



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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

**FINAL DRAFT FOR SHARING PURPOSES
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FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

#113 - 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
604-925-6087 | Toll-free in BC 1-877-422-3672

info@fnesc.ca
www.fnesc.ca | www.fnsa.ca

A HANDBOOK FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES – Draft for Review and Feedback

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SECTION ONE

▶ INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

1.1 First Nation Control of First Nation Education

Education is a fundamental human right. 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*. Education is a basic human right and an “indispensable means of realizing other human rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹

Specifically, First Nations have the right to establish and control their 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, have a strong sense of self, and develop a diverse set of skills and knowledge in order 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.

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. This builds from 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 Nation's "First Nations Control of First Nations Education" policy document.

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

The gap in educational outcomes between First Nation students and non-First Nation students is a persisting legacy of colonialism, and concerted efforts and proactive measures are required to eliminate this gap and contribute to reconciliation in education. First Nation control of First Nation education is a key mechanism to achieve this goal, 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

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 systems that meet the needs of their learners. The System also includes complementary collective organizations with mandates to assist First Nations in supporting their students, and to assist First Nation schools.

1.2.1 Complexity

First Nations education in BC is highly complex, involving federal, provincial and First Nation roles and responsibilities, and therefore requiring collaboration and cooperation to ensure that all First Nation students are supported to achieve successful education outcomes. The System is supported by agreements with Canada and British Columbia that set out roles and responsibilities to achieve systemic shifts (through law, policy and practice) to support First Nations control and student success. These agreements address the funding structure and set out many areas of collaboration in support of First Nations, and include primarily:

- ▶ *Education Jurisdiction initiative: On July 5, 2006, a BC First Nations Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement* was signed by Canada, BC, and the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) on behalf of First Nations. This comprehensive package of 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 built upon the prior 2012 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA), which was signed by Canada, British Columbia and FNESC, and witnessed in support by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA). The purpose of BCTEA is to achieve 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.

This ongoing work 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. It includes extensive work to design and implement culturally relevant programs and services to support greater success for First Nations students.

1.2.2 Diversity

A key component of the BC First Nations Education System for Kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) – and a practical expression of First Nations control of First Nations education – are the more than 100 schools established by First Nations in BC. The schools vary tremendously, given the distinct languages, cultures, values, and perspectives of the First Nations that operate them. They also vary in terms of size, with student populations ranging from as few as three or four students to nearly 300 students, and staff numbers ranging anywhere between one to dozens. The demographics of the communities and capacity of the First Nation generally determine the grade levels offered, with some schools providing K4 and K5 only, to others providing K-12. Student age may include 4-year olds to adults,

again based on community demographics, needs and capacity. Some of the schools are brand new, while others have been operating for close to five decades. Some are located in or near urban settings, while others are extremely remote, sometimes hundreds of kilometers from the nearest center, many of which are accessible only by plane or boat.

1.2.3 Varied School Governing Models

Crucial to any education system is strong leadership – including effective governance over education and schools. First Nations in BC vary in terms of their school governance structures - just as their cultures, languages, demographics, community priorities and capacity vary greatly.

To date, there has been limited opportunity for First Nations in establishing 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 recognizes 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 will bring about a new First Nations Education Authority and Community Education Authorities, which will be recognized legal bodies once established.

As these new opportunities are taken up, the current landscape, based on the complex jurisdictional framework, includes a broad 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.
- ▶ 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 bylaws, and elaborated upon through policy 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.

- ▶ 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 or board, which may or may not be incorporated. Membership on these committees or boards may include elected members or volunteers, sometimes involving only parents / caregivers, or some mix of parents / caregivers, community members and Elders.
- ▶ Some schools may be guided by some kind of education or school committee (non-legal entity), accountable back to the Chief and Council.
- ▶ 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 handbook, the term “**School Governing Authority**” is used to capture all of these models in a general sense. Where there are unique considerations or implications for any particular model, those are noted in the handbook.

It is important to understand that the School Governing Authority is *distinct from* school administration, which is the day-to-day operation of the school.

Often, regardless of which School Governing Authority structure is in place (i.e. a committee, School Board, etc.), Chief and Council may designate a Band employee (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 roles vary.

Most First Nations schools also are typically lead by a principal, head teacher, or other senior position.² For convenience, the term “**principal**” is used in this Handbook, 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

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.”

are many ways that First Nations have structured the staff who have a role in leading First Nations education and schools.

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. But overall, the School Governing Authority is responsible for establishing the overall strategic vision, direction and policy for the school. The principal is then responsible for implementing that vision, direction and policy at the school administration level.

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, within the current landscape, as one aspect of that 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 into implementation.

Regardless of the governance model, School Governing Authorities 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 this. In recognition of this, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) are committed to supporting First Nations in developing the capacity of their School Governing Authorities so that they can continue to effectively operate 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, considering the issues within the context of the unique opportunities and challenges that are associated with operating a First Nation school. The information presented is meant to apply to a wide range of circumstances and, so, 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.

1.3.1 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.fnesc.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 Prince George and Vancouver 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 Nations Governing Authorities – included in the following pages.

KEY PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

The standards below 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, attempt to 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, but it generally supports a specific focus on the success of students enrolled in the community's schools.

The standards have been written to represent promising practices. The hope is that the standards will provide education governance inspiration, providing 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. The standards are intended to serve as a basis for reflection.

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;
- ▶ reflect its 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 its 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 effectively, conducting business according to transparent, 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 philosophy, pedagogies, methodologies, curriculum 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 vision, 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 meetings 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 towards annually approved school goals.
- g) works with the principal as a team 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 should be made by the principal and which decisions are to be made by the Governing Authority.
- i) does not direct or interfere in staff matters that are the jurisdiction of the principal.

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

Performance Indicators: the School Governing Authority:

- a) makes student-centred decisions at all times.
- b) through its policies, procedures, and practices, respects and maintains the confidentiality of students, parents / caregivers, staff, and School Governing Authority 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 School Governing Authority 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 inform their advocacy and identify areas of needs, and bases its advocacy on substantive evidence to focus attention appropriately and validate its efforts.
- e) understands policies 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 and social groups to address the range of issues that affect the interests of children.
- h) keeps leadership 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 Governing Authority 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 contribution 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 the School Governing Authority as 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 the 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 on 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 vision, mission, values, 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 that there is 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

For First Nations schools, effective School Governing Authorities also reflect First Nations' right to design their own educational 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

2.1 The Importance of Leadership

School Governing Authorities are responsible for leading their schools and students to be successful. This is primarily done through the setting of a vision, strategic direction, priorities and goals for the school, as set out in such things as a vision or mission statement, a school growth plan and policies.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS: EFFECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

Research shows that school leadership agencies with high levels of student achievement exhibit specific habits and characteristics. Numerous research reports conclude that effective School Governing Authorities:

1. 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.
2. Have strong shared beliefs and values about the potential for all students to learn and about the school's ability to teach all children at high levels. They have an "elevating" view of students, and see the school's job as releasing each learner's potential. They recognize difficulties (such as poverty, lack of parental involvement, 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.
3. Spend less time focusing on operational issues and administrative details and more time discussing plans and policies to improve student achievement. They focus on establishing a vision supported by policies that target student outcomes. They understand that poor governance is generally characterized by micro-management.
4. Establish collaborative relationships with school staff and the community, recognizing that strong community connections are one of the preconditions for productive change. They use strong communications structures to inform and engage both internal and external partners in setting and achieving relevant goals.
5. Are data savvy. They embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and they use objective facts to drive continuous improvement. Effective authorities use substantive information to identify specific student needs and justify decisions based on data. They avoid relying on subjective opinions of what works.
6. Align and sustain resources, including professional development, to meet established goals. Their decisions about the use of resources – financial and otherwise – are aimed at a clear purpose.
7. Lead as a united team with other educational leaders, each from their respective roles, with strong cooperation. They make an effort to build a supportive work environment for staff based on mutual trust, with the intention of enabling all staff to succeed in their roles.
8. Share a commitment to assessment efforts with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making, and are able to clearly describe the purposes and processes of school improvement initiatives and identify their own role in supporting those initiatives
9. Take part in capacity development to build a shared foundation of knowledge, 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 behavioural parameters for governing members (Ontario Public School Boards' Association. www.opsba.org). Governance of First Nations schools also includes incorporation of the Nation's values, principles and traditions in decision-making processes.

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 the school on their meeting agenda, and making timely and informed decisions. Typically, Chief and Council decisions are made by band council resolution (for example, setting education policy or establishing budgets). Where the School Governing Authority is an incorporated entity under legislation, such as a society, the board of directors is required to follow their constitution and bylaws (procedures) for holding meetings and making decisions. In most cases, the School Governing Authority formally takes direction from- and 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, and Chief and Council exercises little to no control over the board or school (except, perhaps, to appoint the board members).

