Fact sheet 2: Information for students seeking election to council

What is a school council and what does it do?

All government schools in Victoria have a school council. School councils are legal entities that are given powers to set the broad direction of a school. Their roles are guided by rules and laws including Ministerial Order 1280 (Constitution of Government School Councils) 2020, the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* and the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

What are some of the duties of a school council member?

School councils have responsibilities in the following areas:

- **Finance:** overseeing the development and expenditure of the school's annual budget and ensuring proper records are kept of the school's financial operations.
- **Strategic planning:** participating in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan.
- **Policy development and review:** developing, reviewing, and updating selected school policies, such as the student dress code policy.
- **Community engagement:** listening to the thoughts of the school community including fellow students and keeping them in mind when making decisions.

Other key functions of school councils may include:

- raising funds for school related purposes
- maintaining school grounds and facilities
- entering into contracts
- reporting annually to the school community and the department
- creating interest in the school in the wider community
- deciding on after hours use of school premises and grounds
- operating a children's service at the school.

Why is student membership so important?

Having student members on school council allows students to have a say in the future direction of their school and ensures student input into decision-making. Student representation on secondary school councils can also assist in the development of skills, including leadership and communication.

Do I need special experience to be on school council?

No. Each member brings their own valuable skills, knowledge and experiences to the role, however, to successfully perform their duties, school council members may need to gain some new skills and knowledge.

Student members are encouraged to attend the department's free school council training to support them in their role.

For training options, refer to the **School Council – Training and Good Governance policy**.

Who is on the school council?

There are several possible categories of school council membership:

- **parent membership category** – members of this category must make up more than one third of the school council's total membership. A parent member can be any person who has parental responsibility for a student enrolled at the school.
- **school employee membership category** – members of this category may make up no more than one third of the total membership of school council. The principal of the school is automatically a member of this category.
- **community membership category** – if a school council includes a community membership category, the members are co-opted by a decision of the school council because of their special skills, interests or expertise. Department of Education employees are not eligible to be community members on school council.
- **nominee membership category** – a small number of school councils have nominee members.
- **student membership category** – all schools with a Year 7 and above student cohort have a student membership category with 2 positions allocated.

What do I need to do to stand for election?

The principal will issue a Notice of election and call for nominations early in term 1 each year.

If you decide to stand for election, you can nominate yourself for the student membership category by completing a nomination form and returning it to the principal before the due date.

The principal will tell you where you can get a nomination form from.

Nominations for school council

If one student vacancy is available and only one student nominates, then the student is elected.

Unlike the parent or school employee membership categories, if 2 student membership category positions are available and in the first call for nominations only one nomination is received, the student is not automatically declared elected. The principal will immediately post, in a prominent place in the school, a notice calling for further nominations. These nominations are to be received within 3 school days from the closing of the first call for nominations.

If after the second call for nominations one other nomination is received, then both students are appointed to council.

After the second call for nominations if the total number of nominations exceeds the number of vacancies, then all nominees will go to ballot to decide which nominees will be elected to school council. A ballot means a vote is held to determine which of the nominees are elected to school council.

Each student at the school in Year 7 is given a ballot paper to vote for their preferred candidates. The 2 students with the most votes will be elected to school council.

What happens if there are more nominations than positions available

If the number of nominations received is greater than the positions available, a ballot is required to determine who is elected to school council. The ballot process is explained above.

What happens if the number of nominations equals the number of positions available?

The nominees are elected to school council and the school council election process concludes. For example, if one student nominates and there is one position available, that student is elected to school council.

Can I share the role with another student?

No, student school council members cannot share the role with another student.

Are school captains and SRC members offered a position on council before other students?

While being the school captain, vice-captain, or a member of the SRC can provide valuable leadership experience, students in leadership positions must run for election like any other student.

Voting for student leaders at the school, such as school captains and SRC representatives, is a separate process to voting for student school council members.

How long is the term of office?

Generally, the term of office for all school council members is 2 years. The term of office of half the members in each category expires each year, this allows for one student membership position to become available for election each year.

Students voted onto council will be elected to council for a 2-year term of office.

If a student member resigns prior to the end of their term of office, the position can be filled through co-option.

One my family members is already on the school council, can I also be a member?

Yes, relatives are allowed to be members of the same school council.

What happens if there are tied votes?

If there is a tie between some or all of the candidates standing for election, the successful candidate will be determined by the drawing of lots, which means choosing someone by chance. For example, flipping a coin or drawing names out of a hat.

Are there any rules on how I can campaign if a ballot is required?

Yes. Campaign literature supporting student member candidates for school council elections may only be distributed and posted in certain places and times. School resources cannot be used to support candidates.

The principal may invite candidates to prepare a brief written statement to be distributed with each ballot paper. The length of the candidate statement is specified by the principal and is usually no longer than 150 words.

The principal will let you know the full set of rules if a ballot is required.

How do I know which students are standing for election?

The principal will inform the school community of the students who have nominated for school council.

If a ballot is required, names will be listed in random order on the voting/ballot paper.

If the principal decides to allow candidates to prepare a written statement, they will be given to voters along with the ballot paper.

How do I vote?

Each student in Year 7 and above will be provided a ballot paper and given 7 days to complete it and return it.

The details about what you need to do to vote and where you need to drop your completed ballot will be communicated to you if a ballot is required.

School council meetings

School councils must meet at least 8 times a year and at least once per school term. The president chairs all meetings, and all members of the council are expected to attend.

School council members can attend meetings in person or by videoconferencing or teleconferencing, for example on Webex.

Following the school council elections, school council members will determine an appropriate time and location to hold meetings throughout the year. For example, council may agree that meetings will take place on the first Wednesday of each month in the school library.

For most school councils, meetings are located at the school and are held in the evening to ensure that members can attend. Meetings typically last for around 2.5 hours.

You will need to discuss and arrange transport to and from the meeting with your parent/carer.

What if I cannot attend a council meeting?

If you are unable to attend a meeting let the principal know. This is called an apology. A request for extended leave for up to 3 meetings should be submitted to the principal and president.

Can a school council tell a teacher what to do?

No, a school council cannot issue instructions to teachers regarding their professional duties, or to employees of the department in respect of their duties at the school. That role is the responsibility of the principal. If a school council has developed a school policy on certain matters and that policy is consistent with department policy, the council can expect the school staff will implement the policy.

Code of conduct for school council members

School council members must comply with the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission. The Code of Conduct is based on the Victorian public sector values and requires members to:

- **act with honesty and integrity** – be truthful, open and clear about their motives and declare any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest and duty
- **act in good faith** in the best interests of the school, work cooperatively with other council members and the school community, be reasonable, and make all decisions with the best interests of students foremost in their minds
- **act fairly and impartially** – consider all relevant facts of an issue before making a decision, seek to have a balanced view, never give special treatment to a person or group and never act from self interest
- **use information appropriately respect** – confidentiality and use information for the purpose for which it was made available
- **exercise due care, diligence and skill** – accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school
- **use the position appropriately** – not use the position as a councillor to gain an advantage
- **act in a financially responsible manner** – observe all the above principles when making financial decisions
- **comply with relevant legislation and policies** – know what legislation and policies are relevant for which decisions and obey the law
- **demonstrate leadership and stewardship** – set a good example, encourage a culture of accountability, manage risks effectively, exercise care and responsibility to keep the school strong and sustainable.