

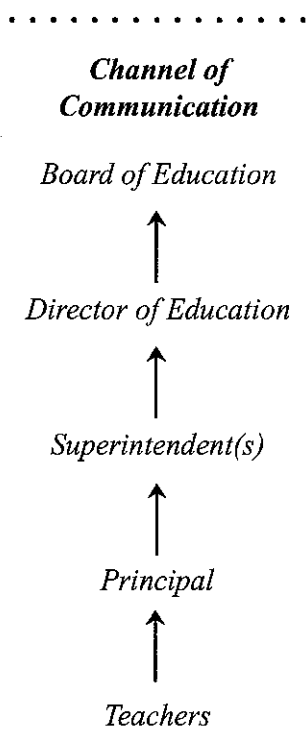
.....
Advocacy and lobbying should never be confused with advice giving. Self-appointed lobbyists are rarely asked for their advice. Elected and representative School Community Councils are asked!

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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 report¹ 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?

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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.

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

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;

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- 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.

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

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*School Community
Council action plans
focus on:*

- *each area of Council responsibility; and,*
 - *the Council's part of the Learning Improvement Plan*
-

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^{PLUS} 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

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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 following¹:

- 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?

¹ 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.

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:

Please describe areas where you think there could be improvement:

Please describe what you see as opportunities for growth:

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 _____

or

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

School Community Councils

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

	Immediate	Future	Action Planned	Results
Working Well				
Areas Needing Attention				
Opportunities for Growth				

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.

Representative¹

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.

**Involving Hard to Reach Parents
and Community Members¹**

- 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.

¹Adapted 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 Officers¹**

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 examples¹ 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.

¹ 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 shall¹:

- 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.

¹ Revelstoke School Planning Council,
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>Majority Vote Model</p> <p>The issue is discussed and a vote is taken. The majority vote decides the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some opportunity for modification during discussion. • Clear decision is made. • Can be a quick and efficient way to decide a clear-cut issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can create a “win/lose” situation and some participants may be dissatisfied. • Requires Council Members, and especially the Chairperson, to understand the “Rules of Order” for voting. • Can negatively affect team building.
<p>Consensus Building Model</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"> • Ensures all Council Members have an effective voice. • Builds on differing perspectives and values. • Allows for flexibility in arriving at solutions. • Can build respect for differing values and viewpoints. • Can lead to better informed, more creative, balanced and enduring decisions. • Ensures the final decision has the support of the entire Council. <p>If unsuccessful, it allows for decision-making by vote.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time, a clear process, skill and the full participation of all Members. • If Council is operating by pure consensus, the status quo will continue whenever there is a stalemate. <p style="text-align: right;">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

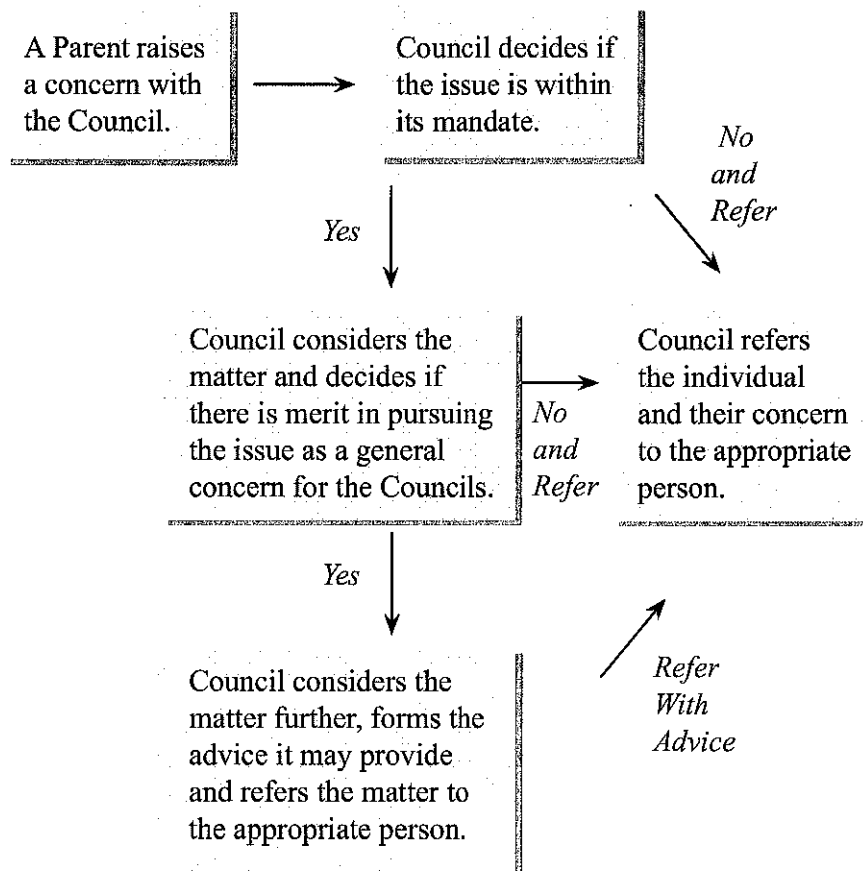
School Community Councils

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

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.....
“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*

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 Guidelines¹

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 to 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

4.0 Assessing Progress

Chapter 4.0 addresses Council self-assessment and outlines:

- *Various ways Councils might go about assessing progress related to their main responsibilities; and,*
- *Means to evaluate the healthy functioning of the Council as a whole.*

Assessing progress is an important part of the work of School Community Councils. Knowing how well the Council is performing is a part of public accountability and the most direct route to improved contribution to student learning and well-being.

Examples of questions that might guide School Community Council self-assessment:

- **Membership:** Is the Council reasonably representative of the student composition of the school? Are the interests of all parents voiced as decisions and plans are made?
- **Internal Council Functioning:** Are Council meetings well attended? Do all Members express satisfaction with their involvement? Is the Council able to resolve difficult issues?
- **Inclusion and Communication:** Does the Council include the larger community in its work? Do parents and community members ask for time to make presentations to or meet with the Council? Are parents aware of the Learning Improvement Plan?
- **Gathering Support:** Has the Council compiled a profile of community resources that could contribute to learning improvement? What resources have been made available to parents as they support their own children's learning?

School Community Council evaluation consists of two main parts; a focus on outcomes or "Are we achieving success in accomplishing our role and responsibilities?" and a focus on procedure or "Are we working well as a team?" The first focus is about measuring the results of Council participation and initiatives while the second focus is on satisfaction with the processes and relationships enjoyed by the Council.

It is important to understand, as well, that Councils are responsible for their own evaluations. The Handbook refers to this as self-assessment and it involves Council Members reflecting individually and collectively on information they may gather about the success of their initiatives and about their functioning as a Council. The goal of self-assessment is improvement.

4.1 Focus on Outcomes

The highest order of outcome for School Community Councils, families, teachers and all other partners in education is student learning and well-being. Ultimately, the success of each depends upon the success of students. The information gathered about student learning and well-being within the school, where they are strong and where improvement is needed, is the key determiner of Council success.

However, Councils don't directly teach the children. This is the work of parents and the school staff. But Councils have the important responsibility of supporting student learning. The roles of Councils provide a helpful framework for self-assessment. The Council should ask itself and others about how well it is achieving each of these roles and where there are concerns what might be done to resolve them.

