

School Council Political Engagement

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) works to empower parents and school councils, providing information and resources to navigate the ever-changing education landscape in Alberta.

As a municipal election is coming on October 18, 2021, the Board of Directors created this package to encourage political involvement prior to the election, and assist with important voting decisions.

This package is designed to encourage parents to interact with political candidates, give them ideas for reaching out, seeking information and gaining insight about candidate perspectives particular to public education.

Specific educational areas of concern for your local school and/or district are ideal conversation starters.

When it comes time to vote, parents on school councils can be confident in making a well-informed decision about who will champion their children's educational success.

Where to start and what to do?

There are a number of ways that parents can get involved, from following candidates on social media, to attending local candidate debates, or organizing an all-candidate forum in the school community.

School councils can play an **enabling** role (communicating dates and locations where parents can attend political events and creating questions to ask) or an **active** role (organizing a candidate forum, asking questions and posting answers from candidates on a website or online forum to better inform others).

This resource outlines strategies to assist a school council to decide what level of political involvement is best suited for their community, and how to develop an action plan.

Getting Started

As a school council (which includes the principal), discuss which aspects of political action you would like to undertake (encouraging or enabling others to get involved, or playing an active role), using the strategies outlined on pages 2 – 3 for reference to make a decision.

Your school council efforts will make a difference, no matter which activity(ies) you undertake.

It is important to be aware of any district policies in place regarding planned activities. Have your principal check before plans are finalized.

Prepare a plan utilizing the tips, actions and templates provided, to promote and launch your campaign.

For more information, or assistance with your political action campaign, call 780.454.9867 or 1.800.661.3470, or email parents@albertaschoolcouncils.ca



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

As a school council and as parents, you can advise candidates about your school district's educational needs, so informed platforms can be created as they seek office. 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.

- Develop a list of all candidates running for office in your ward, along with their contact information (election headquarters address, email address, website information, blog and twitter information). You can find information about provincial candidates on municipal electoral websites.
- 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 out through your school council email distribution list, post on social media.
- Advertise times and venues where candidates will appear – coffee shop visits, community league halls, all-candidate forums, and encourage people to attend (you can get this information from individual candidates' websites).
- 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*” to follow.) Or, send the same questions to each candidate for your school council to compare.

Note: A good topic for discussion at district-wide gatherings of school councils meeting with their school board is - *What are the issues or main concerns in your school community/school division currently? Take these issues and form them into custom-made questions for candidates.*

School Council Active Involvement in Elections

School councils and/or groups of school councils can host a candidates' forum - inviting all candidates, to ask questions and provide input/feedback to them. In order to host a forum, school councils work with their principal to secure appropriate space and ensure district policies are followed.

- Invite all local candidates to a school council hosted “all-candidates forum” – advertise well in advance and encourage your community to attend (to ask the good questions). A smaller committee of the school council could organize this event and manage details.
- Alternatively, arrange for your whole school council to attend an all-candidates forum in your area.

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- 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.
- Create and provide questions to each candidate; post their answers on your website, or distribute in other ways so all parents can read what the candidates’ thoughts are on education related topics.
- Host an online forum; post candidates’ questions and answers and encourage discussion.
- Encourage individual school council representatives to attend their candidates’ forum and ask questions on behalf of the school community.
- Remind parents in the broader school community to get out and vote on Election Day. On Election Day, organize volunteers to drive voters to polling stations, or provide childcare for those who need it.

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. What is your policy position on anti-racism?
2. How do you enact the TRC calls to action in your life and how will you continue that in your role if elected?
3. How do you plan to help reduce after school violence (especially against visible minorities)?
4. What priority do you place on mental health and wellness and how do you think you can support parents and students around the issue of wellness?
5. How do you see the role of schools within the community?
6. What do you think municipal councils can do to help build schools more quickly?
7. How do you see yourself advocating for education in your elected capacity?
8. What have you done in the past to advocate for education?



Political Action Planning Templates

Building Election Awareness and Encouraging Participation of Parent Community

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

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/share their answers.				
4	Host an online forum.				
5	Remind parents to vote on Election Day – organize drivers for those unable to get to polling stations, provide childcare for those who need it.				

Letter Writing

School councils, and individuals, can write letters to candidates outlining the importance of education issues (to all candidates).

- If a letter is sent from the school council by email, it is considerate to copy (cc) school administration and the superintendent.
- If a (hard copy) letter from the school council is mailed, it is considerate to let school administration and the superintendent know this, and provide a copy to them if requested.
- Individual school council members can also write and send individual letters as interested constituents who want to elevate education as an important election issue.
- Letters should be personalized, share a story, and/or list specific areas of concerns.

Sample Letter to a Candidate *from an Individual*

Individual's Name

Individual's Address

Individual's email address

Individual's phone number

Dear Candidate:

Thank you for putting your name forward as a candidate in the upcoming provincial election.

The opportunity to elect officials who will make important decisions, for our province and its future, is one that I appreciate and do not take lightly. I believe it is my responsibility to make an informed and educated choice, when I cast my ballot on Election Day.

In an effort to better inform my decisions, I respectfully ask that you answer the following questions, from your own position.

INSERT PARAGRAPH OR TOPIC/QUESTION LIST HERE

I look forward to your response, and thank you in advance, for taking the time to address this/these important topic(s).

Individual's Name



Sample Letter to a Candidate from a School Council

School Council Name

School Name

School Address

Contact Name

Contact email and phone

Dear Candidate:

Thank you for putting your name forward as a candidate in the upcoming provincial election.

The opportunity to elect officials who will make important decisions, for our province and its future, is one that we appreciate and do not take lightly. We believe it is our responsibility to make an informed and educated choice, when we cast a ballot on Election Day.

In an effort to better inform our decisions, and those of other parents in our school community, we respectfully ask that you answer the following questions, from your own position, on these issues relating to our education system in Alberta.

INSERT PARAGRAPH OR TOPIC/QUESTION LIST HERE

We look forward to your response, and thank you in advance, for taking the time to address this/these important topic(s). Responses will be shared publicly with school community members.

Chair Name or Member Names,

School Council

School

