



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

**A HANDBOOK FOR
FIRST NATION SCHOOL
GOVERNING AUTHORITIES**

UPDATED VERSION: JUNE 2024



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A HANDBOOK FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, Updated June 2024

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SECTION ONE

► INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

1.1 First Nations Control of First Nations Education

Education is a fundamental human right and an “indispensable means of realizing other human rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹ For First Nations, this right is uniquely situated within a framework of inherent rights as Indigenous people that are constitutionally protected and elaborated upon by international mechanisms and instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Specifically, First Nations have the right to establish and control their own educational systems and institutions as a fundamental aspect of their inherent rights of self-determination and self-government – rights protected under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and affirmed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration). First Nations children have a right to enjoy their own cultures and languages, develop a strong sense of self, and acquire a diverse set of skills and knowledge needed to prosper in the contemporary world.

As set out in the UN Declaration:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

¹ Human Rights Council, United Nations, *Human Rights Bodies and Mechanisms - Study on Lessons Learned and Challenges to Achieve the Implementation of the Right of Indigenous Peoples to Education*, Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations: 2009).

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

The pivotal National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, later updated by First Nations across Canada as the Assembly of First Nations' *First Nations Control of First Nations Education* policy document, affirms those rights.

All peoples have the right to maintain their cultural and linguistic identities, and education is essential to actualizing this right. First Nations control over education will provide the means to acquire the necessary skills to be self-empowered and self-sufficient and to maintain First Nations cultural values and languages. This is essential to actualizing an individual's success in society. It will also provide a strong foundation for empowering proud First Nations peoples who are fully able to contribute to the development of their families, clans, communities and nations.

First Nations Control of First Nations Education. It's Our Vision, It's Our Time. Assembly of First Nations. 2010

Concerted efforts and proactive measures are needed to ensure quality educational opportunities are available to all First Nations students and to contribute to reconciliation in education. First Nations control of First Nations education is a key mechanism to achieve those goals, and to address the destructive legacy of the residential school system, through which colonial governments attempted to use education policy to achieve assimilation.

1.2 BC First Nations Education System

In British Columbia (BC), First Nations have worked for nearly three decades to build the BC First Nations Education System, which is premised on quality education for First Nation students and First Nations control of First Nations education.

The BC First Nations Education System respects the authority of each First Nation for the education of their learners, recognizing that local autonomy allows for responsive and sustainable approaches. The System also includes complementary collective organizations with mandates to assist First Nations and First Nation schools in supporting their students – i.e. the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA).

1.2.1 Complexity of the System

First Nations education in BC is highly complex, involving First Nation, federal, and provincial roles and responsibilities. The BC First Nations Education System is supported by agreements with Canada and British Columbia that set out commitments that will lead to systemic shifts (through law, policy, and practice) to support First Nations control and student success. These agreements address funding structures and services to support First Nations education.

Two key agreements are fundamental to the BC First Nations Education System.

- ▶ The July 5, 2006 BC First Nations Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement – signed by Canada, BC, and the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) on behalf of First Nations. The jurisdiction agreements and supporting legislation are intended to advance First Nations control over education.
- ▶ The 2018 BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success (BCTEA) – an agreement that extends the 2012 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA), signed by Canada, British Columbia and FNESC, and witnessed in support by the FNSA. The purpose of BCTEA is to promote systemic shifts, such as legislative and policy reform, to support improved educational outcomes of all First Nation students in BC, regardless of where they live or are enrolled in school.

The BC First Nations Education System represents a shift toward First Nations resuming full control and exercise of jurisdiction over education, after more than a century of colonial policy aimed at assimilation and controlling how and what First Nation children were taught. The System also supports the design and implementation of culturally relevant programs and services to support greater success for First Nations students.

1.2.2 First Nation Schools

A key component of the BC First Nations Education System, and a practical expression of First Nations control of First Nations education, are the more than 100 Kindergarten 4 to grade 12 (K4-12) schools established by First Nations in BC.

BC First Nation schools vary tremendously, reflecting the distinct languages, cultures, values, and perspectives of the First Nations that operate them. First Nation schools vary in size, with student populations ranging from as few as three or four students to nearly 300 students. Reflecting the demographics, priorities, and capacity of each community, the schools offer a range of grade levels, with some providing K4 and K5 only, while others offer grades K through 12. Student ages may include 4-year olds to adults, based on community needs and circumstances. Some of the schools are quite new, while others have been operating for close to five decades, and they may be located in or near urban settings or

in extremely remote locations, sometimes hundreds of kilometers from the nearest center, possibly accessible only by plane or boat.

What Are First Nations Independent Schools?

Some First Nations have chosen to seek independent school status for their school. In these cases, the schools are subject to the same requirements that apply to all provincial independent schools in BC under the Independent School Act. Those requirements are detailed on the MECC website, and related questions can be directed to the MECC Independent Schools Branch. First Nation independent schools must meet specific standards for school operations, teacher certification, governance of the school by a provincially-recognized School Board, and required monitoring inspections by the Independent Schools Branch, among other things.

The decision of whether or not to maintain independent school status is very complicated, as it involves considerations that relate to the principles of First Nations control of First Nations education, First Nations authority for education, community preferences, as well as specific funding issues.

What are Participating First Nation (PFN) Schools?

First Nations in BC have been working collectively for over two decades to advance a First Nations education jurisdiction initiative, which began to be formally implemented as of July 2022. Through the jurisdiction initiative, Canada and the Province of BC have recognized the authority of First Nations who enter into education jurisdiction agreements to make decisions and laws related to their education systems on their own land. First Nations that opt into the jurisdiction initiative and choose to sign an education jurisdiction agreement become Participating First Nations (PFNs). PFNs appoint two directors to the First Nations Education Authority (FNEA), which is responsible for implementing specific education requirements and opportunities for PFNs. PFN schools participate in many of the programs and services available to all First Nation schools in BC as part of the BC First Nations Education System, and the jurisdiction agreements signed by PFNs result in some unique options and obligations for PFN schools.

Issues that relate differently to First Nations independent schools and PFN schools are highlighted where appropriate throughout this Handbook.

1.2.3 Varied School Governing Models

Crucial to any education system is strong leadership – including effective governance over education and schools. Just as First Nations in BC differ in terms of their cultures, languages,

demographics, community priorities, and capacities, First Nation school governance structures vary, as well.

To date, there has been limited opportunity for First Nations to establish governing bodies that are recognized by Canada or BC as “legal” entities. Governing bodies are most often Indian Bands under the federal Indian Act or, in some cases, societies established under federal or provincial legislation. New opportunities are now available for legal recognition of Indigenous governing bodies under the recently enacted Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (BC). The federal government has also enacted child welfare legislation and languages legislation that recognize Indigenous governing bodies, and it is expected that the scope of this recognition will broaden. The federal government has endorsed the UN Declaration and has committed to enacting legislation for its implementation. The Education Jurisdiction initiative also has brought about the new FNEA and the option of Community Education Authorities, which are recognized legal bodies.

For now, the current landscape includes a range of governance models for First Nations’ schools in BC.

- ▶ In some cases, the schools are under the direct authority of Chief and Council, with no school board or committee in existence. According to this governance model, education and matters related to the First Nation school will be on the “agenda” of Chief and Council at their meetings, and Chief and Council will make decisions as needed in the best interests of the Nation / community members, including the school community.
- ▶ In other cases, First Nations have decided to establish a formal school board (a distinct legal entity, usually under the provincial Societies Act). Such boards may operate at arm’s length from Chief and Council (e.g. board members are elected through a community voting procedure), or the Chief and Council may sit as directors themselves on the board. The relationship between the school board and Chief and Council is typically described in the school board’s terms of reference or constitution and bylaws, and elaborated on through policy and reporting procedures – clarifying how the board is accountable back to Chief and Council, which is important to ensure accountability to the Nation’s governing body and overall community. Where incorporated, the school board will also have legal obligations under the governing legislation. Board members must be provided adequate training and information to understand these responsibilities.
- ▶ Somewhere in between these models are schools that are governed by Chief and Council, advised or guided by some kind of an education or school committee, which may or may not be incorporated. Membership on these committees may include elected members or volunteers, sometimes involving only parents / caregivers, or

some mix of family and community members, often with elders as advisors. These committees may also be guided by terms of reference to provide clarity about roles and responsibilities, and to clarify how they are accountable to Chief and Council.

- ▶ First Nation schools that operate as independent schools under the provincial Independent School Act (BC) can be governed by an “authority”, which may be: a society within the meaning of the Societies Act; a company within the meaning of the Business Corporations Act or a corporation incorporated under a private Act; or a person designated, by regulation, that operates or intends to operate an independent school.

Terminology Used

- ▶ In this handbook, the term “**School Governing Authority**” is used to capture all of the models described above in a general sense. Where there are unique considerations or implications for any particular model, that information is noted. The term School Governing Authority is also intended to be inclusive of K4 Centres and Adult Secondary Education Centres. Some of the information included in this Handbook will have to be interpreted with those education settings in mind, but much of the information and many of the broad concepts included in this document will relate to K4 and Adult Secondary Education Centres.
- ▶ Often, regardless of which School Governing Authority structure is in place (i.e. a committee, School Board, etc.), Chief and Council may designate an employee of the Nation (e.g. Education Director, Education Coordinator, Education Manager, or Education Administrator) to be responsible for overseeing education for the community. Often that individual works closely with and may supervise the school principal, with the Education Director or Coordinator taking direction from and reporting to Chief and Council. In this Handbook, these positions are referred to as “**Education Manager / Administrator**” for simplicity, recognizing that titles and specific job descriptions vary.
- ▶ Most First Nation schools are typically lead by a principal, head teacher, or other senior position.² For convenience, the term “**principal**” is used in this Handbook – although it is recognized that positions and titles can vary among schools.

In some cases, one individual may fulfill the role of Education Manager / Administrator and principal. In other cases, the roles and responsibilities are separate and distinct. There are many ways that First Nations have structured the staff who have a role in leading First Nations education and schools.

² Where the school is an independent school under the provincial *Independent School Act*, “principal” is defined as “the teacher responsible for administering and supervising an independent school.”

The choice of the most suitable School Governing Authority model - and how to operate a school - is based on what works best in the circumstances of each community and school setting for supporting the success of students.

To help First Nations clarify the roles and responsibilities of their School Governing Authorities, sample terms of reference (TOR) have been developed for support. The sample TOR are intended to offer ideas and assistance. They are not mandatory in any way; they are simply intended to identify some common components of TOR for First Nation School Governing Authorities to consider. First Nations are encouraged to adapt the sample TOR and remove or add any content or provisions as necessary. The sample TOR includes placeholders for potential modifications, and indicates where specific information is required to reflect local circumstances.

The sample TOR is included as Appendix C of this document.

1.3 Purpose of this Handbook

First Nations have inherent authority over education in their communities. This Handbook is focused on the governance of First Nation schools as one aspect of First Nations' broader authority over education. Aspects of education governance, and governance of schools, will shift and evolve as new forms of Indigenous governing bodies are established, and as the education jurisdiction initiative moves ahead.

First Nation schools in BC generally share the objective of providing quality instruction to learners in culturally appropriate, nurturing and caring environments to achieve high levels of learning for all students. Strong governance over education and schools is crucial to achieving that vision.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) are committed to supporting First Nations in developing the capacity of their School Governing Authorities so that they can continue to effectively lead their schools and increase student achievement. The creation of this Handbook is one component of that support.

This Handbook is intended to share information regarding various responsibilities of School Governing Authorities, given the unique opportunities and challenges that are associated with operating a First Nation school. The information included in the Handbook is meant to apply to a wide range of circumstances, so it is presented in largely general terms. First Nations will express their own specific governance approaches in different ways, and the structures used to exercise governance will be culturally-based and implemented within the context of each First Nation's principles and values. It is therefore expected that the information included within this Handbook will be considered and adapted to meet the unique needs of those who use it.

Project Sponsors



The **First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEsc)** is committed to supporting First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students in BC. FNEsc facilitates collaborative services in the areas of research, communications, advocacy, program administration, and networking, and strives to share up-to-date information about available programs, government policies and initiatives, and local, provincial and national education issues that affect First Nations learners.

See www.fnescc.ca

FNEsc Mandate: "To facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations."



The **First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)** was formally established as a non-profit society with charitable status in 1996. The FNSA represents and works on behalf of First Nations controlled schools in BC and has a mandate to support those schools in creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas. More information is available at www.fnsa.ca.

FNSA Mission: "The First Nation Schools Association will collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that will develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and will equip them to realize their full potential, within self-governing First Nations communities."

Note: An original draft of this Handbook was shared in two focus group sessions involving approximately 30 First Nations representatives, which were held in April 2013. The invaluable feedback that was shared by those focus groups contributed greatly to the original version of this document. At the focus group sessions, the participants also suggested the creation of Standards for First Nation School Governing Authorities – included below.

KEY PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

These standards for School Governing Authorities are founded upon a commitment to the principles of First Nations control of First Nations education. A key component of any education system is strong school leadership – including effective governance of schools by local governing agencies. The following standards, based on research and input from First Nations representatives, outline characteristics of effective governance of First Nation schools, which are operated by First Nations pursuant to their authority over the education of their learners.

First Nation schools differ greatly in terms of their governance structures. The choice of how to operate a school is entirely dependent upon what works best given the circumstances of each school and community.

The standards have been written to represent promising practices. The hope is that the standards will provide a foundation for efforts to establish and review practices, assess strengths, and strive toward improvement. School Governing Authorities are encouraged to consider these standards within their own unique contexts and prioritize those of particular importance or relevance to their communities, schools, and students.

Generally, the standards promote the perspective that a School Governing Authority should:

- ▶ maintain a consistent focus on the school's purpose, using evidence to ensure that the school is reflecting the community's vision for education and continually supporting high levels of learning and achievement for all students;
- ▶ demonstrate a high-level governance role in setting the vision, mission and strategic direction of the school;
- ▶ acknowledge that the administration and day-to-day management of the school rests with the principal;
- ▶ act according to clear codes of ethics, policies, and procedures to maintain a consistent focus on the best interests of students, parents / caregivers, the community, and the school;
- ▶ effectively fulfill their advocacy role for the benefit of the school and students;
- ▶ address the need for adequate professional development and information sharing to support informed governance practice and decision-making;
- ▶ maintain respectful and collaborative relationships;
- ▶ operate transparently and effectively, conducting business using clear and efficient practices;
- ▶ fulfill its financial management and oversight role for the benefit of the school;

- ▶ implement effective communication strategies with the principal and school community;
- ▶ embrace its accountability to students, parents / caregivers, staff, the community, and leadership.

The standards set out below are intended to promote discussion about the challenging and very important role of School Governing Authorities in supporting effective schools and student success. School Governing Authorities may utilize these in their work, and/or adapt them to their unique circumstances.

Standard 1: School Governing Authorities work toward a clear purpose, ensuring and overseeing the development and implementation of a shared school vision, mission, goals, and values to support high levels of learning and achievement for all students.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) maintains a clear, persistent focus on student learning as its highest priority.
- b) supports all school efforts to embed the Nation's worldviews, values, culture, language, and priorities in the school pedagogies, curriculum, climate, and classrooms.
- c) supports an education vision and sets strategic direction based upon the desired future for the school.
- d) understands the potential and responsibility of schools to teach all children at high levels, recognizing that challenges exist but expecting timely improvements in student achievement as a result of the school's efforts.
- e) ensures that the school has a community-driven mission statement that clearly defines the school's purpose and provides the foundation for School Governing Authority decision-making.
- f) approves the school's goals, which are consistent with its mission, and regularly reviews and discusses the goals with the principal.
- g) focuses on quality instruction and measurable results.
- h) encourages and supports innovation and change.

Standard 2: School Governing Authorities understand and commit to their governance role, understanding that day-to-day administration and management of the school is the responsibility of the principal and, as appropriate, school staff.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) clearly demonstrates that it is visionary and goal-oriented.
- b) focuses its efforts and discussions on education governance, not school administrative issues.
- c) fulfills its responsibility for hiring a principal who is responsive to the community's vision of education, and effectively monitors the performance of the principal in ensuring improvements in student achievement.
- d) supports the principal's efforts to maintain a safe, culturally relevant, academically rigorous learning environment for all students.
- e) demonstrates trust, confidence and support for the principal.
- f) collaborates with the principal regularly to review and discuss progress toward approved school goals.
- g) works with the principal in partnership and is perceived by staff and constituents to be effective in its governance role.
- h) clarifies the decision-making authority of the principal, respecting which decisions will be made by the principal and which decisions will be made by the Governing Authority.
- i) does not direct or interfere in staff matters that are the purview of the principal.

Standard 3: School Governing Authorities act transparently and ethically and in the best interest of students, parents / caregivers, the community, and the school.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) makes student-centered decisions at all times.
- b) through its policies, procedures, and practices, respects and maintains the confidentiality of students, parents / caregivers, staff, and members.
- c) ensures its members continually work to avoid conflict of interest.
- d) promotes professional conduct and attitudes on the part of all members.
- e) has processes in place to support members in following all appropriate protocols.
- f) creates and maintains policies that provide clear direction.
- g) makes personal wellness a priority – for students, parents / caregivers, school staff, and Governing Authority members themselves.

Standard 4: School Governing Authorities are committed to fulfilling their advocacy role for the benefit of the school and students.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) uses its mission and goals to set direction for its advocacy efforts.
- b) appropriately involves elders to reinforce the school's respect of the Nation's values, traditions, language and culture.
- c) recognizes the rights of parents / caregivers and the benefits associated with effective parental involvement in home and school learning.
- d) asks critical questions related to student learning to identify areas of need, and bases its advocacy on substantive evidence to focus attention appropriately and to validate its efforts.
- e) understands policies and privacy rules related to how information is shared and who speaks for the Governing Authority in varying situations.
- f) seeks funding and resources to address the needs of students.
- g) builds strong connections to other agencies to address issues that affect students and families.
- h) keeps the community fully informed of key issues and seeks direction as appropriate.

Standard 5: School Governing Authorities are committed to informed practice and decision-making.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) has clarified and understands its authority, accountability, and responsibilities, including to leadership where the School Governing Authority is not the Chief and Council.
- b) provides a comprehensive orientation for new members.
- c) supports all members to ensure they are knowledgeable and well informed regarding the school's purpose, programs and services.
- d) seeks training and external support to adequately address capacity building for successful governance.
- e) regularly conducts a self-assessment with the goal of enhancing its effectiveness.

Standard 6: School Governing Authorities are committed to respectful, collaborative relations.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) requires that all members respect the opinions of others.
- b) maintains clear expectations for member behaviour and conduct.
- c) has a clearly defined code of ethics for members and the principal.
- d) encourages each member to express opinions on any matter under consideration.
- e) accepts differing opinions as a positive part of discussions.
- f) welcomes, values, and appreciates the individual contributions of each member.

Standard 7: School Governing Authorities focus on effective operations of the Authority.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) encourages all members to commit to the concept of a governance body that “speaks with one voice.”
- b) makes certain that all members understand that they do not have any individual powers, and that they cannot make decisions, or take action individually, on behalf of the Authority.
- c) has clear policies related to meeting notice requirements.
- d) has clearly defined rules of order for the conduct of meetings, including quorum, voting procedures, and the selection of the chair.
- e) conducts meetings in a business-like manner according to established rules of order.
- f) maintains meeting minutes that clearly state decisions and direction of the Authority.
- g) receives information (e.g., agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) in a timely manner.
- h) ensures follow-up to its decisions.

Standard 8: School Governing Authorities fulfill their financial management role effectively and efficiently.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) has clarified, in writing, the process and criteria for the development of the school’s annual budget.
- b) remains knowledgeable about and understands the school’s budget.
- c) has a process in place for monitoring budget expenditures.

Standard 9: School Governing Authorities maintain effective and appropriate communications.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) ensures relevant people are informed of the school's purpose, mission, goals, and policies.
- b) establishes collaborative relationships with staff and the community.
- c) communicates information effectively through a variety of methods.
- d) communicates formal and substantive issues to staff through the principal.
- e) listens, seeks input, and hears feedback from constituents.
- f) celebrates the school's accomplishments and shares its progress proactively and positively.

Standard 10: School Governing Authorities fulfill their accountability obligations.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: THE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY:

- a) requests and thoroughly reviews timely reports on school programs and student achievement.
- b) formally reviews budgets and maintains financial transparency.
- c) makes regular, formal reports to parents / caregivers and to Chief and Council.
- d) ensures appropriate and responsible reporting to parents.
- e) regularly and thoroughly reports to the community on school operations and student progress.



SECTION TWO

► A SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 The Importance of School Leadership

School Governing Authorities are responsible for leading their schools so that all students can be successful, which is primarily accomplished by focusing on the school's purpose, strategic direction, and priorities.

For First Nation schools, effective School Governing Authorities also reflect First Nations' rights to design their own education systems in a manner of their choosing, in order to incorporate their values, customs, languages, and traditions. They model a commitment to and understanding of the benefits of integrating First Nation languages and cultures into the school environment and programs – acknowledging the important benefits for both students and for the community's efforts to promote positive self-identity among the Nation's citizens and to advance its language revitalization goals.

(Devarics and O'Brien, 2011; IASB, 2000; First Nations Education Council, 2015; CSBA, 2017)

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

Evidence shows that schools with high levels of student achievement have governing authorities that ...

