

# 6

# SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES



Ontario's **school boards** operate the province's publicly funded schools. They administer the funding they receive from the provincial government in their designated geographic area.

There are four types of publicly funded school boards in Ontario: 31 English public boards, 29 English Catholic boards, 4 French public boards and 8 French Catholic boards. As well, a small number of Ontario schools are operated by **school authorities**. The school authorities manage special types of schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities, and schools in remote and sparsely populated regions.

Each school board has a group of locally elected representatives known as **school trustees**. Trustees are members of the governing board, not employees. Individual trustees have no individual authority, but have the responsibility for communicating with their constituents and bringing their concerns to the board for discussion. The **board of trustees** make decisions as a whole. Board decisions are made by voting, where motions are passed if they have majority support.

The board of trustees is responsible for educational leadership and planning, policy-making, resource allocation, financial oversight, monitoring and evaluation. Some of the specific responsibilities include:

- Creating an educational vision and goals for the board
- Developing the board's multi-year strategic plan
- Hiring and evaluating the director of education (the CEO of the school board)

- Working in partnership with parent committees and school councils
- Providing a link to the public and responding to local concerns
- Setting goals for student achievement and promoting continuous improvement
- Approving textbook and learning materials
- Determining the number, size and location of schools
- Monitoring the effectiveness of school policies
- Gauging public satisfaction
- Approving a balanced annual budget and demonstrating financial accountability

School trustees are elected every four years during municipal elections. Since the territories of many school boards include more than one municipality, the geographic area a trustee represents often includes more than one municipality or more than one municipal ward. Some school boards divide the board into smaller areas, called **wards**. Each year, the board of trustees elects one of their members to act as **chair** of the school board.

In Ontario, each school board currently has one to three **student trustees**, elected each year by students to represent them. In 2020, the minimum number of student trustees will increase from one to two per board. Student trustees act as a link between students and the board. Student trustees are not official board members but they do have many of the same rights and responsibilities. Student trustees participate in board meetings and

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committees. Student trustees may suggest motions to advance issues and may cast a non-binding vote. Student trustees are a direct way for students to have a voice at the school board level.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

How do the decisions made by school trustees impact me? What is the role of school trustees, individually versus collectively? How can I evaluate the trustee candidates?

### SUMMARY

School trustees provide a link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to discussions and decision-making at the board table.

In this lesson, students will explore and debate a position paper put forth by the Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA) using a Both Sides Now approach. Students will discuss the role of school board trustees, and research the composition of their local school board. In groups, students will create a profile for an ideal school board trustee, before researching and assessing the candidates running for election. In the consolidation activity, students reflect on ways to improve school for students in the board, and articulate these views to the newly elected board of trustees, as well as their student trustee(s).

### LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the responsibilities of school trustees and the decision-making process among boards of trustees (Citizen Framework – Structures);
- Explain the impact of board policies and decisions at their school (Concepts of Thinking – Political Significance);
- Work in a collaborative manner to learn about and assess the trustee candidates;
- Consider and respect others' perspectives (Citizen Framework – Identity);
- Voice informed opinions on matters relevant to their school community (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Participation).

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can describe the responsibilities of school trustees and the decision-making process among boards of trustees;
- I can analyze how board policies and decisions affect my life;
- I can collaborate with my peers to learn about candidates running for school trustee;
- I can demonstrate respect for others' beliefs and opinions;
- I can evaluate and express my own beliefs and opinions.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

#### *CHV20 – Overall Expectations*

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance  
A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to civics and citizenship education, and identify some careers in which civics and citizenship education might be an asset  
B1. Civic Issues, Democratic Values: describe beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain how they are related to civic action and to one's position on civic issues  
B2. Governance in Canada: explain, with reference to a range of issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of various institutions, structures, and figures in Canadian governance  
C2. Inclusion and Participation: assess ways in which people express their perspectives on issues of civic importance and how various perspectives, beliefs, and values are recognized and represented in communities in Canada

#### *CHV20 – Specific Expectations*

A1.1 formulate different types of questions to guide investigations into issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance  
A1.2 select and organize relevant evidence, data, and information on issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance from a variety of primary and secondary sources  
A1.5 use concepts of political thinking when analyzing and evaluating evidence, data, and information and formulating conclusions and/or judgments about issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance  
B1.1 describe some civic issues of local, national and/or global significance, and compare the perspectives of different groups on selected issues  
B2.4 explain, with reference to issues of civic importance, how various groups and institutions can influence government policy  
C2.3 describe various ways in which people can access information about civic matters, and assess the effectiveness of ways in which individuals can voice their opinions on these matters

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### MINDS ON

1. Invite students to share what they know about their school board. Questions to prompt discussion:

- What is the name of our school board?
- Who sets the goals and makes strategic decisions for the school board?
- Who oversees operations and makes management decisions at the school board?
- What are some responsibilities of the board of trustees?

