

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

- “The goal of consultation at every level is to ensure that the best possible educational service is provided to the students of the school board. It is recognized that teachers, as the persons most closely involved with teaching, have important input into the shaping of educational policies...”

(4-1.01 Local Agreement)

WHY DO WE NEED SCHOOL COUNCIL?

- The School Council is the teachers' best contractual opportunity to be involved in the formation, modification and implementation of educational policies as well as to develop a dialogue with the school administration.
- It is the one place where teachers can control the discussion with the school/centre administration, and where their views must be listened to.

STAFF MEETING VS. SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

School Council Meetings

- Run by a teacher (chairperson)
- Have powers to make recommendations (pass motions)
- Get direct answers, proof, and explanations

Staff Meetings

- Run by the administration
- For information purposes only
- No major decisions should be made here

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AT A SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

The School Council has a wide mandate to discuss issues of concern in a school/centre.

If an issue is already covered by a Collective Agreement or is of a very personal nature, then these items should probably not come up at School Council. The chairperson should “screen” these items and consult MTA when unclear on how to proceed.

Please remember that in the end, the best-run schools are ones in which the staff and administration have open lines of communication, respect the opinions of each other, and work together in order to better the school for everyone concerned.

Council’s policy decisions need to have the support of a clear majority of the staff. It can happen that individuals want to push their own personal agendas but it is strongly recommended that the Council be as free of cliques/dissent as possible.

SCHOOL COUNCIL MUST BE CONSULTED ON:

- In-school application of decisions of a pedagogical or disciplinary nature coming from the Comité de Gestion de la Taxe Scolaire, MELS, etc.
- Any decisions made by the administrator that would establish or modify the pedagogical or disciplinary nature of the school.
- And the council shall act as the school-level body of teachers in the application of Appendix XXVI (Value Added).

(4-02.07 Local)

ITEMS FOR CONSULTATION

Items calling for the participation of teachers only:

- the overall approach for the enrichment or adaptation of the objectives and contents of the programme of studies and for the development of local programmes of studies to meet the specific needs of the students,
- the time allocation for each compulsory and elective subject,
- the implementation of the programme of studies of the centre,
- the local programmes of studies to meet the specific needs of the students,
- the criteria for the introduction of new instructional methods,
- the textbooks and instructional material required for teaching the programme of studies,

CONSULTATION CONT'D...

- the determination of the educational objectives of the school in relation to the community which it serves and this on at least an annual basis,
- the school organization plan for the following school year, as per Article 8-10.00 of the Entente and 8-10.02.101 Local,
- the type of teachers needed to meet the educational objectives of the school,
- the general organization of student activities,
- the integration of teaching members new to the staff and particularly those who have not taught before,
- the acceptance and orientation of student teachers and the criteria for their distribution,
- the intent and application of school regulations,
- the application in the school of teaching methods, the criteria for evaluating students in their studies, and the policy on report cards,
- the organization and the evaluation for internal purposes of all Professional Days as well as calendar placement of those which are moveable,

CONSULTATION CONT'D...

- parent/teacher relations and liaison with the governing board,
- the distribution of the duties and responsibilities of the teachers in the school,
- the establishment of budgetary priorities in the school,
- the determination of the rotation schedule for emergency substitution in conformity with Clause 5-1.35 of the Local Agreement,
- the scheduling of possible secretarial and other human resource help in the school,
- the system of monitoring (student) lates and absences,
- the purchase, use, and allocation of computers in the school in conformity with Article 10-12.00 of the Entente,
- the system for reporting absences of teachers, arranging for their substitution, and reporting their return to work. (4-2.09 Local)

CONSULTATION CONT'D...

