

Fact sheet 3: Information for parents of children seeking election to school council

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 are given powers to 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, and the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

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:

- **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** – members are co-opted by a decision of the school council because of their special skills, interests or expertise. Department employees are not eligible to be a community member.
- **a 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: **School Council Elections: Guidance**)

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.

Students voted onto council will be elected to council for a 2-year term of office.

If a student member resigns prior to the end of their term of office, a casual vacancy is created. The casual vacancy can be filled through the co-option process by school council.

What does my child need to do to stand for election?

The principal will issue a Notice of election and call for nominations following the start of Term 1 each year.

If your child decides to stand for election, they can nominate themselves for the student membership 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 the receipt of the completed nomination.

If one student vacancy is available and one student nominates, then the student is elected to school council.

Unlike the parent or school employee membership categories, if 2 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 3 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.

If there are more nominations than positions available?

If the number of nominations received is greater than the positions available, a ballot is required to determine who is elected to school council.

In the event of a ballot, each student in Year 7 and above will be given a ballot paper to vote.

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

The nominees are elected to school council and the election process concludes. For example, if one student nominates and there is one position available, that student is elected to council.

Why is student membership so important?

School council exist to make the education students receive as good as possible.

Students provide a unique, lived experience perspective of how students feel about certain initiatives being talked about at school council meetings.

Student voice plays a key role in providing direction and support to the principal and school leadership team to achieve the best possible education outcomes for all students.

Having student members on school council gives the students at the school a voice, and the ability to have a say in the future direction of the school.

Does my child need special experience to be on school council?

No, not at all. Each member brings their own valuable skills and knowledge to the role, however, to successfully perform their duties, school council members including students may need to gain some new skills and knowledge.

Student members are encouraged to attend the department's free virtual live or face-to-face school council training, using the Improving School Governance modules and mini modules to support them to undertake their role. Interactive online training is also available.

For more information about training and access to interactive online modules, refer to the **School Council – Training and Good Governance policy**.

School council meetings

School councils must meet at least 8 times a year and at least once per school term. The president chairs all meetings, and all members of the school council are expected to attend.

School council members can attend meetings in person or by videoconferencing or teleconferencing.

Following the school council elections, school council members will determine an appropriate time and location to hold meetings throughout the year. For example, the school 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 the majority of members can attend. Meetings typically last for around 2.5 hours.

You will need to discuss and arrange transport options to and from the meeting with your child. 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 sub-committee reports, principal's and president's report to school council members. These documents will be distributed approximately 5 days before the meeting.

Conflict of interest

If your child, as a member of school council, or their immediate family has a direct conflict of interest, including a monetary interest, in a matter under discussion at a school council meeting, they must declare the conflict of interest and must not be present during the discussion unless invited to do so by the chair at the meeting. The member will not be involved in any voting associated with the matter at hand.

If your child is interested in joining school council, you should speak with them regarding any conflicts of interest they may have. For example, if a family member of the student owns a local plumbing business which the school contracts. That is a conflict of interest the school council will need to be aware of.

Can I attend school council meetings with my child?

School council meetings are ordinarily open to the school community. Visitors or observers can be present at a school council meeting with the prior agreement of the principal. A request to attend must be forwarded either to the principal or president.

There may be times when, for the purpose of confidentiality or other reasons, a school council meeting needs to be closed and only the appointed members can attend.

I am a parent member of the school council. Can I be a member of the same council as my child(ren)?

Yes, relatives are allowed to be members of the same council.

What if my child cannot attend a school council meeting?

If a member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology needs to 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 3 consecutive meetings.

What if my child decides they no longer want to be a member of school council?

The department strongly encourages students to consider the time commitment of being on council prior to running for election.

Your child should discuss resigning from school council with the principal.

A school council member is required to submit their resignation from school council in writing to the principal for it to be formally accepted.

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 issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission. The Code of Conduct is based on the Victorian public sector values and requires 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 school 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
- **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
- **exercise due care, diligence and skill** – accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school
- **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. Refer to the **School Council – Liability and Legal Proceedings policy**.