.....
We can choose to be a "watchdog," to focus on monitoring and controlling; we can choose to be confrontational, to focus on fault-finding and negativity; or, we can choose to be respectful and trusting; to focus on appropriate roles and decision-making practices and to hold the contributions of both lay and professional participants in high regard.

Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel Final Report, 2005.

Understanding the School and its Community:

The Council might ask what they know about the economic, social and health conditions and needs of their community and about the aspirations for child and youth learning and well-being of families and community members? Is the Council fully aware of the resources and supports that are available for the school, parents and community?

Developing and Recommending a Learning Improvement Plan:

The Council might ask if the development and recommendation process was joint and undertaken in cooperation with the Principal and staff of the school? Is the plan aligned with provincial and School Division plans?

Providing Advice and Approval:

Has the Council extended advice on important issues to the Board of Education, the Principal and others? Is the Council confident about its advice? Does the Council feel its advice was heard? Has the

Council established a framework for its approval of fundraising initiatives and fees? Are Council initiatives consistent with School Division policy and operational procedure? Has the Council considered providing advice to other agencies such as the Regional Health Authority, municipal council or family service organizations? Has the Student Code of Conduct been reviewed and approved by the School Community Council?

Taking Action:

Has the Council followed through on responsibilities assigned to it within the Learning Improvement Plan? Are the responsibilities of the Council and Constitution regularly reviewed to ensure Council obligations are being addressed? Is the success of Council initiatives measured and reported to the Council?

Communicating and Reporting:

Has the Council reported to parents and community on its plans, initiatives and the outcomes attained? Are parents and the community generally aware of the learning achievement and state of well-being of the students in the school? Has the Council reported on the expenditure of funds related to the operation of the School Community Council? Has an audited report of the school fees collected and revenue generated through fund-raising activities been compiled and made publicly available. Does the audited report include an explanation of the reasons for the fees and fund-raising initiatives and an account of the application of those funds?

Developing Capacity:

Has the Council participated in learning opportunities to improve its functioning? Do all Council Members participate in these activities? Has the Council developed a plan for its own growth and development?

4.2 Focus on Council Procedure

School Community Council Members might ask themselves:

Do I conduct myself in a manner that:

1. Supports the vision, beliefs and goals of the school?
2. Serves the overall best interests of the school rather than any particular constituency?
3. Brings credibility and good will to the school?
4. Respects principles of fair play and due process?
5. Demonstrates respect for individuals in all manifestations of their cultural and linguistic diversity and life circumstances?
6. Respects and gives fair consideration to diverse and opposing viewpoints?
7. Demonstrates due diligence and dedication in preparation for and attendance at meetings, special events and in all other activities on behalf of the school?
8. Demonstrates good faith, prudent judgment, honesty, transparency and openness in my activities on behalf of the Council and school?
9. Ensures that the financial affairs of the Council are conducted in a responsible and transparent manner?
10. Avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest?
11. Conforms with the constitution approved by the Council and in particular the Code of Conduct?
12. Publicly demonstrates acceptance, respect and support for decisions legitimately taken in transaction of the Council's business?

Adapted from the Canadian Institute on Governance
<http://www.iog.ca/>

The importance of self-evaluation cannot be overstated. Time should be set aside regularly to assess progress as a Council. Even a small investment in improvement of processes and especially communication and external relationships can return substantial dividends to the success of the Council and more importantly to student learning and well-being.

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.

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.

.....
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.*
-

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/
- 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.

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 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
- *A Significant Journey: A Saskatchewan Resource for the Principalship.*
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 questions¹. 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?

2. Am I involving parents and the community in developing and amending or modifying the expectations, standards and policies for the school?

3. Am I honest and forthcoming in sharing information about the school's challenges?

4. Am I encouraging school council discussions and reflections aimed at developing strategies to address challenges faced by the school?

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?

6. Am I using effective two-way communication methods?

7. Am I making allowances for the language and cultural barriers facing some of the parents?

8. Am I listening carefully to parents and community members?

9. Am I doing all that I can to engage the community?

10. Am I reaching out to those who are not often involved in the school and its activities?

School Community Councils

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?

*Alberta Learning. A Principal's Guide to Working Effectively
with Your School Council*

http://www.teachingquality.ab.ca/resources/PrGuide_SchCouncils.pdf

Appendix A

School Community Council Operation

1.0 School Community Council Constitution Template

The following template is designed to help guide a School Community Council as it develops its constitution.

Name: _____ **School Community Council**

Mission

An organization's mission helps members and others understand its "reason for being". A mission statement describes, in the words of its members, why an organization exists and what it hopes to achieve in the future. Organizations regularly review and adapt their mission statements to reflect their current circumstances. In developing their mission statement Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- Why do we have a School Community Council at our school?
- What does our School Community Council hope to achieve in the next few years?

School Community Councils may wish to refer to the description of the purpose of School Community Councils in Section 1.2.1 of this Handbook as they develop their mission statement. The School Division may also provide the Council with guidance in this area.

_____ **(name of Council) Mission**

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of an organization are based on its mission, and provide direction for members of the organization in their day-to-day activities and relationships with others. These principles also help others know what to expect in their interactions with members of the organization. In developing their guiding principles Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What is most important to us as a group?
- What are the basic understandings that will help guide us in our interactions with each other and with others?

School Community Councils may wish to refer to the “School Community Councils Guiding Principles” outlined in Section 1.3.2 of this Handbook as they prepare their guiding principles. The School Division may also provide the Council with guidance in this area.

_____ **(name of Council) Guiding Principles**

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Structure and Officers

The structure and the officers of an organization ideally provide support for the organization as it seeks to achieve its mission.

The number, role and responsibilities of officers are usually described in an organization’s constitution. The Provincial Policy Framework for School Community Councils states that a Council’s officers are to be elected from among its Representative Members and will include at a minimum, a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary (required officers).

In deciding on Council structure and officers Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What will be included in the role and responsibilities of the “required” offices?
- Would our Council benefit from naming other officers? What will the role and responsibilities of these “other” officers include?

School Community Councils may wish to refer to Section 3.2.1 of this Handbook as they decide upon Council officers and their role and responsibilities. The School Division may also provide the Council with guidance in this area.

_____ (name of Council)

Roles and Responsibilities of Officers

Chairperson

The Chairperson will:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

The Vice Chairperson will:

- _____
- _____
- _____

The Secretary will:

- _____
- _____
- _____

School Community Councils

Other Officers and their role and responsibilities:

- _____
- _____

Scheduling of meetings are often included in descriptions of an organization's structure. Recognizing that Councils are required to meet at least 5 times annually as well as hold a general meeting, and keeping their mission in mind Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- How often during the school year will our Council meet?
- Will we hold special meetings? How will we decide if a special meeting is necessary?

_____ **(name of Council) Schedule of Meetings**

- _____
- _____

_____ **(name of Council)**
Provision for Special Meetings

- _____
- _____

School Community Councils may wish to refer to Section 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of this Handbook as they consider their Council structure and officers. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Means of Public Consultation

Public consultation and communication is important for many organizations and is a key aspect of the vision for School Community Councils. If Councils are to fulfill their mandate they will need to consider carefully how they will consult with parents and community members. There are a number of options Councils may wish to employ such as; telephone surveys or printed questionnaires, personal interviews, public meetings and workshops.

Keeping their mission in mind Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What areas of our mandate will require public consultation?
- What methods might we utilize in each of these areas to consult with parents and community members?