- ▶ Commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction, and define clear goals that will lead toward that vision. They make sure that the school's purpose remains the top priority and that nothing else distracts from that aim.
- ▶ Have strong shared beliefs and values about the potential of all students to learn and the school's ability to teach all students at high levels. They have an "elevating" view of students, and see the school's job as releasing each learner's potential. They see difficulties (such as socio-economic difficulties, stresses, struggles with attendance, etc.) as challenges to be overcome, rather than excuses for mediocre results. They expect to see timely improvements in student achievement as a result of the school's initiatives.
- ▶ Spend less time focusing on operational issues and administrative details and more time discussing plans and policies to improve student achievement. They avoid micro-management. They focus instead on establishing a vision supported by policies and programming that will lead to a safe, effective school and improved student outcomes.
- ▶ Establish collaborative relationships with school staff and the community, recognizing that strong connections are one of the preconditions for productive change. They use positive and clear communication strategies to inform and engage both internal and external partners in setting and achieving relevant goals.
- ▶ Embrace and monitor data, even when the information is not initially positive – using objective facts to drive continuous improvement. Effective authorities use substantive information to identify student needs and make decisions. They avoid relying on subjective opinions of what does and does not work.
- ▶ Align and dedicate resources, including professional development time, to meet established goals. Effective authorities make decisions about the use of resources – financial and otherwise – that are aimed at a clear purpose.
- ▶ Lead as a united team with other education leaders, each from their respective roles. They contribute to a supportive work environment based on mutual trust, with the intention of enabling all staff to succeed in their roles.
- ▶ Share a commitment to assessment efforts with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making. They are able to clearly describe the purpose and process of school improvement initiatives and identify their own role in supporting those initiatives.
- ▶ Take part in capacity development efforts to build shared understandings, and implement formal, deliberate training for new and existing members.

In some ways, First Nations communities need effective Governing Authorities more than other communities. We face unique issues and a number of significant challenges. We need to be especially strategic, planning-focused, and diligent in focusing on evidence that our students are achieving the progress we want for them.

April 2013 Capacity Building Focus Group Participants

2.2 Governance Responsibilities

Governance is the process of decision-making, including the way rules, policies, and actions are structured to ensure that decisions are implemented to achieve the school's mandate.

- ▶ Governance is how leadership is operated and conducted.
- ▶ It is the exercise of authority, direction, and accountability to serve a purpose, with defined roles, relationships, and behavioral expectations for governing members (Ontario Public School Boards' Association. www.opsba.org).
- ▶ Governance of First Nation schools also involves ensuring that the Nation's values, perspectives, and traditions are embedded in decision-making processes and throughout the school.

Where the Chief and Council is the School Governing Authority, they will follow their band council procedures for convening and attending meetings, putting education and school matters on their meeting agendas, and making relevant, timely, and informed decisions (for example, setting education policy or establishing school budgets). Typically, Chief and Council decisions are made by band council resolution.

Where the School Governing Authority is an incorporated entity under legislation, such as a society, the board of directors is required to follow its terms of reference or constitution and bylaws (procedures) for holding meetings and making decisions.

In most cases, the School Governing Authority is the Chief and Council, or the Authority formally takes direction from, reports back, and is accountable to the Chief and Council. There may be some instances where a board operates at arm's length from Chief and Council, with Chief and Council exercising little to no control over the board or school (except, perhaps, to appoint the board members). These relationships are determined according to community circumstances and priorities.

Regardless of the structure used, some key school governance responsibilities include the following.

1. ***Set the vision and purpose.*** It is the School Governing Authority's responsibility to ensure that clear expectations are set out for the school.
2. ***Focus on learning and results.*** The School Governing Authority's focus should always be on the results it wants to achieve, with a clear mission and expectations, as well as well-defined strategies and goals to help achieve the mission. Without a focus on results, attention often shifts to management and, specifically, a detailed interest in the activities of staff – which rarely leads schools toward improved and sustained levels of student achievement.
3. ***Set and monitor strategic direction.*** The School Governing Authority should establish a plan (such as a school growth plan) to work toward its mission and expectations. This typically includes a schedule for the completion of both short and long-term goals and objectives, with ongoing monitoring of the progress being made.
4. ***Hire and monitor the performance of the principal.*** The principal generally serves as the sole “employee” of the School Governing Authority. The principal – sometimes through the Education Manager / Administrator and sometimes directly – is responsible for providing advice to the School Governing Authority, making recommendations for action, and then implementing the direction and decisions made by the School Governing Authority. The principal provides daily on-the-ground leadership and staff direction – in accordance with the mission, policies, goals, and plans approved by the School Governing Authority.
5. ***Advocate for the school community.*** The School Governing Authority has a critical role as an advocate for students, families, and the community. The community places its trust in the School Governing Authority and expects it to provide strong leadership in advancing the collectively established purpose and mission of the school.
6. ***Communicate.*** The School Governing Authority has a responsibility to ensure that relevant people are informed about the school's purpose and mission, policies, and achievements. It also has a responsibility to listen, seek input, and hear feedback from the school community.
7. ***Approve policies and the budget.*** School Governing Authorities are the architects of policies that influence teaching practices and promote a safe school environment that facilitates learning for all. They also establish budget priorities and allocate resources to maximize student learning and help achieve the school's mission and priorities. The

budget is not solely to maintain the school's annual operations; it is key to the school achieving its goals.

A School Governing Authority's continued emphasis on these governance tasks enhances its effectiveness and helps the Authority achieve its aims.

2.3 The Role of School Governing Authority Members

School Governing Authority members are generally better able to fulfill their roles and have a positive impact on the governing process when they have a good understanding of governance expectations.

School Governing Authority members are responsible for participating in discussions and contributing their perspectives and experiences to the Authority's decision-making. Effective School Governing Authority members share a commitment to supporting their school and helping to ensure the educational success of their community's children and youth. They are also passionate about the opportunity to help create a school setting that will promote students' sense of identity and understanding of their Nation's history, traditions, language, and culture.

Often, new members of a School Governance Authority – whether it is Chief and Council, an advisory committee, or a board – begin their role with limited training or direct experience with governance. A natural tendency for many people is to be immediately concerned with the daily operation of the school and how it functions (e.g. learning about the work of the principal and staff). This can be particularly true in smaller communities, where Governing Authority members have a more direct knowledge of the school, its staff, families, and students.

However, while it is natural to want to discuss the detailed day-to-day work of the school, evidence shows that effective School Governing Authorities focus their attention primarily on shaping the strategic direction of the school. In doing so, they have a responsibility to represent and work on behalf of the entire school community.

The commonly used principle “nose in—fingers out” refers to the distinction between a board's obligation to “put its nose in” an organization's governance matters, but to “keep its fingers out” of the management of the organization. Board members have the role of asking questions, but keeping hands off operations, which is carried out by management. This keeps the Governing Authority's attention on high-level policy setting, and out of day-to-day operational issues.

With regard to Chiefs and Councils, many legal cases have confirmed that band councilors owe a fiduciary duty to bands and their members. This is because a band council has the discretion to exercise the powers granted to it by the Indian Act and by the customs of its band. Generally, a fiduciary duty will exist when the band council makes a discretionary decision that will affect the band or band members. A fiduciary duty arises in the context of trust, and requires acting with the utmost good faith. A fiduciary is held to high standards and owes a duty of loyalty to beneficiaries, including avoiding any potential conflicts of interest and reaping no personal profit from the relationship. The fiduciary must always act in the best interests of the beneficiaries.

Directors of societies (and senior managers) also owe fiduciary duties to their society. This means that they owe both a duty of loyalty and a duty of care, as set out in the Societies Act and common law. The duty of loyalty requires acting honestly and in good faith, with a view to the best interests of the society. Directors must also act with a level of skill and competence that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in similar circumstances.

Not all School Governing Authority members perceive themselves as “educational leaders;” some people see themselves simply as volunteers and willing helpers – although their role is much more important than that.

It is important for School Governing Authority members to take their roles very seriously and to think positively about their contributions; they bring valuable perspectives, thoughts, and opinions to the leadership of the school. Authority members should be willing to express their ideas respectfully and clearly so that their views are included as decisions are being made. A combination of many voices makes a School Governing Authority successful.

Given the important role of Authority members, we need to pay attention to their membership. We need to involve our elders and let their wisdom guide us. We need to involve our young people. They will lead our schools in the future and we need to help prepare them now. We need to embrace the impact of our decisions and make sure we are involving our most committed people.

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2.3.1 What is the authority of individual members of the School Governing Authority?

School Governing Authority members may be surprised to learn that they have no individual powers or authority. Even where a Councilor holds the education “portfolio,”

that Councilor is generally accountable for reporting back to the full Chief and Council, where decisions are made. If the School Governing Authority is incorporated as a society under legislation, the board of directors has certain legal obligations under legislation (and common law) and operates as a collective, speaking with “one voice.”

In general, anything that members of the School Governing Authority do, individually or collectively, is at the direction of the whole School Governing Authority – based on a decision already made or to be ratified by the School Governing Authority at a subsequent meeting. This helps to ensure transparency and accountability.

With this understanding, the School Governing Authority as a collective body (not individual members) provides the overall strategic and policy direction for the school and the principal. Individual members should not give direction to staff, and they should not individually speak publicly or make comments on behalf of the School Governing Authority without permission from the collective. Even the Chair should not speak on behalf of the School Governing Authority without proper authorization.

It is also important to remember that governance is not about focusing on issues that are of most interest or concern to individual members. Rather, it is about leadership for the entire school. It is about being an important member of a group that speaks with one voice, and serving the needs of the broader school community – students, families, staff, and the First Nation itself.

2.3.2 Who do School Governing Authority members represent?

It is not uncommon for members of a School Governing Authority to have roles with other organizations and agencies, including within the community. Generally, School Governing Authority members are obligated to “act in the best interests” of all organizations they represent, which may give rise to competing obligations or interests from time to time.

- ▶ For example, Chief and Council may appoint a Councilor to the School Governing Authority, who works along with other members of the community. That person has responsibilities to both the School Governing Authority and the Chief and Council. If the School Governing Authority is an incorporated entity, such as a society, the member will also have specific legal obligations to the board of directors.
- ▶ A question related to those roles may arise, such as when Chief and Council is setting budgets, including the school’s budget. All Chief and Council members must make decisions to address and balance all of the interests and needs of the community. As a member of the School Governing Authority, the member will have a specific interest in the budget of the school.

- ▶ This raises the issue of which interests the member is representing when participating at meetings of Chief and Council versus when participating at meetings of the School Governing Authority.

The most common strategy for dealing with this type of situation is to imagine that the member is wearing a “hat” when attending meetings and participating in discussions and decision-making of the different bodies. When attending Chief and Council meetings, the member is wearing their “Councilor” hat. When at meetings of the School Governing Authority, the member is wearing their “Authority” hat and making decisions in the best interests of the school. Ideally, these interests are almost always aligned and do not give rise to true conflicts. However, where they may not be aligned, the member has to manage their potentially competing interests. In First Nation communities, this can be difficult.

A good management practice is to have guidelines to address conflicts of interest. This helps members navigate situations where they may feel torn between their responsibilities. Such guidelines will set out when the member must declare a potential conflict of interest and perhaps abstain from certain decision-making.

The sample Terms of Reference provided in Appendix C include references to conflict of interest.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Do we share the same understanding of the school’s accountability to Chief and Council and how school matters will be reported to Chief and Council?
- ▶ Do we have established terms of reference or a constitution and by-laws for the operations of our School Governing Authority?
 - If yes, do they work well for us?
 - Do they need review and possibly revision? If so, how do we want to address that issue?
- ▶ Do we have a mutual understanding of the governance role of our Authority?
- ▶ Do we have similar perspectives about the complementary leadership roles and responsibilities of the School Governing Authority, the Education Manager / Administrator (if relevant), and the principal?

SECTION THREE

► WHY FIRST NATIONS ESTABLISH THEIR OWN SCHOOLS

One of the most important roles of a School Governing Authority is understanding the school's students, families, and the broader community. Good school governance begins with having a clear understanding of why the school exists. From that foundation, the Governing Authority can help set the direction for the school's future.

Each First Nation establishes its school for its own unique reasons, but there are some common objectives.

- Generally, the establishment of its own school is a practical expression of a First Nation's authority and control over education.
- Most First Nation schools are created in an effort to provide quality education in school environments that are particularly supportive of and nurturing for First Nation students, and that proactively and deliberately encourage family engagement and community connections.
- First Nations also operate their own schools to promote the preservation and transmission of their language and culture to children and youth. First Nations are committed to ensuring that their education settings meet the needs of their students, in a manner that is reflective of their cultural identity and that prepares learners to be positive citizens of their communities and the world.
- In some cases, the establishment of First Nation schools can also help to address very practical issues, such as eliminating long commutes for students to access an education setting outside of their communities.

PRINCIPLES FOR FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

First Nations in BC have identified key principles for their collective vision of a First Nations education system:

- ▶ First Nations learners must be provided an education that ensures that they are confident in their self-identity, in their knowledge of themselves, their families, their communities, and their traditional values, languages and cultures.
- ▶ First Nations learners must learn the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in contemporary society, including the technological capacity required in the 21st century.
- ▶ First Nations learners must receive an education that will allow them to access any opportunities they choose, including a range of higher learning, employment, and life choices.

School Governing Authorities can play a vital role in helping to ensure that school staff understand the history of the school and why it was established, particularly for employees who are not from the community. New school principals, in particular, should be informed about the community's education values and vision for its school.

- ▶ In setting the overall strategic and policy direction for the school, the School Governing Authority communicates to all school staff, especially the principal, the school's purpose and the expectations of parents / caregivers, families, and the broader community.
- ▶ It is then the principal's responsibility, possibly under the supervision of the Education Manager / Administrator, to ensure that the defined purpose is incorporated into and reflected in the school's climate, curriculum, instruction, behavioral structures, and programs.

Effective First Nation School Governing Authorities have a commitment to and strategy for advancing the First Nations' culture and its vision for its people. Our authorities understand that they are one part of something bigger – one component of a larger community. First Nation School Governing Authorities believe in lifelong learning, and pay attention to the needs of all learners within the Nation.

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3.1 Language and Culture Programming

One common priority for First Nation schools is effective language and culture programming. First Nations across Canada are striving to revitalize their languages and language fluency in their communities. First Nations languages and cultures are central to First Nations' distinctive laws, traditions, and ways of life. First Nations' connections to their lands are described through their languages. As set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places, and persons. First Nations inherent rights to language are constitutionally protected, and are recognized by the Government of Canada in the federal Indigenous Languages Act, S.C. 2019, c.23.

Research shows that language learning is a strong contributor to the educational achievement of all learners. In part, this is because of the positive impacts that language learning has on neurological development. For First Nations students, the academic benefits of learning their languages are enhanced because of its powerful role in helping to build self-esteem and self-identity, and contributing positively to students' personal development and their connections to their communities and traditional worldviews. These factors are all vital components of student success.

An understanding of the value of language learning is clearly reflected in the work of First Nation schools. Most First Nation schools in BC offer some type of distinct language and culture classes, and are also making efforts to integrate language and culture learning throughout the curriculum. Some First Nation schools have reached or are working toward language immersion.

School Governing Authorities can help to prioritize language and culture learning by being involved in the planning and monitoring of their school's language and culture initiatives, including helping to connect the school's language and culture efforts with the work of other community agencies that do work in this area.

In addition, School Governing Authorities (perhaps with the Education Manager / Administrator) have a role in ensuring that the principal is fully aware of and maintains the First Nation's protocols for using language and cultural materials, songs, and dances appropriately. School staff, and students, must also be well prepared to interact in hospitable and respectful ways with elders and other knowledge keepers who contribute to school activities. Respecting an elder means learning about and following appropriate etiquettes and traditional protocols, appreciating their important role, and valuing the knowledge and time they are sharing. Following all protocols is fundamental to honoring

the community, and it reinforces to students that the school respects the community's traditions and values.

Once the School Governing Authority shares relevant protocols and approaches with the principal, the principal can then be expected to take the lead in ensuring that they are followed by all school staff and volunteers, consulting with appropriate community authorities for more direction and help when needed.

SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOLS' LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMMING

Through BCTEA, FNEsc and FNSA manage a comprehensive First Nations Language and Culture Program, which provides grants to First Nation schools for students who are eligible for the ISC Nominal Roll. Approximately \$14 million is allocated annually through this Program – in addition to the \$5 million that is provided directly to schools for language education through the BCTEA funding formula.

First Nation schools are provided details about the Language and Culture grants each year, including information about each school's specific funding amount, as well as the process for accessing allocations and reporting on the sponsored activities. School Governing Authorities should be advised about this funding opportunity and should have an opportunity to help identify the school's language and culture plans and priorities.

FNEsc and FNSA also implement services to support the language and culture efforts of First Nation schools. Language and Culture Coaches are available to support Language teachers in First Nation schools, and information sharing sessions, workshops, and professional development opportunities are organized regularly.

FNEsc and FNSA have also published a resource that provides an overview of possible language revitalization efforts – a *Guide to Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices for Consideration by First Nations Schools*. That Guide was developed through interviews with language champions and with contributions from the First Nations Languages Sub-Committee and a focus group of First Nation school representatives. FNEsc and FNSA are grateful for the extensive input into the writing of the Guide, which can be found on the FNEsc website.

It can be very beneficial for School Governing Authorities and school principals to discuss these resources together, and plan how the funding and supports can best be used to help the school reach its language and culture goals.

More information about the First Nations Language and Culture Program and the available services can be found at www.fnsa.ca.

3.2 Expecting High Levels of Learning for All Students

First Nation schools generally share the goal of providing quality educational opportunities to ensure that all students learn at high levels and develop a sense of pride and positive self-identity. Research shows that high-performing schools invariably embrace a commitment to high expectations for all students. For First Nation schools, this commitment includes high expectations for the transmission of the First Nation's values and worldview, and a holistic perspective of education that respects and incorporates the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of students.

When all members of the school community are committed to ensuring the success of each student, profound changes take place, and researchers who study school improvement have repeatedly found that embracing the following principles results in improved teaching and learning.

- ▶ ***All students can learn.*** If schools operate on the belief that every child and teen has the capacity for achievement, they are more likely to consider it their responsibility to help students meet their potential.
- ▶ ***Teachers and schools can make a difference.*** External factors play a role in student achievement, but schools are far from powerless in effecting positive change. In higher-achieving schools, staff generally have a greater belief in their capacity for improving student achievement, and they are less likely to deflect responsibility or blame other people or circumstances for challenges.
- ▶ ***There is a collective responsibility for student learning.*** Educators from successful education settings believe in the contributions of the entire school community for improving student learning and providing students the supports they need to succeed.

As First Nations School Governing Authority members, we need to stop accepting satisfactory; we need to strive for excellence. We have to overcome complacency and challenge the status quo.

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To support the integration of these principles into all school activities, School Governing Authorities can work with the education professionals in their schools to consider questions such as the following.

- ▶ What school characteristics and educational practices have been identified as most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels?
- ▶ How can we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school? What commitments are needed to make that happen?
- ▶ What indicators should we use to monitor our progress?

These issues are all discussed in more detail in the following sections of this Handbook.

3.2.1 Establishing Inclusive Education Settings

Related to the principle of maintaining high expectations for all learners is the concept of inclusion. This principle generally means creating a school in which all students are accepted and can participate and succeed – a principle that is generally extended to students who have all kinds of learning needs, gender identities, family backgrounds and experiences, and socio-economic circumstances. There is now a widespread acceptance that all students should feel welcome and should be provided appropriate supports that enable them to join in, learn, and contribute to all aspects of school life.

In considering the concept of inclusion, a key consideration is the specific needs of children and youth in care. School Governing Authorities can play a key role in ensuring that adequate attention and supports are provided to ensure success for these students. In particular, it is important to create Learning Plans for children and youth in care to address the need for consistent, long-term supports to help these students achieve their goals. Cooperation between First Nation and public schools is also vital for meeting the needs of these students if they transfer between school systems.

The concept of inclusion also relates to students who have exceptionalities. This term refers to students who may have more complicated challenges or disabilities that require deliberate and structured assessments and interventions to make the student's educational experience as positive as possible. Schools must ensure that students who are identified as having an exceptionality (sometimes referred to as a special need, or a disability or diverse ability) have opportunities to be educated and enjoy learning experiences, to the greatest extent possible, in school and classroom settings along with their peers. To ensure that all students have equitable opportunities, students should be provided programs and services according to their unique needs and circumstances, which may require that some students receive supports and services that are different from other students in the school.

School Governing Authorities help to create a school environment that supports all students when they ...

- ▶ Establish and monitor the school's commitment to the principle of inclusion, including reviewing school policies, practices, and Codes of Conduct (staff and students) to ensure that they are consistent with the conviction that students who have exceptionalities should be educated within the least restrictive environment possible, spending as much time as possible in the general education setting, with opportunities to participate in all available learning opportunities.
- ▶ Promote the philosophy of equity – recognizing that all students differ in their strengths, abilities, challenges, and needs, and that students therefore need varying types and levels of support as they progress through their educational journey.
- ▶ Are attentive to school budgets and resources, discussing with the school principal whether adequate resources are dedicated to the school's programming for students who have exceptionalities.
- ▶ Expect that the school will communicate with all families and caregivers in ways that convey a belief that all students will succeed and achieve, and that the school will work with families in respectful and collaborative ways to make that happen.
- ▶ Review aggregate student data to understand trends in the effectiveness of relevant supports and services.

RESOURCES TO KNOW ABOUT:

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOLS

For almost two decades, a Special Education Program (SEP) managed by FNESC and FNSEA has supported First Nation schools in meeting the needs of their students who have exceptionalities. Each year, the majority of the funding available for this program is allocated to all First Nation schools through grants to support their special education programming. Separate portions of the BC SEP funding are allocated through grants to sponsor support from Speech-Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists, and through a proposal process to address extraordinary needs that cannot be met using schools' annual grants. Information about this funding is sent to all schools each year.

The funding provided for school-based services is complemented by support from SEP staff, collective service initiatives, and professional development opportunities.

