

Fact sheet 3: information for students seeking election to council

What is a school council and what does it do?

All government schools in Victoria have a school council. School councils are legal entities that are given powers to set the broad directions of a school in accordance with Ministerial Order 1280 Constitution of Government School Councils, and the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. In doing this, a school council is able to directly influence the quality of education that the school provides for its students.

What are some of the duties of a school councillor?

The school council has particular functions in setting and monitoring the school's direction.

School councils have key responsibilities.

- **Finance:** overseeing the development and expenditure of the school's annual budget and ensuring proper records are kept of the school's financial operations.
- **Strategic planning:** participating in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan.
- **Policy development and review:** developing, reviewing, and updating selected policies that reflect the school's values and support the school's broad direction outlined in its strategic plan.
- **Community engagement:** informing itself of community views and stimulating community interest in the school.

Other key functions of school councils may include:

- raising funds for school related purposes
- maintaining school grounds and facilities
- entering into contracts
- reporting annually to the school community and the Department
- creating interest in the school in the wider community
- representing and taking the views of the school community into account
- regulating and facilitating after-hours use of school premises and grounds
- operating a children's service at the school.

Why is student membership so important?

Students have a unique perspective on education, teaching and schools. Having student members on school council allows students to have a say in the future direction of their school and ensures student input into decision-making. Student representation on secondary school councils will assist in the development of students' skills, including leadership and communication.

Do I need special experience to be on school council?

Each member brings their own valuable skills and knowledge to the role, however, in order to successfully perform their duties, councillors may need to gain some new skills and knowledge.

Student members are encouraged to attend the Department's free school council training to support them in their role.

For online training options, see: [the Department's School Council – Training and Good Governance, Policy webpage](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy) <<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy>>.

Who is on the school council?

For all schools with a student cohort of Year 7 and above, there are several possible categories of school council membership:

- A mandated elected **parent member** category – more than one-third of the total members must be from this category. Parents and carers of children attending the school are eligible for membership in this category.
- A mandated elected **school employee** member category – members of this category may make up no more than one-third of the total membership of school council. The principal of the school is automatically a member of this category.
- A mandated elected **student member category** (two positions) – members of this category are enrolled at the school and in Year 7 or above.
- An optional **community member category** – members are co-opted by a decision of the council because of their special skills, interests or expertise. Department employees are not eligible to be a community member.

A small number of school councils have nominee members.

How many student member positions are there on school council?

All Victorian government schools with a student cohort of Year 7 and above will have **two** mandated student member positions on school council.

Can I share the role with another student?

Councillors are not permitted to share their role. Councillors are elected to council and are expected to attend all meetings and serve their full term of office.

Are school captains and SRC members offered a position on council before other students?

While being the school captain, vice-captain, or a member of the SRC can provide valuable leadership experience, no students can be offered a position in the student member category based on their standing within the school.

Voting for student leaders at the school, such as school captains and SRC representatives, is a distinct and separate process to voting for student school council members. Any student interested in being a student member of their school council is required to run for election.

How long is the term of office?

Generally, the term of office for all council members is two years. The term of office of half the members in each category expires each year, creating vacancies for the annual school council elections.

Students voted onto council will be elected to council for a two-year term of office.

Now that the student membership category has been established, it is likely that one student will be elected each year. If a student member resigns prior to the end of their term of office, a casual vacancy is created. The casual vacancy is filled through the co-option process by school council.

What happens if there are tied votes?

If there is a tie between some or all of the candidates standing for election, the successful candidate will be determined by the drawing of lots.

What do I need to do to stand for election?

The principal will issue a Notice of Election and Call for Nominations early in Term 1 each year.

If you decide to stand for election, you can arrange for a student in Year 7 or above at your school to nominate you as a candidate or you can nominate yourself (self-nomination) for the student category.

Once the Nomination form is completed, it should be returned to the principal within the stated time. You will receive a Nomination Form Receipt following the receipt of the completed nomination.

Are there any rules on how I campaign?

Campaign literature supporting student member candidates for school council elections may only be distributed and posted in certain places and times as designated by the principal of your school. School resources may not be used to support candidates.

The principal may invite candidates to prepare a brief written statement to be distributed with each ballot paper. The length of the candidate statement is specified by the principal and is usually no longer than 150 words.

Nominations for school council

If one student vacancy is available and only one student is nominated, then the student is duly elected.

Unlike the parent or school employee member categories, if two student member positions are available and in the first call for nominations only one nomination is received, the student is not automatically declared elected. The principal will immediately post, in a prominent place in the school, a notice calling for further nominations. These nominations are to be received within three school days from the closing of the first call for nominations.

