

Lesson 7

School Trustees



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do the decisions made by our school district affect me?
- 2 How can I evaluate the school trustee candidates?

OVERVIEW

School trustees in British Columbia aim to improve student achievement based on the diverse needs, priorities and unique educational requirements of the communities they represent.

In this lesson, students learn about the role of school trustees and the process for collective decision-making. Students create an ideal profile of a school trustee and then research the candidates independently or collectively. In the *Consolidation* activity, students analyze their evaluation criteria and make recommendations for their family members about the research process.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

We are learning to:

- explain the role of school districts and school trustees;
- identify the qualities they would like to see in their ideal school trustee;
- research the candidates running for election; and
- analyze their evaluation criteria and make a decision about who to support and why.

Tips for Teachers

- Please use or adapt the activities in a way that is appropriate for your class.

Supplies/Needs

- Slide Deck 7
- Access to or copies of 7.1 and 7.2
- Any videos, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word and Google Doc can be found on the project website

Starter

1. Introduce the idea that a school district manages the public schools in their community, or several communities within their region. Ask students if they know the name of their school district.
2. Use an adapted 'Focusing Four' protocol to discuss ideas for the following scenario.

The health and well-being of students has worsened over the last few years. The provincial government has agreed to provide additional money to school districts to help improve the situation. The school districts must decide how they will spend the money in their schools in order to support the health and well-being of students in their community.

Divide students into groups of five or six and follow the steps below. One student will act as facilitator per group.

- a) **Brainstorm:** Have each group brainstorm ideas on chart paper. There should be no debate or critique during this stage.
 - b) **Clarify:** Invite group members to ask questions about any of the ideas. The student who put forth the idea should clarify their thinking as needed.
 - c) **Advocate:** Ask students to express which ideas they support and why. Statements should be positive in nature. Students can advocate for as many ideas as they like.
 - d) **Canvass:** Have students vote with a show of hands which ideas they like best. The goal is to come to a consensus on one idea.
3. Have each group share their agreed upon idea with the rest of the class and debrief on the activity.
 - What are the opportunities and challenges in making collective decisions?
 - How can you try to persuade others to agree with your ideas?
 - Why is it important to be respectful and keep an open mind when listening to others' opinions?

Activities

1. Use Slide Deck 7 to review the role and responsibilities of school trustees.
 - School trustees provide a link between local communities and the school district, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to school board discussions and decision-making. A school trustee is a member of a team. Under the *School Act*, the trustee's power lies in membership on the board of education. This means that the board has the authority to make decisions or to take action; individual trustees in and of themselves do not have this authority.
2. As a class, review key information about your school district and trustees using your school district's website.
 - Which municipalities and/or rural areas are included in our school district? (Use a map as a visual aid)
 - How many schools are in our school district?
 - How many school trustees sit on our board of education?
 - How many trustee electoral areas are there within the school district?
 - What is our school's electoral area?
 - How many school trustees are elected in our electoral area?

TEACHER NOTE

Find more info about district boundaries on the BC Government website at [Education and training > Kindergarten to Grade 12 > Administration > Legislation and policy > School Trustee Election Procedures](#)

3. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them brainstorm the characteristics of an 'ideal' school trustee and write them on Activity 7.1. Guiding questions:
 - What personal characteristics would I like to see in my school trustee?
 - What skills or work experience would they have?
 - What is their motivation to become a school trustee?
 - What would be their educational priorities?
4. Review the list of candidates running for school trustee by consulting your municipality, regional district and/or school district website. Focus on your school's electoral area.

5. Ask students to learn about the candidates using candidate websites and social media pages, online searches or by contacting the candidates directly. This 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.

Students should compile their notes using Activity 7.1. You may need to provide multiple copies depending on the number of candidates.

Alternative Activity

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

Consolidation

Ask students to analyze the candidates and reflect on their learning by responding to the prompts on Activity 7.2.

- What is most important to you when evaluating the trustee candidates and deciding who to vote for? Why?
- What advice would you give your family members about learning about the school trustee candidates?

Extended Learning

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

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON SECTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS
Starter	<p>Can students clearly articulate their opinions and ideas in a persuasive manner?</p> <p>Are students working collaboratively to reach a final decision?</p> <p>Can students identify the opportunities and challenges with group decision-making?</p>
Activities	<p>Do students understand the role and importance of school trustees?</p> <p>Are students thinking critically about the qualities and skills needed for the role of school trustees?</p> <p>Are students able to summarize accurate information about the candidates?</p> <p>Can students identify a strong vs weak candidate?</p>
Consolidation	<p>Can students explain what is important to them when evaluating the candidates?</p> <p>Can students analyze the research process and provide advice to family members?</p>

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	<p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ability grouping to help students conduct research on school 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 their most pressing concerns. Have students report the responses back to the class.
Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with terms and definitions in advance. • Encourage students to compare the education system in British Columbia to the one of their home country. This can help with a deeper understanding of the institutions.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the emphasis many First Nations groups place on consensus decision-making.
Accessibility & Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working in pairs or small groups is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

British Columbia's **school districts** operate the province's publicly funded schools and administer the funding they receive from the provincial government.

The province is divided into 60 school districts and each district represents a designated geographic area or, in the case of francophone education, the province as a whole.

Each school district has a group of locally elected representatives known as **school trustees** who are the members of the **board of education** (also known as the **school board**). British Columbians elect their boards of education to improve student achievement according to the diverse needs, priorities and unique educational requirements of the communities they represent.

As a locally elected representative, the trustee's role is to maintain a focus on student achievement and well-being, and to participate in making decisions that benefit the entire district while representing the interests of their local area. School trustees listen to their constituents, guide the work of their school district and set plans, policies and the annual budget. Reflecting the strength of local representation, boards report back to their communities on how students are doing. Boards are directly accountable to the people they serve.

The board of education is responsible for operating their respective school district based on the educational goals of their local communities and in accordance with the general direction established by the provincial government. The respective responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and boards of education are described in the *School Act* and these include:

- Attending meetings;
- Setting local policy for the effective and efficient operation of schools;
- Employing the staff necessary for school district operations;
- Establishing conditions of employment for employees;
- Preparing and approving the school district's operating budgets and capital plans; and
- Hearing appeals from parents and students where a staff decision significantly affects the education, health or safety of the student.

A school trustee is a member of a team. Under the *School Act*, the trustee's power lies in membership on the board of education. This means that the board has the authority to make decisions or to take action; individual trustees in and of themselves do not have this authority.

School trustees are elected every four years during local elections. Each school district is composed of one or more **electoral areas** from which trustees are elected.

The composition of the boards (number of trustees, trustee electoral areas, number of trustees elected from each trustee electoral area) varies to reflect the communities and the population of each school district in the province.

In some school districts, all trustees are elected at large. This means that there is only one electoral area (the entire school district) from which all trustees are elected. In other school districts, there are multiple electoral areas.

There may be more than one trustee elected from each electoral area. Some electoral areas may be composed of: one or more municipalities; a combination of municipalities and rural areas, or rural areas only.

Local governments and boards of education may cooperate on the running of elections. Some trustee elections may be conducted by a municipality or regional district.

Therefore, information will be available and nominations filed in the local government office instead of, or as well as, the school district office.

Following the election, the trustees elect one of their members to act as **chair** of the board.

Independent schools have their own Independent School Authorities and are not under the jurisdiction of public school boards.