

# Lesson 7

## District Education Council Elections



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What makes an ideal education councillor?
- 2 How can I learn about the education councillor candidates?
- 3 What improvements would I like to see in my school or the school community?

### SUMMARY

New Brunswickers elect their district education councils (DECs) to improve student achievement according to the diverse needs, priorities and unique educational requirements of the communities they represent.

In this lesson, students will explore consensus decision-making while debating the issue of using mobile devices in the classroom. Students will discuss the role of education councils and research the composition of their DEC. In groups, students will create a profile for an ideal education councillor, before researching and assessing the candidates running for election. In the *Consolidation* activity, students will reflect on ways to improve their school or the school community and articulate these views to the newly elected district education council.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the role of school districts and district education councils (DECs);
- describe the composition of their district education council;
- assess the influence of school district policies and/or decisions on their school experience;
- work collaboratively with their peers to learn about the DEC candidates; and
- evaluate the candidates running for election.

## Starter

1. Read one or both of the articles below concerning the use of social media and smartphones in the classroom. Alternatively, you could use a local news article or a story pertaining to your own school district.

- **New Brunswick has mixed response to adopting cellphone ban in classrooms** (*Global News*, March 13, 2019) <https://globalnews.ca/news/5052715/new-brunswick-ontario-cellphone-ban/>
- **More Canadian schools move to incorporate, not ban, cellphones** (*CTV News*, February 26, 2017) <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/more-canadian-schools-move-to-incorporate-not-ban-cellphones-1.3301715>

2. Should smartphones be banned from the classroom? Divide students into groups and ask them to debate this topic using a *Both Sides Now* approach (Activity 7.1). Students will have an opportunity to reflect on the issue and increase their understanding of the arguments that support and oppose the positions. At the end, each group will make a group decision as to whether they approve or disapprove of a smartphone ban in classrooms and provide a reason for their decision.

3. As a class, 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 you make sure you understand the points of those you disagree with?

## Activities

1. Invite students to share what they know about their school district. Questions to prompt discussion:

- What is the name of our school district?
- Who sets the goals and makes strategic decisions for the school district?
- Who oversees operations and makes management decisions at the school district?
- What are some responsibilities of the school district?

2. Share background information about school districts and education councillors using Slide Deck 7. Afterwards, review the composition of your school district.

- Does the district have subdistricts? If so, how many? Which one does our school reside in?
- How many education councillors are elected? How many in each subdistrict? How many in our subdistrict?

3. Review the term: policy. A policy is statement of intent or action to achieve certain outcomes. A policy also provides rules to be followed. Using a *Turn and Talk* strategy, ask students to think of specific examples of how school district policies and decisions affect their lives.

4. In small groups, ask students to create a profile for their 'ideal' education councillor using Handout 7.2 and Activity 7.3. What personal characteristics, skills, experience and motivations match the responsibilities of the role?

5. Review the list of candidates running for education councillor by visiting the website for your school district and/or municipality. Review the term: incumbent. An incumbent is the existing holder of a political office.

### TEACHER NOTE

If your education councillor candidates are acclaimed, skip to the *Alternative Activities*.

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

7. Have a closing discussion about the candidates and ask students write a reflection based on their ideal candidate.

- Which candidate(s) do you think would make the best education councillor and why?
- Which candidate(s) most closely matches your ideal candidate? Explain with evidence or examples.
- What are the major issues facing your school district?

### Alternative Activities

1. Select three school district policies that directly influence students. In pairs or small groups, ask students to change each policy to their liking, and describe how this change would affect students (consider advantages and potential drawbacks). Ask students to share their changes and as a class determine the best amendments.
2. If your education councillor was acclaimed, invite them into your class for a discussion about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead within the school district. You could also consider framing the discussion regarding the specific policies analyzed in the above activity.

### Consolidation

Ask students to reflect on what they would like to change or improve about school or the school community and find a way to articulate this to their newly elected DEC. This can be in the form of a letter, video, slide deck or multi-media piece.

## SUPPORTS AND ADAPTATIONS

<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.</li><li>• Encourage students to compare the education system in New Brunswick to the one of their home country. This can help with a deeper understanding of the institutions.</li></ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some students may be shy or reluctant to vote.</li><li>• Include discussion of Indigenous schooling options.</li><li>• Discuss the emphasis many Indigenous groups place on consensus decision-making.</li></ul>
<b>Accessibility &amp; Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion.</li></ul>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

**District Education Councils** (DECs) were first established in 2001 to provide local governance and community input into New Brunswick's education system.

The *Education Act* gives authority and responsibilities to the DECs. DEC members provide local input and set the goals and directions for education in each **school district**. The *Education Act* currently provides for 11 to 13 elected education councillors for each of the school districts. There are 4 Anglophone districts (North, South, East, and West) and 3 Francophone districts (Nord-Est, Nord-Ouest, and Sud), with 7 to 13 elected members on each council.

The provincial Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development meets with DECs bi-annually to discuss major issues, reflect on policy direction and share information. The Minister and Department staff are also in regular contact with DECs to consult on policy development, capital issues, and other business.

DECs focus on the big picture, setting priorities and addressing the needs for education, performance and infrastructure for all schools. This is different from Parent School Support Committees which provide advice to principals at the school level.

The DEC only has authority when it is working as a team to create policies that set boundaries and direct the work of the superintendent. The **superintendent** is responsible for the operational oversight of the school district and day-to-day decisions.

Under provincial legislation DECs have the following responsibilities:

- Approving and monitoring the district education plan
- Approving and monitoring the district expenditure plan
- Maintaining links with the Parent School Support Committees
- Developing district policies and procedures
- Providing for an appeal process
- Determining capital project priorities
- Recommending school closures
- Overseeing trust funds
- Reviewing and approving school improvement and performance reports
- Hiring and evaluating the district superintendent

Find more info about subdistricts on the Elections NB website at *For Candidates > District Education Council Candidates > School Districts Maps*.

To be a candidate in a district education council election, you must be 18 years of age on or before Election Day; a Canadian citizen; a resident of the school district in New Brunswick for at least six months immediately preceding election day; and a resident of the relevant school district and subdistrict or zone when nominated.

Candidates cannot be employees of the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development or school personnel such as teachers; school bus drivers; building maintenance personnel; or secretaries and clerks.