

Lesson 7

District Education Council Elections



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do the decisions made by our district education council impact me?
- 2 How can I evaluate the education councillor candidates?

OVERVIEW

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 learn about the role of DECs and education councillors. Then, students will create an ideal profile of an education councillor and find out which candidate most closely matches up. In the *Consolidation* activity, students reflect on ways to improve the school experience for students in the district, and articulate these views to the newly elected education councillor or DEC.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the role of school districts and district education councils (DECs);
- identify the name of their school district and the candidates running for election.
- assess which education councillor candidate matches their ideal education councillor and interests; and
- express their opinions and ideas about how to improve schools within the school district.

Starter

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 creates the vision and sets goals for the school district?
 - Who establishes rules/policies for all schools in the district?
2. Explain to students that each school district has a group of elected education councillors, collectively called the district education council, or DEC. The DEC makes decisions by voting on motions, which are decisions or actions. A motion must have the support of the majority (more than half) of education councillors in order to be implemented.

Fundamentals

1. Use Slide Deck 7 to review the role and responsibilities of education councillors.
 - Education councillors provide a link between local communities and the school district, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to DEC discussions and decision-making. Education councillors have no individual authority; the DEC makes decisions as a whole.
2. As a class, review key information about your school district and DEC using your school district's website.
 - What are the geographic boundaries of our school district? (Use a map as a visual aid)
 - How many schools are in our school district?
 - How many subdistricts are there within the school district?
 - How many education councillors are elected in each subdistrict?
 - Which subdistrict is our school in?

TEACHER NOTE

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

3. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them create a profile for their 'ideal' education councillor (Activity 7.1). Guiding questions:
 - What personal characteristics would the education councillor possess?
 - What skills or work experience would they have?
 - What is their motivation to become an education councillor?
 - What would be their educational priorities?

4. Review the list of candidates running for education councillor by consulting your municipality and/or school district website.
5. Ask students to learn about the candidates using candidate websites and social media pages, web 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.
6. Have a closing discussion about the education councillor candidates and have students write their reflections using Activity 7.1. Please note that more than one copy may be needed depending on the number of candidates.
 - Which candidate do you think would make the best education councillor and why?
 - Which candidate(s) most closely matches your ideal education councillor? Explain with evidence or examples.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

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. Have students prepare questions in advance.

If the elected education councillor was the incumbent, students could look at past records of DEC meetings to evaluate their education councillor's priorities and predict the issues they may support or promote in the new session.

Consolidation

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

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Below are some guiding questions for teachers for each section of the lesson.

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| Starter | Do students understand the role and importance of education councillors? |
| Fundamentals | <p>Are students thinking critically about the qualities and skills needed for the role of education councillor?</p> <p>Can students identify a strong vs weak candidate?</p> <p>Can students explain the reasoning behind their preferred candidate?</p> |
| Consolidation | Can students clearly articulate their opinions and ideas in a persuasive manner? |

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

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| Individual Education Plans | <p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ability grouping to help students conduct research on education councillors. • 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 the class' 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 New Brunswick 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"> • Some students may be shy or reluctant to vote. • Include discussion of Indigenous schooling options. • Discuss the emphasis many Indigenous groups place on consensus decision-making. |
| Accessibility & 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

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
- Reviewing and approving performance report
- Overseeing trust funds
- 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.