A First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide also includes discussion papers and sample policies for Supporting Students Who Have Exceptionalities, Non-Graduation Certificates, and Shortened School Days (including circumstances that impact on students who have exceptionalities). School leaders are encouraged to review and consider these resources, if appropriate.

All First Nation schools are welcome to request further information about these opportunities by emailing SEP@fnesc.ca.

**THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS
/ ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT
TOGETHER**

- ▶ Do we share the same understanding of the school's purpose and why the Nation created its own school? Has that information been appropriately shared with all school staff?
- ▶ How can we work together to demonstrate a mutual and unwavering commitment to high expectations for all of our learners?
- ▶ Do we share the same commitment to language and culture programming and how our Nation's language and culture can be embedded in the school?
- ▶ How can we all help to ensure school staff know how to honor community protocols for using language and culture materials, songs, and dances, and for respectfully involving elders and other knowledge keepers in school activities?
- ▶ How can we all work together to support this priority for our school?
- ▶ Should we collaboratively discuss how our school budgets, including our SEP funding grants, are used?
- ▶ Is our school submitting the required workplan and reports so that we access our full SEP funding grants? (Workplans are generally required in the Fall, interim reports are generally required in February, and final reports are due in June)



SECTION FOUR

► **DEFINING THE SCHOOL'S MISSION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

As discussed in the previous section, First Nations establish their own schools for unique reasons, though a common objective is providing quality education in a culturally relevant environment that promotes language learning. Building on this foundation, the School Governing Authority is responsible for setting the overall strategic direction of the school, through actions such as establishing and monitoring a mission, priorities, and a plan for continued improvement – key underpinnings to building a successful school.

4.1 Establishing the School's Mission and Values

In order for everyone to feel comfortable in understanding the purpose of the school, the School Governing Authority should set a clear mission for the school, and that mission should guide the implementation of daily activities.³ This foundation can help School Governing Authority members, the Education Manager / Administrator directly involved with the school, the principal, school staff, and families maintain a focus on collectively defined priorities – and avoid becoming distracted by the numerous programs and solutions constantly being promoted in the field of education.

- A clearly articulated mission statement answers the questions “why do we exist?”, “what do we want for our students?” “what do we want to accomplish?” It is usually a brief, succinct statement that explains the school's purpose.
- In considering the school's mission statement, the school community can think about its vision for the school, what it might become, the community's values, and what goals need to be accomplished in order to achieve the mission.

3 Schools may use different terms for this overarching statement of the school's aims.

Some schools may not yet have a clearly defined mission, or they may have a mission statement that needs to be updated. In those instances, the School Governing Authority and the principal, often with the Education Manager / Administrator, will ideally work with the school community to identify or review the mission. In doing so, there are a few things to consider.

- ▶ **Community collaboration.** There are many different ways to approach the development or review of a vision and mission statement, but the process should be collaborative. Effective school mission statements reflect input from the broad school community – which may include other First Nations and off-reserve students and families, if appropriate. People are more likely to accept and commit to the mission if there is broad input into its creation and review. Working collaboratively on the mission will also clearly demonstrate that the community's input is truly valued.
- ▶ **Informed decisions.** It is important to remember that informed decisions require informed participants. For example, it is useful for everyone to understand that schools can and do make a critical difference in the lives of children and teens. All students have the capacity to learn, and it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that all students do learn as a result of the school's actions. This fundamental understanding is important for creating a meaningful and pro-active mission statement.
- ▶ **Timing of discussions.** Developing or updating a community-based mission statement is an important and involved process, and it is important that the right conditions exist for positive and constructive dialogue. Communities deal with a range of issues, and while education may be a key consideration, sometimes other urgent issues may distract from collective education planning. Also, any community may periodically experience tensions, which can negatively affect interactions while concerns are being addressed. If challenges exist, the development or review of the school's mission statement should be considered carefully and cautiously – perhaps waiting for a better time to undertake the work.

The School Governing Authority should discuss all of these matters with the principal before beginning a process of developing or reviewing the mission statement. Then the Authority may seek the recommendations of the principal on an appropriate development process and, if relevant, a facilitator to help. The School Governing Authority can have the principal do all of the background work while retaining overall control of the mission setting exercise by accepting or adjusting the principal's recommendations, and by being fully involved in the development process as it unfolds.

- ▶ If the principal has the confidence of the School Governing Authority and the necessary training and skills, the School Governing Authority may consider having the principal lead the process for setting or reviewing the mission.
- ▶ If the principal is new or inexperienced in this area, and/or if the School Governing Authority wants the principal to be an active participant in the community dialogue process, an independent person may be brought in to serve as a facilitator; it can be difficult for a principal to concurrently lead and be an active participant in discussions.

Once the school's mission statement has been developed, it is the role of the School Governing Authority, with help from the principal, to ensure that the mission is clearly communicated and understood.

4.2 Achieving the Mission By Focusing on Results

Regardless of how the mission statement is created, it is crucial that it is shared widely and is reflected in the school's priorities and programs. Work to achieve the mission begins immediately after its development, which involves the school identifying related goals and expectations, and setting out strategies for achieving those goals.

Working toward the school mission also involves building mechanisms to evaluate and document progress made toward its achievement. It is important to ensure that the school is making genuine improvements by adopting effective data collection and assessment mechanisms that include reviewing student outcomes information, enabling the School Governing Authority and school staff to make any necessary adjustments and improve the school's performance.

WHAT SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process is a five-year cycle of review and follow-up that was established almost two decades ago. The Process supports participating schools in reviewing all aspects of their operations, including student achievement data and input from students, families, school staff, and other community members, with the goal of identifying strengths and creating a plan for improvement – i.e. a School Growth Plan.

FNESC and FNSA sponsor First Nation schools that undertake the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process through an information meeting and ongoing assistance from FNESC staff. Participating schools are also visited by an appointed team of individuals who review the findings and resulting School Growth Plan in order to provide suggestions and feedback. Schools are then assisted in implementing their School Growth Plans through funding grants and continued coaching.

Interested School Governing Authorities also may request “FNSA Certification” upon completion of their assessment reviews, which requires meeting a set of collectively established standards.

Participating First Nation (PFN) schools currently are required to participate in the First Nations Schools Assessment Process, which can lead to FNEA Certification.

Participating in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process is optional, but it is important to understand the potential consequences of not participating in the Process according to the established five year cycle.

- ▶ Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) requires that First Nation schools that are funded through BCTEA (i.e. schools that are not operated by a First Nation that has a treaty or self-government agreement and are not a PFN school) must demonstrate that they have completed a school evaluation once every five years, including First Nations adult education centres that are funded by ISC through the Nominal Roll. That requirement can be met through satisfactorily completing one of the following three processes at least once every five years.
 - a) An assessment under the First Nations Schools Assessment Process;
 - b) An evaluation conducted in accordance with the Independent School Act; or
 - c) An alternate form of assessment or evaluation mutually agreed upon by the First Nation and ISC.

First Nations that use the School Assessment Process to meet the ISC evaluation requirement must ensure completion of the assessment process according to the expected five-year schedule. Schools that choose not to participate in the process must ensure they are using one of the other evaluation options.

- ▶ The Assessment and Certification Process is a central component of the 2009 Reciprocal Tuition Agreement (described more in Section 7.1), through which the BC Ministry of Education of Child Care (MECC) provides full per-pupil funding* for students who are:
 - attending a First Nation school (including PFN school) – as of September 29 of the current school year;
 - school age as defined by MECC (at least five years of age by December 31 of the current school year and up to age 19 before July 1 of the current school year); and
 - living off-reserve and ineligible for federal education funding.

These are students who would be funded by the Province of British Columbia if they attended a public or independent school.

In order to access Reciprocal Tuition, First Nation schools must have up-to-date certification through successful participation in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process (FNSA or FNEA Certification). Certification lasts for a period of five years – matching the cycle for Assessment Process participation.

- ▶ First Nation schools that want to award eligible students the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood Diploma (if they are not an independent school) must have current FNSA or FNEA Certification through successful completion of the First Nations Schools Assessment Process.

Anyone interested in further information about these important issues can contact FNEC and FNSA.

It is also important to note that First Nation independent schools are subject to external evaluation and inspections for the purpose of ensuring that they meet and maintain the legislated standards and requirements for their certificate of group classification under the Independent School Act. Group 1 and 2 Independent Schools are evaluated by an External Evaluation Committee at least once every 6 years, and receive a monitoring inspection every 2 years. The external evaluation is a comprehensive exercise that examines the school's program, facilities, curriculum, operations and teacher certification to ensure that the school meets all basic statutory requirements. Such evaluations are carried out by External Evaluation Committees appointed by the Inspector of Independent Schools.

More information is available from the Independent Schools Branch.

- ▶ Overall, evidence shows that schools with higher levels of student achievement and well-being have identified a clear mission and essential goals for students, and are led by governing authorities that focus attention or resources on achieving that mission and accomplishing those goals.
- ▶ In partnership with the school community and staff, effective School Governing Authorities articulate positive beliefs about student learning that serve as the foundation for school programs and improvement planning.

- ▶ They also establish strategic goals and identify success indicators that help the school community continually monitor whether the mission is, in fact, driving the school's efforts to support students.

4.3 Collecting and Using Meaningful Data to Monitor Success

Collecting and using appropriate data underlies all efforts to achieve and measure progress toward a school's mission and goals for its students, and today there is a growing recognition of the need to use data to inform and guide decision-making, monitor program and instructional effectiveness, inform school planning, allocate resources wisely, and maintain accountability to families, communities, and funding agencies.

- ▶ Information - whether quantitative or qualitative - can help the entire school community decide what actions to take to improve instruction, change practice, or adjust the overall strategic direction of schools.
- ▶ Data provides quantifiable proof of what is happening in schools, taking any emotion out of difficult decisions and providing a foundation for meaningful, substantive dialogue about what is and is not working for students.

4.3.1 Setting Direction for the Effective Use of Data

School Governing Authorities can include the effective use of meaningful data as part of setting the overall policy direction for its school. Working with their principal to clearly define how the school will use evidence to support school growth is consistent with studies showing the value of data-driven decision-making.

- ▶ The clearer the School Governing Authority is about its expectations for performance and results, the easier it is for the Authority, staff, families, and the school community to assess progress; and
- ▶ School Governing Authorities and principals should collaboratively develop a plan for continually monitoring data to ensure that the desired results are being achieved.

It is our responsibility to focus on clear indicators and stay data-driven. How do we know what is working? How do we know what else is needed? These questions can best be answered with real evidence. We need to be reflective and thoughtful about what our school is doing, and we need solid indicators to inform our decisions.

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SUPPORTING FIRST NATION SCHOOL DATA EFFORTS

FNESC and FNSA provide professional development opportunities to assist school staff in using data effectively, including direct support for the use of the Acadiance assessment, the Canadian Achievement Test 4 (CAT4) standardized assessment tool, and the Preschool Early Learning Indicator (PELI) screening tool.

Also, the Data Records and User Management System (DRUMS) provides an integrated infrastructure for First Nation schools' management of student information.

Further information about these opportunities is available by contacting FNESC and FNSA.

Some people may initially be apprehensive about the collection and review of detailed data to monitor the effectiveness of classroom instruction and school programming – especially if the purpose is unclear. In response, the Governing Authority can:

- ▶ Avoid criticism if student achievement results are not ideal to begin.
- ▶ Help school staff and families focus on improvement.
- ▶ Model a perspective that using data is a helpful tool, ultimately contributing to better informed strategies for supporting student achievement.

When considering data use, it is also important to recognize the difference between *the potential* of student-learning data to inform and improve instruction, versus *how* data is actually used. Research has found that many educators struggle to both interpret data and use results to change instruction and programming. School Governing Authorities and principals can work together to address that challenge by:

- ▶ Emphasizing that data is a priority.
- ▶ Investing in data management programs and systems.
- ▶ Encouraging staff to find time to build their capacity to thoughtfully analyze and use data.
- ▶ Supporting the allocation of resources for professional development related to data use.
- ▶ Fostering a perspective of data use for continuous improvement, not judgment (CSBA, 2017).

Finally, directly related to collecting and using data, School Governing Authorities are ultimately responsible for ensuring that reporting requirements are met, and they can expect principals to provide regular updates about student results and the school's reporting.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR BCTEA-FUNDED FIRST NATION SCHOOLS

For all First Nation schools that are funded through BCTEA, the First Nation is required to annually provide to ISC the Nominal Roll Student Census Report and Annual Education Staff Information Form.

The First Nation is also required to provide performance indicator data to FNEESC for the following:

- ▶ percentage of First Nation students who meet or exceed grade level expectations for reading for grades K5 - 7, writing for grades 2 - 7, and numeracy for grades K5 - 7
- ▶ student attendance rates of school-age students
- ▶ teacher/student ratio
- ▶ student/computer ratio
- ▶ level of connectivity

First Nation schools can submit that data each year through an online portal. FNEESC then submits a summary of the data to ISC.

Additionally, FNEESC annually collects the following information through workplans that First Nation schools submit to access their First Nations Language and Culture Program and Special Education Program funding grants.

- ▶ Number of First Nation students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in place
- ▶ Number of students who are meeting the goals of their IEP
- ▶ Number of students receiving First Nations language and culture instruction
- ▶ Number of hours of instruction in the First Nations language provided to students
- ▶ Number of hours of instruction in the First Nations culture provided to students

For all of the indicators listed above, FNEESC aggregates the collective data and submits a summary report to ISC that does not identify individual schools or students.

School Governing Authorities should also note the following BCTEA reporting requirement:

“The Council must make available to parents / caregivers of school-age First Nation students attending the First Nation school an aggregate outcome report on school performance.”

To support First Nations in meeting that requirement, FNEESC annually provides each First Nation that operates a BCTEA-funded school a template report for parents / caregivers that can be completed and shared as appropriate.

First Nation School Governing Authorities should check with their principals to ensure that all reporting requirements are being met.

**THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS /
ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER**

- ▶ Do we have an established mission statement (or an equivalent expression of our vision and expectations for the school)? Is it current? Is it widely known?
- ▶ Do we all regularly use the mission statement to guide our decision-making and monitor our progress? Do school staff know and use the mission as a guide for their work?
- ▶ How does our school monitor our effectiveness and plan for school improvement? Do we use the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process? If so:
 - Do we all know when our school is scheduled for a review?
 - Do we share the same understanding of the critical role of School Governing Authority members in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process?
 - Are we all aware of our most current School Growth Plan?
 - Do we regularly talk about our School Growth Plan, our progress in achieving the goals, and any changes that might be necessary as we implement our plans?
- ▶ If our school needs to access Reciprocal Tuition (tuition payments from the Province of BC for students who are ordinarily resident off-reserve) or offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood to graduating students, is our FNSA Certification up-to-date (or FNEA Certification for PFN schools)?
- ▶ Do we share the same expectations for how we will collaboratively review student achievement and attendance data? How often will we discuss information about student outcomes? What data will we discuss?
- ▶ Is our school meeting our reporting requirements?

SECTION FIVE

► WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

5.1 Distinguishing the Leadership Roles of the School Governing Authority and the Principal

The School Governing Authority and the principal have important, but different, school leadership roles.

- The School Governing Authority is responsible for understanding and using the community's education priorities to establish and monitor the school's mission and strategic direction (as discussed in previous sections). In so doing, the School Governing Authority is exercising leadership in education.
- The principal is responsible for implementing the direction set by the School Governing Authority – in some cases under the direction of the Education Manager / Administrator – while leading the daily operations and administration of the school, working toward the school's mission and strategic goals.

Both the School Governing Authority and the principal operate within the broader context of exercising First Nation control over First Nation education, and advancing First Nation education at the community level.

It is important that School Governing Authorities maintain a focus on their higher-level policy-setting role so that their attention does not drift towards the day-to-day activities of the school – that is, the efforts of the principal and school staff. When this occurs, confusion and conflict can develop.

Effective School Governing Authorities clarify their expectations and point the school forward through clear policy direction – towards the results they seek for their students. They then work with the Education Manager / Administrator (if appropriate), the school principal, and school staff as a team – approving plans, spending, and policies, and relying on the expertise and skills of the principal and staff to get the job done (Thomas, 2002).

Effective First Nations Governing Authorities are results-oriented. They have a plan and a strategy for making change, and they are committed to measuring their progress in getting there.

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Research shows that many people, when they first take on a governance role, don't have a full understanding of the differing school leadership functions of School Governing Authority members and principals – especially because their roles and responsibilities are distinct, but also complementary (CSBA, 2017). Most School Governing Authority members naturally are interested in becoming directly involved in arising issues and problems because they care about the school and students. Some members even think it is their obligation to personally help solve problems and respond to concerns of families and community members. Many members find it difficult to step back from the pressures of the moment and emphasize, instead, planning for the future. As a result, School Governing Authorities can become mired in staff-level activities, which means that the important tasks of governance may not get done.

In addition, as the School Governing Authority is accountable for everything that happens within the school, some members may feel that they have both the right and the responsibility to be informed of anything and everything about the school that interests them. They may feel that Governing Authority members should involve themselves in all aspects of the school's operations.

However, although the School Governing Authority retains ultimate accountability for the school, members cannot reasonably expect to be informed about and involved in everything related to the school's daily operations. The School Governing Authority is responsible for high-level direction setting, and the principal is responsible for implementing that direction with school staff. School Governing Authorities and principals cannot both do the same things, nor do they "share" responsibilities. The School Governing Authority has to be willing to assign responsibilities to the principal who, in turn, may delegate certain tasks to staff. The key question for the School Governing Authority is: "What should we assume direct responsibility for, and what responsibilities do we pass to the Education Manager / Administrator, if relevant, and/or the principal?"

Most School Governing Authorities regularly find themselves considering issues within the context of those questions. While the Authority's role is to listen to, discuss, and make decisions regarding governance issues, members are not expected to have expertise in education or administering a school. Instead, the Authority relies on the Education Manager / Administrator and principal to implement its directions and decisions.

A well-defined, respectful working relationship between the School Governing Authority and its principal is vital to a school's success. The consequences of a poor relationship can be extremely problematic for the school and, in turn, students. To avoid misunderstandings and conflict that can harm the school's operations, the School Governing Authority should identify and differentiate – through dialogue and very clear direction – which responsibilities and tasks will be those of the Authority, and which will be those of the principal and other relevant staff members.

5.1.1 Understanding the importance and Complexity of the Principal's Role

Generally, when School Governing Authorities understand the complex and varied responsibilities of principals, they are better able to identify the right individual to fulfill this role, and they can also help support the principal who is chosen to lead the school – because the role of the principal is central to the success of a school, and it also is extremely demanding.

Numerous studies have concluded that underperforming schools are unlikely to succeed without effective preparation and support for their principals. As Sparks and Hirsh (2000) note:

In their search for ways to improve school performance, educators and policy makers have addressed a broad array of challenges confronting schools. ... But only one area of policy focus – strengthening school leadership – can exert control over all of these challenges simultaneously.

Researchers Branch, Hanushey, and Rivkin (2012) also analyzed educational data and found that strong principals clearly and positively affect student achievement, and DeVita (2007) notes:

The importance of having high-quality teaching in the classroom is a given. But we often fail to recognize that it is the principal alone who can ensure that the teaching and learning in every classroom are as good as they can be.

Principals help set the conditions that attract and retain highly skilled teachers. For example, a 2010 survey of 40,000 teachers identified supportive principal leadership as the main factor influencing teacher retention – which is a vital contributor to student success (CSBA, 2017). According to renowned education researcher John Hattie, it takes three years of effective instruction to help students make up for one year of ineffective instruction – emphasizing the importance of principal practices that help communities attract and retain excellent teaching staff (Hattie, 2003).

Principals are also expected to make daily, and often immediate, decisions that affect the lives of students, teachers, other school staff, families, and community members. The principal is expected to maintain discipline, manage the budget, assist staff, respond to family inquiries, and report to the School Governing Authority. It is also critical that principals are able to coach, teach, and develop the teachers in their schools, and they must fully understand curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to lead continuous progress in raising student performance.

Very generally, the various roles of school principals can be divided into management, instructional leadership and relationship responsibilities, although there is considerable overlap between the categories.

- ▶ ***The Principal's Management Responsibilities.*** Managers focus on “running a smooth ship.” Principals are concerned with the day-to-day running of the school, including ensuring that it is operational for the beginning of each school term, with a functional facility, necessary materials and supplies, and appropriate staff in place. Principals manage the school budget, establish timetables, oversee general discipline, ensure school safety, organize regular staff meetings, and maintain the school's record keeping and bussing system. These tasks typically involve establishing school-level procedures to guide the day-to-day operations and administration of the school – which should be consistent with the high-level policy and strategic direction set by the School Governing Authority in the school's mission.
- ▶ ***The Principal's Instructional Leadership Responsibilities.*** Research identifies instructional leadership as key to effective schools. Instructional leadership includes setting high expectations for students and teachers, supervising instruction, ensuring quality curriculum, promoting meaningful professional development, using data to guide decision-making, and keeping the school community focused on key priorities – particularly the priority of high levels of learning for all. The principal is responsible for continually assessing the school's operations and programs to ensure that they are meeting community and school expectations. Principals are also the shapers of the school environment, which can become either a positive influence or a significant barrier to learning. Generally, principals must set the tone for a school that demands and celebrates growth and high achievement.
- ▶ ***The Principal's Responsibilities to Families and the Community.*** Another primary role of the principal is to maintain strong and positive connections with the families and community the school serves. First Nation schools operate completely within the context of their communities, and effective principals embrace that understanding. Principals, with direction from the School Governing Authority, are responsible for ensuring proactive and effective public relations for the school – sharing the good things that are happening and fostering respectful, constructive relationships.

