

7 SCHOOL 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. In addition, 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 responsibility for communicating with their constituents and bringing their concerns to the board for discussion. The board of trustees makes 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)
- 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 elect one of their members to act as **chair** of the school board.

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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 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?

OVERVIEW

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 unit, students form groups and role-play a governing board of trustees where they debate an issue and pass a motion for schools in the board. Afterwards, students will learn more about the role of boards of trustees and individual trustees, and research the composition of their local school board. Then, students will create an ideal profile of a school trustee and find out which candidate most closely matches up. In the *Consolidation* activity, students will reflect on ways to improve the school experience for students within the board, and articulate these views to the newly elected school trustee(s) or student trustee(s) for their board.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- develop an understanding of the role of boards of trustees and how political institutions affect our lives (Citizenship Education Framework – Structures);
- use the inquiry process to formulate questions, interpret, synthesize and critically analyze the school trustee candidates (Global Competencies – Critical Thinking & Problem Solving);
- demonstrate effective communication skills to share ideas and information with classmates (Global Competencies – Communication);
- voice informed opinions on matters relevant to our school community (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Participation).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I CAN...

- explain how a board of trustees makes decisions;
- influence my peers with my ideas and opinions;
- describe the role and responsibilities of school trustees;
- explain my ideas using details and examples;
- determine through research if school trustee candidates have priorities that match my interests and concerns;
- express my opinion about how schools in our board can be improved.

CURRICULUM LINKS

| | Overall Expectations | Specific Expectations |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Social Studies | Grade 5 – B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments (FOCUS ON: <i>Significance</i>) | Grade 5 – B3.2 describe the jurisdiction of different levels of government in Canada, as well as of some other elected bodies (i.e., federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments band councils; school boards), and some of the services provided by each Grade 5 – B3.7 describe key actions taken by governments, including Indigenous governments, to solve some significant national, provincial/territorial, and/or local issues |
| Oral Communication | 2 – use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes | 2.3 communicate orally in a clear, coherent manner, presenting ideas, opinions, and information in a readily understandable form |
| Writing | 1 – generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience 2 – draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience | 1.2 generate ideas about a potential topic and identify those most appropriate for the purpose 1.6 determine whether the ideas and information they have gathered are relevant, appropriate, and adequate for the purpose, and do more research if necessary 2.8 produce revised, draft pieces of writing to meet identified criteria based on the expectations related to content, organization, style, and use of conventions |

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 creates the vision and sets goals for the school board?
- Who establishes rules/policies for all schools in the board?

2. Explain to students that each school board has a group of elected representatives, called school trustees, which form a decision-making body. The board of trustees makes decisions as a whole; individual trustees have no individual authority. Board decisions are made by voting, where motions (decisions) are passed if they have majority support.

3. Divide students into groups of six or eight and have them model the role of the board of trustees.

a) Present one of the following scenarios to your students or come up with one of your own choosing.

- Many students across the board face challenges, including unique transportation needs, varying socioeconomic situations, and a lack of time, which limit their ability to eat breakfast each

morning. Teachers believe this is negatively affecting students' focus and interest. Some schools are able to have breakfast programs but some cannot afford to.

- Many students are taking their smartphone devices to schools. Some teachers allow them to use their devices in class for learning purposes. However, students also spend a lot of time using their devices for non-educational reasons so it is becoming a distraction.
- Cyber-bullying is increasing within schools across the board. Some students are avoiding coming to school and it is causing many negative consequences.

b) Explain the process: Three roles must also be assigned within each group. One team member will act as 'board chair' and manage the meeting discussion, ensuring all members have a chance to contribute their opinions and to move, second and pass one or more motions (actions/decisions). One team member will be the note taker and summarize the team's ideas. Another team member is an observer and makes notes about group dynamics and the process by which the final decision is made. Students with roles can also contribute their ideas.

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Remind students that the goal is to pass one or more motions, which will determine which actions/rules will be implemented to address the problem. Students should listen to all ideas from all group members, consider the merits of each, discuss further for clarification, and decide which idea to vote for. In order for any motion to be put into place, it must be voted on and have support from more than half of the group members.

c) Provide guiding questions to help structure the discussion. Select questions based on the scenario.

