

School Council Political Action

Your school council may have been discussing becoming more aware of, or involved in, the political aspects of education locally or provincially. Whether there is a municipal/trustee election on the horizon, a leadership race or provincial elections in the future, it's never too late to whet political appetites and encourage others to get involved – whether it is promoting awareness of issues, or taking political action on an ongoing basis.

Where do you start and what do you do?

There are a number of ways parents can get involved, from blogging candidates, to attending candidate forums, to organizing an all-candidate forum and peppering the hopefuls with pertinent questions. School council can play an enabling role (communicating times and places where parents can attend functions, distributing good questions to ask,) or an active role (organizing a candidate forum, asking pertinent questions of the candidates and posting their answers on a website or in an on-line forum to better inform others).

This resource will assist school councils in deciding what level of political involvement is best, and how to develop an action plan to get started.

Getting Started

As a school council meeting, discuss which aspect of political action you'd like to undertake – encouraging or enabling others to get involved or playing an active role. Use the attached ASCA “Political Action Strategies” to frame your decision – the guideline will give you a good sense of what's involved - before you make the decision. A word of advice - start small. Select one or two activities to avoid volunteer burnout. Your school council efforts will make a difference, no matter which activity you undertake.

Once your school council's decision is made, use the tips and action sheets provided, fill in the handy template and it's full steam ahead.

For further information, or assistance with your political action agenda, please call 1.800.661.3470 or email parents@albertaschoolcouncils.ca

Political Action Strategies – Elections

School Council Encouraging and/or Enabling Others to Get Involved at Election Time

There's an election in the offing, and as a school council you can assist parents in your school community who are interested in learning what sorts of views candidates have about education. A school council is well placed in a school community to take the lead in this area. The following will give your school council a sense of what is involved in offering information so others can make informed choices on Election Day.

1. Develop a list of all candidates running for office in your constituency, along with their contact information (election headquarters address, email address, website information, blog and twitter information, etc.). You may find information on trustee candidates on your school division's website or in your local newspapers; provincial candidates on political party websites; federal candidates on federal party websites.
2. Make the list available to all parents in the school community (post on your school council bulletin board, website, publish in your school council newsletter, send through your school council email distribution list, post on the ASCA website profile page for your school council, or start an on-line forum on the ASCA website and post information).
3. Advertise times and venues where candidates will appear – coffee shop visits, community league halls, all-candidate forums, and encourage people to attend (you may get this information from individual candidates' websites).
4. Generate a list of "good questions" on education topics for parents to ask candidates and distribute or post so people know what to ask. (See "Sample Questions for Candidates" sheet attached.)

Note: (This is a good topic for school council discussion at a Council of School Councils or COSC meeting with your school board. What are the issues or main concerns in your school community/school division currently? Take those issues and form them into custom-made questions for candidates.)

School Council Active Involvement in Elections

1. Invite your local candidate(s) to a school council hosted “all candidates forum” – advertise well in advance and encourage your community to attend (and ask the good questions). *(A small committee of the school council could organize this event. See the Action Guide “How to Organize a Candidates Forum” for details.)* Alternatively, arrange for your whole school council to attend an all candidates forum in your area.
2. Invite local candidates to a school council meeting and invite parents of the broader school community to attend. This is a less formal event than the “all candidates forum” and less work. Inviting to a school council meeting eliminates the need for hall rental, equipment, etc.
3. Provide the questions to each candidate; post their answers on your website, or distribute in other ways so all parents can read what their candidates’ thoughts are on education related topics.
4. Host an on-line forum; post candidates’ questions and answers and encourage discussion.
5. Encourage individual school council representatives to attend their candidates forum and ask questions on behalf of the school community.
6. Remind parents in broader school community to get out and vote on Election Day. On Election Day, organize volunteers to drive voters to polling stations, or provide child care for those who need it.