2. Explain to students that each school board has one to three student trustees.

- Student trustees act as a link between students and the board. Student trustees are not board members but do have many similar rights and responsibilities. Student trustees participate in board and committee meetings. Student trustees may suggest motions to advance issues and may cast a non-binding vote. Student trustees are a direct pathway for students to have their voice heard at the school board level.
- In the way a student council advocates for students in the school, student trustees advocate for students in all schools the school board.

3. Under the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, student trustees work together to advocate on behalf of students across the province. As part of this work, the association writes 'position papers' to demand certain changes or improvements. Earlier this year, OSTA-AECO released several position papers ([www.osta-aeco.org](http://www.osta-aeco.org) → Media → Position Papers).

For example:

- The Importance of Breakfast Clubs in Schools
- Student Wellbeing
- Climate in Schools
- The Student Trustee Vote
- Utilization of Student Representation
- Technology and Multimedia in the Classroom
- Environmental Education and Green Schools
- Safe Schools and Cyber-bullying Prevention
- Extracurriculars in Schools

4. Divide students into groups and provide each with one position paper to explore and debate using a Both Sides Now approach (Activity 6.1). Students will have an opportunity to reflect on the topic in the position paper and increase their understanding of the arguments that support and oppose the positions. At the end, they will reach a group decision whether they approve of the position or not. Consider providing some groups with the same position paper so that they can compare their decisions afterwards.

*Teacher note: Some students may need help simplifying some of the language used in the position papers.*

5. As a class, have a follow up discussion:

- What are the opportunities and challenges in making collective or group decisions?
- How do you make group decisions with a group of people who do not all agree?
- How do you get your point across to someone you are debating with?
- How can ensure that you clearly understand the points of someone you disagree with?

### ACTION

1. Use the 'School Boards in Ontario' video (2:37 min) and related slide deck to review the role and responsibilities of school trustees, and how the board of trustees makes decisions.

2. Review the term: policy. A policy is statement of intent or action to achieve certain outcomes. A policy also provides rules to be followed.

Using a Turn and Talk strategy, ask students to think of specific examples of how school board policies and decisions affect their lives.

3. In small groups, ask students to create a profile for their 'ideal' school trustee using Handout 6.2 and Activity 6.3. What personal characteristics, skills, experience and motivations match the responsibilities of the role?

4. Using your school board's website, review the composition of your school board.

- How many trustees are there?
- How many student trustees?
- Does your board have First Nation trustees?
- For those trustees elected in municipal and school elections, what wards/municipalities do they represent?
- Which trustees represent you and your family?

5. Review the list of candidates running for school trustee using the following website:

<http://elections.ontarioschooltrustees.org>

*Teacher note: If your school trustee candidates are acclaimed, skip to the **Alternative Activities**.*

6. Ask students to learn about the candidates using the profiles on the above website, candidate websites and social media pages, or through web searches. You can also look at the board website to see if the candidate is currently a trustee and running for re-election. If so, looking at minutes of past board meetings on the website can tell you the kind of motions the trustee has moved and perhaps what their interests are. This activity can be completed through a jigsaw method or you can assign one candidate to each group and have them present to the rest of the class.

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7. Have a closing discussion about the trustee candidates and have students write a reflection based on their ideal candidate.

- Which candidate(s) do you think would make the best trustee and why?
- Which candidate(s) most closely matches your ideal school trustee? Explain with evidence or examples.
- Would you ever consider running for student trustee? Why or why not?
- How involved are you with the student council? Would you like to be more involved?

### ***Alternative Activities***

A. Select three school board policies that directly impact students. Ask students to change each policy to their liking, and describe how this change would affect students (consider advantages and potential drawbacks). Ask students to share their changes and as a class determine the best amendments.

B. If your school trustee was acclaimed, invite them into your class for a discussion about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead within the school board, and encourage students to share their ideas and concerns. You could also consider framing the discussion about some of the position papers released by OSTA or the specific policies analyzed in the above activity.

## **CONSOLIDATION**

Elected trustees are accountable to the school community and bring community concerns to the board table. Emphasize the fact that student trustees act as the representative for students at the school board table.

Ask students to reflect on what they would like to change or improve about school for students in the school board, and find a way to articulate this to their newly elected school trustee(s) and/or the student trustee(s). This can be in the form of a letter, video, slide deck or multi-media piece.