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 a clear vision and purpose is set for the school.
2. **Focus on learning and results.** The School Governing Authority's focus should always be on the results it desires to achieve, with a clear mission and well-defined vision, values and expectations to help get there. 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 advance its vision and purpose. This typically includes a schedule for the completion of both short and long-term goals and objectives, with ongoing assessment of progress 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 policies 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 vision and purpose of the school.
6. ***Communicate.*** The School Governing Authority has a responsibility to ensure that relevant people are informed about the school’s vision, purpose or 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 vision. The budget is not solely to maintain the school’s annual operation; it is an integral part of the School Governing Authority’s work towards its goals.

A School Governing Authority’s continued emphasis on these governance tasks enhances its effectiveness and helps it to achieve its purpose.

Governing a First Nations school is not like governance in other education systems. In a First Nations 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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2.3 The Role of School Governing Authority Members

School Governing Authority members have a responsibility for participating in discussions and contributing to decision-making by the Authority, bringing forward their perspectives and experiences to those discussions. Generally speaking, regardless of the governing model, those who participate on a School Governing Authority are committed to supporting their school and helping to ensure the educational success of their community's children and youth. They are passionate about the opportunity to support a school setting that will promote students' sense of identity and understanding of their Nation's history, traditions, language and culture.

In developing a good understanding of the role of the School Governing Authority, members will be better able to fulfill their roles within the Authority and have a positive impact in the governing process.

Often, new members of a School Governance Authority – whether it is Chief and Council, an advisory committee, or a board – begin their role with little specific training or experience related to the governance model. 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 members have a much more intimate knowledge of the school, its staff, and the parents / caregivers and students who are being served.

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 setting the overarching vision and strategic direction of the school, shaping the school's future direction. In doing so, they have a responsibility to represent and work on behalf of the entire school community.

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, then, 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 upmost 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 that they act honestly and in good faith, with a view to the best interests of the society. They must also act with a level of skill and competence that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in similar circumstances.

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 keep hands off the actual operation, 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.

Given the importance of the 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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Not all School Governing Authority members perceive themselves as “leaders” - some 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 think positively about their contributions and the valuable perspectives, thoughts, and opinions they bring to 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. It is the combination of many voices that will make a School Governing Authority successful.

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 the decisions are made. Where the School Governing Authority is incorporated as a society under legislation, the board of directors has certain legal obligations under the legislation (and common law) and operates as a collective, speaking with “one voice.”

Generally speaking, anything that members of the School Governing Authority do, individually or collectively, is at the direction of the School Governing Authority – based on a decision already made or to be ratified by the School Governing Authority at a subsequent meeting. This helps 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, or individually speak publicly or make comments on behalf of the School Governing Authority when no permission has been given for such representation. Even the Chair (in the event of a society) 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 integral 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 you represent as a School Governing Authority member?

It is not uncommon for members of a School Governing Authority to have roles with other organizations or bodies, including within the community. One example is where the Chief and Council have appointed a Councilor to the School Governing Authority, along with other members of the community. That Councilor has responsibilities to both the School Governing Authority *and* the Chief and Council. Where the School Governing Authority is an incorporated entity, such as a society, the member has specific legal obligations as a member of the board of directors.

Generally speaking, the member is obligated to “act in the best interests” of both entities, which may give rise to competing obligations or interests from time to time. A common scenario for this situation occurs when the Chief and Council is setting the budget, including the budget for the school. The member, as Councilor, must make decisions with the rest of Chief and Council to address and balance all of the interests and needs of the band/community. As a member of the School Governing Authority, the member will have an 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 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. Similarly, 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 his or her potentially competing interests.

In First Nation communities, this can be difficult. A good management practice is to have in place guidelines to address conflicts of interest. This helps members navigate situations where they may feel torn between the two bodies. Such guidelines will set out when the member must declare a potential conflict of interest and perhaps abstain from certain decision-making.

Where Chief and Council is the School Governing Authority, education and the school will be on the “agenda” of Chief and Council at their meetings, and they will make decisions as needed. In this case, the Chief and Council operates in the best interests of the band/ community members. They may or may not be advised by an education committee.

Where the School Governing Authority is entirely separate from Chief and Council, such as an incorporated society, the members as a collective make decisions in the best interests of the Authority and the school. Any accountability to Chief and Council will be set out in the society’s constitution and bylaws. This is an important aspect of the overall structure to ensure accountability to the Nation’s governing body and overall community.

SECTION THREE

► WHY FIRST NATIONS ESTABLISH SCHOOLS

One of the most important roles of a School Governing Authority is understanding the student body of the school and the needs and priorities of those students, as well as the broader community. Good school governance begins with having a clear understanding of why the school exists and, from that basis, setting the direction for the school's future. The establishment of a school is a practical expression of authority and control over education. And, in some cases, establishing schools on-reserve addressed very practical issues, such as building a school closer to home so that students do not have to travel long distances for their education.

Each First Nation establishes its school for its own unique reasons. Generally speaking, though, 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. It is intended that the operation of their own school will promote the transmission and preservation of their language and culture to children and youth. As such, those program areas tend to be of primary importance in the schools. First Nations take very seriously their responsibility to ensure that their education setting meet the needs of their students, in a manner that is reflective of their cultural identity and in a way that prepares learners to be positive citizens of their communities and the world

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 people who are not from the community. New school principals, in particular, should be informed about the community's education values and vision for the school. The School Governing Authority, in setting the overall strategic and policy direction for the school, helps to ensure that all school staff, especially the principal, maintain a clear focus on the school's purpose, as well as 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 environment, curriculum, instruction, behavioural structures, and programs.

The existence of First Nation schools is a key part of the overall BC First Nations Education System. First Nations schools established the FNSA as a collective support organization.

First Nation schools also are increasingly becoming "schools of choice," as evidenced by the significant amount of funding the Province pays First Nations for off-reserve students to attend those schools through the reciprocal tuition arrangement (described more in section 7.1).

Effective First Nations 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 Nations 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 among First Nations is that their schools provide 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 Nation 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 also shows that language learning is a strong contributor to the educational achievement of all learners. For First Nations students, especially, the academic benefits of learning their languages are enhanced because of its powerful role in helping build self-esteem and positive self-identity, and contributing positively to students' personal development. These factors are all vital components of student success.

Understanding this value of language learning is clearly reflected in the work of First Nation schools, which generally have direction to emphasize and promote First Nations cultures and languages. Most First Nation schools in BC offer some type of distinct language and culture classes, and are making efforts to integrate language and culture learning throughout the curriculum. Some First Nation schools have reached, or seek to reach, the level of language immersion settings.

School Governing Authorities set the vision and direction when they prioritize language learning, and this informs and helps shape the planning and monitoring of their school's initiatives in this regard, including helping to connect the school's language and culture efforts with the work of other community agencies that have a role in this area.

In addition, School Governing Authorities (perhaps with the Education Manager / Administrator) have a role of 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 - as following all protocols is fundamental to reinforcing for students the importance of respecting the community's traditions and values. Once the relevant protocols have been clearly shared 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 the appropriate community authorities for more direction and help when needed.

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

FNESC and FNSA are now managing a comprehensive First Nations Language and Culture program, which provides grants to First Nations schools for students on the Nominal Roll totaling approximately \$14 million annually – in addition to the \$5 million that is provided directly to schools for Language education through the BCTEA funding formula.

First Nation schools funded according to the BC Tripartite Education Agreement are provided details about the Language and Culture grants each year, including information about their specific funding amounts as well as the process for accessing their allocations and reporting on the sponsored activities. School Governing Authorities should be aware of – or expect to be advised by the principal about - this funding opportunity and have an opportunity to help identify the school's Language and Culture plans and priorities.

FNESC and FNSA are also implementing a range of programs and services to provide collective language and culture supports to First Nation schools and communities, including:

- ▶ school visits from a Language Curriculum Manager and Language and Culture Coaches to support staff and students;
- ▶ regional First Nations school information sharing sessions;
- ▶ workshops on curriculum and resource development; and
- ▶ a range of professional development opportunities for Language teachers.

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 Nations with schools in BC share the goal of providing quality education to ensure that all students are learning at high levels and develop a sense of pride and positive self-identity. Research shows that high-performing schools invariably embrace a culture of high expectations for all learners. For learners in First Nation schools, high levels of learning is interpreted broadly to include the transmission of the First Nation's worldviews, 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 begin to take place, and researchers who study school improvement have repeatedly found that the following principles are associated with improved teaching and learning.

- ▶ *All students can learn.* If schools operate on the belief that every child 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 significant role in student achievement, but schools are far from powerless in effecting positive change. Higher-achieving schools have a greater belief in their staff's capacity for improving student achievement and are less likely to deflect responsibility or blame other people or circumstances for challenges.
- ▶ *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 lead the school community in considering critical 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 would we have to make to create such a school?
- ▶ What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress?

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

When considering high levels of learning for all students, a key consideration is the specific needs of children and youth in care

It is important for School Governing Authorities to ensure that adequate attention and supports are provided to ensure success for children and youth in care who attend their schools. 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 them achieve their goals. Cooperation between First Nations and public schools is also vital to ensuring that the needs of this population of students are met if they transfer between school systems. Further information will be shared soon, as a new Indigenous children and youth in care strategy evolves.

