

Lesson 7

School Trustees



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the opportunities and challenges in making collective decisions?**
- 2 What is the role of school trustees?**
- 3 How can I learn about and evaluate the school trustee candidates?**

OVERVIEW

British Columbians elect their school trustees to improve student achievement according to the diverse needs, priorities and unique educational requirements of the communities they represent.

In this lesson, students explore collective decision-making while discussing ways to improve students' mental health and well-being. Students review the role of school trustees and research the composition of their board of education. In groups, students create a profile for an ideal school trustee, before researching the candidates running for election. In the *Consolidation* activity, students evaluate the trustee candidates using evidence or analysis based on their ideal trustee.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- work collaboratively with their peers to discuss solutions to a problem;
- explain the role of school districts and school trustees;
- research and present information about the trustee candidates; and,
- evaluate the candidates running for election.

Starter

1. Introduce the idea that a school district manages the public schools in their municipality, or within several communities in 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 and is having a negative effect on student achievement. The provincial government has agreed to provide additional money to school districts to address 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 should take on the role of facilitator in each 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 idea they like best. The goal is to come to a consensus on one final 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. Review key information about school districts and the role of school trustees using Slide Deck 7.

2. Investigate the composition of your school district.
 - How many school trustees are elected to the board?
 - Does the district have trustee electoral areas? If so, how many?
 - If applicable, which electoral area does our school reside in? How many school trustees are elected in our electoral area?
3. In small groups, ask students to create a profile for their 'ideal' school trustee using Handout 7.1 and Activity 7.2. What personal characteristics, skills, experience and motivations align with the responsibilities of the role?
4. Review the list of candidates running for school trustee in your community or electoral area by visiting the website for your school district and/or municipality.

TEACHER NOTE

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

5. Ask students to learn about the candidates through online searches, candidate websites and social media pages. This activity can be completed through a jigsaw method or you can assign one or two candidates to each group and have them present to the rest of the class.

Consolidation

Have a closing discussion about the candidates and ask students write a reflection about their evaluation of the candidates.

- Which candidate(s) do you think would make the best school trustee and why?
- Which candidate(s) most closely matches your ideal candidate? Explain with evidence or examples.
- What advice would you give to a family member about researching trustee candidates?

Alternative Activities

- A. Ask students to reflect on what they would like to change or improve about their school experience and find a way to articulate this proposal to their newly elected board of education. This can be in the form of a letter, video, slide deck or multi-media piece.
- B. If your school trustee or board was acclaimed, invite them into your class for a discussion about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead within the school district.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

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| 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 Indigenous groups place on consensus decision-making. |
| Accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom 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.