

# 5 Local Candidates and Issues

## OBJECTIVE

Students will gain an understanding of current issues in their electoral division and get to know the candidates running for election.

## KEY WORDS

electoral division, riding, electoral system, candidate, independent, ballot, incumbent, issue, constituent, Single-Member Plurality, First-Past-the-Post

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is an electoral division?
- What is a candidate? How do candidates get elected?
- What is the name of my electoral division and who are the candidates running for election?
- What are the most important issues in my electoral division?
- How can I learn about my local candidates?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Local Candidates and Issues
- Worksheet 5.1: My Electoral Division
- Worksheet 5.2: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.3: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting
- Worksheet 5.4: Graphic Organizer

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Explain to students that the province is divided into 87 different areas or divisions. Find your school's electoral division on the provincial electoral division map and write the name of the division on a blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard.
2. Ask students if they notice any differences between their electoral division and others across the province (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population, geography, landmarks).
3. Show students an individual map of the school's electoral division (found at [www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca) under MAPS). Answer the following questions:
  - What are the boundaries of the school's electoral division?
  - Where is the school located?
  - What major landmarks or attractions are included in the school's electoral division?

4. Give students an opportunity to fill out sections of Worksheet 5.1 or assign it for homework.

### Instruction: 10-15 min

1. At the provincial level, there are 87 electoral divisions (also known as ridings or constituencies) in Alberta and each has its own elected representative called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). The electoral divisions are divided in a way that allows each MLA to represent roughly 50,000 people. This is why the size of divisions differs across the province.
2. During an election, several people in each electoral division compete against one another for the job of MLA. These people are called candidates. Candidates can be associated with a political party or have no association (called an independent).
3. A ballot lists the candidates (and their political party association) running for election in the local electoral division. Each voter is allowed to choose one candidate. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the MLA. This method of electing representatives is called First-Past-The-Post (or Single-Member Plurality).
4. An incumbent is the term given to the candidate who held the position of MLA before the election.

### Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and skills do you expect from an MLA? Why are these qualities necessary for the job?

### Activity: 20-30 min plus homework

1. List all of the candidates (and their party association if applicable) running for election in your school's electoral division. Show students where they can find this information ([www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)). Ask students to write down the information on Worksheet 5.1.
2. Ask students to create a profile of each candidate by examining their website, social media platforms and campaign literature, or finding information through newspapers and media websites. For each candidate, students should focus on the following questions to narrow their research:
  - What experience and skills does the candidate

have? Consider careers, jobs and volunteer experience.

- Why does the candidate want to be elected? What goals do they want to achieve?
- What do you like or dislike about the candidate and why?
- What question would you like to ask the candidate?

*Teacher Note: This activity can be completed independently, in groups or by jigsaw method using Worksheet 5.2. Ensure that all candidates in your electoral division are researched. Have students share their findings with the class or within their groups.*

### Debrief: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about local issues and candidates with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log.

- How can a voter learn about the issues and candidates?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Which candidate do you support the most and why?
- What does it mean to run as an independent? Why would someone choose to run as an independent?
- Would you ever consider running as a candidate? Why or why not?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. To help students learn more about the candidates, their priorities and their ability to take on the role of representative, have students prepare questions for each of the candidates. Consider the following to guide the development of questions:

- Which election issues have you been following most closely?
- Which issues impact you, your family and friends?
- What do you want to know about the candidates before casting your ballot?

Pose the questions to the candidates by email, by conducting a phone interview, by arranging candidates to visit your class or by organizing an all-candidates' debate in your school (refer to Worksheet 5.3).

B. Ask students to collect articles related to their electoral division and the candidates. The articles could be shared on a daily basis as part of current events. Students should identify the *who, what, where, when, why* and *how* (Worksheet 5.4). Post the articles on a bulletin board for reference.

C. Have students organize a mock debate to gain a better understanding of the job of a candidate and their team in a local campaign. In small groups, select one student to take on the role of each local candidate (and persona, if possible); the rest of the group will

be the candidate's campaign team. Using existing arguments taken from media coverage, candidate websites and campaign literature, have each group prepare their candidate for the debate.

D. Have students take on the role of a local election candidate and write a campaign speech to attract supporters. Students should focus on three main arguments or points. Students can take on the role of an actual candidate and use information from the candidate's website and campaign literature to guide their arguments. Alternatively, students could be their own candidate running for election in the electoral division or use they could use a fictional example for their campaign speech (i.e., the playground grant from Lesson 4). Students can be assessed on their persuasive writing skills.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

*What is an electoral division?*

An electoral division is a geographical area with defined boundaries represented by an elected official. An electoral division is also known as an electoral district, constituency or riding.

In Alberta, the provincial elected official is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Each electoral division has one MLA who represents the local needs and interests of his or her constituents (people living in the electoral division) and addresses issues at the local level.

The number of electoral divisions changes over time and is established by a formula. Electoral division boundary adjustments reflect changes and movements in population. Currently, Alberta has 87 electoral divisions, each represented by one MLA.

*What is an electoral system?*

An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats.

All electoral systems have three basic elements:

- District magnitude: The number of members elected per division/district.
- Ballot type: The way in which choices are presented and voters express their preference(s).
- Electoral formula: The method for determining which candidate gets elected (or wins).

*How does First-Past-The-Post/Single-Member Plurality work?*

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used in Alberta (and across Canada). Another name for FPTP is Single-Member Plurality.

- The district magnitude is single-member districts. Citizens elect one representative per electoral division.
- The ballot type is categorical or exclusive ballot. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate/party on their ballot.

- The electoral formula is plurality. The successful candidate must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (or the most votes).

Example of FPTP: In an electoral division with 100 ballots cast.

#### VOTE TOTALS BY CANDIDATE

Lisa (Banana Party)	40
Josh (Pear Party)	15
Nancy (Apple Party)	11
Norman (No Affiliation)	34

In this case, Lisa becomes the elected representative because she has the most votes. Note: Lisa wins even though 60 per cent of the voters chose other candidates. Under FPTP, it is not necessary to win over 50 per cent of the votes — the candidate simply needs to win the most votes.

*How does one find out which electoral division they are in?*

You can visit the Elections Alberta website and search using your postal code or location/address to find out your electoral division. During a provincial election campaign, Elections Alberta also posts a list of candidates running for election in each division. The final list is posted after nominations close (14 days before polling day) and once all candidacies have been confirmed.

*What are the most important issues facing my electoral division?*

An individual's political views are personal and highly subjective. They are unique and shaped by their experiences and feelings. Therefore, each person is responsible for forming his or her own opinions. Sometimes those opinions can be formed by listening to other people whose opinions you respect, researching information through media, and sometimes it simply takes a period of reflection to come to your own conclusions.

No one can tell you how to vote, although this is the primary objective of all candidates and campaigns. It is up to you, the voter, to decide what is most important, who you should listen to, and ultimately, who you will support.

*How can I learn about my candidates and the issues they support?*

There are many ways to gather information about your local candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings where constituents are invited to listen to candidates speak about issues they and their parties support. Information can also be found on radio and television, and in newspapers and magazines. You may also visit local campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to the candidates when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing, or

campaign in public settings. Information is easily found online through party websites, media websites and social media platforms.

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Provincial electoral division maps — [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca) (Under MAPS)
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)