

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

School trustees provide a link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to discussions and decision-making at the board table.

In this lesson, students learn about the role of school trustees and 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 explain the role of school trustees to their family or adults they know.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- develop an understanding of the role of school boards and how political institutions affect our lives (Citizenship Education Framework – Structures);
- use the inquiry process to formulate questions, interpret, synthesize and critically analyze the school trustee candidates;
- work in a collaborative and critically thoughtful manner (Citizenship Education Framework – Attributes);
- voice informed opinions on matters relevant to our school community (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Participation).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I can...

- influence my peers with my ideas and opinions;
- discuss issues and solutions in a collaborative manner;
- describe the role and responsibilities of school trustees;
- identify the characteristics of my 'ideal' school trustee;
- research and analyze the different trustee candidates;
- evaluate my criteria for comparing the trustee candidates.

Curriculum Links

GRADE 5 SOCIAL STUDIES

B3. Understanding Context: demonstrate an understanding of the roles and key responsibilities of citizens and of the different levels of government in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments (FOCUS ON: Significance)

B3.2 describe the jurisdiction of different levels of government in Canada, as well as of some other elected bodies (i.e., federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments band councils; school boards), and some of the services provided by each

B3.7 describe key actions taken by governments, including Indigenous governments, to solve some significant national, provincial/territorial, and/or local issues

Tips for Teachers

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

Supplies/Needs

- "School Boards in Ontario" video
- 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 board manages the public or Catholic schools in their community, or several communities within their region. Ask students if they know the name of their school board.
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 boards to help address the situation. The school boards 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 forward the idea should clarify their thinking as needed.
 - c) **Advocate:** Ask students to express which ideas they support and why. Statements should be persuasive and 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 the "School Boards in Ontario" video and Slide Deck 7 to review the role and responsibilities of school trustees.
 - School trustees provide a link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their communities to school board discussions and decision-making. A school trustee is a member of a team. 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 board and trustees using your school board's website.
 - Which municipalities are included in our school board? (Use a map as a visual aid)
 - How many schools are in our school board?
 - How many school trustees are elected?
 - Are school trustees elected at-large or by ward? If applicable, what is our ward?
 - How many trustee candidates do I get to vote for?

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?
 - Why would they want to become a school trustee?
 - What educational issues would be important to them?
4. Review the list of candidates running for school trustee by using the following website:
<http://elections.ontarioschooltrustees.org>
 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.

Consolidation

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

- How would you explain the role of school trustees to your family members?
- What is most important to you when evaluating the trustee candidates and deciding who to vote for? Why?

Alternative Activity

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

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 or board of trustees. 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 explain the role of school trustees to their 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 Ontario 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.
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

Ontario's **school boards** operate the province's publicly funded schools. They administer the funding they receive from the provincial government in their designated geographic area.

There are four types of publicly funded school boards in Ontario: 31 English public boards, 29 English Catholic boards, 4 French public boards and 8 French Catholic boards. In addition, a small number of Ontario schools are operated by **school authorities**. The school authorities manage special types of schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities, and schools in remote and sparsely populated regions.

Each school board has a group of locally elected representatives known as **school trustees**. Trustees are members of the governing board, not employees. Individual trustees have no individual authority, but have responsibility for communicating with their constituents and bringing their

concerns to the board for discussion. The board of trustees makes decisions as a whole. Board decisions are made by voting, where motions are passed if they have majority support.

The board of trustees is responsible for educational leadership and planning, policy-making, resource allocation, financial oversight, monitoring and evaluation. Some of the specific responsibilities include:

- Creating an educational vision and goals for the school board
- Developing the board's multi-year strategic plan
- Hiring and evaluating the director of education (the CEO of the school board)
- Setting goals for student achievement and promoting continuous improvement
- Approving textbooks and learning materials
- Determining the number, size and location of schools
- Monitoring the effectiveness of school policies
- Assessing public satisfaction
- Approving a balanced annual budget and demonstrating financial accountability

School trustees are elected every four years during municipal elections. Since the territories of some school boards include more than one municipality, the geographic area a trustee represents often includes more than one municipality or more than one municipal ward. Some school boards divide the board into smaller areas, called **wards**. Each year, the board of trustees elect one of their members to act as chair of the school board.

In Ontario, each school board currently has two to three **student trustees**, elected each year by students to represent them. Student trustees act as a link between students and the board. Student trustees are not official board members but they do have many of the same rights and responsibilities. Student trustees participate in board meetings and committees. Student trustees may suggest motions to advance issues and may cast a non-binding vote. Student trustees are a direct way for students to have a voice at the school board level.