All of those roles are complementary and equally important, and they should be balanced appropriately, so that one role (e.g. management) does not end up consuming all of the principal's time. This is particularly true as management issues are often very pressing and require immediate action. Many principals struggle to find time for their instructional leadership and relationship responsibilities.

Given this reality, it is very important that School Governing Authorities fully understand that, in order to be truly effective, principals must make time and pay adequate attention to all of their school leadership tasks. Principals, with support from their School Governing Authorities, must be attentive to how they organize their work priorities and implement effective time management tools.

SUPPORT FOR FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

“Regional Principals” are available to help school principals fulfill their complex roles by providing professional advice and sharing information about teacher observation and evaluation approaches, frameworks for monitoring and responding to student data, and scheduling / planning of school programs and structures.

Additionally, a network is organized each year to help principals connect and share their experiences and ideas, and a range of workshops are hosted annually to keep First Nation school principals informed about priority issues, programs and services.

What can School Governing Authorities do to help? They can ask their principal what supports they need, and they can encourage their principals to take advantage of the learning opportunities and resources available to them.

Finally, a key consideration for all school leaders and a key role of principals is ensuring that the school is meeting all legal, policy, and funding requirements related to employment and student safety issues. School Governing Authorities are encouraged to discuss these responsibilities with the school principal to ensure that all requirements are being met.

SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO LEADERSHIP TEAMS FOR MEETING LEGAL, POLICY, AND PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

All schools have specific responsibilities related to child protection and disclosure. In order to help First Nation schools address those issues proactively and consistently, a *Policy And Procedure Resource Guide for First Nation Schools in BC* includes related policy and procedures for schools to adapt and approve, as appropriate.

In addition, First Nation schools have specific requirements related to having staff and volunteers complete criminal records checks. *The Policy and Procedures Resource Guide for First Nations Schools* includes relevant template policies, and a *2020 Employment Toolkit for First Nations Schools* includes extensive sections outlining requirements related to criminal record checks for employees. A *Criminal Record Checks* pamphlet is also available, which provides information about how First Nation schools (with and without independent school status) can implement their related responsibilities.

First Nation school leaders should also be very familiar with opportunities and obligations related to hiring and employing certified teachers – as described in an information pamphlet: *BC First Nations Schools and Hiring Certified Teachers: Things To Know*.

First Nation schools in BC generally must employ teachers who have a teaching certificate in good standing issued by a provincial education authority or a recognized Canadian teacher certification authority. However, the following specific requirements apply in certain circumstances.

- ▶ First Nation schools that access Reciprocal Tuition must employ only teachers with a valid BC Ministry of Education and Child Care (MECC) Certificate, other than those who teach First Nations language or culture.
- ▶ First Nation schools with independent school status must follow independent school requirements related to teacher certification.
- ▶ First Nation schools that are operated by a PFN must follow the requirements of the FNEA.

Further, while being allowed to hire teachers who have a teaching certificate in good standing issued by any provincial authority does offer First Nation schools more flexibility, challenges can arise because Canadian provinces have very different protocols in place for certifying and decertifying teachers.

- ▶ When MECC certifies teachers, it ensures that they meet and maintain standards.
- ▶ If a teacher is certified outside of BC, the same levels of protection may not be in place.
- ▶ Accordingly, First Nation schools may choose to have all of their teachers apply for certification from MECC – as described in the pamphlet on hiring certified teachers.

Also, the MECC website includes an Employers Area, which provides potential employers with a record of a teacher's employment in BC so they can confirm an applicant's work history.

- ▶ All First Nation schools can access the Employer's Area.
- ▶ First Nation schools with independent school status must upload lists of their teachers annually.
- ▶ First Nation schools without independent schools status (including PFN schools) are also able to upload lists of teachers to the Employer's Area.
- ▶ Contributing to this list is important for tracking the employment of certified teachers in BC and it provides important information for all potential employers.

Finally, First Nation schools with independent school status must follow the reporting requirements set out in the Independent School Act related to teaching discipline and terminations. For First Nation schools without independent school status, there are legal reporting obligations for individuals who are certificate holders or who hold a letter of permission. More information about those issues is described in the information pamphlet: *BC First Nations Schools and Hiring Certified Teachers: Things To Know*.

5.1.2 The School Governing Authority's Role as the Principal's Employer

Ideally, School Governing Authorities and principals will work together collaboratively through respectful partnerships, but ultimately the principal works for and reports to the School Governing Authority.

School Governing Authorities, as described above, are responsible for overseeing the school, including monitoring and supporting the principal to operate the school within established parameters. The principal provides advice, makes recommendations for School Governing Authority action, and implements the direction and decisions of the Authority. Principals are responsible for the detailed, ongoing administration and management of the school, including providing leadership with respect to school staff, curriculum, and student learning. The principal, not the Authority, provides ongoing staff leadership and staff direction. However, the principal always undertakes those tasks according to overarching policies and plans approved by the School Governing Authority.

Additionally, the principal is usually responsible for providing regular reports to the School Governing Authority on key school-related matters (except for cases when this is the responsibility of the Education Manager / Administrator), including:

- ▶ the annual budget for approval, and regular updates on the school's spending and finances⁴;
- ▶ classroom updates and information about how school programs are progressing;
- ▶ data regarding student achievement and attendance, for joint review and discussion; and
- ▶ any personnel matters requiring serious attention, including discipline and possible termination actions – although sharing information about personnel matters should be done very cautiously, with School Governing Authorities only being advised of human resources matters on a “need-to-know” basis and ensuring that confidentiality is strictly maintained.

School Governing Authorities should also be provided regular opportunities so they can be integrally involved in:

- ▶ any school assessment activities undertaken (the School Governing Authority should lead decisions about when to start an assessment process and should be fully informed about and approve assessment results).
- ▶ the development of school policies, with a central role in any processes for policy review and/or changes, and ultimately approving all school policies that are created.

If a School Governing Authority is not being provided any of the information or opportunities outlined above, that is an important issue to address with the principal and/or, if appropriate, the Education Manager / Administrator.

Additionally, recognizing the School Governing Authority's role as employer of the principal, sound human resource management processes related to the principal role are imperative.

- ▶ If the school falls within the scope of the First Nation's human resource policies and procedures, the School Governing Authority should be informed about whether those policies are being followed.
- ▶ If the School Governing Authority is a legal entity and therefore able to independently manage the school's human resource procedures, the principal's employment should be carefully monitored, and the School Governing Authority should ask questions to ensure that the principal is effectively managing the employment of other school personnel.

4 Note: a BCTEA Funding Estimator Tool is available to help inform First Nations schools' budgeting process, which can be found at www.fnsa.ca.

SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES

FNESC and FNSA offer several resources to assist First Nations in designing and implementing effective school employment practices.

- ▶ The *Employment Handbook for First Nations Schools* can be found at www.fnesc.ca.
- ▶ The *Policy And Procedure Resource Guide For First Nation Schools In BC* provides sample policies intended to assist First Nations schools in establishing thorough and effective policies of their own – including a comprehensive section dealing with human resources policies. It is expected that the information included in the Guide will be adapted to reflect local circumstances.
- ▶ A Human Resources Specialist is available, upon request, to support First Nation School Governing Authorities or principals in considering employment issues. Contact HR@fnesc.ca for more information.

Please note: none of these resources is intended to provide legal advice. First Nation School Governing Authorities are encouraged to seek legal advice, as appropriate, to review their own policies and practices, to ensure they meet the needs of their communities, school staff, and students.

It is common practice in employment situations to undertake evaluations of an employee to identify areas of strength, areas requiring attention for improvements, or additional supports that may be needed for success. As such, it is good practice for principals to be periodically evaluated - if possible, in a manner mutually determined by the School Governing Authority and principal.

There are many reasons for and benefits of a positive, improvement focused performance review.

- ▶ A principal may be interested in receiving feedback from an external expert to help them grow professionally.
- ▶ A School Governing Authority may initiate a performance review as part of its oversight responsibilities and to assist in monitoring the school's overall operations and effectiveness.
- ▶ A positive performance review process can foster professional growth, and may increase confidence in the principal from teachers, families, the School Governing Authority, community members, and students.
- ▶ Ultimately, an effective review can provide information that may assist First Nations in their decisions regarding employment and/or professional improvement goals for their principals.

THE FNEC/FNSA FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL LEADERS PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS

FNEC and FNSA offer a First Nations School Leaders Performance Review Process, which is founded upon the perspective that a meaningful performance review process can assist school leaders in the realization of their full potential. The Process recognizes that in First Nation schools, the “school leader” role may involve a principal, vice principal, head teacher, school administrator, or even a leadership team. The Performance Review Process can be adapted to fit the specific circumstances of each school and community.

School Governing Authorities interested in learning more about this process are invited to contact FNEC and FNSA.

5.1.3 What If the Relationship Between the Governing Authority and the Principal Is Not Working?

Overall, School Governing Authorities should continually monitor whether the performance of the principal is satisfactory, and take action if concerns arise. As much as it is desired, relationships between School Governing Authorities and principals may not always be positive and effective.

There is always the potential for a School Governing Authority and a principal to periodically experience conflict. The Authority may sometimes disagree with decisions made by the principal, just as the principal may not always agree with every decision of the Authority. What is important is to respect and adhere to each other’s roles and responsibilities, making decisions and taking actions that fall within those parameters – that is, governance decisions for the School Governing Authority, and day-to-day school leadership decisions for the principal. Clarity in this division of responsibilities is key.

- ▶ The principal, as the School Governing Authority’s key staff person, supports the Authority to develop the mission, goals, policies, and educational direction of the school.
- ▶ The job of the principal is to then implement the School Governing Authority’s direction and decisions. Daily decisions to be made at the administrative level should be left to the principal.

Within that framework, some differences of opinion are normal and may not mean drastic action is needed. Many concerns can be resolved through open discussion about expectations and challenges.

In more serious cases, however, it may become clear that the principal does not have the skills, expertise, and/or experience needed to effectively lead the school. On occasion, the School Governing Authority may become aware that it was not sufficiently clear about its expectations in the hiring process, or it may discover that its values and approaches to issues are too different from those of the principal. Some Authorities never do state their expectations and leave the principal to his or her own initiative, which can also lead to problems.

Whatever the reasons for concerns, School Governing Authority members must understand that monitoring the principal's performance is the Authority's responsibility. The School Governing Authority should consistently clarify its expectations – explicitly and in writing – and offer reasonable opportunities for improvement. It is only fair that the principal is made aware of concerns and have a chance to address them.

In the end, however, if feedback and support for the principal do not resolve serious issues, the School Governing Authority, as the employer, will need to consider its options for continuing its relationship with the principal. The Governing Authority has an obligation to set the strategic direction of the school and hire a principal who is able to advance that direction. If the School Governing Authority believes that termination is its only option, the Authority should seek legal advice at the earliest opportunity.

What is most important is that concerns relating to the School Governing Authority's relationship with the principal are not left unresolved. Allowing a dysfunctional situation to continue is unfair to the School Governing Authority, the principal, and the entire school community.

Ideally, however, the School Governing Authority and principal will work together proactively and constructively as a unified leadership team to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community – understanding the School Governing Authority as the school's vision-setter and policy-maker, while respecting and empowering the principal and other staff as implementers, responsible for executing plans and also providing valuable guidance and expertise.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Does the principal have the support and resources they need to fulfill their important leadership roles and responsibilities?
- ▶ Is the school meeting its fundamental responsibilities for student safety and legal requirements, such as ensuring appropriate criminal record checks and meeting the school's requirements related to employing certified teachers? (It is not the role of the School Governing Authority to perform related tasks, but it is their responsibility to confirm they have been done).
- ▶ Is the principal practicing self-care, so they are able to effectively run the school, and support staff and student success?
- ▶ Would a principal performance review be useful to help identify the principal's strengths and areas for professional growth?

SECTION SIX

► **ADVOCATING, COMMUNICATING AND WORKING COLLABORATIVELY**

School Governing Authorities are advocates for the school community, and they can be invaluable in building positive relationships and promoting the school, both within the community and with people and organizations outside of the community.

Effective School Governing Authorities keep their constituent's needs as the main priority. Staff must always be treated fairly and with respect, but the School Governing Authority's primary concern must always be how well the school is fulfilling its purpose and mission, and meeting the needs of students, families, and the community.

The school environment is strongly influenced by positive attitudes and beliefs about teaching, learning, students, families and collaboration – all of which can be modelled and encouraged by the School Governing Authority. School Governing Authority members can also help create a culture of trust in the school in several ways.

- **Engage with the community.** Collaboration helps to strengthen community ties and build trust.
- **Foster mutual accountability.** School Governing Authorities and the principal should work together to develop initiatives, set realistic timelines, thoughtfully allocate resources, and report to the school community about progress being made.
- **Model positive and professional relationships.** The School Governing Authority can model professional and respectful relationship-building, setting a positive tone for community interactions with the Authority and the school.
- **Make decisions with transparency.** Open and transparent decision-making contributes to trust.

Our responsibility is to be diligent about our connections to the community and our accountability to Chief and Council. The school's efforts must build on the community's vision if we are to support the Nation's goals appropriately. Overall, the professional perspective needs to be linked to the community perspective. Balance is the key.

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A School Governing Authority's advocacy role is not always easy. The Authority will hear a wide variety of ideas, opinions, and suggestions on issues from many sources – opinions that are often expressed passionately. The School Governing Authority must filter, interpret, and make sense of the information and input it receives. Ultimately, it is not always possible to keep everybody happy all of the time. If decision-making about the school was always simple and straightforward, there would be no need for a School Governing Authority. In the end, the Authority must take positions, make decisions, and give directions in the interests of students, first and foremost, while also thinking about families, the community, and school staff.

- ▶ Many people may want to influence School Governing Authority members.
- ▶ In responding to pressures, it is important to keep the school's mission front and centre in decision-making.
- ▶ Following established terms of reference and policies and procedures can also help guide the School Governing Authority when difficult decisions must be made.

We need to be visible. We need to be out in the community, participating in activities. We need people to see that we understand the important connection between the school and community. We can be role models for others around us.

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6.1 Effective Collaboration and Communications

Effective School Governing Authorities build a broad commitment to the school through strong, transparent, two-way communications and inclusive decision-making.

School Governing Authorities typically identify a spokesperson who speaks for the Authority, based on the decisions and direction of the Authority as a collective.

- ▶ Where the School Governing Authority is Chief and Council, this may be the Chief or a designated Councilor.

- ▶ Where the School Governing Authority is a board, it is most often the chair who serves as the spokesperson.

If a School Governing Authority member who has not been designated as the spokesperson chooses to speak to the media or the community about School Governing Authority or school matters, they should make it clear that they are speaking as an individual, and not as a representative of the School Governing Authority or school. In such situations, the individual member also must bear in mind their legal and moral obligations to the School Governing Authority.

The principal does not speak for the Authority, but the principal may be a spokesperson for the school and, with the Authority's approval, will often speak on matters related to the school's operations.

6.1.1 Communications Among School Governing Authority Members

Communications among School Governing Authority members is an important issue for consideration. Generally, information should be shared equally, and any communication from the chair or principal should be sent simultaneously to all members. Problems and misunderstandings will occur if one or more members are left out of the information loop, or if they do not receive information at the same time as their colleagues.

- ▶ At School Governing Authority meetings, each member receives the same information and hears directly all of the comments made.
- ▶ Away from meetings, communications and interactions among members may be more informal, and members may share and discuss information individually or in small groups. This informal sharing is natural, but it should not be interpreted as official discussion that can lead to directions to the principal or school actions.

6.1.2 Communications and Work With the School Principal

The School Governing Authority makes decisions at its meetings according to its established processes. It may communicate its decisions to the principal in a number of ways, such as inviting the principal to meetings, or sharing resolutions or policies with the principal in writing.

But realistically, communication with the principal will not necessarily occur only at formal meetings or in follow-up notices. In communities, contact between School Governing Authority members and the principal can occur regularly, often daily, through informal contact and discussions as people go about their everyday business.

- ▶ Some Governing Authorities may encourage informal communications with the principal, where appropriate, so that time is not wasted at Authority meetings discussing matters that are only of interest to one or two individuals.
- ▶ However, such informal contact and communication should only occur where the issue is general in nature; the communication should not be related to specific Authority business, and it should avoid sensitive or emotionally charged issues.
- ▶ When individual School Governing Authority members contact and discuss matters directly with the principal, there is a chance that confusion, misunderstandings, and miscommunications may occur. The principal cannot ensure that all members of the School Governing Authority will receive exactly the same information through individual discussions. Nor can the principal control how comments may be interpreted.
- ▶ It is up to the School Governing Authority to ensure that all of its members receive school governance-related information at the same time, and questions or concerns will ideally be raised and addressed at meetings of the Authority.

Finally, the School Governing Authority chair and the principal may have contact, if necessary and appropriate, between meetings.

- ▶ Where the chair has the confidence and support of the full Governing Authority, such communication will not be a problem.
- ▶ If there is disagreement within the Governing Authority, direct communication between the chair and the principal may not be well received and should occur only when necessary, and then carefully.
- ▶ Regardless, any communication or direction from the chair to the principal should be consistent with decisions made by the full School Governing Authority at its meetings.

6.1.3 Communications with Other School Employees

Research suggests that effective Governing Authorities demonstrate a high level of confidence in their school's staff and regularly show appreciation for their work – such as recognizing staff at community meetings or during meetings of the School Governing Authority.

Also, it is not uncommon for School Governing Authority members to have direct contact with employees for a variety of reasons. A member may have simple questions about the school's operation that do not require the principal's personal attention. In the case of minor questions or informal discussions, direct communication is not usually problematic. In First Nations communities, School Governing Authority members regularly come into contact with school employees in day-to-day life, and will often engage in informal conversations. In some cases, they may even be family members.

However, formal communications about school matters must be consistent with the roles and responsibilities of the School Governing Authority and established procedures. Individual School Governing Authority members should approach direct communications with school employees with great caution and it is good practice to avoid talking about serious school business whenever possible. Employees who are experiencing difficulties at work may try to communicate directly with School Governing Authority members, but if the principal is left out of the information loop, problems very often develop.

It is also important to remember that the Authority speaks with “one voice,” and the most appropriate communication with school employees is through the principal. When this channel of communication is bypassed and staff members take concerns directly to the School Governing Authority, confusion, misinformation and misunderstandings may emerge.

To avoid challenges, the School Governing Authority and the principal should mutually determine appropriate protocols for communication between the School Governing Authority and staff members. The School Governing Authority and the principal can establish procedures to address potentially difficult issues and grievances, the principal should clearly communicate those procedures to staff, and then everyone should follow the procedures closely.

Generally, the following recommendations are offered to avoid any potential misunderstandings.

- ▶ If a school employee contacts a School Governing Authority member directly about matters that should more properly be discussed with the principal, the member can redirect the employee to communicate their concerns through proper protocols.
- ▶ If the School Governing Authority member does hear out the employee, the member should contact the principal immediately and share the communication, and the member should also advise the other School Governing Authority members of this exchange to ensure transparency.

6.1.4 Communications and Engagement with Parents and Families

Get your families involved. They have a particularly strong interest in the school. They can contribute to the school in very important ways.

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Effective School Governing Authorities model and expect effective engagement with families, as all schools should prioritize working with families as valued partners in the education process.

An emphasis on the crucial role of families and communities in children's development and learning is entirely consistent with First Nations education traditions, and ensuring that parents / caregivers have a strong and meaningful voice in the education and learning of their children continues to be a core aspect of contemporary First Nation perspectives of education. The landmark 1972 document, Indian Control of Education, and almost all subsequent education policy directions from First Nations leadership, have focused on the primary role and responsibility of parents / caregivers for setting appropriate education goals for their children.

- ▶ Parents / caregivers play a key role in the education of their children, and their engagement in learning and school activities can have a profound impact on student success.
- ▶ Research is very clear about the critical importance of family engagement in raising student achievement, and extensive evidence shows that home environments matter for school success.
- ▶ Study after study has shown that when families are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve.

Students whose families are visible in the school and actively engaged in home learning activities understand that their families value learning, which encourages students to take school seriously and strive for success. Families also have invaluable insights and experiences to contribute to the learning process. In addition to their contributions at home, families can greatly enhance a school's efforts by providing meaningful input into school decision-making. They also improve school programs and the overall learning environment by donating their time and effort. Families who are involved in school activities are more aware of what is happening in the school and, when given adequate information about the school's goals and student achievement, they better understand the school's efforts and challenges and can help the school to progress.

School Governing Authorities and principals can talk together about how the school can build partnerships with families that extend beyond simple communications alone, and School Governing Authorities can support school efforts to truly engage families in the education process. School leaders, including the principal, must recognize and maintain a meaningful focus on the school's crucial link with families, as well as the school's primary accountability to students and parents / caregivers.

- ▶ Schools should make every effort possible to build school-family connections that are built on respectful relationships, listening, welcoming, and shared decision-making.
- ▶ Just as schools must maintain high expectations and embrace their ability to support all students in reaching their full potential, it is critical that schools understand their power to increase parental involvement.
- ▶ Schools should empathize with the challenges that exist for families and communities, but then focus on the school's beliefs and the assumptions that shape its practices with families, adapting things that the school can control in order to encourage family involvement in the school.
- ▶ Schools can offer families information and assistance to help them constructively engage in the education of their children

In terms of direct communications, parents and family members often contact School Governing Authority members directly. Generally, members who are contacted directly by a parent with a complaint or question should always listen to the concerns. If the matter is a simple request for information or clarification, the School Governing Authority member may address the communication easily. However, if the comments relate to a complaint or concern with the principal or a school employee, caution is needed.

