

Fact sheet 5: nominating and voting others to the student member category

What is a school council and what does it do?

All government schools in Victoria have a school council. School councils are legally constituted bodies 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 operation.
- **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 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 community into account
- regulating and facilitating after-hours use of school premises and grounds
- operating a children's service at the school.

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
- a mandated elected **school** employee member category
- a mandated elected **student** member category (two positions) – members of this category are enrolled at the school in Year 7 or above.
- Many school councils have an optional **community** member category, and a small number of school councils have nominee members.

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

Why is student membership so important?

Students have a unique perspective on education, teaching and schooling and 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 candidates 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 acquire this knowledge by attending the Department's free school council training using the Improving School Governance modules to support them to undertake their role. Training is also available online.

For more information about training options for school councillors, see: [School Council – Training and Good Governance on the Department's website at <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy>](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy)

How do I nominate a candidate for a position on council?

The principal will issue a Notice of Election and Call for Nominations following the start of Term 1 each year.

Students can arrange for a student in Year 7 or above to nominate them as a candidate or they can nominate themselves for the student member category.

Once the nomination form is completed, it should be returned to the principal within the time stated on the Notice of Election. A Nomination Form Receipt will be issued following receipt of the completed nomination.

Generally, if there are more nominations received than there are vacancies on council, a ballot will be conducted during the two weeks after the call for nominations has closed.

How do I know which students are standing for election?

If the number of nominations exceeds the number of vacant positions, an election/ballot process 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.

Note: 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.

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 secure 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.

For further information please contact the school principal.