SECTION FOUR

► DEFINING THE SCHOOL'S VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION

4.1 Establishing the School's Vision, Mission, Values and Goals

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

In order for everyone to feel comfortable in understanding the purpose of the school, the School Governing Authority should set a clear vision and mission for the school that guides the implementation of daily activities. 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 priorities – and avoiding distraction by the numerous programs and solutions constantly being promoted in the field of education.

- A **vision statement** 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.
- A clearly articulated **mission statement** 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.

- ▶ **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.
- ▶ Finally, **goals** describe what needs to be accomplished to implement the vision and mission. They describe steps to be taken and when, who is responsible for initiating and/or sustaining each step, the timeline for each phase of the activity, and the criteria to be used in evaluating progress.

Some schools may not yet have a clearly defined mission and vision for what the school can achieve. In those instances, the School Governing Authority and the principal, often with the Education Manager / Administrator, will ideally work with the community to identify educational values and set out a vision and mission. In their review of research about the relationship between leadership and student achievement, Roberts and Marzano reported a positive, statistically significant correlation between the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the goal-setting process and student achievement (cited in CSBA, 2017).

If a vision and mission have already been developed, it is the role of the School Governing Authority, with help from the principal, to ensure that the vision, mission and related values are shared, clearly communicated and understood, and that people commit to using them as a guide for implementing the school's programs and activities.

If the school does not yet have an established vision and mission statement, there are a few things to consider before beginning the work of establishing them.

- ▶ **Community collaboration:** There are many different ways to approach the development of a vision and mission statement, though commonly the process is very collaborative. Effective visions and mission statements are those that have input and buy-in from the community they impact, which may include other First Nation communities and off-reserve students and parents / caregivers, if appropriate. Including the broader community in the process of their development will increase both acceptance and commitment to the school's vision and mission, and demonstrate that the community's input is truly valued.
- ▶ **Informed decisions:** While broad input is key, it is also important to remember that informed decisions require informed individuals. For example, it is critical that everyone participating in determining a school's vision and mission statement understand that schools can and do make a critical difference in the lives of children. All children have the capacity to learn, and it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that all children *do* learn as a result of the school's operations. This fundamental understanding is important for creating a meaningful and pro-active vision and related mission statement.

- ▶ **Conditions are right:** In undertaking the fairly significant and involved task of developing a community vision and mission statement for its school, it is important to have the right conditions for positive and constructive dialogue. Communities have a range of issues that they must deal with daily. While some may consider education important, they may be inundated with other urgent issues. Also, any community may periodically experience tensions, which may negatively affect the way in which some people interact with the School Governing Authority or the school. If such challenges exist, the development of the school's vision or mission statement should be considered carefully and cautiously – perhaps even waiting for a better time to begin work on them.

The School Governing Authority should discuss these matters with the principal. 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 community dialogue. Alternatively, 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 development process, an independent person may be brought in to serve as a facilitator, as it can be difficult for a principal to concurrently lead a process and be an active participant.

The School Governing Authority may seek the recommendations of the principal on an appropriate development process and, if relevant, a facilitator. The School Governing Authority may choose to have the principal do all of the background work, with the School Governing Authority retaining overall control of the vision and mission statement by approving, adjusting or declining the principal's recommendations, and by being fully involved in the development process as it unfolds.

4.2 Monitoring the Implementation of the Vision – Focusing on Results

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

Working toward the school vision and mission statement also includes building in mechanisms to evaluate and document progress made toward their achievement, and it is important to ensure that the school is making genuine improvements by adopting effective monitoring and assessment mechanisms that provide student outcomes information and enable 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, parents / caregivers, school staff, and other community members, with the goal of identifying strengths and creating a plan for improvement.

FNESC and FNSA sponsor First Nations 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, and the schools are then assisted in implementing their School Growth Plans through funding grants and continued staff support.

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

It is important that First Nations School Governing Authorities fully understand the potential consequences of not participating in the Assessment Process according to the established five year cycle.

- A. *Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) requires that all First Nations schools 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 three processes outlined below according to a five-year schedule.*
- 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 to 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.

- B. *The School Assessment and Certification Process is a central component of the 2009 Reciprocal Tuition Agreement (described more in Section 7.1), which allows the provincial government to pay the tuition fees for school-age students living off-reserve and for eligible non-status students living on reserve lands who are enrolled in First Nations schools that do not have Independent school status. Approximately \$15 million is paid annually to First Nations according to this agreement.*

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

First Nations schools that enroll eligible students (if they are not Independent schools) must complete the Assessment Process in time to renew their Certification on schedule, or they will be unable to access Reciprocal Tuition.

- C. *First Nations schools that want to award eligible students the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood Diploma (if they are not Independent schools) must have current Certification through successful completion of the First Nations Schools Assessment Process.*

First Nation schools that do not have Independent School status will not be able to offer the Dogwood/Adult Dogwood Diploma directly to their eligible students if their Certification has lapsed as a result of not undertaking the School Assessment Process according to the expected schedule.

Anyone interested in further information about these important issues can contact FNEsc and FNsa.

It is also important to note that First Nations 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.

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 vision, 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 effectiveness, meet school planning needs, and maintain accountability to families, communities and funding agencies.

Research highlights the range of benefits that can result from thoughtful efforts to measure educational success. Information - whether quantitative or qualitative - can help the entire school community to 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. As stated by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010):

...we will not know whether or not all students are learning unless we are hungry for evidence that students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most essential to their success. We must systematically monitor each student's learning on an ongoing basis and use evidence of that learning to respond immediately to students who experience difficulty, to inform our individual and collective professional practice, and to fuel continuous improvement.

Effective use of meaningful data can help ensure no students fall through the cracks, and can assist the school community to assess instructional effectiveness, allocate resources wisely, and report on trends in student outcomes. Or as Killian and Bellamy (2000) state:

Understanding and using data about school and student performance are fundamental to improving schools. Without analyzing and discussing data, schools are unlikely to identify and solve the problems that need attention, identify appropriate interventions to solve those problems, or know how they are progressing toward achievement of their goals. Data are the fuel of reform ... In short, using data separates good schools from mediocre schools.

4.4 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 define clearly how the school will use evidence to support school growth would be in line 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 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 are committed to supporting schools in thoughtfully using evidence to improve school success and student outcomes. For example, FNESC/FNSA provide assistance for the collection and analysis of student achievement data by sponsoring related professional development, as well as the implementation and scoring of the Acadience and Canadian Achievement Test 4 (CAT4) standardized assessment tools. Also, the Data Records and User Management System (DRUMS) provides an integrated infrastructure for managing student information at the school level, and for analyzing and reporting aggregate data at the provincial level. Further information about these opportunities is available through FNESC and FNSA.

New initiatives to collect and review detailed data in order to monitor the effectiveness of classroom instruction and school programming may be concerning to some, if they are unsure about the purposes. School Governing Authorities can help to address this concern by modeling a perspective of data use as a helpful tool for educators, and by avoiding overly critical responses if student achievement results are problematic to begin. The School Governing Authority can model a focus on the importance of using data to enhance understandings of student needs and to verify that the efforts of the school community are leading to the desired outcomes. Overall, positive perspectives of data use on the part of School Governing Authorities can help create positive perspectives from school staff and families, ultimately contributing to better informed strategies to support all students.

When considering data use, School Governing Authorities need 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 alter instruction, and School Governing Authorities can help to address that challenge by:

- ▶ making data use a priority;
- ▶ investing in data management systems;
- ▶ allocating resources to professional development for data use;
- ▶ approving staff time to build their capacity to thoughtfully analyze and use data; and
- ▶ 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 all First Nations school reporting requirements are met, and they should expect principals to provide relevant updates about student results and the school's reporting.

FIRST NATION REPORTING REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO FIRST NATION SCHOOLS

For all First Nation schools that are funded pursuant to BCTEA, the First Nation (Band Council) is required to annually provide to Canada the following:

- a) Nominal Roll Student Census Report; and
- b) 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; and
- ▶ administration of standard learning assessments.

To support First Nations and First Nations schools in meeting these reporting requirements, FNEESC collects the necessary data: i) through DRUMS (if the school participates on that data management system); or ii) through the submission of a completed PDF form.

Additionally, FNEESC annually collects the following information through workplans submitted to access the BCTEA First Nations schools Language and culture 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; and
- ▶ 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 school a template report for parents / caregivers that can be completed and shared as appropriate.

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, leadership roles with respect to the school. The School Governing Authority is responsible for understanding the community's education priorities and establishing the school's purpose through a vision, mission statement and strategic level direction (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 – in the daily operations and administration of the school, so that the vision and mission are advanced and met. Both the School Governing Authority and the principal operate within the broader context of exercising First Nation control over First Nation education, and advance the First Nation education system at the community level.