Items calling for the participation of teachers and the other staff of the school:

- the student supervision policy,
- the rules of conduct and safety measures,
- the approach for the implementation of the Basic School Regulation,
- the programming of educational activities entailing changes in the arrival and departure times or requiring the students to leave school premises,
- an approach for the implementation of students' services and special educational services programmes,
- the rules governing the placement of students and their promotion from one cycle to another at the elementary level,
- the needs of the school with respect to each staff category and the professional development needs of the staff,
- the implementation of the programmes relating to students' services and popular education,
- the operating rules of the centre. (4-9.03 Local)

FINALLY...

4-2.10 Local

- The School Council must approve any proposal made in accordance with article 8-10.00 (school organization plan) – in particular projects designed for all or some of the teachers in the school.
- The School Council must approve professional development activities for the teachers that are organized by the principal.

4-2.12 Local

- The School Board and the Union agree that the collection, sale, or distribution of materials for a school fundraising activity or to benefit outside, non-profit, or service organizations, shall be unacceptable unless such collection, sale, or distribution has received the prior approval of the School Council.

COUNCIL COMPOSITION

- Teachers are encouraged to elect people who want to serve and who are capable of representing the views of the staff even if they do not necessarily share the same opinion.
- Teacher members: No more than 8, no less than 3
please note that the Sr. MTA rep should have an automatic place on the council)
- Administration: Usually the principal, when absent the VP. *The VP can also be a non-voting member of Council when the principal is present.*
- **While it is not obligatory, Council members can be chosen by: Cycle, Team or Department.**

ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL ON COUNCIL

- The principal is a member of council like any other, and as such has the right to vote on any motions proposed at a meeting of the School Council. When an item is raised for discussion and a motion is presented, council members may speak for or against the motion. Just because the principal may speak against the motion, it does **not** mean the motion is lost.
- The principal does have an additional responsibility since she/he is responsible for putting certain items on the agenda in the first place. In addition, the principal must receive the recommendations of the council, each time a vote is taken, and the motion is carried by a simple majority of those present and voting.

ROLE OF PRINCIPAL CONT'D...

- Should the principal **not** carry out the Council's recommendation before the next meeting, the subject is placed on the agenda under matters arising from the minutes and she/he must explain why it hasn't been done either orally or in writing.
(4-2.15 Local)
- If the Council is not satisfied with the reasons given by the principal for not carrying out the recommendation, the Council can **adopt a motion** to write a letter to the Deputy Director General (**with copy to the MTA**) outlining the problem and the Council's dissatisfaction with the situation. The Council can also decide to invite the Deputy Director General and someone from the MTA office to a meeting to discuss it further to see if a more satisfactory arrangement can be achieved.
- Again, the principal may speak against writing such a letter, but as long as such a motion is duly moved and carried, it is the responsibility of the Chairperson (or Secretary) to deal with the correspondence.
- The principal **cannot stop** the Council from writing a letter. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the Deputy Director General to answer the Council Chairperson **directly** in writing.
- Incidentally, copies of **all** correspondence written by the Council should be sent to the MTA office to enable us to support Council requests and to help detect common problems and concerns in our schools. It may also be useful to send copies to your Governing Board if the issue is deemed to be in their interest.

Role of the Chairperson on the Council

- to prepare and post the agenda
- to call the meeting to order
- to announce the business of the meeting, according to the agenda
- to recognize members entitled to speak
- to handle the motions
- to ensure at the beginning of each year that the Council
- establishes its rules of internal procedures, e.g., whether the chairperson votes or not, if observers are allowed to attend meetings, etc.

Operation of the Council

- At the first meeting, the Council elects a chairperson and a secretary.
- The Council adopts its own rules of internal procedure.
- In order to reach a decision, a majority of the members **present** and **voting** is necessary.
- Any member of School Council may invite any "resource person" to speak to the item under consideration. The chairperson has only to **inform** the principal that such a person is coming to the meeting. The principal must follow the same procedure if she/he wishes to invite someone also. For example, somebody from the MTA Office could serve as a resource person on a topic, if you feel you need assistance.
- Within five (5) workdays of each Council meeting, the chairperson must inform the staff of the Council's resolutions (i.e., distribute the unofficial minutes) and **upon request**, report to the staff on its deliberations.