- ▶ One reasonable approach is to listen to the complaint, make sure the concern is fully understood, and then refer the parent to the principal. Then it is important to call the principal to communicate that the parent will be calling to discuss a specific issue.
- ▶ Alternatively, a School Governing Authority member could call the principal, pass along the information, and ask that the principal handle the situation directly.

What is most important is that families feel heard, and that the principal has an opportunity to respond to any concerns families may have. Often, misunderstandings can be addressed simply through a conversation with the parent. If necessary, serious concerns can be discussed at a School Governing Authority meeting for a formal response.

Further, communication is not just the transmission of information to others; it is also listening and receiving input and feedback, and processing that information to ensure understanding. A communication problem for some school leaders is assuming that 'a message sent is a message understood.' School Governing Authorities and principals should consider strategies for sharing important information many times and in many different ways to ensure that the messages are being heard and understood, along with feedback mechanisms to confirm that communication efforts were successful.

Overall, it is primarily the principal's responsibility to ensure that the school is a place where families feel welcome and recognized for their strengths and contributions, but School Governing Authorities can play a critical role in assisting the principal's efforts, supporting and monitoring the effectiveness of school approaches to engaging families for the benefit of schools, students, and the community.

Governing Authority members must strive to present issues clearly and effectively for the benefit of the school. It is important that we are able to answer questions and explain change. We can be a strong voice for our schools and students.

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SUPPORT FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRST NATION PARENTS / CAREGIVERS / FAMILIES

The First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide includes a discussion paper and sample policy for family engagement that school leaders are encouraged to review and consider, as appropriate.

A Parents Toolkit is also available, which includes short, reproducible papers that can be adapted and shared with parents on topics related to advocacy and involvement with the education system, meeting with school staff, graduation requirements, online safety, and creating positive learning environments at home. That resource is available online at www.fnesc.ca and www.fnsa.ca.

Additionally, the First Nations Parents Club began in 2000, with the intention of encouraging greater family involvement in schools and home learning efforts. The initiative involves the establishment of locally based Parents Clubs that are organized and operated according to the needs of parents and caregivers in each community. Each Club receives support materials, newsletters, books for parents to read with their children at home, as well as a variety of incentives to recognize the significant contributions being made by First Nations families throughout the province. All Parents Club materials and activities are offered at no charge. Anyone interested in more information can call the FNESC and FNSA office.

6.1.5 Communications and Work With the Community

In addition to working with school staff and families, one of the most important roles of a School Governing Authority is helping to promote the excellent work being done by the school, including building a positive relationship with and reporting to the broader community – which will build community confidence by demonstrating a commitment to accountability.

- ▶ Research shows that high performing school governance bodies can identify how they connect with and listen to their communities, can name specific ways they involve the community and keep others informed about student progress, and take pride in their related efforts (WSSDA; CSBA, 2017; IASB, 2000).
- ▶ First Nation schools are particularly connected to their communities, as their Nation made a deliberate decision to establish its own school under its own control, and it expends great effort and commitment in making those schools successful.

The connections and expertise that come from interacting with people, organizations, and agencies throughout the community can be invaluable in supporting school initiatives. School improvement necessarily requires community input, which comes from effective linkages – linkages that School Governing Authorities are uniquely positioned to facilitate. Research also shows that improvement efforts are more successful and sustainable when the school and the broader community have an opportunity for continual feedback; when reforms are determined and implemented without securing community agreement and support, there can be substantial resistance that could effectively stop improvement efforts and/or erode community trust (CSBA, 2017).

- ▶ Some schools establish a specific committee to address community engagement proactively.
- ▶ Some schools have community involvement policies, developed in consultation with community members, to mutually identify an organized approach for community members to share their opinions and have some degree of influence over decisions made.
- ▶ Any model used to promote community involvement should be flexible and take the community's social and political realities into consideration, and should be consistent with the First Nations' traditions, history, and culture (FNESC, 2000).

Generally, working with the community involves clearly communicating the school's progress toward its goals, and making sure the community is aware and supportive of the school's programs and activities.

- ▶ Schools can implement proactive steps to bring community members into the building and encourage their participation in school events.
- ▶ Community-wide attendance campaigns are essential for showing students that everyone expects and will help make it possible for students to attend school regularly and on-time.
- ▶ Community employers can be asked to donate money, supplies, or expertise, sponsor career exploration days for students, or become part of a cooperative education initiative, career awareness activity, or other school-to-work program.

- ▶ Communities and schools can work in partnership to provide “wrap-around services” to support families in their efforts to strengthen their children’s academic achievement. When families face difficulties, schools, other organizations in the community, and other social service agencies can collaborate to help provide assistance and draw families into partnerships around common goals (discussed below).

Finally, one of the critical roles of First Nations schools is helping to promote and maintain the community’s language and culture. That work cannot be done alone. The entire community, including the school, must join in complementary efforts if children are to learn and value their languages and cultures.

The School Governing Authority can work with principals to address all of the issues listed above, discussing their related roles and activities in order to implement consistent and complementary approaches.

6.1.6 Communications and Work With Other Service Agencies

Research clearly shows that if children have unmet health or welfare needs, this can often limit their ability to learn. Studies also show that the successful coordination of community services can result in a sustained commitment to educational success from various specialized agencies.

Many First Nation schools are therefore making great efforts to coordinate and integrate with community services and agencies. Schools commonly require service delivery assistance from health and social service agencies, especially for students who have exceptionalities.

Especially important is the link between the school and early childhood education agencies. The connection between children’s early childhood experiences and their success in the formal school system has been studied intensively, and it is clear that community-wide efforts to assist families in creating stimulating home environments early in their children’s lives will have significant benefits for students’ lifelong learning.

Also of particular importance is a strong partnership between the school and child protection agencies. In cases of suspected child abuse, school staff are required to immediately report any concerns. However, these situations can challenge the school and the principal’s relationship with families and other community members. The involvement of the Ministry of Children and Families and the RCMP can create tremendous tensions, and it is imperative that schools have very clear guidelines in place to deal with any problematic situations that may arise – to help everyone involved follow the expected steps.

School Governing Authorities can advocate for and model an understanding of the important role of schools in making connections with other agencies. Schools can promote integrated services and cooperative efforts by helping students and families be familiar with service agencies that may be involved with the school and children. For example, schools can invite people from different agencies to school gatherings, open houses, and workshops to talk about their work. Giving service agencies visibility in a positive context and providing opportunities for them to explain their roles means that when they are needed, families will be more familiar with the agency staff and better aware of what help they can offer. To promote positive understandings, everyone involved can emphasize that they are interested in working in the best interests of children, youth and families.

6.1.7 Communications With the Media

While uncommon, from time-to-time people involved with the school may be called upon to deal with the media, especially if situations arise that attract public attention. School Governing Authorities should be prepared for such occurrences.

Reporters can be very aggressive in pursuing information. They may directly contact School Governing Authority members, the principal, employees, families, and community members. Sometimes the media may develop a story that takes on a life of its own. And if policies or procedures have not been developed to help channel the flow of communications, misinformation or confusion may occur, or reputations may be impacted.

School policy should be clear about who can speak on behalf of the school, and the School Governing Authority should clearly discuss this issue with the principal. It is very important that a consistent message is delivered to the media to avoid negative impacts or issues.

There are several strategies a School Governing Authority can pursue if the media seeks information about the school.

- ▶ If the interest is simply informational, the principal may be authorized to speak for the school.
- ▶ If the matter is about governance or is controversial in nature, the Chief, chair, or other designated spokesperson may speak for the Authority.
- ▶ If the matter is particularly sensitive, the Authority may wish to quickly meet to decide on a course of action, which may or may not include their own media communications.

Regardless of how the School Governing Authority approaches this issue, it should be cautious. Reporters will be selective about which comments to use in their story. On controversial matters, a School Governing Authority may decide to issue its own media release, giving its side of a story and providing relevant information and facts – as determined by the Authority.

Schools also can be proactive in using the media as a way to promote their schools' excellent work. Positive reports in the media can have a strong impact on family and community attitudes, and schools can seek to share good news stories and consider inviting reporters to interesting school events. Doing so will help to promote the school's activities and may help staff, students, and families feel more proud of the school.

What is most important is that the School Governing Authority and principal openly communicate about how media relations will be handled. Also, if the principal and Authority members have limited experience in media relations, it may be useful to consider training on how to make the most effective use of this important public relations mechanism.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Are we satisfied with the engagement of families with the school, including their involvement in decision-making? If not, how can we address this issue?
- ▶ Are we satisfied with our connections to the community? If not, why not?
- ▶ Do we have positive relationships with other community agencies for the benefit of students and families?
- ▶ Do we share an understanding of who speaks for the School Governing Authority and who speaks for the school? Do we feel comfortable with our respective roles?

SECTION SEVEN

► FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Once a school's mission, growth plan, and goals have been established, the School Governing Authority must assess what resources are needed to achieve its priorities. A critical aspect of good governance is making strategic decisions about accessing and aligning resources so they will have the greatest impact, and sound financial management ensures adequate accountability and helps to foster respect for and trust in a school.

- School Governing Authorities are responsible for managing resources to ensure they are allocated to school priorities and strategic level policy directions.
- They are also responsible for ensuring the resources are used for their intended purposes in order to meet specific legal / contractual obligations under their funding agreements.

It is important to note that financial obligations vary depending on the nature of the school and community's funding agreements. For example, First Nations that are funded through BCTEA, PFNs, and First Nations that have a treaty or self-government agreement follow different arrangements.

Generally speaking, financial management measures must ensure that the available resources adequately support, among other things:

- the recruitment and retention of appropriate personnel;
- instruction and educational programming that promotes high levels of learning and adequately reflects students' lives and identities;
- language and culture programming, including related curriculum and resource development, immersion teaching (if relevant) and on-the-land learning opportunities;
- the maintenance of a safe school environment that fosters learning;
- professional development for school staff;
- programs and services that meet the needs of all students, including students with exceptionalities;

- ▶ technology needed to perform administrative tasks and facilitate learning, including language and culture learning;
- ▶ transportation services for students;
- ▶ extra-curricular activities;
- ▶ library operations and learning resources; and
- ▶ career exploration, awareness, and skills training opportunities for students.

The School Governing Authority is responsible for ensuring that processes are in place to:

- ▶ Prepare the annual operating and capital budgets for its approval.
- ▶ Monitor expenditures.
- ▶ Ensure that financial operations follow accepted accounting practices.

To meet those goals, the Authority can direct its principal, if appropriate with the Education Manager / Administrator, to propose a financial management process that includes relevant administrative checks, clear criteria, and a schedule for the preparation and approval of the budget. When this information is received, the Authority can either accept the proposed process as presented, or suggest changes it feels are necessary.

- ▶ To monitor the budget and expenditures, the School Governing Authority can create policy, which provides direction to the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator.
- ▶ The Authority can also expect that budget information will be presented in a format acceptable to, and understandable by, its members. For example, the Authority may direct that an appropriate staff person provide monthly reports detailing the percentage of budget funds that has been spent or committed for each area of the school's operation.
- ▶ If the School Governing Authority is not satisfied with the presentation or formatting of budget information, it can request in-service training, further explanations, or it may ask for the information to be presented and formatted differently. It is important that members feel comfortable asking any questions they have and/or requesting clarification or further information about financial issues.
- ▶ Additionally, the Authority should pro-actively help the principal be aware of how the community's financial management structures apply to the school to avoid any potential misunderstandings and problems.

7.1 Setting the School Budget

A budget is simply a forecast of expected revenues and expenditures for a stated period of time, usually a year. It is a projection of the funding needed to finance the school's operations and meet its priorities.

School Governing Authorities generally control two distinct budgets – an operational budget and a capital budget.

- ▶ The operational budget projects expenditures to cover basic operating costs, including, among other things: salaries and benefits for employees; instructional resources; technology and materials; training for School Governing Authority members, school administrators, and school staff; and operations and maintenance, transportation and custodial costs. For most schools, the majority of operational costs are for staff compensation.
- ▶ The capital budget includes such things as: costs for site purchases; facility construction and renovation; large information and technology infrastructure; and purchases of major pieces of costly equipment such as vehicles and buses. The School Governing Authority or Chief and Council may need to enter into long-term financing arrangements to support the purchase of capital budget items. It is critical that community protocols are clearly understood and followed in this regard.

It is also important that the school's leadership is aware of all funding available to the school. The School Governing Authority can set policy to ensure it is kept apprised of current funding and related funding formulae. For example, Chief and Council may direct its Education Manager / Administrator to share this information, or the School Governing Authority (whatever model it may be) may direct the principal to carry out this task.

For some School Governing Authorities, budget planning basically involves thinking about what is required to maintain existing programs and services, and then considering any additional services that might be possible with any remaining resources. With this approach to budget planning, Authorities may find themselves focusing on what they cannot do because of the funds they do not have. A more effective approach may be to focus on the school's goals first, and then consider how funds should be allocated to achieve the established priorities.

A challenge for some First Nations Governing Authorities is starting a community conversation about appropriate pay scales for education staff. In some cases, this issue can be difficult to resolve, but adequate compensation and competitive rates of pay are important considerations in determining the quality of the learning environment in the school.

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Once approved, the budget should not change unless it is revised by the School Governing Authority. This should be clearly set out in the policies of the Authority, to ensure transparency and accountability. The actual revenues and expenditures for a budget year will likely end up being different than the budget as originally established, as unexpected issues will invariably arise. Therefore, throughout the year, the Authority should receive updates about actual funding received and expended, and budget adjustments can be made as required. Generally, the principal spends as directed and keeps the School Governing Authority informed about the school's financial situation and any necessary changes as they arise.

What expertise in finance and budget should School Governing Authority members have?

School Governing Authority members are not expected to develop and monitor the school budget without assistance. Members are expected to use common sense, ask appropriate questions, and seek technical assistance as needed. In-service training can be arranged if members want more information about financial management. It is also appropriate to ask the principal to present or answer questions related financial matters in an understandable format.

Finally, another check on the school's finances is the annual auditor's report. Independent auditors can check the financial records and report their findings, in writing, directly to the Authority. If members have questions about the auditor's report or the school's finances in general that the principal cannot answer, members can expect the principal to help them in finding any answers they need.

FUNDING SOURCES TO KNOW ABOUT BC TRIPARTITE EDUCATION AGREEMENT FUNDING

In June 2016 the BC Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA) was signed by FNEESC, Canada, and British Columbia, and witnessed by the FNSA. BCTEA promotes systemic shifts and collective efforts that will support improved educational outcomes of all K4 – 12 First Nation students in BC, regardless of where they live or are enrolled in school.

BCTEA outlines the funding formula for most First Nations schools in BC – except for those that are operated by a First Nation that has a treaty or self-government agreement with Canada. According to BCTEA, Canada provides funding for students who are ordinarily resident on reserve in BC. The funding formula set out in BCTEA is based upon MECC's funding model for public schools, with specific adaptations to reflect the unique circumstances of First Nations.

The funding formula in BCTEA calculates funding allocations using individual enrolment data and factors that apply specifically to each school. In other words, over time First Nations schools' funding depends on student enrolment numbers, which vary annually and drive changes – potentially significant – to funding levels. The enrolment data reflects the information provided for each First Nation on ISC's annual Nominal Roll. ISC calculates funding allocations using its BCTEA Funding Detail Budget Report Table. Each year, ISC provides each First Nation with its unique Budget Report Table showing the specific funding calculations for its school(s).

- ▶ FNEESC and FNSA have created a *BCTEA Funding Handbook* to explain ISC's Funding Detail Budget Report Table, which is sent to First Nations each year. That Handbook explains the components of the BCTEA funding calculations. See www.fnesc.ca for a copy of the Handbook.
- ▶ In addition, a *Funding Estimator Tool* is available to assist First Nations in better understanding and predicting their future funding, recognizing student enrolment changes. Assistance for use of the Estimator Tool is available from FNEESC staff.

RECIPROCAL TUITION

School Governing Authorities should also be aware of the Reciprocal Tuition Agreement signed by FNEESC and the Province of BC in November 2009. Under that Agreement, MECC provides full per-pupil funding for students who are:

- ▶ attending a First Nation school as of September 30 of the current school year;
- ▶ school age as defined by MECC (at least five years of age by December 31 of the current school year and up to age 19 before July 1 of the current school year); and
- ▶ ineligible for federal education funding.

These are students who would be funded by the Province of British Columbia if they attended a public or independent school.

In order to be eligible to access Reciprocal Tuition, First Nations with schools that are not registered with the Independent Schools Branch must meet several requirements (including being FNSA or FNEA Certified), and must apply to MECC each year. More information is available in a *Reciprocal Tuition Handbook*, available at www.fnesc.ca.

TRANSPORTATION CAPITAL (SCHOOL BUS PURCHASE) GRANTS

Through BCTEA, FNESC and FNSA are now managing funding from ISC for the purchase of school buses for First Nation schools. Grants allow for the purchase of a range of bus sizes depending on school needs. To support the effective management of the bus capital funding, First Nations schools are asked to regularly provide information regarding their school buses to inform the prioritization of bus needs. Notices are sent to all schools regularly, and it is important that the requested information is submitted for effective funding management.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Do we have clear procedures for how the school budget will be created and monitored? Do we share the same expectations related to financial management?
- ▶ Are we receiving the financial information we need in a timely way, and is the information in a format that we all agree is easy to understand and clear?
- ▶ Would any School Governing Authority members benefit from training to help fulfill the Authority's financial management responsibilities?
- ▶ Is our school eligible for Reciprocal Tuition? If so, are we all aware of the need to apply for that funding annually, and is our FNSA or FNEA School Certification up-to-date so we are eligible for the funding?

SECTION EIGHT

► SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY POLICIES

A School Governing Authority's expectations for various aspects of the school's operations are typically set out in policy. The School Governing Authority's policies direct and guide the actions and decisions of the principal in undertaking the daily management of staff and the school.

- Policies define the boundaries for administrative and staff action – boundaries about what can and cannot be done; they tell the principal what the staff is expected to do, and to what extent.
- All staff members, including the principal, are expected to follow policies in making decisions and operating the school.
- The principal typically will lead the development of school-level procedures that are consistent with and advance the higher-level education policies set by the School Governing Authority.

A real concern for some First Nations schools is members who are unaware of the school policies, or having under-developed, ineffective policies in place. We need a solid foundation for our decision-making and our actions.

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A RESOURCE GUIDE TO ASSIST WITH POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As described above, a *Policy And Procedure Resource Guide For First Nation Schools In BC* provides discussion papers and sample policies intended to assist First Nation schools in establishing thorough and effective policies of their own. It is expected that the information included in the Guide will be adapted to reflect local circumstances, and so School Governing Authorities may need to implement a meaningful process to review and adapt the samples as appropriate.

School Governing Authorities may adopt policies on a range of issues that relate to the conduct of the School Governing Authority, as well as policies for, among other topics, the following.

- ▶ Human resource (HR) management, unless the school follows the Nation's HR policies
- ▶ Supporting students who have exceptionalities
- ▶ Family engagement
- ▶ General school administration and operations
- ▶ Safety and emergencies

In addition, key issues for thoughtful policy development are described below.

8.1 Attendance Policies

Research is clear that students who have the best chance to succeed are generally those who attend school on a consistent basis. Regular school attendance is an essential part of the learning process and crucial to finishing school with a strong foundation for further studies and a successful career. Evidence shows a strong correlation between students coming to school regularly and on-time and higher school completion rates, achievement outcomes, and transitions to post-secondary. Students who attend school regularly also develop important behavioural, social-emotional, and lifeskills. Studies have shown that by ninth grade, students' chances of graduating from high school drop by 20 percentage points for every week of school they miss.

Given the range of benefits associated with good attendance, School Governing Authorities are strongly encouraged to thoughtfully engage the school community in designing relevant activities to address student absences, such as attendance promotion campaigns, awareness raising efforts, incentive programs, support services for families, transportation solutions, etc. It is also important for schools to carefully consider policies and procedures that provide for quick and consistent responses to unexplained absenteeism, and include prevention measures and ways to identify and support students who are facing attendance barriers.

RESOURCES RELATED TO ATTENDANCE ISSUES

- ▶ *The First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide* includes a discussion paper and sample attendance policy that school leaders are encouraged to review and consider, as appropriate.
- ▶ *A Toolkit For Raising The Attendance Rates of First Nations Students In British Columbia* (updated 2024) is available to help First Nations and First Nations schools consider issues related to student attendance, including why attendance is an important issue, some of the reasons why students might not be in school, and what can be done to help.
- ▶ *Attendance Information Guides* developed specifically for First Nations School Governing Authorities, Parents, and First Nations Adult Education Programs are also available from FNEsc and FNsa.

8.2 Information Technology Policies and Procedures

The increasing use of information technologies (IT) in schools raises new responsibilities for school leaders. Schools need to organize and manage technology capabilities and applications in instructionally appropriate, equitable, sustainable, and safe ways. This is not easy.

More and more, school leaders are required to make difficult and complicated decisions about technology purchases and use. They also need to be attentive to long-term planning and IT security.

- ▶ Deciding what devices and software to buy can be challenging. There are many different brands and options to choose from.
- ▶ Over the past few years, the range of technology and the number of devices purchased by a typical school has increased significantly. The task of keeping track of these devices is challenging.
- ▶ Keeping school data secure is an essential function for school operations. Most schools have systems for properly dealing with data stored in physical files – such as locked filing cabinets, procedures for determining access, and policies related to retention and appropriate disposal of information (e.g. shredding when required). With an increasing shift towards digital data maintenance and storage, the same attention to digital data is essential.
- ▶ Creating a cybersecurity plan can be a complex and intimidating process, but it is critical for schools to establish policies and an effective infrastructure related to data security and management.

