

Lesson 7

School Trustees



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the opportunities and challenges when 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 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 school board. 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 analysis based on their ideal trustee.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- develop an understanding of school boards and the responsibilities of school trustees (Citizen Education Framework – Structures);
- use the inquiry process to formulate questions, interpret, synthesize and critically analyze the trustee candidates;
- consider and respect others' perspectives (Citizen Education Framework – Identity);
- work in a collaborative and critically thoughtful manner (Citizenship Education Framework – Attributes);
- voice informed opinions on matters relevant to their school community (Citizenship Education Framework – Active Participation).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

I can...

- work collaboratively with their peers to discuss ideas to improve students' health and well-being;
- explain the role of school boards and school trustees;
- identify the characteristics of my "ideal" school trustee;
- research the trustee candidates using primary and secondary sources;
- evaluate the candidates running for election using evidence and analysis.

Curriculum Links

CIVICS – CHV20

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance (A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4)

A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to civics and citizenship education, and identify some careers in which civics and citizenship education might be an asset (A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4)

B1. Civic Issues, Democratic Values: describe beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain how they are related to civic action and to one's position on civic issues (B1.1, B1.5)

B3. Rights and Responsibilities: analyse key rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship, in both the Canadian and global context, and some ways in which these rights are protected or may be infringed upon (B3.2, B3.3)

C1. Civic Contributions, Inclusion, and Service: analyse the importance of various contributions to the common good, and assess the recognition of beliefs, values, and perspectives, in communities in Canada and internationally (C1.2, C1.3, C1.5)

POLITICS – CPC30

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues of political importance in various communities and ways to address them (A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A.5, A.6)

A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to politics, and identify some careers in which a background in political studies might be an asset (A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4)

B2. Issues of Political Importance: explain the political importance of some current issues and analyse various perspectives associated with these issues (B2.1, B2.3)

Starter

1. Introduce the idea that a school board manages the English/French public or Catholic schools in their municipality, or within several communities in their area. 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 and is having a negative effect on student achievement. The provincial government has agreed to provide additional money to school boards to 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 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 when 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' perspectives?

Activities

1. Review key information about school boards and the role of school trustees using the "School Boards in Ontario" video and Slide Deck 7.
2. Investigate the composition of your school board.
 - 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 the name of our ward?
 - How many school trustees do I get to vote for?

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 by using the following website:
<http://elections.ontarioschooltrustees.org>

TEACHER NOTE

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

5. Ask students to learn about the candidates through media sources, 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 friend or 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 trustees. This can be in the form of a letter, video, slide deck or multi-media piece.
- B. If your school trustee was acclaimed, invite them into your class for a discussion about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead within the school board.



ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., school board, school trustee, ward). • 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.
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

Ontario **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.