

APRIL 2009

BUILD A NETWORK

Work with School Councils

What are school councils?

In 1995, the Ministry of Education mandated each school to set up a School Council. Its official role is to consult with parents and advise the principal and school board on matters of concern, including board policies, codes of conduct, education initiatives, improvement plans and fundraising.

School councils can be strong allies

School Councils, and their parent leaders, can be progressive voices for public education and strong allies of educational workers. When they speak out, their voices have political “weight” at the school board and with the provincial government.

School Councils also have the authority and ability to reach out and engage members of the whole school community. It is important to recognize and work with this network.

Keep your eyes open...

School Councils vary considerably. Too often, their role is limited to fundraising and finding volunteers. Some members get involved only out of self-interest. Principals may also try to recruit parent or staff representatives who will act as personal supporters for their pet projects.

Who can be on the school council?

The school council consists of:

- parents/guardians: Parent reps must make up the majority of Council members;*
- teacher representative(s), elected by teachers;*
- support staff representative(s), elected by non-teaching staff;*
- student representative(s) in the high schools, to be appointed by student council, or elected by the other students if there is no student council;
- community representative(s) to be appointed by the school council;
- the school principal.

**School board employees cannot be parent members if they work in the same school their child attends. There is no set number for teacher or support staff reps as long as parents remain in the majority.*

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The role of a federation representative

Being involved with the School Council gives OSSTF/FEESO members an opportunity to work with parents and others in the education community. As teacher or support staff representatives, we are able to:

- provide information on education issues and concerns to parent leaders;
- offer an alternative view to that of the school administration or board;
- encourage parent members to be active and to speak out on education issues at the board and in the community;
- influence trustees who often work closely with their area's School Councils and leaders;
- access a wider audience through School Council networks;
- participate in building education coalitions and grassroots support in the school and community.

Remember: An OSSTF/FEESO teacher or support staff representative on School Council is elected by staff, not selected by the administration.

Resources

- OSSTF/FEESO. *School Council Guide*

Some words of advice for federation representatives on School Councils

Don't get isolated from your district or bargaining unit. Keep in touch with your worksite representative and local OSSTF/FEESO office for support and information. Make sure you let them know what is happening and what issues are coming up.

Remember your role and responsibilities as a Federation member and as a representative of teachers or support staff.

Seek advice from your OSSTF/FEESO office if you find yourself on the opposite side of the fence from your Principal or others in authority.

Be aware that School Councils should NOT be involved in discussing matters related to the employment, discipline or performance of those working for the school or the Board. Check with your OSSTF/FEESO office for advice if these issues come up.

The Federation's responsibility

OSSTF/FEESO districts and bargaining units are encouraged to make a strong effort to work with School Councils and their members, and to provide information and build alliances on issues of common concern in public education and the school community.

Support must be provided to members acting as teacher and support staff representatives. Keep in touch and make sure they are kept informed about Federation issues and priorities. Offer resources and materials. Encourage them to work with the worksite representative and provide regular updates to the district.