Schools generally benefit from creating an IT plan, with short and long-term goals and considering sustainable ways to fund and maintain IT resources. Who will be involved in creating an IT plan will vary, depending on school size and capacity, and the community's IT model. It will likely involve some combination of:

- ▶ The school principal
- ▶ The school's IT lead, if there is one
- ▶ Teachers and/or other school staff who have a particular interest / skills in this area
- ▶ One or more School Governing Authority members, parent representatives, and student representatives who have a particular interest / skills in this area
- ▶ Relevant community members and First Nation staff
- ▶ Possibly an IT consultant

School Governing Authorities are not responsible for addressing these issues directly, but they should talk with the principal about whether their school has a plan for technology infrastructure and security.

HELP TO CONSIDER IT INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

To assist schools with this complicated area of operations, an Information Technology (IT) Toolkit is available to provide guidance and suggestions to help First Nation schools:

- ▶ Be more aware of the types of technologies and tools that are available.
- ▶ Be better informed and prepared to make purchasing decisions.
- ▶ Have an effective understanding of security, privacy, and professional development requirements.
- ▶ Develop an IT plan.

The information included in the Toolkit is for informational purposes only, and is current as of the time of writing. Technologies continually change, and school representatives are encouraged to seek out advice from IT specialists and check specific details as needed.

In addition to considering the school's IT infrastructure, effectively using new technologies as learning tools requires that school staff have adequate training and in-service so they can use IT to raise student achievement. Many educators receive little preparatory support for integrating IT into teaching, and much of the training educators do receive often focuses primarily on technical rather than teaching matters. Teachers may need professional development to become fluent in using IT to enhance instruction and help students develop

thinking and problem-solving skills, and teachers also require time to plan and practice what they have learned and to share their technology-based practices with colleagues.

Additionally, use of the Internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools raises a range of critical questions, including how they should support teaching and learning in schools, how students can use AI and technologies in enriching and meaningful ways, and how teachers can help students develop digital literacy and understand how new information technologies shape reality. All school staff also need to understand their professional responsibilities related to the safe and ethical use of AI and other types of IT, including ensuring that students use technologies appropriately and securely.

The term “**digital literacy**” is being used more and more to refer to the ability to use technology in effective and intelligent ways. When we use all kinds of technologies, we need to think about: protecting personal information; avoiding online scams; using social media safely and responsibly; and communicating with others respectfully.

Schools must promote digital literacy through staff development (if needed), deliberate teaching with students, and information sharing with parents.

Policies will help to guide the school community in considering critical IT-related issues, which are increasingly important as technologies are embraced in 21st century learning approaches.

RESOURCES RELATED TO IT POLICIES

An Information Technology (IT) Toolkit for First Nation schools includes information related to IT policy development, as does a new Privacy Toolkit for First Nation schools. A template policy is also included in the First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide.

8.3 Record Keeping Policies

Effective and appropriate record keeping is a fundamental part of a school's operations. Specifically, maintaining thorough records is an important component of a school's efforts to:

- ▶ track student progress over time;
- ▶ record credits earned toward graduation;
- ▶ monitor student attendance;
- ▶ ensure smooth transitions when there is staff turnover;
- ▶ enable a continuation of services if a student transfers to another school;
- ▶ coordinate school-based and community services; and
- ▶ maintain accountability for services and programs provided to students.

Clear policies and practices related to record keeping are key for effective school operations and for meeting legal requirements related to the protection of student information. School Governing Authorities are not responsible for directly managing record keeping, but they should be assured that relevant policies and procedures are in place.

RESOURCES RELATED TO RECORD KEEPING

- ▶ The *First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide* includes a sample record keeping policy.
- ▶ Additionally, a *Record Keeping Handbook for First Nation Schools* is available to assist with effectively maintaining student records. It includes suggestions that schools can adapt as required to meet their needs. The Handbook provides information and sample forms related to student files, confidentiality, and student record transfers.

Note: First Nation Independent schools must follow the requirements outlined in the Independent School Act and relevant Ministerial or Inspector's orders. First Nations Independent Schools are encouraged to review relevant MECC materials to inform their record keeping practices.

8.4 Student Reporting

Student reporting refers to the processes used to summarize and share information about student learning and progress:

- ▶ with parents / guardians, to inform their engagement in dialogue and decision-making about their children's education;

- ▶ with future teachers, to promote easier transitions and more seamless supports for students when they change grade or school; and
- ▶ with students, through relevant activities and conversations that will help students understand and take greater responsibility for their own growth.

Written report cards are also important for maintaining a record of student learning.

Consistent, timely and meaningful student reporting in clear and accessible language enables parents / guardians, students, teachers, and other school staff to proactively work together to enhance student success. Effectively using a range of reporting mechanisms can explain and document what students can already do and areas for continued growth – which helps students, families, and school staff collaboratively consider what supports will help students develop their strengths and address any challenges they may be experiencing.

School Governing Authorities and principals should work together to review their student reporting policies and ensure that are up-to-date and meeting their needs.

- ▶ **Independent First Nation schools** must follow the Student Reporting Policy, Ministerial Orders and Regulations that are outlined on the Ministry [website](#).
- ▶ **Non-Independent First Nation schools** can work with their School Governing Authorities to determine their own reporting policies.

RESOURCES RELATED TO RECORD KEEPING

The *First Nation Schools Policy and Procedures Resource Guide* includes a sample student reporting policy.

Additionally, a *Student Reporting Handbook for First Nation Schools* has been written to support First Nation schools in designing meaningful reporting mechanisms. It includes:

- ▶ Evidence-based suggestions for student reporting practices.
- ▶ An overview of possible reporting mechanisms, with a focus on written report cards and the use of proficiency scales, letter grades, and comments / written feedback.
- ▶ Considerations related to reporting policies, including reporting for students who have Individual Education Plans, reporting on school leaving certificates, and record keeping.

8.5 Graduation Planning

There are a number of different paths that students can take in secondary school, which seem similar but lead to very different outcomes. It is critical that students, families, and school staff understand and agree about each student's education goals and journey to graduation.

In this regard, School Governing Authorities and principals will ideally discuss a number of key questions to ensure that the school is effectively supporting secondary students, such as the following.

- ▶ Are almost all of our Grade 12 students working toward a graduation certificate (usually the Dogwood Diploma for most First Nation schools)?
- ▶ Does our school have policy related to when students might access a school leaving certificate (such as the MECC Evergreen, which is *not* a graduation certificate)? How are decisions made to put students on a school leaving certificate rather than a graduation path? Who is involved?
- ▶ Do students, families, and school staff all understand what a school leaving certificate is and is not?
- ▶ What secondary course delivery options does our school use? Are these options meeting the need of students? Should we consider expanding our course delivery options to meet student needs?
- ▶ Who in the school is responsible for ensuring students are on track for graduation?
- ▶ How does our school inform families about their students' progress toward graduation?
- ▶ Would information sessions / other communications help all families feel informed?

RESOURCES RELATED TO GRADUATION

- ▶ The *Policy and Procedures Resource Guide for First Nation Schools* includes a discussion paper and template policy related to offering students school leaving certificates, and when that option might be considered.
- ▶ Throughout the past several years, work has been undertaken to promote a number of options for students in First Nations schools to earn credits toward graduation with the BC Graduation Certificate (the Dogwood Diploma), as determined by their School Governing Authority. In addition to earning credits by successfully completing MECC courses, students can be awarded credits by taking First Nations Authorized Courses, as well as through external credentials, challenge, equivalency, and independent directed studies. A *Guide to Options For Students In Non-Independent First Nation Schools To Access Credits for the BC Graduation Certificate* is now available, which outlines these options in more detail and includes sample policies for First Nation schools to consider.
- ▶ *Guiding Your Education Journey: A Handbook for First Nations Families* provides information to help families decide what courses students should take – especially in Grades 10, 11, and 12 – and to assist with planning for post-secondary education, training, and future careers.
- ▶ A version of *Guiding Your Education Journey for Adult Students* is also available to support adult students with graduation and career planning.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY POLICIES

What is the best format for School Governing Authority policies? Generally, there is no one standard way to write and format policies; they may be general or specific, long or short, as the School Governing Authority desires. Because they are intended to give direction only, and not to describe how something is to be done, they are often written as broad statements of intent. It is only necessary that they provide concise, clear direction; the style depends largely on the person who writes them and the Authority that approves them.

What are administrative procedures? For many schools, statements of procedure are written to accompany policy statements. While the policy states broadly what is to be done, procedures – usually prepared by the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator – describe some specifics of how the policy will be implemented.

How many policies should a School Governing Authority have? There is no ideal minimum or maximum number of policies. What is important is that there are appropriate policies to provide for the effective operation of the school.

Who develops policy? The School Governing Authority develops policy, though it may contract individuals or request assistance of the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator to put them into writing. The Authority's overarching role is to approve final versions.

- ▶ One effective strategy is to have the Authority members discuss a topic, with an appropriate person recording the main points of the discussion and then drafting a policy for the Authority's approval.
- ▶ Some policies may benefit from legal or expert advice, to ensure they are consistent with any applicable legal standards (e.g. human rights, employment law).

What is a policy manual? In order to ensure that the Authority's policies are clearly understood and readily available, they are normally collected into a policy manual. That document then becomes an important operational guide. But not all decisions of the School Governing Authority need to be collected and published in a policy manual.

- ▶ More important decisions are usually translated into policies and then included in the manual.
- ▶ Less significant decisions may simply be recorded in the School Governing Authority's meeting minutes for future reference.

How is the policy manual kept up to date? The policy manual should be a "living" document, used regularly by School Governing Authority members, the principal, and staff. It is therefore important to establish a process to keep policies current and relevant.

- ▶ The School Governing Authority should identify a process for a focused review of its policies on a regular basis (e.g. annually) to determine any relevant or pertinent updates to keep it consistent with evolving management practices and priorities.
- ▶ Once updates are made, the policy should be republished, either in whole or in part (i.e. the updated sections), so that policy manual holders can be confident they are following current policies and procedures.
- ▶ Members may find it easier to check their policies if each manual clearly indicates the date of first approval, as well as dates of any subsequent amendments.
- ▶ The principal may be asked to assist in ensuring that a process is in place to keep the policy manual up to date.

What is the status of School Governing Authority policies? Decisions of the School Governing Authority, whether translated into written policies and included in the Authority's policy manual or remaining as decisions recorded in meeting minutes, are consequential. School Governing Authorities must be accountable to students, parents / caregivers and the community. It is essential that policies are accurate, current, and relevant, and particularly that they communicate exactly what the Authority intends as direction on a given matter.

Who decides what is a matter of policy for the School Governing Authority's action, and what are to be considered as administrative issues and procedures? Each School Governing Authority will develop its policies in a manner that it finds acceptable. What one Authority may include in a policy, another may leave for the principal to include in administrative procedures. A simple guideline is to understand that the Authority determines what is to be done, and then generally leaves it up to the principal to determine how the policy will be implemented.

What is the difference between a draft policy and a final policy? When approving policy, it is not always possible to predict all of its implications and consequences for the management and operation of the school.

- ▶ To ensure that there is an opportunity for feedback, some Authorities give approval-in-principle to a policy and then direct that it be circulated for comment.
- ▶ If there is no negative feedback, or if any expressed concerns are minor and can be addressed without changing the policy, the Authority will then give final approval to the draft policy at its next regularly scheduled meeting.
- ▶ This can be an effective process; providing time to think carefully about policies before they are given final approval lessens the chance that the Authority will have to retract a policy because of a meaning or interpretation that was not intended or predicted.

How can a School Governing Authority decide if it is giving proper attention to its policy-making role? A quick check to see if the School Governing Authority is sufficiently focused on its policy role is to think about: how often the Authority refers to its policies; if the Authority follows its policies or ignores them; if the school's practices are consistent with policies; and whether or not policy matters are the focus of meeting agendas.

What if a new School Governing Authority member disagrees with an existing policy, or a new Governing Authority disagrees with the policies of the previous Authority? The School Governing Authority speaks with only one voice. All members must follow an approved policy unless the Authority as a whole retracts it. Similarly, new School Governing Authorities inherit the policies of the prior Authority. If a new School Governing Authority has concerns about policies, it should follow the established policy process for changing or cancelling them. In the meantime, a new School Governing Authority cannot ignore the established, written policy of the previous Authority.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Do we share an understanding of our different roles and responsibilities for discussing, drafting and approving policies? For developing procedures?
- ▶ Do we feel that our policies are complete and up-to-date? If not, how can we arrange a process to review and, if necessary, revise our policies?
- ▶ Is everyone, including school staff, adequately informed about / aware of school policies? If not, what can we do in response?

SECTION NINE

► PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

9.1 School Governing Authority Development

Considerable research indicates that training and professional learning for School Governing Authority members are essential to enhance their ability to carry out their duties and positively effect student achievement. School Governing Authority members will come to their role with a range of experiences and backgrounds, and every Authority is different. While all Authority members may benefit from opportunities to learn about common governance tasks, Authorities as a whole and individual members may also require training about specific issues that are unique to their situation and community

- Research shows that effective authorities take part in team development, sometimes with their staff leaders, to build shared knowledge, values and commitment to improvement efforts.
- Moreover, for effective School Governing Authorities, learning will not be a one-time effort. As understandings grow, learning needs will change.
- Research (CSBA, 2017) supports the conclusion that useful areas of training for School Governing Authority members might include:
 - Improving governance practices to ensure that meetings are run efficiently and that effective protocols are in place so that meetings can focus on student achievement and attendance.
 - Learning about ways to improve student outcomes, to help members become champions of learning when they set goals, create policies, and make investments — so that all students receive the instruction and supports they need to achieve their potential.

- Reviewing current research and best practices in order to ensure that decisions reflect the best thinking in the field of education and child development.
- Developing better understandings of how to engage families and the community to broaden advocacy for the needs of the school.

We need to stop being reactive, and start being pro-active. That includes being pro-active about our own training and Governing Authority professional development.

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9.1.1 School Governing Authority Orientations

In addition to welcoming events and social activities planned for new Authority members, it is critical that School Governing Authorities provide effective orientations.

We cannot overstate the importance of developing the skills and confidence level of those who are making decisions for our students – especially chairs. We need thorough orientations to ensure we have a shared understanding, a shared vision, and an informed awareness of our role and responsibilities.

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Many School Governing Authorities set policy confirming an orientation program for new members, declaring the need for new members to be adequately informed and prepared for their important work. The specific topics to be covered in the orientation may be listed in the policy.

Who should plan and conduct the orientation?

- ▶ Having the School Governing Authority chair and/or other members actively involved in the orientation planning and presentations can be very beneficial. Doing so will reflect the importance placed on the orientation.
- ▶ However, having members lead the orientation program is not always possible or practical. The Governing Authority may be almost entirely new, with all of its members inexperienced in their role. Sometimes, members may be uncomfortable in presenting information and leading the orientation.
- ▶ In those cases, School Governing Authorities sometimes ask the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator to help provide an orientation to new members.

- ▶ However, even if an Authority has enough trust and confidence in staff to have them undertake this important task, having the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator present the orientation may confuse new members regarding roles and reporting structures.
- ▶ It may be fine to have staff explain the school's operations, but it is generally not appropriate for staff to tell Governing Authority members how to do their job. It would be better for existing Authority members to lead the orientation, with the principal assisting as much as possible.
- ▶ Alternatively, an independent person with expertise in governance may be brought in to explain governance – and experienced Authority members may even participate in such training as a refresher, or to enhance their skills in governance.

9.1.2 The Focus of the Orientation

Many School Governing Authority orientations provide information about the school and about the staff and their jobs. This management information is important, but ideally the orientation will also share information regarding the governance role and responsibilities of the Authority. A useful approach generally includes providing appropriate information and documents, reviewing and explaining the information, and giving each new member the opportunity to ask questions for clarification.

At a minimum, a School Governing Authority orientation should include:

- ▶ An introduction to the School Governing Authority and the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator, and other staff as time permits.
- ▶ A thorough explanation of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Governing Authority and the principal.
- ▶ A review of the school's growth plan and policy development process.
- ▶ An overview of the school's finances.
- ▶ Reports and assessments that relate to matters before the Authority.

Several documents also will be of interest to new members. Some directly affect the operation of the School Governing Authority and the school; others may be provided for information only. The following documents should be provided to new members.

- ▶ School Governing Authority terms of reference or constitution and by-laws (if available) / other documentation describing meeting procedures, how and when the chair is selected, when meetings are held, start and end times for meetings, expectations for member attendance at meetings, what constitutes a quorum, and a list of committees

- ▶ Minutes of past School Governing Authority meetings
- ▶ The school policy manual
- ▶ Planning / school assessment documentation
- ▶ Budget documents
- ▶ The school calendar

Maintaining confidentiality is also a sensitive governing issue, particularly in small communities where news travels fast and people have a more intimate knowledge of others in the community – and this issue should be a key topic emphasized in an orientation.

- ▶ School Governing Authority members must respect the confidential nature of information provided during the course of the Authority’s deliberations.
- ▶ It is improper conduct for a member to divulge, share, or otherwise make public information that has been provided to the School Governing Authority in confidence.
- ▶ This includes not just the content of information, but also who said what, where, and when.

Governing a First Nations school is not like governance in other education systems. In a First Nation community, members know every student by name. We know their families. That’s very positive. We also understand that people are aware of everything we do. That can be difficult.

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9.2 Supporting Principal and Staff Professional Development Efforts

In addition to being attentive to their own development, effective School Governing Authorities support the ongoing professional development of school staff, and then ensure that resources for related activities are included in the budget.

- ▶ There is widespread evidence that teachers and principals matter.
- ▶ Research also shows that individual teachers and principals differ significantly in their effectiveness.
- ▶ Individual differences in educators will never go away, but professional development can reduce those differences significantly.
- ▶ Additionally, unless they are encouraged otherwise, even the most talented education staff can become complacent and entrenched in particular approaches. Regardless

of the adequacy of preparation, no educator will remain current for their entire career without meaningful professional development.

- ▶ Teachers in First Nation schools, who often work in significant isolation, continually emphasize the importance of professional development opportunities, suggesting that it is easy for them to become “isolated and unaware of the latest educational trends.”
- ▶ Research shows that providing access to high quality, appropriate supports and opportunities for professional learning can help to retain educators who might otherwise leave for other employment.

Additionally, affirming other school staff by finding opportunities for them to grow professionally greatly affects student success (Strong, 2013). Education Assistants, administrative staff, and other members of the school community are invaluable in helping to support students, and many of those individuals would appreciate and benefit from professional learning opportunities.

Principals, in particular, need to seek out opportunities to keep up-to-date and prepared to inform staff about current research and practice (Strong, 2013), with the following issues important for principal professional development.

- ▶ Time management and organization skills, student discipline best practices, human resource management, and finance, privacy and legal issues.
- ▶ How to create a positive school climate.
- ▶ Using data and other indicators of student learning to guide improvements.
- ▶ Helping teachers improve their classroom performance through supervision of instruction techniques, including how to effectively spend time in classrooms, observe teaching, and encourage higher performance.
- ▶ Fostering teacher leaders.
- ▶ Family and community engagement.
- ▶ Public engagement strategies and/or media relations training.
- ▶ Stress management.

When principals are willing to allocate some of their time to increase their own knowledge and skills, it is not only beneficial for principals themselves; it also models the importance of continuous learning and demonstrates that the school embraces the importance of lifelong learning (Sparks, 2001).

Professional development opportunities must be determined according to the unique needs of each school and its staff. Research shows that no single strategy will always work in every school, for every staff member, all of the time. Therefore, many professional development approaches combine several strategies, such as in-service opportunities, attendance at workshops outside of the community, coaching, and dedicated time for colleagues to work together to share ideas, experiences, and new learnings. All of these approaches can be valuable.

To help, School Governing Authorities can:

- ▶ Share the perspective that building staff capacity is essential to improving teaching and learning. Research shows that support from the school's leadership for professional development can have a meaningful impact on the school's commitment to staff learning (CSBA, 2017).
- ▶ Invest in professional development, making it a budget priority. This might include ensuring staff have access to relevant IT to allow them to participate in cost-effective virtual options.
- ▶ Participate in planning professional development that emphasizes the link between teacher's skills and student outcomes, and collectively work to ensure that the school's staff development efforts are tied to student learning needs, especially as identified through performance data.

Additionally, the School Governing Authority and the principal should work together to regularly review staffing requirements – exploring, for example:

- ▶ how talent can be developed from within the school;
- ▶ professional development options that will help prepare employees for leadership positions; and
- ▶ a strategy for staff succession (FNEC, 2015).

Finally, it is important for the School Governing Authority to support the principal in letting the community know about the school's professional development activities. Sometimes, families and community members are uncertain about why staff are leaving the school and community for learning opportunities. It is helpful to demystify that situation by sharing information about what has taken place. In some circumstances, it may be useful to have a staff person meet with the School Governing Authority or a parents' group to tell them about the new ideas and strategies they learned through a training activity. Other possibilities include sharing information in the school newsletter about a professional development experience and how the training will benefit students in the school. Communication is key.

**THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS
/ ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT
TOGETHER**

- ▶ What types of professional development would benefit the School Governing Authority? How can those be arranged?
- ▶ Is there adequate attention to the professional development of school staff? What resources are needed to build the skills and knowledge of the people who work in the school?

SECTION TEN

► SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY PROCEDURES

School Governing Authorities should be very clear and intentional about their decision-making processes; research shows that when effective strategies are used, members have more time and energy (during and outside of meetings) to focus on factors that support improved student outcomes – i.e. establishing relevant school structures through policy, monitoring student achievement, engaging the community, ensuring accountability through oversight and review, and setting a collaborative relationship with staff (IASB, 2000; CSBA, 2017).