If after the second call for nominations one other nomination is received, then both students are appointed to council.

After the second call for nominations if the total number of nominations exceeds the number of vacancies, then all nominees will go to ballot. The two students with the most votes will be elected to council.

How do I know which students are standing for election?

If the number of nominations exceeds the number of vacant positions, a ballot will be held.

Student names will be listed in random order on the voting/ballot paper.

The principal may invite candidates to prepare a brief written statement to be distributed with each ballot paper. The candidate statements will be placed in the same order as listed on the ballot papers.

How do I vote?

At least seven days before the date fixed for the closure of the ballot, the principal will arrange delivery of the ballot papers.

A securely sealed ballot box or boxes in the case of multiple school campuses will be available for the casting of votes at the school between the hours of 8.00am and 4.00pm on every school day up to and including the day of the closure of the ballot.

A voter must not vote more than once in a ballot and may either post the vote back to the school or deliver the completed ballot paper to the school. The principal or school staff will provide advice on how to return the completed ballot paper.

School council meetings

School councils must meet at least eight times a year and at least once per school term. The president chairs all meetings and all members of the council are expected to attend.

Councillors can attend meetings in person or by videoconferencing or teleconferencing.

Following the school council elections, council members will determine an appropriate time and location to hold meetings throughout the year. For example, council may agree that meetings will take place on the first Wednesday of each month in the school library.

For most school councils, meetings are located at the school and are held in the evening to ensure that the majority of members can attend. Meetings typically last for around 2.5 hours.

You will need to discuss and arrange transport to and from the meeting with your parent or carer.

The school council does not provide transport.

The principal, in consultation with the school council president, will ensure an agenda is prepared for each regular meeting and will distribute the agenda, draft minutes from the previous meeting and meeting papers such as subcommittee reports, principal's and president's report to school council members. These documents will be provided approximately five days before the meeting. All members, including student members are expected to read all documents and prepare in advance of each meeting.

Conflict of interest

If you, as a member of council, or your immediate family has a direct conflict of interest, including a pecuniary* interest in a matter under discussion at a school council meeting, you must declare the conflict of interest and must not be present during the discussion unless invited to do so by the chairperson at the meeting. The member will not be involved in any voting associated with the matter at hand. *For this purpose, pecuniary is defined as: relating to or consisting of money.

What if I cannot attend a council meeting?

If a member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology should be submitted to the principal prior to the meeting. A member of the school council may apply in writing to the president for extended leave of up to three consecutive meetings.

Is there training that I can attend?

School councillors can attend training offered state-wide. The training uses the Improving School Governance package and is at no cost to school council members. Training is available in the following modules for students: Governance, Strategic Planning, and Finance.

Students are encouraged to attend the virtual training offered by the Department in consultation with the principal. The principal is responsible for providing evidence of parent/carers permission to the training providers.

The modules and mini modules are also accessible as online training. Participants can complete the modules at their own pace, in any order and are able to return to each module as often as necessary.

To access the online training options including videos and mini-modules, see: [the Department's School Council – Training and Good Governance, Policy webpage](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy)

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Can a school council tell a teacher what to do?

A school council cannot issue instructions to teachers regarding their professional duties, or to employees of the Department in respect of their duties at the school. That role is the responsibility of the principal. If a school council has developed a school policy on certain matters and that policy is consistent with Department policy the council can expect the school staff will implement the policy.

Further Information

For more information on the roles and responsibilities of school councillors, see: [the Department's School Council – Powers and Function, Policy webpage](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-powers-and-functions/policy)

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Code of conduct for school councillors

School councils in Victoria are public entities as defined by the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

School councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission. The Code of Conduct is based on the Victorian public sector values and requires councillors to:

- **act with honesty and integrity** – be truthful, open and clear about their motives and declare any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest and duty
- **act in good faith** in the best interests of the school, work cooperatively with other councillors and the school community, be reasonable, and make all decisions with the best interests of students foremost in their minds
- **act fairly and impartially** – consider all relevant facts of an issue before making a decision, seek to have a balanced view, never give special treatment to a person or group and never act from self interest
- **use information appropriately respect** – confidentiality and use information for the purpose for which it was made available
- **exercise due care, diligence and skill** – accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school
- **use the position appropriately** – not use the position as a councillor to gain an advantage
- **act in a financially responsible manner** – observe all the above principles when making financial decisions
- **comply with relevant legislation and policies** – know what legislation and policies are relevant for which decisions and obey the law
- **demonstrate leadership and stewardship** – set a good example, encourage a culture of accountability, manage risks effectively, exercise care and responsibility to keep the school strong and sustainable.