Please note that having the principal approve / vet the minutes is not a requirement of the council chairperson nor the council secretary.

In actual fact, the principal is like any other member of council, and doesn't have the right to edit or preapprove the School Council minutes. She/he should be voting on them at the actual School Council meeting, as everyone else does.

Agenda

- Staff should be provided with opportunity to add items to the agenda
- Post agenda in obvious area and be consistent with the location
- Circulate agenda among staff
- Person adding an item to the agenda should sign their name so that chairperson may have prior information about the item.
- Unless it is an emergency, administration items (which must go to Council) need to go to the Chairperson 5 work days in advance of the meeting. This is also true for teacher items covered in 4-2.09 Local.
- It is suggested that the agenda be shown to the administration after the staff has had a chance to add their items. The council is more likely to get answers and not have to wait until the following meeting if done this way... plus no one likes surprises.

Dealing with agenda in council

Chairperson should prioritize items

- Items left from previous meeting should be dealt with on a priority basis at the next meeting
- Chairperson may decide some items are for information only and can be dealt with via memo and/or at a staff meeting
- When appropriate, chairperson may ask cycles or departments to pre-discuss items

School Council Timeline

August:

- Ideally school council should be elected and hold its first meeting during the pedagogical days that begin the school year
- The members elected should choose a chairperson and a secretary for the year
- Establish internal rules of order
- Contractually, the council must be elected no later than September 30

September:

- Status of workload distribution
- Parent/teacher meetings and interviews/compensatory days
- Review of reporting schedule and procedures
- Procedures re teacher absence and substitution
- Staff phone chain / emails for emergencies i.e. school closings, snow days, etc.
- Orientation of teachers new to the school, including substitutes
- Supervision schedule (interim schedule)
- Use of professional days (local and if available board-wide days)

October:

- Review of final workload distribution
- Budget status
- Discuss ECA approved activities
- Discuss school system for monitoring/recording Value Added credits

November:

- Budget: School Councils should be requesting that they be given their school's budget. This is according to clause 4-2.13 Local: *"The school administration shall continue to provide budgetary information and updates on money expended throughout the school year, as well as any changes to the budget that may occur."*

This entitles teachers to be given a copy of the operating budget of your school/centre.

- Review school calendar of special events (including exam schedule & supervision).
- Consider special planning for the days preceding the holidays.

December:

- Begin study of objectives, curriculum offerings and school organization for the following year.

January:

- Continue study of objectives, curriculum offerings and organization for the following year, begun in December.

February:

- Plan major renovation / equipment requests for summer scheduling.
- Examine student enrolment forecasts for the next school year.
- Formulate programme and organizational recommendations based on work done in December and January.
- Examine results of budget distribution for current year and begin planning for next year.

March:

- Establish budget distribution for following year.
- Address staffing organization plans.
- Begin provisional staffing needs.

April:

- Staff Assistant job description, qualifications and criteria for selection
- School Calendar for the following year including:
 - local pedagogical days
 - evening parent meetings
 - scheduling of graduation, curriculum night, open house, etc.
- Discuss Value Added provisions

May:

- Redistribution of workload due to invigilation of June exams
- Planning for new programmes
- Review rules of conduct & safety
- Review emergency preparedness plans
- Review Value Added assigned credits (early May)

June:

- Review status of staffing plan
- Review the per capita allocations and the global amounts available to the school for the following school year. (budget)

FINAL THOUGHTS/SUGGESTIONS

- Invite guests to Council if an “expert” opinion is needed.
- (teachers) In order to keep everyone on the same page, hold a pre-council meeting and if really needed a post-council meeting.
- Distribute or post Council minutes for all to see.
- (teachers) Don’t be afraid to ask for a caucus during a meeting if there is confusion on a motion/topic.
- Be sure to communicate with your administration in an open and honest manner. No one likes surprises and if the council wants to get answers then adequate time is needed for these answers to be found.