It is important that School Governing Authorities have a clear understanding of their higher-level policy-setting role so that their attention does not instead drift towards the day-to-day operations and administration of the school – that is, the activities and 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.

April 2013 Capacity Building Focus Group Participants

Research shows that many governance members begin their tenure with only a vague understanding of the distinction between the differing school leadership roles (CSBA, 2017), and a challenge for many School Governing Authority members is distinguishing between the role of the Authority and that of the principal because the distinct but complementary responsibilities of each can easily become confused.

Most School Governing Authority members naturally are interested in becoming directly involved in arising issues and problems because they care about the school and the students. Some members even think they are responsible for personally helping to solve difficulties and respond to concerns of parents / caregivers 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, the School Governing Authority, as the governing body, is accountable for everything that happens within the school. As such, 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 members *should* involve themselves in all aspects of the school's operations.

Although the School Governing Authority retains ultimate accountability for the school, it 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. They 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 these questions. While the Authority's role is to listen to, discuss and make decisions regarding school governance issues, members are not necessarily 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 positive working relationship between the School Governing Authority and its principal is vital to the school's success. The consequences of a poor relationship can be devastating 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 Recognizing the Importance of the Principal

Effective School Governing Authorities fully acknowledge that the position of the principal is critical to school effectiveness – perhaps even more so in schools that operate within difficult circumstances.

Studies of educational data have shown that principals have a clear effect on student achievement, and researchers 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. These approaches to improvement have included raising standards, strengthening teacher professional development, refocusing schools around the primary goal of student achievement, and holding schools accountable for results. 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 demonstrably and positively affect student achievement, and a similar perspective is shared by DeVita (2007), who 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.

As cited by the CSBA (2017), a meta-analysis of 70 studies found strong links between specific principal behaviours and student learning, and importantly, 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. 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 all practices that help communities to attract and retain excellent teaching staff (Hattie, 2003).

5.1.2 Understanding the Complexity of the Principal’s Role

It is also important to recognize that, while the role of the principal is central to the success of a school, it also is extremely demanding. Ideally, School Governing Authorities will understand the complex and varied responsibilities of principals, so that they are able to identify the right individual to fulfill this role and effectively provide resources for the individual in that role. This will include monitoring the principal to determine if additional supports are needed.

Principals are expected to make daily, and often immediate, decisions that affect the lives of students, teachers, other staff members, parents / caregivers, and community members. The principal is expected to lead the school, 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 a full school 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. This typically involves establishing school-level policy and guidelines to guide the day-to-day operations and administration of the school. Such policy would be consistent with the high-level policy and strategic direction set by the School Governing Authority in the vision, mission statement and related values, etc.
- ▶ ***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, undertaking supervision

of learning, ensuring quality curriculum, promoting meaningful professional development, using data to guide decision-making, and keeping the school community focused on its 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 the Community:*** Another primary role of the principal is to maintain strong and positive connections with the community it serves. First Nation schools operate completely within the context of their communities, and effective principals understand and embrace this fact. 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 a respectful, constructive relationship with the community.

All of these roles are complementary and equally important. It is important for a principal to balance these roles 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, in particular, are often very pressing and require immediate action.

Given this reality, it is very important that School Governing Authorities fully understand that, in order to be truly effective, principals must have enough time and support to pay adequate attention to all of their functions. Additionally, principals, with support from their School Governing Authorities, must be aware of how they spend their time and implement effective time management tools.

Support for First Nations School Principals

FNESC and FNSA's commitment to supporting all of the principal's important roles is reinforced through the First Nations schools Professional Growth Process (PGP). Established almost two decades ago, the PGP is intended to ensure appropriate and consistent principal leadership within First Nations schools in BC. Schools that are participating in the PGP receive support from "Regional Principals" who work with school-based principals to reflect upon and strengthen their practice. Regional Principals assist First Nation school principals through a combination of in-school visits, video coaching, and email/telephone support, helping principals fully understand the complexity of their roles, modeling supervision of instruction practice (including effective teacher observations and follow-up approaches), demonstrating good instruction, assisting with scheduling / planning of school structures, guiding principals in accessing available services, providing professional advice, facilitating professional development, and helping with the design and implementation of frameworks for monitoring and responding to student data.

Additionally, each year a First Nations schools Principals' Short Course includes presentations on topics of interest to principals and vice principals of First Nation schools, and facilitates networking amongst school leaders who might otherwise work in relative isolation – geographically and professionally. Information about the Principal's Short Course is posted to www.fnsa.ca each spring.

School Governing Authorities that are interested in more information about these opportunities can contact FNESC or FNSA.

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

While a positive partnership approach is ideal, in the end it must be remembered that the principal works for and reports to the School Governing Authority. School Governing Authorities, as described above, are ultimately responsible for overseeing the school, but they support 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 set by the Authority. Generally, 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 these tasks according to overarching policies and plans approved by the School Governing Authority.

Additionally, the principal is usually responsible for providing regular reporting to the School Governing Authority on key school-related matters (except for the 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 finances³;
- ▶ classroom updates and information about how school programs are progressing;
- ▶ data regarding student achievement, for review and discussion; and
- ▶ being apprised of any personnel matters requiring serious attention, including discipline and possible termination actions.

School Governing Authorities should also be provided regular opportunities to:

- ▶ be integrally involved in any school assessment activities undertaken (the School Governing Authority should lead decisions about when to commence on an assessment process and it should be fully informed about and approve the results); and
- ▶ be involved in the creation of all school policies, with a central role in any processes for policy review and/or changes.

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 resources policies, those should be carefully followed. If the School Governing Authority independently manages its human resource procedures, the aspects that relate to the principal's employment should be carefully considered.

³ 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 their school employment practices.

To begin, an *Employment Handbook for First Nations Schools* can be found at www.fnesc.ca.

In addition, a *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. The samples provided may require minimal to significant changes in order to make them suit each specific school and community setting. See www.fnsa.ca for more information.

Additionally, FNESC employs a Human Resources Coach who is available, upon request, to support First Nations in considering employment issues.

PLEASE NOTE: none of these resources are offered as legal advice. First Nations are encouraged to seek legal advice, as appropriate, to review their own policies and 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 and areas requiring attention for improvements or additional supports 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. A principal may be involved in a performance review for a variety of purposes. A principal may want to get feedback from an external expert, or 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, increase confidence in the principal from teachers, families, the School Governing Authority, community members, and students – and, ultimately, provide information that may assist First Nations in their own decisions regarding employment and/or professional improvement steps for their principals.

The FNEC/FNSA First Nations School Leaders Performance Review Process

FNEC and FNSA are piloting a First Nations School Leaders Performance Review Process, which is founded upon the perspective that school leadership is a critical element of school success, and that a meaningful performance review process can assist school leaders in the realization of their full potential. The developed Process recognizes that in First Nations schools, the role of school leader can be undertaken by people who are employed using a number of different terms – the principal, the vice principal, the head teacher, the school administrator, or even a team of school leadership personnel. It is intended that the Process that has been developed will 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.

But remember: while having clearly defined performance criteria and a predetermined evaluation process may result in useful feedback, it should not be the final factor in determining a principal's job security. Instead, it is the role of the Governing Authority to continually monitor whether it is satisfied with the performance of its principal, which is the fundamental factor in decisions about the principal's continued employment.

5.1.4 What if the relationship between the School Governing Authority and the principal is not working?

As much as it is desired, not all relationships between School Governing Authorities and principals will always be positive and effective.

There is always the potential for a School Governing Authority and the 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 management decisions for the principal. Again, 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, vision, values, goals and policies for 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 this framework, some differences of opinion will still be normal and not cause for drastic action. These should be resolved through discussion.

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

In the end, if feedback and support for the principal do not resolve serious concerns, the School Governing Authority, as employer, will need to consider its options in continuing any relationship with the principal, as the School 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, the School Governing Authority and principal will work together proactively and constructively as a unified governance 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.

WORKING AS A LEADERSHIP TEAM TO MEET ALL LEGAL, POLICY AND PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

Clearly, a key consideration for all school leaders is the importance of meeting all legal, policy, and funding requirements related to employment and student safety issues.

Child Protection and Duty to Report

For example, 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 a related template policy and procedures for schools to adapt and then approve – as follows.

Rationale

Children have the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. The [–Principal–], teachers, and other employees of [–School Name–] are in a unique position to be aware of indicators of possible physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect. Identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect requires every individual to take appropriate action.

Where applicable, the provincial *Child, Family and Community Service Act* mandates a legal responsibility for an employee (CFCSA s.14) who has reason to believe that a child needs protection as defined in the Act (CFCSA s.13) to report the matter to a Child Welfare Worker. For students residing in [–Community Name–] this is [–Name of Community Child Services Agency–]. For other children attending the school this is the Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD).

2.1 Duty to Report

2.1.1 All school employees have the legal duty to report a child at risk, where the parents / guardians are unable or unwilling to provide protection for the child.

2.1.2 All school employees will follow the guidelines as set out in the *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers* (June 2017).