A clear understanding on the part of the School Governing Authority with regard to its system of governance will have a significant impact on the effectiveness of its policy development, decision-making practices, and adherence to its obligations. It will also influence how the community perceives the efficacy of the board and its value to the school and Nation (www.opsba.org).

10.1 School Governing Authority Meetings

School Governing Authorities should have established meeting procedures, designed to make meetings as focused, constructive, and efficient as possible.

- The Authority may set a regular schedule, so that members know in advance when they will meet.
- Ideally members will receive an agenda and related materials in advance of the meetings.
- The Authority should regularly review its meeting procedures (which may be set out in policy or bylaws) with a view to increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

How a School Governing Authority prepares for meetings and conducts its business will vary according to: the training, background, and experience of members; the skills and approaches of the principal; past practices and local politics; and reporting requirements, if any, to a higher authority. However, there are some common procedures used by many School Governing Authorities.

Overall, the School Governing Authority properly conducts its business only at duly constituted meetings. Where the School Governing Authority is the Chief and Council, this may be at meetings of Chief and Council in accordance with bylaws, or at specially held meetings focused primarily on education. Where the School Governing Authority is a board of an incorporated society, their meetings will be in accordance with their bylaws. Typically, these include regular meetings and special meetings.

Very generally, regular meetings are held according to a regular schedule that is set by the School Governing Authority. The frequency and length of the regular meetings and the topics for discussion are determined by the Authority, with input from the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator. Special meetings are called when an urgent matter requires the Authority's attention between regular meetings. The discussion at a special meeting should be limited to the topic(s) set out in the notice for the meeting.

It is important that School Governing Authorities define the circumstances under which special meetings can be called and the required notice to members. For example, a Governing Authority might clarify that a special meeting can be called for a specific stated purpose, but only with 72 hours' notice to members (the notice time will vary, depending on the decision of each School Governing Authority). The School Governing Authority might further clarify that, in emergency situations, the 72-hour notice requirement may be waived with the unanimous consent of members. In this situation, the Authority would be free to meet as quickly as members could get together, providing of course that all members were notified of the meeting.

Reasons for special meetings might include, among others:

- ▶ financial situations requiring direct and immediate attention;
- ▶ a school incidence involving violence or another very serious problem; or
- ▶ an incident that affects the ability of the principal to fulfill a critical aspect of their position.

Additionally, a School Governing Authority may, from time to time, require "in-camera" meetings to discuss matters of a confidential or sensitive nature. It is best practice to establish policy or procedures that clarify when such meetings are appropriate and what procedures will be followed to maintain accountability of the Authority.

10.1.1 Decision-Making Procedures During Meetings

School Governing Authorities should have clarity on how they will make and record their decisions. Commonly, decisions of School Governing Authorities occur through motions (or resolutions) made at properly called meetings. At the time a motion is made, its wording should be clarified to ensure there is no misunderstanding among members about what is

being stated. Some School Governing Authorities require that members put their motions in writing. Others do not require this approach.

All School Governing Authority members should have an opportunity to comment on proposed motions. Should members have an actual or a perceived conflict of interest in a matter under discussion, they should abstain from the decision-making, ideally in accordance with clear policy of the Authority. In such situations, the members, in addition to abstaining from the vote, may also physically remove themselves from discussion on the matter, and ask that their absence from the discussion and vote be recorded in the minutes. This protects everyone and maintains the integrity of the Authority's decisions.

Conflict of interest can be a particularly significant challenge in First Nations communities, which tend to be small and where people are so closely related. This can make conflict-free decision-making difficult – but not at all impossible. School Governing Authorities just need to be especially attentive to this issue and have clear guidelines for how decisions are made.

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To assist the School Governing Authority with the conduct of its business, many use commonly accepted procedures for conducting their meetings. One approach to the conduct of meetings is following Robert's Rules of Order, a widely used guide for conducting meetings and making decisions as a group, where quorum is required and decisions are made by a vote. A "consensus model" is also a common approach to decision-making used by many First Nation School Governing Authorities.

Meeting procedures can become quite technical, and many members find it frustrating when their meetings get bogged down in what they perceive as bureaucratic rules of order. However, having commonly accepted procedures ensures fairness in the manner in which matters are discussed and decided, and they do help to create a businesslike atmosphere to meetings.

What is important is that each School Governing Authority identify practices and procedures that meet its needs, and that all members fully understand the procedures.

People will have differing opinions. That is what makes a healthy Governing Authority. Just make sure everyone is heard.

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10.1.2 The Chair

Usually, a chair serves as the spokesperson of the School Governing Authority and provides leadership for the conduct of meetings and business of the Authority.

The chair is selected according to the procedures set by the Authority. If Chief and Council, this may mean the Chief or a designated Councilor serves as the chair. In the case of an incorporated society with a board of directors, the board will have established procedures for selecting and appointing a chair (e.g. election). The election or appointment of the chair should be defined in meeting procedures. Some School Governing Authorities prefer that the chair position rotate annually or biannually to give more than one member the opportunity to lead. Others find comfort in a strong leader who represents the Authority well and who is willing, with the confidence of the Authority, to remain in the position.

What are the duties of a chair?

- ▶ The chair usually acts as the School Governing Authority's spokesperson and is viewed as the communication link between the Authority and the principal when the Authority is not in session.
- ▶ The chair does not, without the approval of the Authority, make decisions, speak on behalf of the Authority, or direct the principal.
- ▶ The chair's responsibilities and duties, as approved by the Authority, should be clarified in writing.
- ▶ Typically, a chair's primary duties are to: prepare for and conduct meetings; provide leadership at and away from the School Governing Authority table; act, with proper authorization, as the Authority's representative; and, with the principal, ensure follow-up to decisions made.

10.1.3 Committees

School Governing Authorities may decide to establish committees - either standing committees or ad hoc committees – on an "as needed" basis. The committee structure and operation may be explained in policy. The Authority should be clear about the committee's terms of reference – that is:

- ▶ the committee's membership (who will be on the committee?);
- ▶ purpose (why does it exist?);
- ▶ duties (what is the committee expected to do?); and
- ▶ communication and reporting mechanisms (who will the committee communicate with and how will the committee report back to the School Governing Authority?).

Overall, committees exist to help with governance, not to help the principal manage the school.

It is also important to remember that committee meetings are not meetings of the School Governing Authority; Authority decisions cannot be made at committee meetings.

The conduct of committee meetings generally follows many of the same procedures as Governing Authority meetings, but with important differences.

- ▶ The committee cannot make decisions on behalf of the Authority.
- ▶ The committee chair will present the committee's report to the Authority at a meeting, and will present any committee recommendations as motions for the School Governing Authority's consideration.

KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE MEETINGS (ADAPTED FROM THOMAS, 2002)

A Stated Meeting Purpose: It may seem self-evident to say that every meeting should have a stated purpose, but in practice this is not always the case. Sometimes meetings are held simply because someone decided it was time to have a meeting. Perhaps a School Governing Authority committee has not met for a while, and the committee chair feels guilty about this. In other cases, a committee may set a regular meeting schedule (for example, the first Monday of each month), and committee members may find themselves meeting according to the schedule, even if there is no formal business to conduct. When this happens, the chair may “create” an agenda to justify the meeting, and the meeting may consist of a series of informational reports that could have been communicated in other ways. This is not necessarily the best use of time. Instead, clarifying the purpose of the meeting can help to confirm the need for the meeting.

Attendance of Key People: Once the purpose of a meeting has been clarified, the next consideration is “Who should attend, and for what reasons?” People who are not required at the meeting should not be asked to attend. The principal can usually determine whether key personnel are needed at the meeting for specific questions and answers.

A Published Agenda: Generally, School Governing Authority meetings should be about Authority business, not about the staff’s business, and because the Authority owns the agenda, the Authority should create it and all members should have equal opportunity for input. Typically, the chair and the principal meet to prepare the agenda and then share it with other members for comments and additions. Also, finalized agendas, along with background information, should be distributed in sufficient time for members to read and study agenda materials, and to be fully prepared for the meeting. A big issue for many Authorities is “surprise” agenda items, which can create many problems. At the start of the meeting, the chair will ask for approval of the agenda. Generally, this is not the best time to be adding items to the published agenda.

Meeting Start and End Times: Meetings should have a clear start time. Many people find it frustrating when delays occur because one or more members are late, and so it is important that all members strive to arrive on time. Authorities should also agree on their expected end-times for meetings. The chair should pace the meeting and help focus discussion in order to meet that end-time. Meetings should not be endurance contests. People do not contribute their best ideas when they are tired and exhausted, and meetings should end at a reasonable hour whenever possible.

Frequency of Meetings: The frequency of meetings is not a sign of an effective or ineffective Authority. Authorities that are governance focused, provide clear direction, and put their time and effort into hiring the right principal, generally find they need fewer, not more meetings.

An Effective Chair: An effective chair is critical for an effective meeting. The effective chair knows and follows established rules of order, treats members and staff fairly and with respect, and allows sufficient discussion of topics to facilitate good decisions. Each member should have an opportunity to speak on any matter before the Authority.

Focused Discussion: Once the agenda has been adopted by the Authority at its meeting, members should discipline themselves to ensure that their discussion and debate is properly focused on agenda topics. It is beneficial when discussion does not wander off topic and when excessive repetition does not prolong discussion unnecessarily.

Striving for Consensus: Many School Governing Authorities strive for consensus when making decisions. Striving to reach consensus requires members to truly listen to the debate and to understand and appreciate positions that are contrary to their own. If taking a little longer with discussion produces a decision that all members feel they can support, then the Authority should strive for this level of agreement. If this is not possible, some Authorities decide to rely on a voting process. Regardless of which approach is used, members must remember that the Authority speaks with only one voice.

Meeting Minutes: There are many formats for recording meeting minutes. What is important is that the meeting minutes record key decisions and directions. It is not necessary to provide a transcript of the meeting, nor to provide a summary of the discussion and debate. However, if the School Governing Authority wants a summary to help capture the discussions that took place, the minute-taker may be asked to take more extensive notes, which should be written as objectively as possible. A secretary may be identified to oversee the preparation of the minutes. Minutes should be circulated to members and the principal, to ensure that required follow-up occurs and that directions are properly understood.

Agreement on Follow-Up Action: It is frustrating to put time and energy into discussion and decisions, only to find that the direction was not carried out as intended. But this can occur if direction is vague and unclear, and if meeting minutes do not specify who is to do what and by when. An effective chair will ensure that the motions made and directions given are clear, and that there is a common understanding about what action is required, and by when, from the principal. Also, members with concerns regarding meeting follow-up should ask for a status report from the chair or principal, as appropriate.

Guest Speakers/Visitors: School Governing Authorities may encounter situations where others request to attend a meeting and speak to the Authority. The Authority should therefore consider establishing policy specifying the process by which delegations will be heard at meetings. The delegation should be asked to confirm its interest and any specific details in writing, and submit them for inclusion in the agenda package. This is important. The group may not be clear about its concerns and what action it expects from the Authority, and requiring this to be put into writing may help the delegation become clear about what it is requesting. The delegation also should be asked to designate a leader to speak on behalf of the group and, because it has other important business to conduct, the Authority may specify that a limited time period is available. This will help to ensure the meeting runs smoothly. Otherwise, several people may speak out at one time, making it difficult to understand the proceedings, different and contradictory comments may be made by delegation members, and their presentation and comments may stretch on during the meeting. Trying to shut down discussion without a pre-set timeframe can make people more upset than necessary.

Make meetings as manageable as possible. The most capable people are often the busiest. This can be especially true in First Nations communities, which are small and sometimes have a limited pool of people who can sit on Governing Authorities. It can be hard to find people who can commit the time required to be an effective member. Trying to accommodate demanding schedules as much as possible while still making sure the Governing Authority's job is done well ... that's our challenge.

April 2013 Capacity Building Focus Group Participants

10.2 Leading the School Governing Authority Forward

School Governing Authorities can help to sustain the positive impact of their work by ensuring that plans are in place to help future members succeed. A key consideration for School Governing Authorities is successful leadership transitions (for their own members, as well as the principal), which will help to increase the sustainability of programs and processes that are working well and also provide a strong platform for continued improvements.

Additionally, conducting a self-assessment can help School Governing Authorities to consider continuous improvement, because good governance doesn't just happen; it requires a thoughtful review of practices to promote greater certainty about how well governance is working for the benefit of students. The process undertaken to review performance will vary. The collection of information to inform an Authority's self-assessment might include surveys of members, focus groups with community members and other education partners, interviews of members and the principal, and possibly feedback from an outside facilitator / consultant (www.opsba.org). A sample self-evaluation tool for School Governing Authorities is included as Appendix A.

What is most important is that School Governing Authorities recognize and build processes to continue their vital role in promoting school growth and student success and well-being.

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS / ADMINISTRATORS (IF RELEVANT), AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Do we offer effective orientations for new members?
- ▶ Are our meeting procedures clear, and do they result in effective meetings that facilitate equitable input into governance decisions?
- ▶ Do we regularly think about succession planning? Are we building capacity for continued effective governance? Do we strive to build enthusiasm for the work of the Governing Authority and encourage new people to take part?
- ▶ Do we feel that a self-assessment or an evaluation would benefit the School Governing Authority? If yes, how can that be arranged?





► CONCLUSIONS

First Nation schools play a critical role in First Nations' efforts to revitalize their languages and cultures, and they represent special learning environments where First Nation learners can feel particularly comfortable, valued and supported. First Nation schools also maintain high expectations for students and are striving to raise levels of achievement for all learners. School Governing Authorities are key to leading those efforts.

FNESC and FNSA fully recognize the invaluable contributions made by members of First Nation School Governing Authorities. As stated by the CSBA (2017):

Examples of high-performing settings or sustained transformation are rarely, if ever, stories about stumbling upon success. Instead, researchers have consistently found that having a "focused direction" is a necessary precondition for improvement.

It is school leaders - in collaboration with families, the community, and school staff - who can define and maintain consistent attention on a "focused direction," thereby moving First Nation schools forward in their work to help all students achieve their full potential.

FNESC and FNSA hope that this Handbook will assist First Nation School Governing Authorities as they define their school's purpose, effectively direct school staff, plan for and monitor school growth, and ensure that their schools are places where First Nations learners can thrive.

Feedback and comments on this document are welcome at any time, and First Nation School Governing Authority members are encouraged to contact FNESC or FNSA with any questions or requests for help.

APPENDIX A

▶ A SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY SELF EVALUATION

	YES	NO
Our Authority Works Toward a Clear Purpose		
We focus on student learning as our highest priority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We support all efforts to promote student learning related to our language, culture, traditions and values	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We oversee the development of a school mission and vision statement, which provide the foundation for our decision-making and school actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We approve school goals, which are regularly reviewed and discussed with the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We encourage strategic planning and support innovation and change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Maintains a Governance Focus		
We focus on governance, not administrative issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have clarified the decision-making authority of the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
We support the principal and have confidence in their daily management of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Acts Ethically and Professionally		
We maintain effective policies, procedures, and practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We maintain confidentiality, especially in regard to our discussions and student and family information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We diligently avoid conflicts of interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We follow clear policies that guide decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Commits to Informed Practice and Decision-Making		
We have clarified and understand our authority and responsibilities to Chief and Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We provide a comprehensive orientation for new authority members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We encourage, support and participate in ongoing training in governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are knowledgeable and well informed regarding the school's programs and services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We regularly conduct a self-assessment with the goal of enhancing effectiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Maintains Respectful, Collaborative Authority Relations		
We respect the opinions of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We maintain clear expectations for our members' behaviour and conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
We have a clearly defined code of ethics for authority members and the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are all given the opportunity, and are encouraged, to express our opinions on matters under consideration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We accept differing opinions as a positive part of discussions and decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Focuses on Effective Operations		
We commit to the concept of the authority as a unified body that speaks with one voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand that we do not have any individual powers, and that we cannot make decisions, or take action individually, on behalf of the authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have clearly defined rules of order for the conduct of meetings, including meeting notice, quorum, voting procedures, and the selection of the chair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our meetings are conducted in a business-like manner according to established rules of order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We receive information (e.g., agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) in a timely manner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minutes of our meetings clearly state our decisions and direction, and are distributed in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minutes of authority meetings clearly state authority decisions and direction, and are distributed in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We ensure appropriate follow-up to authority decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Fulfills its Financial Management Role Effectively and Efficiently		
We have clarified, in writing, the process and criteria for developing the school's budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We understand and monitor budget expenditures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
Our Authority Maintains Effective and Appropriate Communications		
We ensure relevant information sharing with our constituents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We maintain collaborative relationships with staff and the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For substantive issues, our communication with staff, and the staff's communication with the authority, is through the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We communicate information effectively through a variety of methods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our Authority Fulfills Its Accountability Obligations		
We request and review timely reports on school programs and student progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We make regular, formal reports to Chief and Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We ensure responsible and appropriate reporting to parents/caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We report to the community about important and relevant issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B

► COMMON SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY CHALLENGES – AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

ADAPTED FROM THOMAS, 2002

COMMON CHALLENGES	INSTEAD ...
Entrenched thinking: School Governing Authorities can sometimes find that some or all of their members have become resistant to change, with individuals or groups of individuals having trouble letting go of their fixed ideas.	To address complex issues, members must be willing to listen to the thoughts and diverse opinions of others, embrace new ideas, and seek innovation and creativity. The challenge for many is not in embracing new ideas, but rather in letting go of the fixed ideas they already have. Governing Authorities that get results are open to thinking in new and different ways.
Lack of member orientation and training: Sometimes, School Governing Authorities may not provide for member orientation or ongoing training – especially if funding is a challenge. But when Authorities do not provide a “governance” orientation to incoming members, and when members do not participate in or value ongoing governance training, they are sharing a message that improvement is unimportant and unnecessary.	Effective School Governing Authorities understand that good governance is a learnable skill and that the development of the governance skills of members requires ongoing training and practice. For effective Authorities, orientations, training and ongoing in-service are given high priority.

COMMON CHALLENGES

INSTEAD ...

Confusing the roles and responsibilities of the School Governing Authority and the principal: Those roles are of course closely related, but different. Members may feel it is their responsibility to personally become involved in the daily affairs of the school, even to the point of directing staff on matters of personal concern or interest. Elders particularly may feel this pressure; they legitimately may feel that the community expects them personally to find resolution to issues brought to their attention, but such expectations can put members in very difficult positions.

Everyone working together toward common goals creates the best climate for success – including respecting the appropriate roles of those involved in supporting the school. Effective Authorities expect and allow their principal to handle administrative matters and direct staff, and it is the Authority's responsibility to monitor itself in this regard. Authorities build school success by focusing on the big picture and setting direction. Members should seek sufficient information to perform their governance role, without becoming involved in the daily operation of the school and without feeling the need to directly manage the staff.

Lack of a vision and planning: Not all School Governing Authorities give priority to defining a vision and undertaking the planning required to achieve it. Often Authorities are preoccupied with present issues and circumstances. Vision-setting may not seem like an urgent priority, and so it is often left to be undertaken when other more important tasks have been addressed. The problem with this approach is that there are always other important tasks and other immediate needs.

Proactive School Governing Authorities accept the present reality, but maintain a focus on the future. They acknowledge that unanticipated circumstances may affect their progress toward their goals, and that many things will happen that are beyond their control. However, they believe that the school's future is not the result of circumstances, but rather is the sum of all the choices and decisions that the Authority makes given those circumstances.

Absence of policy direction: Too many School Governing Authorities pay insufficient attention to policy. They become consumed with pressing issues, urgent demands, and their current situations, and they quickly find themselves deeply involved in the management of the school. If they do have a policy manual, it may be outdated, or only occasionally referenced.

Policy is the process by which a School Governing Authority gives guidance for the daily operation of the school. Policy guides the actions of both the Authority and staff. It states clear expectations so that the principal and staff feel comfortable that they are working within a framework for decision-making that will be supported by the Authority.

COMMON CHALLENGES	INSTEAD ...
<p>Misunderstanding the budget's purpose: Many School Governing Authorities can become focused on supporting existing programs and services that have been funded for many years, which can lead to resistance to new ideas that do not readily fit within the existing budget.</p>	<p>The purpose of the budget is to support the direction and goals of the Governing Authority, not just to carry the system through yet another year of operation. The school's goals should drive the budget, and changing priorities can mean changes in the way the school's funding is spent.</p>
<p>Not focusing on results: Some School Governing Authorities can be preoccupied with peoples' activities and efforts, and particularly the activities of staff. This is understandable. Schools are people-focused, and Authority members want to improve the lives of their constituents. Also, some Authorities do not commit to measurable results because they have failed to develop a clear vision and specific goals. If there is no clear mission, no clear vision, and no goals, then it makes sense that the Authority will not be concerned with results.</p>	<p>It is the responsibility of the School Governing Authority to ensure a focus on results and to expect the principal to present strategies for assessing the effectiveness of the school's programs and services.</p>
<p>Lack of understanding of the advocacy role of the Governing Authority.</p>	<p>It is important to understand that School Governing Authority members are the primary advocates for the students and families the school serves.</p>

COMMON CHALLENGES	INSTEAD ...
<p>Absence of effective communication strategies: Almost all School Governing Authorities find communications a challenge at some time, as they have to continually monitor how they are sharing information about complex and sometimes very difficult issues with families, community members, Chief and Council, and the broader public.</p>	<p>Effective School Governing Authorities create a plan detailing their strategies for communicating and for seeking feedback on their decisions and actions.</p>
<p>Ineffective meeting strategies: Signs of meeting ineffectiveness include: no agendas / poorly planned agendas; lack of background information prepared or circulated prior to meetings; unfocused discussion; discussing matters not on the agenda; arguing over procedural matters; getting mired in conflict; and lack of follow-up to Authority decisions and direction.</p>	<p>School Governing Authority members and the principal spend many hours in meetings, so they must be timely and purposeful, and it is critical that people feel the time spent is productive and aimed at the most important consideration – improving the success of the students. When discussions and activities are focused on that priority, potential conflict can often be addressed pro-actively and positively.</p>

APPENDIX C

► SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY SAMPLE TERMS OF REFERENCE OUTLINE

FOR CONSIDERATION BY FIRST NATION SCHOOLS IN BC

The intention of this paper is to help First Nation school leaders consider Terms of Reference for their School Governing Authorities. The paper includes important considerations, as well as **sample** Terms of Reference inclusions. The document is intended as a starting point to help First Nation school communities discuss and establish thorough and effective Terms of Reference or governance policies of their own. ***It is expected that the sample will be adapted to reflect local circumstances, as appropriate.***

This sample policy is not offered as legal advice. It is meant to inform relevant considerations at the local level.