_____ (name of Council)

Means of Public Consultation

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

School Community Councils may wish to refer to Appendix B, Section 1.1 for more information on methods of public consultation. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Means of Public Communication

Most organizations have favoured methods of communicating with their public. Because of the nature of School Community Councils choosing effective means to communicate with parents and community is key to their success. Section 3.1.5.3,

Communication Planning and Strategies of this Handbook outlines areas Councils may wish to consider when communicating with others. In deciding on what means they will utilize to communicate with parents and community Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What areas of our operation may require regular communication with parents and community? How can we best accomplish this?
- What areas of our operation may require less frequent communication? How can we best accomplish this?

_____ (name of Council)

Means of Public Communication

School Community Councils

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

School Community Councils may wish to refer to Section 3.2.3 of this Handbook for more information on methods of communication with parents and community. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Council Code of Conduct

An organization's code of conduct outlines expectations for its members and guides their behavior. A *Suggested practice for establishing a Code of Conduct is included in this Handbook* (Section 3.2.4). Keeping their mission in mind Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What guidelines will foster positive, cooperative, student-focused and forward-looking relationships among parents, the school and the community?

Code of Conduct _____ School Community Council

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Several examples of Council Codes of Conduct or Codes of Ethics are included in this Handbook. Please see Section 3.2.4 and Section 4.0 of Appendix A. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Decision-Making Processes

Two commonly used decision-making models used by organizations are those of Majority Vote and Consensus. Depending on their mission many organizations use a combination of both. Providing a description of a Council's preferred decision-making model will help guide Council Members. The advantages and disadvantages of each model are described in Section 3.2.6 of this Handbook. Councils may wish to outline within their constitution under what circumstances each of the models might be utilized. Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- In what cases might Council use the Majority Vote model of decision making?
- In what instances might Council use the Consensus Building model of decision-making?

School Community Council

Decision-making processes

- Type of decision - process employed

- Type of decision - process employed

More information related to each decision-making model is included in this Handbook, Appendix A, Section 5.0. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Complaints and Concerns Procedures

Healthy organizations have accepted ways of dealing with complaints and concerns. In creating complaints/concerns procedures Council Members may wish to ask themselves:

- What kinds of complaints/concerns does the School Community Council have the authority and responsibility to deal with?
- How will Council as a whole and individual Council Members deal with complaints or concerns related to the operation and responsibilities of Council?

Complaints and Concerns Procedures

Complaint/Concern	Council authority/responsibility

Process for dealing with Council complaint/concern that falls under Council responsibility/authority.

- _____
- _____
- _____

For more information related to creating Council complaints/concerns procedures see Section 3.2.7.1 of this Handbook. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

Methods for Evaluation of Council Operations

By evaluating its operations an organization helps members focus on what will allow them to fulfill their mission, what they are doing well, and what they may improve upon. When considering what methods they wish to use to evaluate their operations Councils may wish to ask themselves:

- What formal methods do we wish to use to evaluate our day-to-day operations and determine if we are meeting our goals and achieving our mission?

- What more informal methods do we wish to use to evaluate our day-to-day operations and determine if we are meeting our goals and achieving our mission?

_____ (name of Council)

Formal Evaluation Methods

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

_____ (name of Council)

Informal Evaluation Methods

- _____
- _____
- _____

For more information related to evaluating Council operations see Section 3.2.9, Chapter 4, and Appendix A, Section 7.0 of this Handbook. The School Division may also provide Councils with guidance in this area.

2.0 Supporting Council Members and Committees of Council

2.1 Supporting Individual Council Members

School Community Councils will likely be made up of parents and community members, students and staff who come from diverse backgrounds. This diversity can become a very positive resource for the Council to draw on; it can also present a challenge. Some Council Members may need support in order for their strengths to become Council assets.

Some barriers individual Council members may encounter and examples of possible supports are described below:

Barrier: Lack of understanding of the role/responsibilities of the Council

Support: Provide a clear description of Council roles and responsibilities. Match each new Council Member with an experienced Council Member who can help explain the role and responsibilities of Council and answer questions. Boards and their administrations may also help Councils in this regard.

Barrier: Cultural differences

Support: Be sensitive to cultural values, attitudes, manners and views of school that may be different. Learn about religious holidays and observances of different cultures so they can be honoured when scheduling meetings and events. Respect different communication patterns such as pauses, silence and eye contact. Ask questions respectfully.

Barrier: Language

Support: Arrange for an interpreter. Have printed materials translated.

Barrier: Time

Support: Find a mutually agreeable time to meet. Make sure meetings begin promptly and end when expected.

Barrier: Childcare

Support: Consider providing a room at your place of meeting where children can be cared for.

.....
The process of creating a better education system is not a relay race, but a marathon. We youth are not just passing the baton to adults expecting them to finish the race. We want to be involved in every step and every decision.

John Kohli, Provincial Youth Delegation, 2003 as seen in *Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support*, Saskatchewan Learning, 2004.

Barrier: Tokenism

Support: Make sure all voices are listened to, and what has been said is taken into account in decision-making. Make sure there are true opportunities to become involved in planning, decision-making and actions of the Council.

Barrier: Assumptions

Support: Sometimes all of us make assumptions based on what we think is true of other people. Sometimes support simply means asking another what is needed in order for them to contribute.

2.2 Supporting Students

High School students will also be included in the membership of many Councils and their inclusion presents a very real opportunity. Students can provide true, down-to-earth insights into way the school is serving the needs of children and youth. They can provide a fresh perspective on educational issues. Sitting on Council can also provide students with valuable experience related to community leadership. Councils who wish to receive maximum benefit of student membership may wish to consider supporting student Council Members in various ways.

In general, Councils can support students by:

- Listening carefully and respectfully to student voices.
- Making sure what adult Council Members think was said, was truly said. Try paraphrasing and encouraging students to elaborate on what they have said.
- Allowing students to present and receive information in a manner that is most comfortable for them. Many students are comfortable using technology to communicate.
- Letting students know they are not “token” Members, that their contributions are expected and valued.
- Being flexible about students’ schedules. Many students, aside from attending school full time, have part-time jobs and other responsibilities.
- Developing a mentoring strategy. Students have not experienced many of the understandings adults take for granted. Councils can support students offering students the opportunity to connect with another adult Member who can provide advice and guidance.
- Asking students what is needed. Councils can support student Council Members by checking frequently to see if they are receiving the support they need.

2.3 Forming and Operating Effective Committees

Some hints for forming and operative effective committees

- Ensure the committee is clear on its role and tasks, and is aware of the larger goals of the School Community Council. The Council may consider creating a written job description including responsibilities involved for each committee.
- Aim for broad representation. This is where the Council can involve more parents and community members who would like to participate but do not have time to become a member of Council.
- Use committees as leadership training ground. Potential Council Members may begin as committee members, gain confidence in their skills and increase their involvement in the School Community Council.
- Establish reporting procedures. It is important that the Council know, and approve of, what a committee is doing. A committee Chairperson may serve as a formal link to the Council.
- Ensure committees set realistic objectives and tasks. Committees may, in their initial enthusiasm, take on too much. The Council can help prevent volunteer burnout and frustration by suggesting committees decide what objectives and tasks are most important and which can wait.