Possible suggestions:

- What are some possible solutions or actions that could be taken to improve the situation?
- What rules could be established?
- On the board website, what is the current policy and/or procedure that addresses the problem? What is good about the policy? What could be improved?
- Since the solution will need to be implemented for all schools of the board, what considerations need to be taken into account?

Teacher note: If there is a current policy or program that relates to the scenario, print it up in advance for the groups.

4. Each team's ideas are presented to the class with a quick report about how the group functioned and the decision-making process.

5. Afterwards, 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?
- What skills are useful within a group that is debating an issue or determining a decision that may have opposing viewpoints?

ACTION

1. Use the 'School Boards in Ontario' video (2:37 min) and accompanying slide deck to review the role and responsibilities of school trustees.

- School trustees provide a link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to board discussions and decision-making. Trustees have no individual authority; the board of trustees makes decisions as a whole.

2. As a class, review key information about your school board using your board's website.

- What are the geographic boundaries of our school board? (Use a map as a visual aid)
- How many schools are in our school board?
- How many school trustees are elected?
- How many student trustees are on the board?
- Does our board have any First Nation trustees?
- If applicable, how many wards are there within the school board? Which is our school board ward?

3. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them create a profile for their 'ideal' school trustee (Activity 7.1). Guiding questions:

- What personal characteristics would the school trustee possess?
- What skills or work experience would they have?
- What would be their motivation to become a school trustee?
- What priorities would they have?

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

<http://elections.ontarioschooltrustees.org>

Teacher note: If your candidate(s) are acclaimed, skip to the Alternative Activity.

5. Ask students to learn about the candidates using the above website, candidate websites and social media pages, web searches or by contacting the candidates directly. This activity can be completed through a jigsaw method or you can assign each group one candidate to research and have them present to the rest of the class.

Teacher note: Students can also look at the board website to see if the candidate is currently a school trustee and running for re-election. If so, looking at minutes of past board meetings on the website can tell students the kind of motions the school trustee has moved and perhaps what their interests are.

6. Have a closing discussion about the candidates and have students write their reflections using the related worksheet (Activity 7.1). Please note that more than one copy may be needed depending on the number of candidates.

- Which candidate do you think would make the best school trustee and why?
- Which candidate most closely matches your ideal school trustee? Explain with evidence or examples.

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Alternative Activity (Acclaimed candidates)

If your school trustee was acclaimed, invite them into your class for a discussion about the opportunities and challenges within the school board. Have students prepare questions in advance.

CONSOLIDATION

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

ASSESSMENT

| Type of Assessment | Unit Area | Guiding Questions for Teachers |
|--------------------|---------------|---|
| FOR LEARNING | MINDS ON | Are students collaborating with their classmates to try to come up with a solution? Are student solutions or actions feasible? |
| AS LEARNING | ACTION | Are students thinking critically about the qualities and skills needed for the role of school trustee? Can students identify a strong vs weak candidate? |
| OF LEARNING | MINDS ON | Can students clearly articulate their ideas and lobby for their views in a respectful manner? |
| | ACTION | Can students identify a candidate they might vote for? |
| | CONSOLIDATION | Can students clearly articulate their opinions and ideas in a persuasive manner? |

LEARNING FOR ALL

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Individual Education Plans | <p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use ability grouping to help students conduct research on trustees. Allow students to present their information in various ways (orally, written, only to the teacher). <p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to contact the candidates and ask three questions about the class' most pressing concerns. Have students report the responses back to the class. |
| English Language Learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage students to compare the education system in Ontario to the one of their home country. This can help with developing a deeper understanding of the institutions. Allow for extra time during research periods. Provide vocabulary in advance. |
| Culturally Responsive Pedagogy | <p>Some students may be shy or reluctant to share or vote due to cultural reasons.</p> <p>Indigenous Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include discussion of Indigenous schooling options. Discuss the emphasis many Indigenous groups place on consensus decision-making. |