Every four years, voters across Ontario decide who will represent their interests and lead their communities by electing the members of their municipal councils and school boards.

The provincial government sets out common rules that all voters and candidates must follow. However, municipalities are responsible for conducting elections to their council and school boards within their jurisdiction. Every municipality has a municipal clerk who is in charge of running the election.

You are eligible to vote in the municipal council election in Ontario if:
• you are a Canadian citizen
• you are aged 18 or older
• you qualify to vote in the municipality*

*You may qualify in one of three ways:
1. You are a *resident elector* if you live in the municipality.
2. You are a *non-resident elector* if you own or rent property in the municipality, but do not live there.
3. You are the spouse of a *non-resident elector*.

There is also a special rule for students who may be living away from home while they attend school. If you are a student and consider your "home" to be the place where you live when you are not attending school (i.e. you plan on returning there), then you are eligible to vote in both your "home" municipality *and* in the municipality where you currently live while attending school.

You are eligible to vote in the school board election in Ontario if:
• you are a Canadian citizen
• you are aged 18 or older
• you qualify to vote for that particular school board

If you are a *resident elector* in a municipality, you are eligible to vote for a school trustee that represents the municipality or ward where you live.

There are four types of school boards, but you can only vote for one type.
• English-language public school board
• English-language Catholic school board
• French-language public school board
• French-language Catholic school board

Voters are automatically eligible to vote for the English-language public school board unless they take steps to change and become a supporter of a different kind of board. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) keeps the provincial record of school support.

If someone wants to change which type of board they vote for, they must contact MPAC. When they contact MPAC, they can change the type of board they vote for in any of the following scenarios:

- to vote for an English-language Catholic school board, they are Roman Catholic and they or their spouse are an English-language Catholic school board supporter;
- to vote for a French-language public school board, they have French-language rights* and they or their spouse are a French-language public school board supporter;
- to vote for a French-language Catholic school board, they are Roman Catholic, they have French-language rights and they or their spouse are a French-language Catholic school board supporter.

*According to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*, in Ontario, a French-language rights holder is defined as either someone whose native language is French, someone who has received French-language education in elementary school, or someone whose child has received or is receiving French-language education in elementary or secondary school.

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is responsible for preparing the preliminary list of electors for each municipality. Your municipality receives the preliminary list from MPAC and creates and posts the **voters' list.**

A voter's name must be on the **voters' list** in order to cast a ballot. While a voter's name can be added on voting day, it is helpful to do this in advance. In some municipalities, being on the voters' list ensures they receive a voter information card, which indicates their voting place on voting day and the dates, times and locations of advance polling places. Voters can check and see if they are on the voters' list by contacting their municipality or by visiting the Voter Lookup website (www.voterlookup.ca).

Each municipality is responsible for conducting the election and determining the voting method. Options include online voting, voting by mail, voting by phone, paper ballots or a combination of these methods. Please consult with your municipal clerk's office or local elections office to find out specific information about your municipality's election process.

When a voter arrives at a voting place, they must show identification to prove that they are the person whose name appears on the voters' list. The identification must show their name and address. Photo identification is not required.

The **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in each race. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark their choice. In **First-Past-the-Post** elections (not ranked ballot elections), voters are permitted to mark their choice for as many candidates as are elected in the race. For example, in a multi-member race where five council members are elected **at-large**, voters can vote for up to five candidates. Alternatively, if only one candidate is being elected in a ward, it is only possible to vote for one candidate. You can only vote for one type of school board trustee.

Municipalities have the option of using **ranked ballots** to elect members of council. The City of London is the first municipality in the province to change their voting process, beginning with the 2018 elections.

A ballot is declared invalid by the **deputy returning officer** because it was not properly marked. This is called a **rejected ballot.** For example, the voter selected more than the number of candidates they were allowed to choose or if the ballot was left blank. In the case of municipal elections, one race or section may be declared valid and another may be deemed invalid.

Ontario's Municipal Act allows voters to **decline** their ballot. To decline their ballot, voters must inform the election official that they are declining their right to vote when they receive their ballot. This is a public process and it is done out loud. The election official will mark "declined" on the election documentation and the ballot will not be placed in the ballot box but in an envelope for **declined ballots**.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What does the voting process look like in my municipality? What are some barriers people face when voting in elections? Is voting a duty or a choice?

SUMMARY

The right to vote comes with the responsibility to vote in an informed and purposeful manner.

In this lesson, students explore their own opinions and those of others about participating in elections. Afterwards, students review the voting process in municipal and school board elections in Ontario and general statistics from the 2014 elections. Students respond to a voting survey before examining the barriers that some people face when participating in the electoral process. In the culminating activity, students rank a series of motivational barriers in order of significance or propose a solution or strategy to help overcome them.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- Determine the importance of participating in elections (Concepts of Thinking – Political Significance);
- Describe the voting process in municipal and school board elections;
- Use the inquiry process to interpret, analyze and evaluate the barriers to participating in the voting process;
- Explore issues related to personal and societal rights and responsibilities, and develop attitudes that foster civic engagement (Citizenship Education Framework – Attributes).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can assess the significance of voting in elections and the consequences of not voting;
- I understand the voting process well enough to cast my own ballot in the Student Vote program or share my knowledge with a friend or family member;
- I can evaluate the barriers to participating in the voting process and consider which may influence my decision to vote in the future;
- I can discuss personal and societal rights and responsibilities and the importance of contributing to my community.