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

3.0 Effective Meetings

3.1 Simple Rules for Chairing a Meeting

- The Chairperson calls the meeting to order
- The meeting's formality depends on the Chairperson, the group's size and the group's preference
- The Chairperson recognizes Members before they speak
- Each item is entitled to full and free debate by individual Members—one at a time
- Each person desiring to speak should be allowed to speak once before anyone speaks for a second time
- The Chairperson is responsible for moving the meeting along and ensuring no one monopolizes the floor
- Only one subject may be discussed at a time
- If time does not permit full discussion of an item, a motion may be made to table the item for discussion at another meeting
- Every member has equal rights

Adapted from Alberta Home and School Councils' Association. 1995.
School Council Resource Manual. Edmonton.

3.2 Meeting Checklist

- Meeting Date:
- Start time:
- End time:
- Participants: Number expected
- Sign in sheet with meeting, date and location indicated
- Name tags and holders
- Name cards for Council Members
- Facilities: Size of room is appropriate
- Seating arrangement: Fits agenda and encourages open discussion.
- Tables for participants to write on
- Refreshments: Tea, coffee, juice
- Equipment: Projector
- Transparencies
- Extension cord

3.3 Running Meetings

School Community Council meetings offer Councils the opportunity to get together with others who possess diverse thoughts and views to discuss issues and offer suggestions related to Council decisions. In order to take advantage of this benefit, meetings take some planning and effective management to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard with efficient use of time.

Planning the School Community Council meeting is usually the responsibility of the Chairperson. S/he may delegate a number of the tasks described below:

- *Publicizing the meeting well in advance*

This can be done in community calendars, school newsletters, school or Division website, the newspaper, community announcements on television and radio, posters, and phone trees. Make sure everyone is given plenty of notice (two weeks if possible). Try to establish a set meeting day, time and location to help people remember.

- *Arranging the room*

How the room is arranged can add to the success of the meeting. A round table style, rather than a head-table style can be more conducive to discussion. Make sure there is enough seating for everyone and no one feels on the “outside”. Arrange any necessary equipment and supplies prior to the meeting day.

- *Establishing the agenda*

The agenda should clearly outline what will be dealt with at the meeting. Having a standard, yet flexible agenda will help save time preparing for meetings. The Chairperson usually prepares the agenda with input from others. Below is a list of standard items Councils may wish to include in their agenda as well question prompts to help Council as they consider each item.

A Handbook for School Community Councils and Principals

<i>Agenda Item</i>	<i>To Consider</i>
Record of the previous meeting.	Was follow up action taken on issues of concern? Are there further issues that need to be addressed?
Principal's Report	Will items particular to this month's report require more time or consideration?
Updates on the Learning Improvement Plan and/or other Council action plans	What progress has been made to date? What kind of specific information may be required by Council at this time?
Committee Reports	What committees of Council need to provide a report at this time?
Expenses of Council	What expenses have been incurred to date? (accounts both paid and outstanding) What further expenses might be expected in the near future?
Decision Items	What decisions need to be made at this time? Is Council ready to make these decisions or is more information required? If so, how will Council obtain that information?
Discussion Items	Are there new topics, issues or concerns that merit Council's attention?
Received Items	Are there reports, correspondence etc. that need to be acknowledged?
Items for future consideration	Are there items that need to be highlighted for future consideration?
Date, time and agenda items for next meeting	Are changes anticipated to the date, time or location? What agenda items can be anticipated for the next meeting?

- *Choosing a Consistent Meeting Style*

Councils will want to follow a meeting style that is efficient yet enhances the participation of all.

- *Recording the Minutes*

The Secretary assumes responsibility for recording the proceedings of the meeting. In the absence of the Secretary the Chairperson appoints another Council Member to record the minutes.

The minutes can be recorded in one of three ways:

- Formal minutes: when a Chairperson governs the meeting.
- Semiformal minutes: when a small group is conducting a relaxed discussion.
- Informal minutes: used to record the generalities of a meeting.

Using a lap top computer helps keep information easy to read back and saves time on the final draft of the minutes. Accurate minutes provide School Council Members and others with:

- a clear objective summary of what went on at the meeting.
- a historical account of the decisions of the group and the rationale behind them.
- objective comments, rather than opinions.
- highlights, rather than narrative accounts.
- motions and resolutions recorded verbatim.

.....

Chairperson's Role:

- *The Chairperson invites a wide range of people to speak*
- *All who wish to speak are given the opportunity*
- *If necessary, time limits can be put on each speaker*
- *Invites each person around the table to speak on the issue if they choose (a time limit for individual contributions may be established beforehand).*

Councils may wish to consider placing their minutes on the school or School Division website.

3.4 Ideas for Stimulating Discussion

Strategies:

Pairing: People are randomly paired off to discuss an issue and report back to the group.

Absolute Quiet: Time is provided for participants to think, read or make notes relating to the issue being discussed.

Brainstorming: Spontaneous discussion related to a problem or issue. Brainstorming ground rules include:

- the Chairperson makes sure everyone is clear on the issue to be discussed

- participants can choose priorities
- no criticism is allowed
- every idea is noted
- emphasis is on quantity of ideas, not quality
- ideas can be modified and combined
- visual aids are useful

Round Table: Similar to brainstorming, however, the group is subdivided into small groups of four to six people. Flip charts are used to record all ideas. Each group is given a time limit. All ideas are recorded and brought back to the main group.

Brain Writing: Similar to the “round table”, but with more individual participation. Each member has index cards and writes down one idea on each card. Cards are exchanged and new ideas or comments are added. A facilitator records ideas.

Pro/con Analysis: Participants focus only on the pros and cons of an issue. After all items have been listed, each member votes on what he or she considers the three or four best ideas. Coloured stickers or differently coloured felt markers could be used to rank ideas in order of importance.

Value Voting: useful to get feedback when time is limited. The Chairperson asks people to take a position on the issue (strongly agree through strongly disagree). Each category is tallied to arrive at a direction, rather than a decision.

Adapted from Alberta School Council Resource Manual, Alberta Education, 1995

4.0 Examples of Codes of Conduct/Ethics

- The (Name of School Community Council) is not a forum for the discussion of individual school personnel, students, parents, or other individual members of the school community.
- A Council Member who is approached by a parent with a concern relating to an individual is in a privileged position and must treat such a discussion with discretion, protecting the confidentiality of the people involved.
- A parent who accepts a position as a School Community Council Member:

Upholds the constitution and bylaws, policies and procedures of the School Community Council.

Performs his/her duties with honesty and integrity.

Works to ensure that the well-being of students is the primary focus of all decisions.

Respects the rights of all individuals.

Takes the direction from the Council, ensuring that the representation processes are in place.

- Encourages and supports parents and students with individual concerns to act on their behalf and provides information on the process for taking forward concerns.

Saskatchewan Association of School Councils
<http://www.sasktelwebsite.net/sasc/>

Suggested Code of Ethics Community School Council

As a Member of the Community School Council and/or volunteer, I shall:

- Be guided by the policy, vision, goals and principles of the Community School program;
- Know and work toward the vision for the _____ Community School;
- Endeavour to be familiar with school policies and operating practices and act in accordance with them;
- Practice the highest standards of honesty, accuracy, integrity and truth;
- Encourage a positive atmosphere where individual contributions are encouraged and valued;

School Community Councils

- Recognize and respect the personal integrity of each member of the school community;
- Apply democratic principles;
- Consider the best interests of all students;
- Respect and maintain the confidentiality of student information;
- Limit discussions at school council meetings to matters of concern to the school community as a whole;
- Use the appropriate communication channels when question or concerns arise;
- Promote high standards of ethical practice within the school community;
- Accept accountability for the decisions of the Community School Council; and,
- Declare any conflict of interest.

