

Appendix A: Fact sheets

Fact sheet 1: School council elections – information for parents

What is a school council and what does it do?

All government schools in Victoria have a school council. They are legally constituted bodies that set the broad direction of a school and provide oversight of school decisions and finances. Their roles are guided by rules and laws including Ministerial Order 1280 (Constitution of Government School Councils) 2020, the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* and the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

Who is on the school council?

There are several possible categories of school council membership:

- **parent membership category** – members of this category must make up more than one third of the school council's total membership. A parent member can be any person who has parental responsibility for a student enrolled at the school.
- **school employee membership 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.
- **community membership category** – if a school council includes a community membership category, members are co-opted by a decision of the school council. The decision may be based on their special skills or to provide broader representation of diversity in the school community. Department of Education employees are not eligible to be community members on school council.
- **nominee membership category** – a small number of school councils have nominee members.
- **student membership category** – all schools with a Year 7 and above student cohort have a student membership category with 2 positions allocated, unless they have sought an exemption. Refer to **School Council Elections: Guidance**.

What do you need to do to stand for election?

The principal will issue a Notice of election and call for nominations in term 1 of each year and let you know where you can get a nomination form.

You can nominate yourself in the parent membership category by filling in the nomination form.

Parent members are required to hold a valid Working with Children Clearance (WWCC) to nominate for a position on school council. The only exception to this requirement is parents who are also teachers and hold a current VIT registration.

If you work at your child's school, then you are not eligible to run in the parent membership category, but you can nominate for the school employee membership category.

If you work for the Department of Education somewhere other than your child's school, then you are eligible to nominate for parent membership at that school. However, there is a limit to the number of department employees who can hold office in the parent membership category. Check with your school's principal.

You must return your completed nomination form to the principal within the time stated on the notice of election. You will receive a nomination form receipt via post, email or by hand delivery.

How do I get a Working with Children Clearance, and does it cost money?

You can apply for a Working with Children Check (WWCC) through the **Services Victoria website**.

School council members are volunteers which means that applying for a WWCC is free.

When applying for a WWCC, parents must:

- nominate the Department of Education as the organisation they are working for when applying for a Working with Children Check
- provide evidence of their Working with Children Clearance as soon as practicable after receiving it (or via the school council nomination form).

What happens if there are more nominations than positions available?

If the number of nominations is greater than the positions available in any school council membership category, a ballot is required to elect members to school council. A ballot means a vote is held to determine which of the nominees are elected to school council.

Each parent/carers who is eligible to be on school council is given a ballot paper to vote. Ballot papers are only given to members of the specific membership category where the ballot is required.

For example, if a ballot is required to determine who will be elected to the parent membership category, each parent/carers of a child at the school are given a ballot paper and are able to vote.

What happens if not enough parents nominate to fill the available parent membership positions?

All nominees will be declared elected to school council. For the remainder of the unfilled positions, the principal will call for a second round of nominations, for a 3 day period.

What happens if the number of nominations equals the number of positions available?

The nominees are elected to school council and the election process concludes. For example, if 3 parents nominate and there are 3 parent positions available, all 3 parents who nominated are elected to and join school council.

How long is the term of office?

Generally, the term of office for all council members is 2 years. The term of office of half the members in each category expires each year, creating vacancies for the annual school council elections.

How often does school council meet?

School council is required to meet 8 times per year and at least once per term.

Meetings are held at the school, generally after school hours. School council members can also join meetings virtually.

If you would like to read more about what happens at a school council meeting, please refer to the **School Council – Meetings policy**.

Why is parent membership so important?

Parent members on school councils provide important viewpoints and have valuable skills, experiences and knowledge, which help inform and shape the direction of the school.

Do I need special experience to be on school council?

No. Each school council member brings their own valuable skills, knowledge and life experience to the role. An interest in your child's school and the desire to work in partnership with others to help shape the school's future are the most important criteria.

To successfully perform their duties, school council members may need to gain some new skills and knowledge. Free school council training is available to all school council members. The training helps support school council members with their roles and responsibilities.

Code of conduct for school council members

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

School council members 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 school council members 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 council members 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 school council member 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.

Indemnity for school council members

The Department of Education provides insurance to school council members. School council members are not legally liable for any loss or damage suffered by council or others as a result of reasonable actions taken in good faith in the exercise of their powers and functions as a member of school council. For further information refer to the **School council – liability and legal proceedings policy**.

How can you become involved?

By participating in, and voting in the school council elections, which are held in Term 1 each year. Ballots are only held if more people nominate as candidates than there are positions vacant.

You might consider:

- standing for election as a member of the school council
- encouraging another person to stand for election.

Remember

- Consider standing for election to school council.
- Ask the principal for instructions if you are not sure what to do.
- Be sure to vote if the election goes to ballot.