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;
C1. Civic Contributions: analyze a variety of civic contributions, and ways in which people can contribute to the common good
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;
A2.2 demonstrate in everyday contexts attributes, skills, and work habits developed in civics and citizenship education

B1.2 describe fundamental beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada
C1.2 describe a variety of ways in which they could make a civic contribution at the local, national, and/or global level
C2.1 analyze ways in which various beliefs, values, and perspectives are represented in their communities, and assess whether all perspectives are represented or are valued equally

MINDS ON

1. Pose the following question to your class: If you were 18 years old, would you vote in the upcoming municipal election? Why or why not?

Ask students to share their views and opinions about participating in the voting process through a whole class discussion.

2. Watch the 'Why Vote' video (3:45 min) with your students to listen to different reasons why people believe voting is important.

3. Using a 'Turn and Talk' approach, ask students to discuss the following questions:
- Which opinions shared in the video resonate the most with you?
- Over the course of the Student Vote activities, has your opinion changed about whether voting is important or not?
- What are the consequences if people do not vote in elections?

ACTION

1. Through a whole class discussion, ask students the following questions.
- Have you ever voted for something? How was the vote organized? What was the method? (e.g., student council, student trustee, MVP, online contests).
- What principles do you think are important when conducting a vote? (e.g., fair and unbiased conduct, secrecy in expressing your choice, confidence in the process)
- Why is it important to know how to vote properly?

2. Using the accompanying slide deck and your own municipality's information, discover some of the key aspects of the voting process in municipal elections.
- Who is responsible for organizing municipal elections?
- Who is qualified to vote in municipal elections? How does it differ from provincial elections?
- What is the voters' list? Why is it helpful to be on the voters' list in advance?
- What voting method is used in my municipality?

3. Ask students to guess what they think voter turnout was in the 2014 municipal elections. Afterwards, share the statistics below from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.
- Average voter turnout is 43.12% (based on results from 389 out of 444 municipalities)
- Largest voter turnout was 86.63% - Town of Latchford
- Lowest voter turnout was 15.81% - Town of Petawawa
- The entire council acclaimed in 18 municipalities
- A portion of the council was acclaimed in 3 municipalities

Have a follow-up class discussion: Are you surprised with the statistics? What factors do you think contribute to high or low voter turnout? How would you feel if your entire council was acclaimed and there was no election?

4. Provide copies of Activity 7.1 to each student and ask them to answer each question as honestly as they can. Afterwards, give them a few minutes to discuss their responses with a partner.

5. Review some key research findings about voting and the barriers to electoral participation using the accompanying slide deck.
- Low voter turnout has been a concern at all levels of elections in Canada over the last few decades.
- Young voters are less likely to vote than older voters (on average 20 per cent less).
- There are many different barriers to voting, including motivational barriers and access barriers. Motivational barriers have been found to be most important.
- Motivational barriers include low levels of political interest and political knowledge, lack of perceived relevance, cynicism and lower sense of civic duty.
- Access barriers include not knowing when and where to vote, lack of personal identification, challenges getting to the polling station, and language and literacy skills.

6. Independently or with a partner, have students reflect on how many zeros they recorded on the voting survey (Activity 7.1) and which barriers could influence their decision to vote in the future.

Extension Activity

Ask students to survey a family member or friend with Activity 7.1 and discuss the different attitudes about politics and voting.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a closing discussion about barriers to participating in the voting process, or ask students to write a reflection in response to one of the following questions.
- Rank the seven barriers on Activity 7.1 (1 being the most influential barrier to prevent someone from voting, compared to 7 being the least important). Explain your rankings.

- Pick one barrier that you believe is most important and determine what actions could be taken to overcome the challenge.

Key questions:
- What are the underlying conditions to the issue? Who is being affected and how? Why is it happening?
- What role should individuals, community groups and governments play? What can they do?

ASSESSMENT

Speakers Corner
In this activity, students practice articulating viewpoints about voting. Students state their position, for either 'voting is a choice' or 'voting is a duty', and then provide statements that support their opinion. Students divide into pairs and take turns speaking, listening, and recording their discussions.

Part 1:
- Distribute a copy of the "Brainstorming Sheet" (Activity 7.2)
- Put students in pairs as Partners A and B
- Direct all Partner A students to prepare the "Brainstorming Sheet" for the following statement: 'Voting is a choice'
- Direct all Partner B students to prepare the "Brainstorming Sheet" for the following statement: 'Voting is a duty'
- Direct all Partner A students to begin expressing their opinions on the given topic to Partner B
- Direct students to listen carefully to their partner's ideas and use point form to record their partner's ideas on the back of their brainstorming sheet
- Monitor the students' discussions by circulating among the groups
- Comment constructively on the process
- Direct the partners to reverse their roles and repeat the process

Part 2:
- After both partners have shared their positions ask volunteers to share their learning and ideas with the whole class
- Allow time for some class discussion

Part 3:
- Have small partner groups join together with one or two other partner groups
- Have groups share their views about whether voting is a choice or a duty
- Have groups record their ideas on chart paper or the back of their brainstorming sheet
- Have a class discussion about which statement they agree with most

Teacher note: Alternatively, you could debate the statement: 'voting is a right' or 'voting is a responsibility'.