Procedures:

- ▶ When a staff member suspects that a student is suffering or has suffered abuse or neglect, they will immediately make a report to MCFD and/or [–name of the Community Child Services Agency–].
- ▶ After the staff member has called MCFD and/or [–Community Child Services Agency–], they will immediately inform the [–Principal or relevant person in your community’s situation–].
- ▶ If a staff member is unsure whether they have reasonable grounds to report to MCFD and/or [–Community Child Services Agency–], they must confer with the [–Principal–] or designate.

- ▶ Once the report has been made and the [–Principal–] or designate has been informed, the school principal/designate will be the lead school contact and he/she will take direction from MCFD and/or [–Community Child Services Agency–], if required.
- ▶ At no time, will a school staff member or [–Principal–] or designate contact the parents / guardians unless advised to do so by MCFD or [–Community Child Services Agency–].
- ▶ In the case where a school employee is the alleged offender the [–Principal–] or designate will take direction from MCFD and/or [–Community Child Services Agency–], if required, and no school staff or [–Principal–] or designate will attempt to question or interview the alleged offender.
- ▶ The [–School Governing Agency–] will endeavor to develop a memorandum of understanding with MCFD that outlines further procedures when an investigation is necessary that will provide details regarding notification of visits, access to student(s), child advocacy, when communication with parents / guardians can resume, and how any other information will be shared.
- ▶ Confidential information will be treated with upmost care and attention. Information will be shared on a need to know basis and will contain only pertinent details.
- ▶ [–Community Child Services Agency–] and the [–School Governing Agency–] will endeavor to provide support both during and after critical incidents to students, their family, and staff.

Supporting Documents

- ▶ *The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook_serviceprovider.pdf
- ▶ *Supporting Our Students: A Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse.* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/independent-schools/sos_guide_independent_schools.pdf

(Note: the federal *Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* became law on June 21, 2019. Its purposes are: to recognize Indigenous People’s jurisdiction over child and family services, as part of an inherent and Aboriginal right to self-governance; to establish national standards in this area, in response to the TRC’s Call to Action #4; and, to contribute to the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This law will have implications for the longer-term applicability of the provincial CFCSA in First Nation communities going forward, as First Nations resume the exercise of jurisdiction over children and families.)

Criminal Record Checks

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 template policies such as:

- ▶ All Employees who will be working with or around children must have a Criminal Record Check.
- ▶ If the results of the Criminal Record Check disclose a criminal record that is relevant to an applicable position, the school will review whether the individual is suitable for employment.
- ▶ Employees are required to disclose any additional criminal charges or convictions.
- ▶ If deemed necessary, Employees may be subject to a subsequent Criminal Record Check.

Also:

- ▶ Any person acting as field trip supervisors / drivers must obtain a criminal record check before participating.

To provide further assistance with this issue, the *2020 Employment Toolkit for First Nations Schools* includes extensive sections outlining requirements related to criminal record checks for employees, and a Criminal Records Checks pamphlet is available from www.fnesc.ca, which includes information about how First Nations schools with and without Independent School Status can implement their related responsibilities.

Criminal Record Checks and First Nations Schools

Prepared by
The First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) and
The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)
September 2015

What should you know about criminal record checks?

It is imperative that all First Nations schools ensure that individuals who work with children directly, or who have unsupervised access to children, have successfully completed a criminal record check.

Normally, written offers of employment for anyone who will be involved with children should include a criminal record check as a condition of employment.

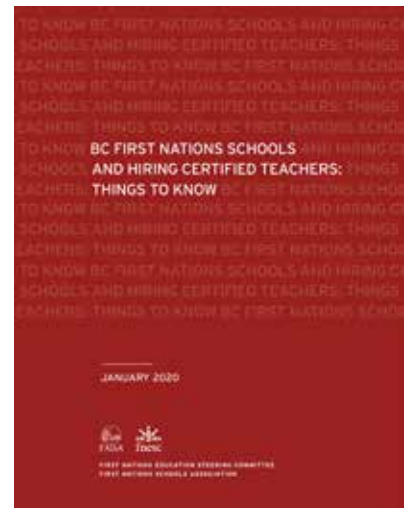
This pamphlet outlines the steps to be taken to address this issue. The information is prepared for First Nations schools that have Independent School Status and those that do not, as the requirements and procedures are different in each of those cases.

Anyone requiring further information is encouraged to seek legal advice. The information included in this Handbook is NOT presented as, or intended to serve as, legal advice. First Nations are encouraged to seek independent legal advice as required regarding their particular employment circumstances.



Hiring and Employing Certified Teachers

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.



1. What Teachers Can Be Hired To Work in First Nations Schools?

First Nations schools in BC must employ teachers who have a teaching certificate in good standing issued by a provincial education authority or a recognized Canadian teacher certification authority.

Pros: Flexibility – you can hire teachers with a variety of certificates.

Cons: Challenges can arise because Canadian provinces have very different protocols in place for certifying and decertifying teachers, resulting in varying levels of protections and potential problems.

- ▶ When the BC Ministry 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 the BC Ministry.

NOTE: *First Nations schools that access Reciprocal Tuition must employ only teachers with a valid BC Ministry 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.*

2. When Hiring a Teacher, How Can You Verify An Applicant's Certification?

Teacher Certificate Verification Card: Individuals with a teaching certificate can download confirmation from the Ministry website, which you can ask to see and check the “valid to” date.

Teacher Online Registry: All teachers who hold a current teaching certificate will be listed on an online registry, which also provides information about the teacher’s current status.

Employers Area: The BC Ministry website includes an Employers Area, which provides potential employers with a record of the teachers’ employment in BC so they can confirm an applicant’s work history. All First Nations schools can access this list.

- ▶ First Nations schools with independent school status must upload lists of their teachers annually.
- ▶ First Nations schools without independent schools status are also able to upload lists of teachers.

Contributing to this list can be helpful for tracking the employment of certified teachers in BC – sharing important information with all potential employers.

3. *What Are Your Responsibilities Related to Reporting?*

Employers may sometimes have to discipline or terminate a teacher for misconduct or incompetence, or a teacher may resign before disciplinary action can be taken. If this is the case, it is important that the TRS receives information as the regulator of teachers in BC. This information sharing is important for the safety of students.

- ▶ First Nation schools with independent school status must follow the reporting requirements set out in the Independent School Act.
- ▶ For First Nation schools without independent school status, there are still legal reporting obligations for individuals who are certificate holders or who hold a letter of permission.

For more information about any of these issues, contact the BC Ministry of Education’s teacher regulation services office.

SECTION SIX

▶ **ADVOCATING, COMMUNICATING AND WORKING COLLABORATIVELY**

School Governing Authorities are advocates for the school community, and they will ideally play a key role in building positive relationships and promoting the school, both within the community and with people and organizations outside of the community.

In fact, 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 the school is pursuing its vision and mission, and serving student and community needs.

Studies of high performing school settings show the beneficial impact of governance agencies modeling and making explicit professional behaviours that will foster effective teaching and learning. 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 support a culture of trust in the school community in several ways:

- ▶ ***Engaging with the community*** - collaboration helps to strengthen community ties and build trust.
- ▶ ***Fostering mutual accountability*** - when School Governing Authorities include educators and administrators in the development of initiatives, set realistic timelines, and provide necessary resources, school community members are more likely to be confident that they will be supported to succeed.

- ▶ *Modeling positive and professional relationships* - the School Governing Authority can model professional and respectful relationship-building, setting a positive the tone for community interactions with the Authority and the school.
- ▶ *Making 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 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.

April 2013 Capacity Building Focus Group Participants

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 often are expressed passionately. The School Governing Authority must filter, interpret, and make sense of the information and input it receives and, unfortunately, 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. And, ultimately, 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, is it necessary to keep the school's vision and mission front and centre in decision-making, and follow the bylaws, established policies and procedures put in place to guide the School Governing Authority.

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.

April 2013 Capacity Building Focus Group Participants

6.1 Effective Collaboration and Communications

Effective School Governing Authorities build broad commitment to their school's vision and mission through a strong, transparent, two-way communication program, and inclusive decision-making.

School Governing Authorities typically identify a spokesperson that speaks for the Authority, based on the decisions and direction of the Authority. 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 can often become an issue for consideration, particularly if information is not shared equally among all members. At School Governing Authority meetings, each member receives the same information and hears directly all of the comments made. Away from these meetings, communications and interactions among members is more informal, and members may share and discuss information individually and 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.

The School Governing Authority should ensure that any communication from the chair or principal is 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.

6.1.2 Communications and Work with the School Principal

The School Governing Authority makes decisions at its meetings according to its 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. Communication with the principal will not necessarily occur only at formal meetings. In First Nations communities, contact between School Governing Authority members and the principal occurs regularly, often daily, through informal contact and discussion as people go about their everyday business.

Some Governing Authorities may encourage informal communication between members and 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 and not related to specific Authority business or 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 any 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. Any questions or concerns should be raised and addressed at meetings of the Authority.