Political Action Strategies – Post Elections & Ongoing

Election Day has come and gone. Now what? How can your school council stay “plugged in” to the political efforts of the successful candidate(s)?

1. Invite the successful elected candidate to your school council meeting two or three times per year. This will encourage greater awareness at the political level of the importance of parents in the education system, plus you will gain an opportunity to ask questions and learn the views of your elected representative.
2. Keep your elected representative informed of what your school council is doing, and what your hopes are for the future of the school and the system.
3. Be aware of what your elected representative is doing to keep his or her election campaign promises – hold him/her accountable for the answers to the good questions he/she was asked during the campaign period.
4. Attend your Council of School Council (COSC) meetings. This will give you an opportunity to learn what your school board is planning, interact with all school division trustees, and make your school council’s views known on a variety of education topics.
5. If your school division does not have a COSC, advocate to your school board and to other school councils to get one started. COSC is a great way to network with other school councils in your school division and build good relationships with your board of trustees.
6. Consider running for school trustee in the next election! (Many trustees got their political “start” on a school council.)



Sample Questions for Candidates

GENERAL:

1. What are your top three priorities for education?
2. What actions would you take in order to provide long-term, predictable and sustainable funding for education?
3. School council was mandated in the School Act in 1995 to provide advice to principal and the school board on matters concerning education – yet most of the time, principals expect school councils to raise money – what is your view on legislating an end to school council fundraising?
4. How would you go about creating greater parental and community engagement in education?
5. What would you do to ensure only quality teachers are in front of our children?
6. Do you believe parents have a greater role to play in how the education system operates? If so, how?

TOPICS SPECIFIC TO YOUR SCHOOL/SCHOOL JURISDICTION:

Transportation

1. Will you advocate changes to transportation funding so parents won't have to subsidize travel to and from school? How?

2. What do you feel is a maximum school bus ride time for a child in early elementary school? What would you do to try to keep ride times to a minimum?

School fees and fundraising

3. Will you advocate for an end to parents being expected to pay school fees? How?
4. What would you do to try to end the expectation that parents fundraise for education?

School buildings/equipment

5. We need new (modernized) schools here –what would you do to get our schools built (modernized)?
6. Our school is bursting at the seams. Our school board has learned there is no extra money to add space. What would you do to help resolve this problem?

Programs/Curriculum

7. Do you feel access to music, drama, language is important in the development of children? What would you do to ensure the arts were part of the curriculum in our schools?
8. What are your views on standardized tests?
9. What do you think should be the appropriate weight for the Diploma Exam?

Political Action Planning Template

Building Election Awareness and Encouraging Participation of Parent Community

#	Political Action Goals	Who	Start Date	End Date	Resources Needed
1	Communicate upcoming elections, encourage people to get active.				
2	Distribute candidate names & contact info (including website, blog, twitter, LinkedIn info).				
3	Advertize times and venues where candidates will appear.				
4	Develop & distribute/post a set of candidate questions.				
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Political Action Planning Template

School Council Active Participation in Election

#	Political Action Goals	Who	Start Date	End Date	Resources Needed
1	Host an “all candidates forum”; or alternatively, organize school council parents to attend an all candidates forum in their area				
2	Invite all candidates to a school council meeting.				
3	Email questions to each candidate; post their answers				
4	Host an “on-line” forum				
5	Remind parents to vote on election day – organize drivers for those unable to get to polling stations; provide child care for those who need it.				
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Political Action Planning Template

School Council Activities Post-Election & Ongoing

#	Political Action Goals	Who	Start Date	End Date	Resources Needed
1	Invite elected representative to school council meeting – build a positive relationship				
2	Keep elected representative informed of school council activities/initiatives				
3	Keep tabs on what elected representative is doing to keep election promises regarding education (hold him/her accountable for words and actions)				
4	Ensure school council representation at school district Council of School Council (COSC) meetings (if no COSC in your area, advocate to school board to establish one)				
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