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

5.0 Decision-Making Methods

5.1 Majority Vote Model of Decision-Making

Simple Rules of Order for Decision-Making

Making a Motion:

- Stating the motion – a member must formally let the Chairperson know that s/he would like to make a motion and the Chairperson must “recognize” the person making the motion. Once acknowledge by the Chairperson the individual making the motion “has the floor” S/he may make a formal proposal beginning with the statement, “I move that...”
- Seconding the motion: Before the motion can be considered another person must “second” the motion by saying “I second the motion”. This means s/he agrees the motion is worthy of discussion. A seconder is not normally required for regular Council meetings however, at larger meetings like the Annual Meeting, motions should have a seconder.
- Stating the Question: Once a motion has been made the Chairperson restates the motion so that everyone clearly understands what is being proposed. From then, until voting occurs all discussion is focused on the proposed motion.
- Discussion: The Chairperson opens the floor to discussion of the motion. If no one wishes to discuss the motion it is put to a vote. If Members of the Council wish to discuss the motion, the Chairperson opens the debate. Each member may speak to the question twice, but no one member may speak a second time until everyone has had a change to speak once.
- Declaring a vote: If no one wants to speak further to the issue, the Chairperson asks the Council if it is ready to vote on the proposal. The Chairperson repeats the question and conducts the vote by asking for those in favor and those opposed.
- The majority needed to pass a motion needs to be stated in the Constitution. In the case of a tie the motion is defeated.

Amending a Motion:

- Until the Chairperson states the question (repeats the motion) for a final vote, the person who made the motion may change it (in this case the original seconder may choose to withdraw, in which case another seconder would be required).
- Once the Chairperson has repeated the question in readiness for a final vote the motion can be amended in one of the following ways:
 - The person making the motion may ask to change the original wording. The Chairperson will ask if anyone objects. If no one objects the wording of the motion is changed. Debate continues on the amended motion.
 - If someone does object, the question of whether to allow a change in the wording of the motion is put to a vote. If the group consents to the change, debate continues on the motion as amended.
- Someone else may also amend the motion by saying, “I move to amend the motion by...”. The normal process for making a motion is then followed (see above).
- An amendment to an amendment may also be proposed but a third amendment is “out of order”.
- If an amendment is defeated, discussion continues on the original motion.

Withdrawing a Motion:

- At any time before a vote the person making the original motion may ask to withdraw it. This does not require a seconder. Once a motion is withdrawn it is as if it never existed.
- If the Chairperson has already “stated the question” in preparation for voting and a request to withdraw the motion is made, the Chairperson asks if there is any objection. If there is none the motion is withdrawn. If someone objects the request to withdraw the motion is put to a vote.

Motion “To Consider at a Later Date”

† A motion to “consider at a later date” means to set an issue aside to discuss at another time so more pressing business can be discussed, or so more information about the issue can be obtained.† The following rules apply to a motion “to consider at a later date”:

- The motion “to consider at a later date” takes precedence over the discussion of the motion
- The motion “to consider at a later date” requires a seconder.
- There can be no debate on a motion “to consider at a later date”.

5.2 Consensus Building Model of Decision-Making

Basic Steps to Arrive at Consensus

- Identify the issue or problem.
- Relate the issue to identified goal and/or Council roles and responsibilities.
- Open the floor to suggestions. If necessary brainstorm for alternatives.
- Discuss each suggestion, clarify; don’t jump to conclusions.
- Weight the suggestions in terms of reconciling or solving the issue.
- Select the suggestions member think most worthwhile.
- Use consensus voting:
 - How many are all for it? Believe in it so much they could be leaders on the issue.
 - How many are for it? Would lend support?
 - How many need to talk about the issue further?
 - How many are not sure, “but can live with it”? Encourage such Members to describe their reservations and as if they would like their reservations formally recorded.
 - Record the consensus decision of the Council (and reservations).
- Suggested phrases for Chairpersons to use as Council Members try to reach consensus:
 - Let’s begin by getting a reaction from everyone in the group.
 - Let me summarize what I hear you saying.
 - Let me repeat what I think I heard you say.
 - Let me ask you . . .
 - Have everyone had the opportunity to express an opinion?
 - Let me see if I can pull this together in a recommendation.

6.0 Understanding and Resolving Conflict

6.1 Understanding Conflict: Team Building

Building positive working relationships among School Community Council Members can also strengthen and promote teamwork. As trust and respect develop, Council Members will likely become more open about sharing opinions, taking risks, and resolving conflicts in a positive manner. It is also important to remember that teams are not formed overnight. Groups, on their way to becoming working teams may behave in their own, often perplexing, fashion. People who study group dynamics suggest that groups go through four common stages on their way to becoming a team:

Stages in Team Development ¹

Stage One: "Forming"

Getting to know one another and the issues in a polite and guarded way.

Stage Two: "Storming"

Beginning to air differences and sort out difficulties. Confrontations may occur and some people may opt out of the group.

Stage Three: "Norming"

Getting organized. The group develops procedures, acquires skills, and feels comfortable confronting issues. Members give feedback in an open and constructive manner.

Stage Four: "Performing"

Beginning to work together effectively to accomplish goals and objectives.

¹Hergert, Phlegar, & Perez-Selles, 1991. *Kindle the spark: an action guide for schools committed to the success of every child*. Andover, MA: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands.

Councils may recognize these stages as they begin to work together. Understanding group dynamics can help Council Members overcome some of the frustration and confusion that they may encounter in their first year together. Each stage is important. Some groups may move quickly through, others may have more difficulty.

Communication skills are important at all stages, but imperative during “storming”. An open and respectful communication climate with conflict resolution procedures will help Councils move through the stages with more confidence.

Communication Skills ¹

- Stop talking - to others and to yourself - and learn to still the voice within: listening is an equal partner in communication, but it can't be done while you are talking.
- Carefully examine the other person's viewpoint. See if you can effectively summarize the points. You may find more to agree with than you imagine.
- Look, act and be interested.
- Observe nonverbal behaviour such as body language to grasp meanings beyond what is being said.
- Don't interrupt. Sit still *past* your tolerance level. Listen between the lines for implicit meanings as well as for explicit ones. If you must interrupt, speak only affirmatively. Resist the temptation to jump in with an evaluative, critical or disparaging comment while someone is expressing his or her point of view.
- To ensure understanding, at key points in the conversation, rephrase what the other person has said.
- When you speak, speak clearly and only to the issue being discussed. If you have several points to make, jot them down ahead of time to help keep you focused.

¹ Alberta Home and School Councils' Association. 1995. School Council Resource Manual. Edmonton.

Adapted from Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, 1995

6.2 Resolving Conflict

The following steps may be helpful in resolving conflict:

Build a collaborative climate. The Council establishes a collaborative climate so that differences in opinion can be dealt with in an open manner and everyone's views are valued. All Members should agree to:

- respect the perspective of others,
- listen to what others have to say,
- prepare to problem solve.

Be Prepared: If differences of opinion cannot be worked out, have a procedure in place.