Finally, School Governing Authority members should expect that the chair and the principal will have contact as 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, communication between the chair and the principal may not be well received and should be done only when necessary, and then carefully. Regardless, any communication or direction from the chair to the principal should be consistent with decisions by the full School Governing Authority at its meetings.

6.1.3 Communicating with Other School Employees

Research suggests that effective governance agencies regularly communicate a high level of confidence in staff and can actually identify specific examples of the ways they show their appreciation – such as recognition at community meetings or meetings of the governance board.

However, it is important to remember that individual School Governing Authority members should approach direct communication with the school's employees with caution. The Authority speaks with "one voice" and the most appropriate communication with employees is through the principal. When this channel of communication is bypassed, confusion, misinformation and misunderstandings may emerge.

That said, it is not uncommon for School Governing Authority members to have direct contact with employees for a variety of reasons. They may have simple questions about the school's operation that do not require the principal's time personally to answer. In the case of minor questions, direct communication is not usually problematic. Also, 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.

The point is that formal communication about school matters should be consistent with the roles and responsibilities of the School Governing Authority and established procedures. It is important to avoid talking about school business in these situations. Employees who are experiencing a difficulty at work may try to communicate directly with School Governing Authority members; but, if the principal is left out of the information loop in communications, problems very often develop.

To avoid this situation, the School Governing Authority and the principal should mutually determine appropriate protocols for communication between the School Governing Authority and staff members. Usually, such communication is carried out through the principal, and misunderstandings can occur if that protocol is by-passed and staff members take concerns directly to the School Governing Authority. The School Governing Authority and the principal can establish procedures by which potentially difficult issues and grievances will be addressed, and the principal should communicate the determined approaches clearly to all school staff. Then everyone should follow the procedures closely.

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

- ▶ If school employees contact 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 channels.
- ▶ If you *do* hear out the employee, be sure to contact the principal immediately and share the information you received, and advise the other School Governing Authority members of this exchange to ensure transparency.

6.1.4 Communicating and Engaging with Parents and Families

It is very important that the School Governing Authority model and expect effective communications with families. Parents / caregivers have a key role to play in the education of their child, and their engagement in their child's learning and in 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

educational literature shows that home environments matter for school success. Study after study has shown that families can make a valuable difference to their children's learning, and that when families are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve.

It is critical for School Governing Authorities to encourage the principal and staff to remember that their relationships with parents / caregivers should extend beyond simple communications alone. School Governing Authorities can help principals and support all school efforts to truly engage families in the education process. School leaders, especially principals, 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.

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 ultimate role and responsibility of parents / caregivers for setting appropriate education goals for their children.

Of course, the relationship with and accountability to parents / caregivers in the context of First Nation schools is particularly important. An emphasis on the crucial role of families and communities in their children's development and learning is entirely consistent with First Nations education traditions. This understanding led the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) to comment:

Many Aboriginal leaders speak of resuming control of education, since First Nations and Inuit exercised complete control of education for countless generations. Rather than being a new responsibility, self-determination in education was practised by families and communities in earlier times.

Students whose parents / caregivers are visible in the school and actively engaged in home learning activities understand that their families value learning, which will encourage students to take school seriously and strive for success. Parents / caregivers 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 and improving school programs and learning environment by donating their time and effort. Parents / caregivers who are involved in school activities are more aware of what is happening in the school, and when given information about the school's goals and student achievement, they will better understand the school's efforts and challenges and help the school to progress.

Accordingly, all schools should make every effort possible to build school-family connections 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 prioritize working with families as valued partners in the education process. Schools should empathize with the challenges that exist for families and communities, but should focus on the school's beliefs and the assumptions that shape its practices with families, adapting things that the school can control to encourage families being in the school. Generally, schools should offer families information and assistance to help them constructively engage in the education of their children

In terms of communications, parent 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 staff employee, caution is needed.

- ▶ One reasonable approach is to listen to the complaint, make sure you understand the concern, then refer the parent to the principal. Then call the principal to communicate that the parent will be calling to discuss a specific issue.
- ▶ Otherwise, you may wish to call the principal yourself and pass along the information, and ask that the principal handle the situation directly.

What is most important is that parents / caregivers feel heard, and that the principal has an opportunity to respond to any concerns parents / caregivers 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, information and feedback and processing that information to ensure understanding. A communication problem for some School Governing Authority members is assuming that a 'message sent is a message understood.' School Governing Authorities must develop communication strategies to expose people to ideas many times and in many different ways before they can assume that their messages are being heard and understood, and an Authority should only make the assumption that its message was received if it has feedback mechanisms that serve as a communications check.

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 and monitoring the principal's efforts, and supporting all school approaches to engage families for the benefit of the school, 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 First Nation Parents/Caregivers

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. Each Club receives support materials, newsletters, Parents Club calendars, 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 FNEESC and FNSA office.

6.1.5 Communicating and Working 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). Of course, 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.

In fact, in all situations, challenges faced inside the school are often connected to and compounded by things that are happening outside of the school in the community. Good community relations are, therefore, critical to ensuring positive learning situations

for all learners. In addition, the connections and expertise that come from interacting with people, organizations, and agencies throughout the community can be invaluable to a school's initiatives. School improvement necessarily requires community will and support, 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).

What components of governance can promote community involvement?

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 the values and needs that will guide involvement efforts. An organized community involvement structure and policy can ensure a process 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. Also, schools can implement proactive steps to bring community members into the building and encourage participation in school events. 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 or other school-to-work program. In addition, communities and schools can work in partnership to support families in their efforts to strengthen their children's academic achievement. When families have difficulty doing what is needed for students, schools, other organizations in the community, and other social service agencies can collaborate to help provide assistance and draw families into partnerships around common concerns.

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 help work with principals to address all of the issues listed above. In fact, it is critical that the Authority and principal collaboratively discuss their related roles and activities in order to ensure that consistent and complementary approaches are in place.

6.1.6 Working Collaboratively with Other Service Agencies

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

Many First Nations are therefore making great efforts to coordinate and integrate community services and agencies, and schools should have a particular interest in this area. Schools commonly require service delivery assistance from health and social service agencies, especially for students who have exceptionalities.

Also, particularly important is the link between the school and early childhood education agencies. The link 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.

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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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 fully exposing students and parents / caregivers to service agency personnel who 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, parents / caregivers will be more familiar with the people involved and they will be better aware of why the agencies do what they do. A consistent emphasis on the fact that everyone is working in the best interests of children will also help prevent potential misunderstandings.

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 report any potential challenges immediately. These situations can severely 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.

School Governing Authorities should assist principals in establishing positive relationships with other community agencies, and commit to consistent messaging when communicating outside of the school context.

6.1.7 Communicating 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.

If the media determines there is a story, reporters can be very aggressive in pursuing information. They may directly contact School Governing Authority members, the principal, employees, families, and community members. If the media can get comments that are contradictory, they 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 be delivered to the media to avoid negative impacts or issues.

There are several strategies a School Governing Authority can pursue if the media desires information about the school. First, 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, with relevant information and facts included as the Authority determines.

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

Again, 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 possible of this important public relations mechanism. They may also seek advice on a best practices media policy.

SECTION SEVEN

► FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Once a school's vision, mission statement and goals have been established, the School Governing Authority must assess what resources are necessary for success. A critical aspect of good governance is making strategic decisions about accessing and aligning resources so they will have the greatest impact.

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

It is important to note that these obligations vary depending on the nature of the funding agreement. First Nations with block funding or 10-year grants have different management parameters and reporting requirements under their agreements than First Nations with annual funding agreements.

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

- ▶ curriculum and programs that adequately reflect the students' identity and reality;
- ▶ the recruitment and retention of appropriate human resources;
- ▶ training and certification of language and culture teachers;
- ▶ professional development for school staff;
- ▶ a safe school environment that fosters learning;
- ▶ instruction and programs adapted to the needs of all students, including students with exceptionalities;
- ▶ access to technology to facilitate learning, including language and culture learning;
- ▶ extra-curricular activities;
- ▶ library operations;
- ▶ skills training; and

- ▶ implementing Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, methodologies, and pedagogies.

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; and ensure that financial operations follow accepted accounting practices. The Authority can direct its principal, if appropriate with the Education Manager / Administrator, to propose a process inclusive of relevant administrative checks (e.g. finance committee), criteria, and a schedule for the preparation and approval of the budget. When this information is received, the Authority can either accept the proposal as presented, or suggest changes it feels are necessary.

To monitor the budget and expenditures, the School Governing Authority creates policy as direction to the principal and/or Education Manager / Administrator, and requests that budget information be presented in a format acceptable to, and understandable by, its members. For example, the Authority may direct that the 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.

Sound financial management ensures adequate accountability and helps to foster respect for and trust in a school, meaning this aspect of school governance is a crucial part of a School Governing Authority's role. 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: i) an operational budget; and ii) 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 members, administrators, clerical and other staff; and utility, transportation and custodial costs. For most schools, the majority of operational costs are for teacher/staff expenses.
- ▶ 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 be clearly understood and followed in this regard.