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

A. Important Considerations

Important to any education system is strong leadership – including effective governance over education and schools. First Nations in BC vary in terms of their governance structures with respect to education and schools. It is important to understand your governance model, as this gives rise to particular considerations. Generally, the existing First Nation school governance models in BC include:

- **Chief and Council:** In some cases, the schools are under the direct authority of Chief and Council, with no school board or committee in existence.
- **School Board:** In other cases, communities have decided to establish a formal school board (a distinct legal entity, usually under the provincial Societies Act). Such boards may operate at arm's length from Chief and Council (e.g. board members are elected through a community voting procedure), or the Chief and Council may sit as directors themselves on the board. The relationship between the school board and Chief and Council is typically described in the school board's terms of reference or policies and reporting procedures, to clarify how the board is accountable back to Chief and Council. Where incorporated, the board has legal obligations under the governing legislation.

- ▶ **Chief and Council, supported by a Committee/Board:** Somewhere in between the above models are schools that are governed by Chief and Council, which is advised or guided by some kind of an education or school committee or board - which may or may not be incorporated and which is accountable to Chief and Council. Membership on these committees or boards may include elected members or volunteers, and may involve any combination of parents/caregivers, community members and Elders.

Note: Independent Schools: Some First Nation schools are operated as independent schools under the provincial Independent School Act (BC). Independent schools can be governed by an “authority”, which may be: a society within the meaning of the Societies Act; a company within the meaning of the Business Corporations Act or a corporation incorporated under a private Act; or, a person designated, by regulation, that operates or intends to operate an independent school.

For purposes of this paper, the term “School Governing Authority” is used to capture all of these models in a general sense, noting where there are unique considerations or implications for any particular model. Whatever structure is chosen to meet the unique priorities of each community and school, it is important to establish governance policies or “terms of reference” for the School Governing Authority.

B. Purpose of Terms of Reference

The sample terms of reference (TOR) herein have been developed to highlight and support the important governance function of and guidelines for the School Governing Authority. They speak to the role of the School Governing Authority, including:

- ▶ Establishing foundations to guide and direct all activities within the school(s);
- ▶ Structure of the School Governing Authority;
- ▶ Roles, responsibilities and expectations of the School Governing Authority and its members;
- ▶ Operations of the School Governing Authority, including committees;
- ▶ Accountability; and
- ▶ School Governing Authority Policies.

It should be noted that the School Governing Authority’s Terms of Reference are distinct from administrative procedures and policies that are developed and implemented by the principal to provide guidance and direction to staff and the community. Any administrative procedures established at the school level, however, must be consistent with these Terms of Reference and the policy direction established by the School Governing Authority.

The development of these two separate streams of policies and procedures is meant to reinforce the distinction between:

- a) the School Governing Authority’s responsibility to *govern*, and
- b) the principal’s responsibility to *administer* the school (based on strategic direction of the School Governing Authority).

How to Use These Terms of Reference

These sample Terms of Reference (TOR) are intended to offer ideas and assistance to First Nation School Governing Authorities that seek to develop tools and materials in support of its governance role. They are not mandatory and are simply intended to help identify common components of terms of reference for school governing bodies, while allowing for modifications to address the unique circumstances of communities. First Nations are encouraged to adapt these sample TOR and remove or add any content or provisions as necessary or desired. There are placeholders for potential modifications, and indicators where specific information is required.

PART II – TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

TOR 1 – Foundations

Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

1. The School Governing Authority is responsible for setting:
 - a) the vision of the school.¹
 - b) the mission of the school, in furtherance of its vision.²
 - c) guiding principles for the school.³

TOR 2 – Structure of the School Governing Authority

1. The School Governing Authority is comprised of ____ number of voting members who are [selected/appointed/elected] by the [selection body/appointing body] and representative of⁴:
 - a) [Each community of the Nation]
 - b) [Each school within the Nation]
 - c) [Elders]
 - d) [Other]⁵

¹ *Drafting option:* Include an Appendix that sets out a vision statement that answers the questions “what do we hope to become?” and “what do we hope to accomplish?” In other words, it is a shared image of what the school should look like in the future.

² *Drafting option:* Include an Appendix that sets out a clearly articulated mission statement that answers the questions “why do we exist?”, “what is our overall goal”, and/or “how will we achieve our vision?” It is usually a brief, succinct statement that explains the school’s purpose.

³ *Drafting option:* Include an Appendix that sets out Guiding principles that encompass beliefs and values that guide conduct and influence decision-making. These can help create a culture and environment where everyone understands what is important. They reflect the world view and philosophies of a people/community. Values are more specific than mission and vision statements. While a mission statement asks the school to consider why it exists, and a vision statement asks what it might become, core values clarify *how* the shared vision will become a reality.

⁴ The composition of your School Governing Authority should be set out here. These will vary among Nations/communities, depending on the legal structure.

⁵ *Drafting option:* where the School Governing Authority is a board operating under an incorporated entity, include a provision or appendix that sets out the Appointment of Members process, including who selects/elects/appoints and how that appointment is confirmed (e.g. resolution, letter of appointment).⁶ Generally speaking, School Governing Authorities are authorized by, and accountable to, Chief and Council. Variations may exist where the School Governing Authority is a board incorporated under the provincial *Societies Act* (BC) or the *Business Corporations Act* (BC) and is governed by that statute. In those situations, the board’s relationship with Chief and Council may or may not be set out in the board’s governing bylaws or appointment process.

2. The term of appointment for each member shall be ____ years *[with/without]* opportunity for renewal.
3. The School Governing Authority will have ____ number of *ex officio* (non-voting) members who are *[selected/appointed/elected]* by *[selection body/appointing body]* and representative of:
 - a) [Chief and Council]
 - b) [Elders]
 - c) [Parents]
 - d) [Students]
 - e) [Other]
4. The term of appointment for each *ex officio* non-voting member shall be ____ years *[with/without]* opportunity for renewal.

TOR 3 - Role and Duties of the School Governing Authority

1. The School Governing Authority is responsible to and receives its authority from the Chief and Council.
2. The School Governing Authority is responsible for engaging and supporting the school community and building and maintaining a school system that reflects the established vision, mission, values and priorities of the community in relation to education and the operation of the school(s). The School Governing Authority achieves this by:
 - a) Setting the strategic direction through policy;
 - b) Setting annual work plans;
 - c) Establishing policies and procedures;
 - d) Hiring and monitoring the performance of a principal⁶;
 - e) Developing and approving the annual budget; and
 - f) Monitoring and evaluating school and student success.
3. For greater clarity, the School Governing Authority is responsible for:
 - a) **Policy Making:** Establish policies to direct the school principal on the conduct of school business.
 - b) **Education Planning:** Assist the school principal with counsel and advice for the determination of education programs, services, and goals, including School Governing Authority members sharing their experience and knowledge of the education priorities and expectations of the school community in order to inform effective decision-making.
 - c) **Assessment and Improvement Planning:** Work with the school principal to oversee school assessment and improvement planning activities, including determining when the school will undertake an assessment, participating in the assessment

⁶ This should reflect the appropriate position title for the principal/education manager/senior administrator of your school(s), as the case may be. For convenience, the term "principal" is used in these terms of reference, although that will vary among schools. Where the school is an independent school under the provincial *Independent School Act*, "principal" is defined as "the teacher responsible for administering and supervising an independent school."

- implementation, and approving the assessment findings and resulting plans for school improvement.
- d) **School Budget and Financial Management:** Approve and monitor the school's budget, which will allocate staff and financial resources to enable the school to achieve its mission and goals, as well as alerting Chief and Council of any financial issues requiring their attention.
 - e) **Public Relations:** Provide appropriate mechanisms for ensuring two-way communications with parents, families, community members, and the First Nation's staff.
- 4. The authorities, powers and duties of the School Governing Authority rest only with the School Governing Authority as a whole and not with any individual members or committees of the School Governing Authority.
 - 5. While members of the School Governing Authority may be appointed as representatives of their community, their primary role and responsibility is to participate with all School Governing Authority Members in the governance and oversight of the school(s) in the interest of all students, and to ensure that they are grounded in supporting student achievement and well-being.
 - 6. For greater clarity,
 - a) School Governing Authority Members make decisions collectively and no individual Member has the authority to make decisions on behalf of or that bind the School Governing Authority;
 - b) School Governing Authority Members exercise authority of the School Governing Authority only through motions and voting at duly convened meetings where quorum is met; and
 - c) an individual Member has authority only when the School Governing Authority has delegated authority to them through a recorded decision at a duly convened meeting.
 - 7. Individual Members of the School Governing Authority will:
 - a) refer questions or issues not covered by existing policy for discussion and resolution by the School Governing Authority as a whole; and
 - b) refer questions related to administration and school operations to the principal.
 - 8. Where unincorporated, the School Governing Authority will rely on Chief and Council to enter into contracts and agreements for goods and services for the school and serve as the legal employer of school staff and any contractors.
 - 9. The School Governing Authority will fulfill its governance functions according to the policies or procedures of Chief and Council and, where applicable, the laws of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

TOR 4 – Hiring a Principal

1. The School Governing Authority is responsible for recruiting and hiring a principal, head teacher, or other senior position,⁷ who is responsible for implementing the vision, mission, direction and policy established by the School Governing Authority in the day-to-day operations of the school at the administration level.
2. The School Governing Authority is responsible for directing the principal to maintain a safe, culturally relevant and academically rigorous learning environment for all students.
3. The School Governing Authority seeks advice from and provides direction and decisions to the principal on strategic direction, policies and plans.

TOR 6 – School Governing Authority Meetings

1. The School Governing Authority will meet regularly on dates and times it determines and sets out in an annual meeting calendar.
2. School Governing Authority meetings will end no later than 10:00 pm, unless a motion to continue beyond that time is passed unanimously by all members present.
3. Special meetings may be:
 - a) scheduled by a majority decision of the School Governing Authority members, or
 - b) called by the Chair,provided that two days written notice is given to all School Governing Authority Members, along with the agenda for the meeting.
4. All regular and special meetings of the School Governing Authority will be open to the public.
5. By majority decision, a meeting may move in-camera to discuss confidential matters that are related to staff, students, School Governing Authority Members, or other individuals, and which may violate confidentiality if discussed publicly.
6. School Governing Authority decisions and resolutions resulting from in-camera discussions will be recorded in the meeting minutes, unless subject to confidentiality, although the discussion will not be recorded or otherwise made public.

TOR 7 – Chair

1. A School Governing Authority Chair will be selected and appointed by ... *[a process that is appropriate for each community, e.g.: elected by a majority of the School Governing Authority Members; or a consensus decision of the School Governing Authority members; appointed by Chief and Council, or other appropriate mechanism]*.

⁷ For convenience, the term “principal” is used in this document, as appropriate, although it is recognized that positions vary among schools. In some cases, one individual may fulfill the role of Education Manager / Administrator and principal. In other cases, the roles and responsibilities are separate and distinct. There are many ways that First Nations have structured the staff who have a role in leading First Nations education and schools. Where the school is an independent school under the provincial *Independent School Act*, “principal” is defined as “the teacher responsible for administering and supervising an independent school.”

2. The term of the Chair will be one year from the date of appointment.
3. The Chair will appoint a School Governing Authority Member to carry on the Chair's duties in their absence [*or possibly a Vice-Chair may be selected through an appropriate process*].
4. The Chair will:
 - a) convene and preside over meetings;
 - b) prepare and present a meeting agenda;
 - c) coordinate the preparation of meeting materials;
 - d) represent the School Governing Authority inside and outside the community; and
 - e) call special School Governing Authority meetings when necessary.
5. The principal will be expected to attend School Governing Authority meetings, unless directed by the School Governing Authority Chair, on direction of the School Governing Authority Members, to not attend part or all of a meeting.
6. The principal will take minutes at School Governing Authority Name meetings.
7. Other staff may, at the principal or Chair's request, attend meetings as required.

TOR 8 – School Governing Authority Committees

Appendix A – Committee Representation (*set out which committees are established and participation of members on those committees; consider requirement of terms of reference for each committee*)

TOR 9 – Accountability

1. The School Governing Authority has accountabilities in respect of the following:
 - a) the First Nation Government (Chief and Council)
 - b) the First Nation/community
 - c) Parents (members of First Nation)
 - d) Parents (non-Member parents)
 - e) under governing statute, if applicable (e.g. Society Act)

TOR 5 - Conflict of Interest

1. A conflict of interest, real or perceived, exists when:
 - a) A School Governing Authority Member or their immediate family member(s) may personally benefit from a School Governing Authority decision that the Member may affect or influence, and/or with respect to which the Member has access to information that is not readily available to the public or community the School Governing Authority serves, including a benefit of a financial or a personal nature; or
 - b) a School Governing Authority Member is also a member of another entity that may be beneficially affected by a decision of the School Governing Authority.
2. When a real or potential conflict of interest exists, or may be perceived to exist, the School Governing Authority Member must declare the conflict and excuse themselves from discussion and decisions in relation to the interest at hand [in accordance with the School Governing Authority's conflict of interest policy and procedures].⁸

TOR 10 – Honoraria

1. Each School Governing Authority Member shall receive an annual honorarium for attending authorized School Governing Authority meetings, as determined by the School Governing Authority.
2. The honorarium shall be paid ... [*e.g. after each meeting, or monthly based upon each member's attendance at a number or percentage of scheduled meetings, or an alternate basis*].
3. School Governing Authority members will be required to record their arrival time on an official sign in sheet at every meeting.
4. School Governing Authority Members who incur expenses in carrying out their duties, as authorized or directed by the School Governing Authority, will be reimbursed upon submission of a properly completed and approved expense claim, together with supporting receipts as required in accordance with financial policies.

TOR 10 – Professional Development

1. School Governing Authority Members are encouraged to attend such conferences and workshops as are necessary to access relevant professional development, with consideration given to time and budget limitations.

⁸ It is good governance practice to establish clear conflict of interest policy and procedures to govern potential real or perceived conflicts of members. It may also be desirable to establish a code of conduct setting out standards of conduct for members.

TOR 11 – Policy Development

1. Written policies will constitute the rules for the School Governing Authority and for the operation of the school, and will be readily available to school families, staff, and community members as a record of how the School Governing Authority exercises leadership of the school.
2. Policies will be developed and implemented according to the following framework:
 - a) The development and approval of new policies and the revision of existing policies is the responsibility of the School Governing Authority;
 - b) The School Governing Authority may establish a sub-committee to develop policy and delegate to the principal responsibility for consultation, research, and drafting appropriate policies, and for advising the School Governing Authority on potential conflict with existing policies or provincial or federal law;
 - c) All policies will be written, clearly designed, and consistent with the school vision, mission statement and guiding principles;
 - d) Before being approved, new policies and policy revisions will have a first and second reading at two separate School Governing Authority meetings to ensure there has been adequate opportunity for full consideration of the proposed policy and, for greater clarity, only in exceptional circumstances, and through a motion of the School Governing Authority, will a policy be approved following only one reading;
 - e) The principal will establish and maintain an orderly plan for recording and making accessible the policies adopted by the School Governing Authority and will develop and follow administrative procedures required to implement them;
 - f) Questions on the interpretation of policies will be addressed to the principal and, in the event of a perceived error or misinterpretation, will be referred to the School Governing Authority Chair, who may decide to bring the matter to the full School Governing Authority.
3. Where immediate action is required and no policy exists, the principal is authorized to act in accordance with best-established practice, using the following criteria:
 - a) the action is in keeping with the vision, mission statement and guiding principles and any strategic direction set by the School Governing Authority;
 - b) the action meets any legal requirements; and
 - c) the action is consistent with best practices for the safety and well-being of the school and its students, families, staff, and the community.
4. If the action has the potential to cause controversy or difficulties, the principal will make best efforts to brief the School Governing Authority Chair before taking action, depending on the immediacy of the situation, and will seek policy direction at the next meeting of the School Governing Authority.



APPENDIX D

► SUMMARY

THINGS SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, EDUCATION MANAGERS /
ADMINISTRATORS, AND PRINCIPALS CAN TALK ABOUT TOGETHER

- ▶ Do we share the same understanding of the school's accountability to Chief and Council and how school matters will be reported to Chief and Council?
- ▶ Do we have established terms of reference or a constitution and by-laws for the operations of our School Governing Authority?
 - If yes, do they work well for us?
 - Do they need review and possibly revision? If so, how do we want to address that issue?
- ▶ Do we have a mutual understanding of the governance role of our Authority?
- ▶ Do we have similar perspectives about the complementary leadership roles and responsibilities of the School Governing Authority, the Education Manager / Administrator (if relevant), and the principal?
- ▶ Do we share the same understanding of the school's purpose and why the Nation created its own school? Has that information been appropriately shared with all school staff?
- ▶ How can we work together to demonstrate a mutual and unwavering commitment to high expectations for all of our learners?
- ▶ Do we share the same commitment to language and culture programming and how our Nation's language and culture can be embedded in the school?
- ▶ How can we all help to ensure school staff know how to honor community protocols for using language and culture materials, songs, and dances, and for respectfully involving elders and other knowledge keepers in school activities?
- ▶ How can we all work together to support this priority for our school?
- ▶ Should we collaboratively discuss how our school budgets, including our SEP funding grants, are used?

- ▶ Is our school submitting the required workplan and reports so that we access our full SEP funding grants? (Workplans are generally required in the Fall, interim reports are generally required in February, and final reports are due in June)
- ▶ Do we have an established mission statement (or an equivalent expression of our vision and expectations for the school)? Is it current? Is it widely known?
- ▶ Do we all regularly use the mission statement to guide our decision-making and monitor our progress? Do school staff know and use the mission as a guide for their work?
- ▶ How does our school monitor our effectiveness and plan for school improvement? Do we use the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process? If so:
 - Do we all know when our school is scheduled for a review?
 - Do we share the same understanding of the critical role of School Governing Authority members in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process?
 - Are we all aware of our most current School Growth Plan?
 - Do we regularly talk about our School Growth Plan, our progress in achieving the goals, and any changes that might be necessary as we implement our plans?
- ▶ If our school needs to access Reciprocal Tuition (tuition payments from the Province of BC for students who are ordinarily resident off-reserve) or offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood to graduating students, is our FNSA Certification up-to-date (or FNEA Certification for PFN schools)?
- ▶ Do we share the same expectations for how we will collaboratively review student achievement and attendance data? How often will we discuss information about student outcomes? What data will we discuss?
- ▶ Is our school meeting our reporting requirements?
- ▶ Does the principal have the support and resources they need to fulfill their important leadership roles and responsibilities?
- ▶ Is the school meeting its fundamental responsibilities for student safety and legal requirements, such as ensuring appropriate criminal record checks and meeting the school's requirements related to employing certified teachers? (It is not the role of the School Governing Authority to perform related tasks, but it is their responsibility to confirm they have been done).
- ▶ Is the principal practicing self-care, so they are able to effectively run the school and support staff and student success?
- ▶ Would a principal performance review be useful to help identify the principal's strengths and areas for professional growth?
- ▶ Are we satisfied with the engagement of families with the school, including their involvement in decision-making? If not, how can we address this issue?

- ▶ Are we satisfied with our connections to the community? If not, why not?
- ▶ Do we have positive relationships with other community agencies for the benefit of students and families?
- ▶ Do we share an understanding of who speaks for the School Governing Authority and who speaks for the school? Do we feel comfortable with our respective roles?
- ▶ Do we have clear procedures for how the school budget will be created and monitored? Do we share the same expectations related to financial management?
- ▶ Are we receiving the financial information we need in a timely way, and is the information in a format that we all agree is easy to understand and clear?
- ▶ Would any School Governing Authority members benefit from training to help fulfill the Authority's financial management responsibilities?
- ▶ Is our school eligible for Reciprocal Tuition? If so, are we all aware of the need to apply for that funding annually, and is our FNSA or FNEA School Certification up-to-date so we are eligible for the funding?
- ▶ Do we share an understanding of our different roles and responsibilities for discussing, drafting and approving policies? For developing procedures?
- ▶ Do we feel that our policies are complete and up-to-date? If not, how can we arrange a process to review and, if necessary, revise our policies?
- ▶ Is everyone, including school staff, adequately informed about / aware of school policies? If not, what can we do in response?
- ▶ What types of professional development would benefit the School Governing Authority? How can those be arranged?
- ▶ Is there adequate attention to the professional development of school staff? What resources are needed to build the skills and knowledge of the people who work in the school?
- ▶ Do we offer effective orientations for new members?
- ▶ Are our meeting procedures clear, and do they result in effective meetings that facilitate equitable input into governance decisions?
- ▶ Do we regularly think about succession planning? Are we building capacity for continued effective governance? Do we strive to build enthusiasm for the work of the Governing Authority and encourage new people to take part?
- ▶ Do we feel that a self-assessment or an evaluation would benefit the School Governing Authority? If yes, how can that be arranged?

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