Conflict resolution procedures may include the use of:

- a mediator to develop a solution that will be satisfactory to both sides;
- a jointly agreed-upon panel to make a recommendation or a binding decision; or,
- a plan to refer a dispute to school administrators or the board of education.

Identify the Problem: Only by clearly defining the problem can a group begin to resolve it and the underlying issues. Disputes usually occur because of disagreements on:

- facts
- resources,
- perceptions,
- values and beliefs, or,
- styles.

Defining the problem involves: clearly stating views, listening to others, trying to understand their views, and asking questions to clarify. At this stage, participants should avoid giving advice or judgments.

Brainstorm and Evaluate Options and Solutions: by working together to find a solution to the problem, individuals and groups can create a win-win situation.

Create an Action Plan; the plan should identify timelines, who is responsible for what actions, and who will follow up.

Adapted from: Alberta Home and School Councils' Association. 1995.
School Council Resource Manual. Edmonton.

7.0 School Community Council Meeting Evaluation

Sample School Community Council Meeting Evaluation Form

Adapted from Alberta School Council Resource Manual: Alberta Education, 1995

School Community Council Meeting Evaluation Date: _____

Please take the time to complete this survey.
This is your opportunity to improve future meetings.

<i>Evaluation Scale</i>	Not at All				Very Much So
	1				5
1. Was the agenda of this meeting clear to you?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Were you encouraged to contribute as much as you wanted?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Did the atmosphere allow for free discussion?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Was there enough time for discussion?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Are you clear on what, if any, decision(s) was reached?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Are you clear on the next steps being taken?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Are you clear about who is responsible for taking the next steps?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Do you think the purpose of this meeting was fulfilled?	1	2	3	4	5
9. What aspects of this meeting were most appealing to you?					
10. What aspects of this meeting were least appealing to you					
11. Any comments for the Chair on how the meeting was conducted?					
12. Do you have suggestions for improving future meetings?					

Name: _____

(You do not need to sign this sheet.)

Parent Student Teacher Community member

(Please check appropriate space(s).)

If you would like to connect with a School Community Council Member please

Phone: _____ e-mail _____

Appendix B

School Community Council Responsibilities

1.0 Understanding the Community

1.1 Example of a School Community Profile

The following is an example of a “School Community Profile”. It includes contributions the Principal of the school may provide (School Profile) and contributions the School Community Council may provide.

The School Principal may provide:

School Profile

Midwest School is located in southern Saskatchewan in a small city setting. Midwest school is a public school that enrolls 256 children aged 4-14.

Curriculum and Options

Midwest School follows the provincial curriculum. The school is technologically advanced making e-learning available to students. An extensive extra curricular environmental education program is also offered.

Staff

Midwest School has 16 professional staff and 5 support personnel.

Facilities

Midwest School has a gymnasium, and outdoor sports grounds, access to a skating and curling rink, a full library, and two computer labs. We are located close to several areas that allow us to maintain a challenging outdoor education program including, hiking, canoeing and camping.

School Year and School Day

The School year runs from August 28th to June 30th with holidays for Christmas and Easter. The school day is from 9:00AM to 3:30PM.

Educational Philosophy

The educational philosophy of Midwest School is to provide students with a quality education that focuses upon using available resources to advance learning. Our aim is to provide students with opportunities to learn in academic, social and physical settings.

Possible School-Community Council contributions to the School Community Profile:

Community Social, Economic and Health Conditions

- Midwest School is...information related to economic conditions.
 - Type of neighborhood.
 - Statistics related to employment
 - Statistics related to housing
 - Other areas of interest

- Midwest School is...information related to social conditions.
 - Description of:
 - Languages spoken at home, programs available for New Canadians
 - Clubs, organizations in the area of the school
 - Recreation facilities, libraries, arts centres, etc.
 - Businesses
 - Other areas of interest

- Midwest School is...information related to health conditions and services. Description of:
 - Health status and health concerns of school community members
 - Preventative/restorative health services available in the area
 - Other areas of interest

Needs and Aspirations of School Community Members

Midwest School is...information related to the school community's desires and expectations related to the learning success and well-being of children and youth.

Description of Expected Outcomes

- Expected achievement in curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Expectations related to post-secondary education and/or employment upon school completion – where applicable;
- Values related to social and, where applicable, work behavior of students;
- Expectations related to general health and wellness; and,
- Other areas of interest

Resources

Midwest School has...information related to resources available within the school community or accessible to the school community.

Examples of opportunities that may be provided by:

- Volunteer organizations;
- Libraries, cultural facilities such and theatres, museums etc.;
- Businesses that offer learning opportunities;
- Health and recreation facilities; and,
- Other areas of interest

1.2 Consulting with Parents and Community Members

Many aspects of creating the School Community Profile will require public consultation. The following description of consultation methods are taken from *Building Communities of Hope, Implementation Manual, 1997* and have been adapted for School Community Council use.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Mailed Questionnaires</p> <p>Survey questionnaires are constructed and mailed to participants</p>	<p>Can be sent directly to those the Council wishes to consult.</p> <p>Flexible to cover a wide range of topics.</p> <p>Can reach a large number of people.</p> <p>Sense of privacy may encourage more frank responses.</p>	<p>May be a low rate of return.</p> <p>Questions may be misunderstood.</p> <p>For statistically reliable results, trained personnel to design</p> <p>Postage and handling costs.</p> <p>Requires a certain print literacy level.</p>
<p>E-mail Questionnaires</p> <p>Survey questionnaires are constructed and e-mailed to participants.</p>	<p>Can be sent directly to those the Council wishes to consult.</p> <p>Flexible to cover a wide range of topics.</p> <p>Can reach a large number of people.</p>	<p>May be a low rate of return.</p> <p>Questions may be misunderstood.</p> <p>For statistically reliable results requires trained personnel to design.</p>

School Community Councils

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
	<p>Least expensive/ time consuming of all survey methods.</p>	<p>Requires a certain print literacy level. Does not reach those without e-mail access.</p>
<p>Face-to-Face Interviews/ Questionnaires</p>	<p>Provides more detailed, richer information. Provides opportunity to clarify questions and responses and to probe for further information. More questions can be asked. Higher response rate than other questionnaires. New issues can be uncovered through conversation. Avoids problems with illiteracy.</p>	<p>Most time consuming method. May be difficult to arrange interviews with people.</p>
<p>Public Meeting/ Workshop Bring together a group of interested parents and community members and use a workshop format to consult of various issues.</p>	<p>Relatively easy to arrange an inexpensive. Generates interest amongst parents and community members. Chance to profile the role and purpose of Council.</p>	<p>Those attending may not be representative of the community. Some voices may overpower others. Some people may not feel comfortable speaking in a large group. May raise expectations that cannot be met.</p>

2.0 Needs Assessment

2.1 Needs Identification

Based on your jointly developed vision, your School Division priorities and provincial priorities the Council, principal and staff will need to consider more carefully what needs they wish to address in the School Growth Plan. Once needs are identified more information may be required. It is likely that Councils will be able to contribute some of this information. Councils and others may wish to ask themselves:

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

Possible methods for gathering this information have been described above (see *Understanding the Community: Methods for Gathering Information*)

2.2 Assigning Priority to Needs

Having identified the needs that will be focused on in the School Growth Plan the working group will want to determine which needs have the highest priority. You may begin by developing some criteria that will help you decide which needs are the most important or which you believe should be addressed first. Examples of criteria include:

- Address the key provincial and School Division priorities
- Are widely and strongly felt by most of the group
- Are something most feel committed to.