First Nations needs to be aware of all available education funding. The School Governing Authority can set policy to ensure that there is an ongoing effort to keep apprised of current funding and related funding formulae. For example, Chief and Council may direct its Education Manager / Administrator to do this, or the School Governing Authority (whatever model it may be) may direct that the principal carry out this task.

Basically, the purpose of the budget is to carry the organization forward into the next year of its operation. For some School Governing Authorities, budget planning basically involves thinking about what is required to maintain existing programs and services, and then to consider 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 make budget adjustments if required. Generally, the principal spends as directed and keeps the School Governing Authority informed about the school's financial situation.

FUNDING SOURCES TO KNOW ABOUT

BC Tripartite Education Agreement

In June 2016 the BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success (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 the BC Ministry of Education’s funding model for public schools, with specific adaptations to reflect the unique circumstances of First Nations. The Ministry’s funding model is described in detail in its Operating Grants Manual (OGM).

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 Nations on Indigenous Services Canada’s (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, the BC Ministry of Education agrees to provide 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 the BC Ministry of Education (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 and must make annual application to the BC Ministry of Education. More information is available in a Reciprocal Tuition Handbook, available at www.fnesc.ca.

Transportation Capital (School Bus Purchase) Grants

Additionally, through BCTEA, FNESC and FNSA are now managing funding from ISC for the purchase of school buses for First Nation schools. Following direction from a Working Group comprised of representatives of First Nation communities and schools, this funding is being allocated to First Nations based upon factors including bus age, mileage, and bus route conditions. Grants allow for the purchase of a range of bus sizes depending on school needs, with ninety percent of the grants provided up-front and the remaining ten percent provided based upon proof of purchase.

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 will be sent to all schools regularly, and it is important that the requested information be submitted for effective funding management.

Special Education Program

For almost two decades, a Special Education Program (SEP) administered by FNESC and FNSA has supported First Nation schools in meeting the needs of their students with 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. A separate portion of the BC SEP funding is also available 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 also complemented by a range of collective initiatives to create economies-of-scale and increase access to necessary expertise and special education materials by all First Nation schools in BC. Those services include the following.

- ▶ SEP staff share information with schools, answer questions, organize services, and provide overall management to ensure the effective operation of the program. SEP also provides professional development through workshops and in-school support from SEP Coaches who have a range of specialized skills. To date, all schools that have requested support from a SEP staff member or Coach have received it before the end of the school year.
- ▶ SEP-sponsored Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) provide teachers and education/learning assistants with information and language development strategies that are of benefit to all students, and assessment and intervention recommendations for specific students with exceptional language learning needs.
- ▶ Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Physical Therapists (PTs) provide families and school staff with relevant training and provide needed student assessments and follow up, including intervention recommendations and supports.
- ▶ First Nation schools are invited to participate in a provincial-level Coordinated Psycho-Educational Assessment initiative for students referred for potential learning and behavioural disabilities; individual psycho-educational assessments are sponsored to determine students' needs, establish follow-up procedures, recommend interventions, and provide direct supports for students, as appropriate.
- ▶ Services through the SLP, OT, PT and Coordinated Psycho-Educational Assessment initiatives are allocated through an application process. To date, all schools that have met the application criteria have been provided these types of supports.
- ▶ Additional specialists are providing autism-focused assistance for students identified through assessments and SEP staff visits to schools.
- ▶ Behaviour Coaching visits and phone calls are scheduled when requested, with first priority given to schools that enroll students with exceptional needs who do not have access to behaviour supports through school-based counselors.

Finally, specialized supports and materials are provided for students who require specific assistive technologies in order to access the curriculum and demonstrate their progress in learning.

Information about the First Nation Language and Culture Program funding grants and support services is outlined in section 3.1 above.

Some First Nations are also accessing funding through Jordan's Principle, especially for special education programs and services.

All First Nation schools are welcome to request further information about these program areas.

7.2 Questions and Answers About the School Governing Authority's Budget Responsibilities

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.

What should School Governing Authorities know about financial audits

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.

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. They 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 their decision-making and in 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 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 plan a significant process to review and finalize policies of their own.

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 that set the direction for schools, including:

- ▶ conflict of interest;
- ▶ code of conduct;
- ▶ human resource (HR) management, unless the school follows the band's HR policies (with relevant FNEsc and FNsa supports for employment and personnel issues available);
- ▶ special education;
- ▶ school administration and operations;
- ▶ safety and emergencies; and
- ▶ staff performance reviews.

In addition, two critical areas for thoughtful policy development are attendance and information and communications technologies.

Attendance Policies

Research is clear that students who have the best chance to succeed in school are generally those who attend school on a consistent basis. Regular school attendance is an essential part of the learning process and crucial to graduating from school with a strong foundation for further studies and a successful career. Evidence shows a strong correlation between poor attendance and the possibility that a student will drop out of school before completing their secondary education, leaving affected students more likely to become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in the poverty trap, dependent on welfare, and involved in the justice system. 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 serious consequences of attendance challenges, School Governing Authorities are strongly encouraged to thoughtfully engage the school community in designing appropriate policies – and to consider a range of other activities to address student absences.

Help to Consider Attendance Issues

A Toolkit For Raising The Attendance Rates of First Nations Students In British Columbia is available to help First Nations and First Nations schools consider issues related to student attendance at school, 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. Copies can be accessed from www.fnesc.ca.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policies

The increasing use of technologies in schools now places new responsibilities on school leaders. Schools need to organize and manage technology capabilities and applications in instructionally appropriate, equitable, and sustainable ways. The power of new technologies as learning tools also requires that school staff have the training and in-service they need in order to use computers to raise student achievement. Teachers may need professional development to become fluent in using ICT 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 raises a range of critical questions, including how it should support teaching and learning in schools, how students can use it in the most enriching and meaningful ways, and how teachers can help students develop media literacy and understand how new information technologies shape reality and whose values control the medium.

Many educators receive little preparatory support for using these media effectively, and much of the training that teachers receive often focuses primarily on technical matters rather than pedagogical concerns. All school staff also need to understand their professional responsibilities related to personal and professional use of ICTs and potential problems that can arise, and student safety issues related to ICT use, as well.

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

8.1 Questions and Answers About School Governing Authority Policies (Adapted from Thomas, 2002)

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 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. The procedures should outline the principal’s role in implementing the School Governing Authority’s policies.

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 the policies?

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 develop and 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 guidebook. But not all decisions of the School Governing Authority need to be collected and published in the policy manual; the more important decisions are usually translated into policies and then included in the manual. Other 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, and 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 and feedback. 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; trying 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.

Supporting First Nation School Record Keeping Practices

FNESC and FNSA also have prepared a Student Record Keeping Handbook for First Nations Schools in BC in an effort to assist schools in adopting and maintaining student records in ways that reflect effective practice and that meet their needs. The Handbook provides information related to student files, confidentiality, and student record policies and procedures. This document can be found at www.fnsa.ca.

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 come to their role with a range of experience 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, and research shows that effective authorities take part in team development, sometimes with their staff leaders, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

Moreover, for effective School Governing Authorities, learning will not be a one-time event. As understandings grow, learning needs will change. Research (CSBA, 2017) supports the conclusion that useful areas for training might include:

1. 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;
2. Learning about ways to improve student outcomes to help board members become champions of learning in how they set goals and policies—and make investments—so that all students receive the instruction and supports they need to achieve their potential;
3. Reviewing current research and best practices in order to ensure that decisions reflect the best thinking in the field of education and child development; and
4. 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, as highlighted in the handbook prepared by Thomas (2002), separate from any welcoming events and social activities that are planned, it is critical that School Governing Authorities provide effective orientations to new members. Doing so will clearly demonstrate that the Authority is committed to ensuring that incoming members are knowledgeable, prepared and skilled.

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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In fact, many School Governing Authorities approve a policy confirming an orientation program for new members, declaring the need for new members to be properly prepared for their invaluable work. The specific topics to be covered in the orientation may be listed in the policy.

Who plans and conducts the orientation is important. 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 also 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. But while it may be seen as very positive that the Authority has adequate trust and confidence to let its principal undertake this important task, having the principal present the orientation in isolation may confuse new members regarding roles and reporting structures. It may be fine to have the principal present information and explain the school's operations, but it is generally not appropriate for the principal to tell members how to do their job. It would be

better for any existing 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 the governance role and responsibilities. In fact, experienced 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 may include 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 other staff as time permits.
- ▶ A thorough explanation of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Governing Authority and the principal;
- ▶ A presentation of approved planning documents regarding the school's vision, mission statement, values and goals;
- ▶ A review of the policy manual and an explanation of policy processes and key policies;
- ▶ An overview of the budget and current documents explaining the financial operation of the school; and
- ▶ An introduction to 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 meeting procedures, including an indication of 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 documents and school assessment project documentation;
- ▶ A list of any committees and their terms of reference;
- ▶ Budget documents; and
- ▶ The school calendar.