The following chart is an example of how the group might go about organizing and assigning priority to needs. Targeted Provincial Learner Outcomes have been used as priorities in this example.

Needs	Priority
<p>Improved Learner Outcomes in reading, writing, mathematics and science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • <p>Improved outcomes of First Nations and Metis students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • <p>Enhance pro-social skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • <p>Improved student transitions within Pre-K – 12 and to post-secondary education and/ or employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	

2.3 Identification of Services, Resources and Strengths

The next step in completing a needs assessment is to identify the services, resources and strengths in your school, School Division and community. It may be helpful to review the School Profile (if available) and your School Community Profile to see if there are existing resources that may meet your identified needs. A next step is to brainstorm a list of organizations, agencies or individuals that might provide the time, skills, services, supports, money and knowledge you school can draw upon. Once you have a list members of the group can commit to contacting each organization/person to collect information on the services they might offer, resources of strengths.

3.0 Advice

3.1 Making Decisions Regarding Advice

In many ways in fulfilling their responsibility related to providing advice Councils will become collaborative partners in decision-making. Bruce Wellman and Laura Lipton (2004) have developed a method to help groups who wish to engage in collaborative decision-making on behalf of children and youth. Their method, which they call “Collaborative Inquiry”, may help Councils as they are asked to provide advice on various matters.

Wellman and Lipton suggest groups follow three processes as they seek to explore an issue. These three processes, known as, “Here’s What”, “So What” and “Now What”, have been adapted to fit the needs of School Community Councils:

Here’s What

Wellman and Lipton (2004) suggest groups begin by talking about their expectations and experiences regarding an issue.

Action:

For any given issue a Council has been asked to given advice on group members share with each other:

- the assumptions they hold about the issue or situation
- predictions they might make about the issue or situation
- the kinds of questions they have about the issue or situation
- the possibilities for learning that the issue or situation presents

So What?

Wellman and Lipton (2004) suggest the next step is to explore the data or information they have on hand to discover what it might reveal.

Action:

For any given issue a Council has been asked to give advice on, they are encouraged to consider:

- what points appear to “pop out” when they view information or understandings they have come to
- what patterns or categories or trends appear to be forming
- what is surprising or unexpected
- what are some things that need to be further explored

Now What?

The final step in Wellman and Lipton's (2004) process is to consider what interpretations or explanations/conclusions can be made related to the issue.

Action:

For any given issue Members ask themselves:

- what explanations/conclusions might we come to?
- what additional information do we need to verify our explanations/conclusions?
- what kind of advice might we provide based on our explanations/conclusions?

4.0 Approval of Fundraising

Fundraising

Definitions

1. Fundraising Activities

For the purpose of this policy, "fundraising activities" shall refer to school-based fundraising and parent association fundraising, in accordance with definitions below.

2. School-Based Fundraising

For the purpose of this policy, "school-based fundraising" refers to all fundraising activities initiated and conducted by school staff or sanctioned pupil groups, under the approval and supervision of the principal. School-based fundraising includes activities conducted by student representative councils and booster clubs.

3. Parent Association Fundraising

For the purpose of this policy, "parent association fundraising" refers to all fundraising activities initiated and conducted by parent associations, under the approval and supervision of the principal.

4. Charity or Charitable Agency

For the purpose of this policy a "charity" or "charitable agency" is any organization or institution engaged in non-profit assistance to the poor, distressed, or persons in need, or such institutions set up for the care of such individuals or groups.

5. Community Project

For the purpose of this policy, a "community project" is an activity that promotes the educational, philanthropic, or other work for the betterment of the local, regional, national, or international community.

Policy

The Board recognizes its responsibility in providing funds for basic educational programming. The Board acknowledges that from time to time, a school, school-based group, or parent association may wish to conduct fundraising activities to complement and/or supplement the basic educational program, support approved charities or community projects, or fund co-curricular and/or extra-curricular activities.

.....
*Check on the policies
your School Division
has on fundraising
activities.*

Funds raised should be used to benefit pupils and enhance the quality of Catholic education. Fundraising activities shall be compatible with the best interests of pupils, staff, and community and not detract from curricular activities. Fundraising in Regina Catholic Schools shall operate in harmony with the School Division mission, belief statements, religious and educational mandate, and Board policy.

Regulations

1. General Fundraising Principles

All school-based and parent association fundraising shall operate under the same guiding principles.

- a. All fundraising shall:
 - i. Operate under the approval and supervision of the principal.
 - ii. Operate keeping with regulations of the City of Regina and applicable laws of the Province of Saskatchewan.
 - iii. Be accounted for in accordance with procedures established by the Business and Finance Department.
 - iv. Consider poverty sensitive principles and the support capacity of the community involved.
 - v. Operate with respect for the preservation of instructional time.
 - vi. Operate on a voluntary basis for pupils and families.
 - vii. Operate with consideration for the safety and security of pupils.
- b. Funds raised should complement and not replace public funding for education.
- c. Fundraising shall not be conducted for providing instruction, basic education items, or any items required for course completion.
- d. Pupils shall not be excluded from an event or program based on lack of involvement in fundraising initiatives.
- e. Fundraising objectives shall be developed in advance of the fundraising activity.

- f. Fundraising activities shall not require pupils to listen to or read commercial advertisements.

2. Purposes of Fundraising

School-based or parent association fundraising may be designated for:

- a. Approved pupil excursions, field trips, or other out-of-school educational programs.
- b. Special events or activities conducted at the school or by school-based groups.
- c. Purchase of non-essential print or non-print learning resources.
- d. Equipment and supplies for extra-curricular activities.
- e. Improvements to school sites or playgrounds.
- f. School-based partnerships.
- g. Community projects.
- h. Charitable agencies.

3. Fundraising Fiscal Management

- a. Fundraising activities in the School Division shall operate in accordance with fiscal management requirements established by the Superintendent of Business and Finance.
- b. The principal is responsible for establishing proper procedures for safekeeping, accounting, and management of all monies collected.
- c. The purchase of goods and services with funds derived from school-based fundraising shall follow management requirements established by the Superintendent of Business and Finance.
- d. An annual financial summary of all school-based fundraising activities conducted during the school year shall be prepared and made available to superintendents, staff, recognized parent associations, or individual parents upon request.

Board of Education of the Regina Roman Catholic Separate School Division

5.0 Engaging Parents and Community Members

5.1 Stages of Development of Parent and Community Involvement

The Epstein Framework

The Epstein Framework below outlines six types of cooperation between families, schools and community

Type 1: Parenting

Families provide a healthy and safe environment at home that promotes learning and good behavior at school.

Type 2: Communicating

Families need information about school programs and student programs in a format that meets their individual needs.

Type 3: Volunteering

Families contribute to the school.

Type 4: Learning at Home

Families assist and supervise learning at home with the support of teachers.

Type 5: Decision-making

Families play meaningful roles in the school decision-making process.

Type 6: Collaboration with the Community

Families gain access to support services from other community agencies and support other community groups in efforts to improve community life.

5.2 Other Frameworks

Keeping the vision of School Community Councils in mind, the stages described below are adapted from those described by Gordon Kerr, Executive Director of the Ontario School Council Support Centre.

- **Stage 1**

Some parents and community members are interested and feel most comfortable in becoming involved in the school in what might be called a “traditional” manner. Individuals who become involved in schools at this level support children and youth through activities such as fundraising, volunteering in the classroom or at school

events, or by attending school events. At this level parents and community members may also attend School Community Council meetings and participate in Council sponsored activities. This type of involvement can have a positive impact on student learning and sense of well-being

- *Stage 2*

Other parents and community members may be interested in learning more about the school and the school community. At this level of involvement individuals are often interested using their knowledge to help support student learning and well-being by providing informed advice to the school, the Board and others. Parents and community members involved at this level may sit on Council committees, advise Council on certain issues or act as valued information sources regarding Council's questions. This type of involvement can have a positive impact on the students and the school as a whole. It can also build capacity within the school community to serve the learning and well-being needs of children and youth.

- *Stage 3*

Still other parents and community members may wish to become involved in school-level governance and become Council members themselves. Such individuals are often quite comfortable with providing informed advice to the school, the Board and others. They are often interested in an advanced level of partnership dedicated to improved student learning and well-being. Involvement of parents and community members at this level can have a synergistic effect on the school community resulting in improved learning success and well-being for children and youth.

Appendix C

Legislation

Selected sections, related to School Community Councils, of Bill No. 59, an Act to amend *The Education Act, 1995* and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as of first reading, April 12, 2006.

- **Sections 135 to 140 repealed**
17 Sections 135 to 140 are repealed
- **New Division re school community councils**
18 The following Division is added before Part IV:

“SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS

- **“Establishment of school community councils**
140.1 (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), every board of education shall establish a school community council for each school in its division.

(2) Two or more school community councils in the same school division may petition the board of education of their school division to recommend to the minister that those school community councils be amalgamated to form one school community council.

(3) If the minister receives a recommendation from a board of education to amalgamate school community councils, the minister may approve the amalgamation if, in the minister’s opinion, it is in the best interests of education in Saskatchewan.

(4) If the minister receives a recommendation from a board of education to separate an amalgamated school community council and establish two or more school community councils, the minister may approve the separation and establishment if, in the minister’s opinion, it is in the best interests of education in Saskatchewan.
- **“Membership of school community council**
140.2 Subject to the regulations and the policies of its board of education, every school community council shall consist of:
 - (a) no fewer than five and no more than nine elected members to represent parents of pupils and community members; and
 - (b) appointed members.

- **“Terms of office**

140.3 (1) Subject to subsection (2), each elected member of a school community council holds office for two years and is eligible for re-election.

(2) In the first election for each school community council, approximately half of the members are to be elected to one-year terms and the other members are to be elected to two-year terms.

(3) If there is a vacancy in an elected member’s position, a board of education may appoint an individual to that position.

- **“Disqualification of members**

140.4 A school community council member shall vacate his or her office as a member of the school community council if the member:

(a) is convicted of an indictable offence;

(b) is absent from three or more consecutive meetings of the school community council without the authorization of the school community council; or

(c) ceases to be eligible for election as a member pursuant to the regulations or the policies of the school community council’s board of education.

- **“Duties and powers**

140.5 Every school community council shall:

(a) facilitate parent and community participation in school planning;

(b) provide advice to its board of education;

(c) provide advice to its school’s staff;

(d) provide advice to other agencies involved in the learning and development of pupils; and

(e) comply with the regulations and the policies of its board of education”.

- **Section 176 amended**

19 Subsection 176(1) is amended:

(a) by adding “or (3)” after “subsection (2)”; and

(b) by striking out “basic”.

- **Section 177 amended**

20 Section 177 is amended by striking out “Subject to the regulations, the” **and substituting** “The”.

- **Section 182 amended**

21(1) Subsection 182(1) is repealed and the following substituted:

“(1) Religious instruction, as authorized by the board of education of a school division with respect to any of the schools in its jurisdiction, may be given in that school division for a period not exceeding two and one-half hours per week”.

(2) Subsection 182(3) is amended by striking out “a board of trustees, or the board of education in the case of a school division that is not divided into districts,” **and substituting** “the board of education”.

Access the French version of these amendments at

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/EduationalIssues/SchoolCommunityCouncils/EducationActFrench.pdf>

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

On-line Resources

Saskatchewan Learning <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/>
Information on Effective Practices Framework and Continuous Improvement Framework as well as many Saskatchewan Learning (Saskatchewan Education) publications that are available on-line.

A number of manuals from school councils across Canada are available on-line. Because of the unique responsibilities and position within school governance of Saskatchewan's School Community Councils adaptations may need to be made.

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

Revelstoke School Planning Council http://www.sd19.bc.ca/pac_spc


Canadian Institute on Governance <http://www.iog.ca/>
"The Institute on Governance, a non-profit organization that explores, shares, and promotes the concept of good governance in Canada and abroad, and helps governments, the voluntary sector, communities and the private sector put into practice for the well-being of citizens and society."


Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/>
This web-site provides information on the work of the National Network for Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University which follows the Epstein framework for parent and community involvement in schools.


On-Line Learning for Administrators: *Planning for a More Successful School – School Goals Workshop*.
http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/online_admin/leadership/


Other Resources


Resources developed by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association are represented by the symbol 


 **Website for School Community Councils** – Resources and background information for School Community Councils. Includes the School Community Council handbooks.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/EducationalIssues/SchoolCommunityCouncils/SchoolCommunityCouncils.htm>


 **Public Engagement – Module 15** – Engaging the school board, school staff, students and members of the school community to dialogue to work together for better schools.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module15.pdf>

 **Building the Parent School Partnership** – A collection of web articles, resources and ideas for building a successful parent-school partnership.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/EducationalIssues/ParentSchoolPartnership/ParentSchoolPartnership.htm>

 **The Way Things Work: An Orientation – Module 1** – Insight into the organizational structure of Saskatchewan's Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module1.pdf>

 **Vision, Mission and Planning – Module 3** – Understanding the importance of vision, mission and planning in your school division
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module3.pdf>

 **Education Finance: Getting and Spending – Module 4** – Understanding revenues and expenditures and the importance of aligning a budget with organizational values
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module4.pdf>

 **School Program and Student Achievement – Module 7** – Understanding the role of the board of education in program decisions
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module7.pdf>

✔ **Successful Schools: Guidelines for Boards of Education – Module 9** – What makes a successful school and how parent-school-community partnerships can help
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module9.pdf>

✔ **Diversity in Education – Module 10** – Understanding diversity and the importance of meeting students needs in schools.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module10.pdf>

✔ **Becoming a Better Board Chair – Module 12** – How to become an effective Captain, Organizer, Policy Leader and Spokesperson in your role as Chair.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module12.pdf>

✔ **Effective Public Speaking – Module 13** – Improving your public speaking skills
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module13.pdf>

✔ **Effective Communications and Public Relations – Module 14** – Creating positive images through effective communications and public relations skills.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module14.pdf>

✔ **Risk Management – Module 17** – Understanding the boards role in managing school and school division safety risks
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/TrusteeEducationAndBoardDevelopment/LearningModules/Module17.pdf>

Partners at School – A Handbook on How to Involve Indian and Metis Parents in School Activities. This handbook was published by Saskatchewan Learning in collaboration with Saskatchewan School Boards Association and the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation.
<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/IndianAndMetisEducation/1987s.pdf>