Orientation issue – maintaining confidentiality

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

9.2 Supporting Principal and Staff Professional Development Efforts

In addition to being attentive to their own development, School Governing Authorities can set an overall strategic objective of supporting the ongoing development of school staff, and then ensure that resources for related activities are included in the budget.

Research clearly shows that teachers and principals matter. Research also shows that individual teachers and principals differ significantly in their effectiveness. In fact, individual differences in educators will never go away, but new and useful forms of professional development should reduce those differences significantly.

In addition, 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.” Providing access to high quality, appropriate support and opportunities for professional learning can

actually help to retain educators who might otherwise become frustrated and 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 / Learning Assistants Teachers, 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 professional development opportunities to keep up-to-date and able to inform staff about current research and practice (Strong, 2013), with the following issues important for principal training.

- ▶ Managerial tasks, such as discipline, human resource management, finance 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 teachers in becoming leaders.
- ▶ Family and community engagement.
- ▶ Public engagement strategies and/or media relations training.
- ▶ Stress management.

Generally, professional development for school principals is key - not only for principals themselves, but also as a way to model the importance of continuous learning and to clearly demonstrate that enhancing one's abilities is so vital that principals are willing to allocate some of their time to increase their own knowledge and skills (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 development programs actually include several strategies in one theme, such as a workshop that provides formal learning, combined with coaching and/or time with colleagues to discuss and plan for ongoing implementation. A professional development committee may be established to make recommendations to the School Governing Authority on appropriate topics for development.

Further, there is a growing consensus of researchers and educators that ongoing, school-based professional development is more effective than conventional one-time workshops. For example, numerous studies suggest that one-time professional development workshops do not always lead to changes in classroom teaching. In other words (Martin, 2008):

We will have to go beyond the typical “sit and get” event that an educator attends in the hopes of gathering tidbits of information to take back to the classroom. While there is well-meaning intent on behalf of both those delivering the message and those receiving it, more often than not, traditional professional development only provides an inspiring and motivating moment.

In this regard, schools are increasingly looking to coaching and other relationship-based professional development strategies to improve the skills and performance of school staff. Coaching and training can help staff consider improvements in instruction, planning, assessment practices, behavior management, and parental and community engagement practices.

School Governing Authorities can openly discuss the school’s professional development plans with the principal, jointly exploring a range of options and the various types of training and coaching that can be tried – whenever possible identifying options that are tied to the reality of the community and the various education issues it is facing (FNEC, 2015).

Regardless of what approaches are selected, School Governing Authorities are encouraged to recognize the need for ongoing growth of their staff, as new ideas are critical for continually improving school and classroom practices, and ultimately enhancing student success. School Governing Authorities can:

- ▶ Share the perspective that adults can have a positive impact on student achievement, and that staff capacity development is essential to improving teaching and learning. Research shows that the leadership’s support for professional development can have a meaningful impact on the school’s commitment to staff learning (CSBA, 2017).
- ▶ Invest in extensive professional development, making it a budget priority and ensuring staff have access to relevant information and communications technologies to allow them to participate in cost-effective options.
- ▶ Participate in planning professional development that emphasizes the link between teacher training 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 school principal should work together to regularly review staffing requirements, and when necessary focus on the relationship between professional development and succession planning, including exploring:

- ▶ how talent can be developed from within the school;
- ▶ whether employees or volunteers have the required skills, knowledge, experience, and the desire to be promoted;
- ▶ necessary activities, professional development, and training options to prepare employees for other positions within the school; and
- ▶ a strategy for the transition process (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 what staff is doing and why they are leaving the school and community for professional development purposes. 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 the ways in which the training will benefit students in the school. Pro-active communication is the key.

SECTION TEN

► SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY PROCEDURES

School Governing Authorities should be very clear and intentional about their decision-making processes, and research shows that when effective strategies are used, members have more time and energy – during and outside of meetings – to focus on the factors that support better student outcomes: 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 and business 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 also set a meeting schedule so that members know when they will meet, and ideally members will receive an agenda and related materials in advance for review. The Authority should regularly review its meeting procedures (which may be set out in policy or bylaws) with a view of 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) as 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 had been 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 a very serious problem; or
- ▶ an incident that affects the ability of the principal to fulfill a critical aspect of his or her 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 a member have an actual or a perceived conflict of interest in a matter under discussion, the member should abstain from the decision-making, ideally in accordance with clear policy of the Authority. In such situations, the member, in addition to abstaining from the vote, may also physically remove him or herself from discussion on the matter, and ask that the absence from the discussion and vote be recorded in the minutes. This protects the member from scrutiny and maintains the integrity of the decision of the Authority.

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" also a common approach to decision-making used by First Nation community agencies. What is important is that each School Governing Authority identify practices and procedures that meet its needs, and that all members fully understand them.

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.

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

How is the chair selected?

The chair serves as the spokesperson of the School Governing Authority and lends leadership to 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 desire 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 the 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 – and, therefore, Authority decisions cannot be made at those meetings. The conduct of committee meetings generally follow 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 (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 serve to clarify 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 as resource people.

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, that provide clear direction, and that 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 permit 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 to 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. On the positive side, striving to reach consensus requires members to truly listen to the debate and to try and 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 therefore should 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 act 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.

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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 and policies 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). 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.



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 Nations' School Governing Authorities throughout BC. Their dedication and commitment is a key component of the success being achieved by First Nations schools.

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 to such 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 Nations' 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 Nations' School Governing Authority members are encouraged to contact FNESC or FNSA with any questions or requests for help.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

▶ A SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY SELF EVALUATION

	YES	NO
Works Toward a Clear Purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority focuses on student learning as the highest priority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority supports all efforts to promote student learning related to our language, culture, traditions and values	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority oversees the development of a school mission and vision statement, which provide the foundation for authority decision-making and school actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority annually approves school goals, consistent with its vision, which are regularly reviewed and discussed by the authority and principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority encourages strategic planning and supports innovation and change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintains a Governance Focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority focuses on governance, not administrative issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority has clarified the decision-making authority of the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
The authority supports the principal and has confidence in his or her daily management of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acts Ethically and Professionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority maintains effective policies, procedures, and practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members maintain confidentiality appropriately, especially in regard to authority discussions and student and parent information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members diligently avoid conflicts of interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members follow clear policies that guide decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commits to Informed Practice and Decision-Making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority has clarified and understands its authority and responsibilities to Chief and Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority provides a comprehensive orientation for new authority members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority encourages, supports and participates in ongoing training in governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members are knowledgeable and well informed regarding the school's programs and services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority regularly conducts a self-assessment with the goal of enhancing effectiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintains Respectful, Collaborative Authority Relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members respect the opinions of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority maintains clear expectations for authority member behaviour and conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
The authority has a clearly defined code of ethics for authority members and the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Each authority member is given the opportunity, and is encouraged, to express opinions on any matter under consideration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Differing opinions are fully accepted as a positive part of authority discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focuses on Effective Authority Operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority members commit to the concept of the authority as a corporate body and speaks with one voice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority 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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority has clear policies related to meeting notice requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority has clearly defined rules of order for the conduct of meetings, including quorum, voting procedures, and the selection of the chair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Authority meetings are conducted in a business-like manner according to the established rules of order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority receives information (e.g., agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) in a timely manner	<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"/>
The authority ensures appropriate follow-up to authority decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fulfills its Financial Management Role Effectively and Efficiently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority has clarified, in writing, the process and criteria for developing the school's budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority understands and monitors budget expenditures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
Maintains Effective and Appropriate Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority ensures relevant information sharing with constituents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority establishes collaborative relationships with staff and the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For substantive issues, the authority's communication with staff, and the staff's communication with the authority, is through the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority communicates information effectively through a variety of methods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fulfills its Accountability Obligations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority requests and reviews timely reports on school programs and student progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority makes regular, formal reports to Chief and Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority ensures that there is responsible and appropriate reporting to parents/caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority reports to the community about important and relevant issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX C

▶ COMMON SCHOOL GOVERNING AUTHORITY CHALLENGES – AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

ADAPTED FROM THOMAS, 2002

COMMON CHALLENGES	INSTEAD ...
<p>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.</p>	<p><i>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.</i></p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><i>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.</i></p>

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 ...**

Misunderstanding the budget's

purpose: First Nations schools share common financial challenges, and many School Governing Authorities can become caught up with what they can't do because of the funding they don't have. Authority members 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.

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.

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.

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.

Lack of understanding of the advocacy role of the Governing Authority.

It is important to understand that School Governing Authority members are the primary advocates for the students and families the school serves.

COMMON CHALLENGES**INSTEAD ...**

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.

Effective School Governing Authorities create a plan detailing their strategies for communicating and for seeking feedback on their decisions and actions.

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.

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.



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

#113 - 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
604-925-6087 | Toll-free in BC 1-877-422-3672

info@fnesc.ca
www.fnesc.ca | www.fnsa.ca



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FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION