



School Council News

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Welcome to School Council News

From the School Governance Network

Nicholas Abbey, Acting CEO, School Governance Network

Welcome to the July edition of School Council News, a shared initiative of the Department of Education and Training and the School Governance Network.

This is the third of eight issues of the newsletter to be published in 2018. The purpose of School Council News is to provide information and a forum for ideas, case studies and timely stories that highlight good governance and positive outcomes for students. In this edition, we have a story, written by a student, of the recent student members' election at Upwey High School, as well as an example of collaborative strategic planning at Yarra Me School. There are also articles that highlight governance issues to assist school

councillors with their work.

You are receiving this newsletter because you are a school principal or school council president. Please forward this newsletter to other school council members to enable them to subscribe via the link at the bottom of the newsletter.

For more information or if we can assist in any way, and if you have examples of school governance you would like to share or any other ideas for future content, please contact us by email at <mailto:admin@sgn.org.au> or phone 0402 152 634.

From the Department of Education and Training

Tim Dighton, Executive Director, Group Planning, Coordination and Operations

Many schools have been busy since our last edition supporting student member elections and induction to the critical role of school council member.

The Department values the role of all of our school council presidents and members in the governance and leadership of a school and its student and family communities. A strengthened relationship between schools, students and the community underpin the capacity and success of any school council.

A key value of the Department is Leadership, and your contribution to this in our schools cannot be underestimated. Thank you for your ongoing dedication to your school and school community.

News and activities



Students and school councils

Yarra Me School - insights into the role of a school council

Special feature

The Yarra Me School Council plays a significant role in complementing and supporting the wonderful work of the staff.

Some years ago, the council commissioned a study to explore how the school may continue to evolve and the possible future options. Following extensive discussions

among staff and school community stakeholders, including school council, the study made recommendations in relation to:

- A common purpose and whole school approach to improving outcomes
- Student learning, engagement and achievement
- Data and evidence-based practice
- Partnerships and joined-up services
- The optimal use of digital technology
- Deeper personalisation in learning
- Prevention and early intervention.

In turn, this study informed the new strategic plan that the school was about to develop. Council also worked to optimise everyone's input into the development of the strategic plan.

Through all of its policy, planning and partnership work (the '3Ps'), the Yarra Me council has championed the school's focus on:

- **Personalisation:** how the school supports each learner as a whole person with particular needs, interests and goals. This means combining learning, development, health and wellbeing outcomes for a student as a whole person and focusing on students' strengths.
- **Strong learning relationships:** learners, teachers, families, parents, caregivers, health professionals and others working closely with each other to best meet the needs of each learner. Yarra Me refers to this as the 'team and network around each learner'.

Council members are strongly aware of their responsibilities as members of a strategic, governing body and how their work is consistent with:

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 objectives of a school council include, to:

- Assist in the efficient governance of the school
- Ensure that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interest of the students
- Enhance the educational opportunities of students at the school.

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 functions of a school council include, to:

- Establish the broad direction and vision of the school within the school's community
- Ensure that all money coming into the hands of the council is expended for proper purposes relating to the school


- Inform itself and take into account any views of the school community for the purpose of making decisions in regard to the school and the students at the school.

The principal and council president make sure that each council meeting agenda has a focus on aspects of the goals in the strategic plan. The principal's report at each meeting also outlines the school's work and progress toward the goals.

These are some of the ways in which the Yarra Me council helps to promote the collaborative and inclusive character of education as the basis of improving outcomes for all students.

Nancy Sidoti, Principal, and **Nicholas Abbey**, School Council President, Yarra Me.

Training and governance



Training and support

School council training

There are two forms of training available to councillors: face-to-face and online. Both are based on the Improving School Governance (ISG) materials, widely distributed to schools.

The ISG has five modules: governance, strategic planning, finance, policy and review, and the school council president.

In Term Two 2018, 1,885 school councillors participated in free face to face training.

At the conclusion of each training session, participants are asked to evaluate the training. Generally, participants felt that after the training they had a greater understanding of their role as a school councillor and were more confident in their abilities to fulfil it. Many also felt they were better equipped to ask questions, more engaged in council and more able to make a worthwhile contribution. Some of the comments made by participants, are:

'Training has improved my ability to understand my responsibilities with regard to school finance.'

'Participating in the training has helped me understand council's role in strategic planning, especially the school review.'

'The strongest features of the training were the manual, group activities and hands-on approach.'

'The facilitator was excellent and well-informed.'

The face-to-face training is conducted by two companies and is offered free of charge to schools and school councils. To book training, please contact the relevant company by email, phone or online.

Synergistiq offers the training for the **Governance** and **School Council President** modules and can be contacted on:

(03) 9946 6801

Via email: sct@synergistiq.com

Online: [School council training](#)

National Curriculum Services (NCS) offers the **Strategic Planning** and **Finance** modules and can be contacted on:

(03) 9415 1299 or toll free 1800 631 203

Via email: christine.reid@ncsonline.com.au

Online: [National Curriculum Services](#)

The online training program in all five ISG modules can be accessed through the Department's website at: [Improving school governance](#)

For additional information about school council training, please contact Russell Polson, Project Manager, school council training. Email: polson.russell.a@edumail.vic.gov.au or by phone: (03) 7022 1344.

For general advice about school councils, please email the School Operations and Governance Unit at: school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au

Student participation in councils

From 29 June 2018, schools with a year seven cohort, have in place the two new school councillors in the student member category. Advice was available from the Department for those schools that went to election due to the number of student nominations.

As an example, Upwey High School students now have their new elected student members in place.

Written by Wren Gillett, Year eleven student at Upwey High School

Upwey High School has responded with strong enthusiasm to the roll out of 'Students on School Councils'.

Mr Tom Daly, Upwey High School's Principal, initially spoke to students about the new requirements at a whole school assembly, following the advice from the Department.

The subsequent student voting processes were conducted extremely well. Students put forward their nominations, either for themselves or for a peer, as per the requirements.

The nominating students were publicised through their campaigns. Each candidate could create a PowerPoint slide to be run over all of the school's digital information screens, a poster to be displayed in four designated locations around the school and a 150 word statement to be distributed with each ballot paper.

The official student election involved ballots and a confidential voting slip to be completed and placed in envelopes directly in the front office. In summary, the process was as follows:

1. All students received digital and verbal notification of the requirements and process during Upwey High School's whole school assembly about the new requirements.
2. Every nominating student was encouraged to complete: One PowerPoint slide to be run over all of the school's digital information screens / One poster to be displayed in four designated locations around the school / A 150 word statement to be distributed with each ballot paper.
3. Every student of Upwey High School was given an individual pack including an envelope, the nomination information and a voting page to be returned to the office.
4. All students were encouraged to vote for their chosen candidates.
5. The sealed envelopes containing each student's vote were handed directly to the office.
6. The votes were counted confidentially.

This election process has appointed two students to the school council. The feedback and response from students has been extremely positive, with an enthusiastic student participation in the process and an improved understanding of the value associated with student input into decision-making. Upwey High School encourages all schools to fully pursue this opportunity.

Advice and support

What makes an effective school council

Managing conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest (COI) arises where your public duties – that is, your duties as a school councillor – are influenced, or could be seen to be influenced, by your private interests (including the interest of family members or close friends).

Any COI must be declared as soon as the councillor becomes aware of it, and managed and monitored for as long as it exists. This is in order to prevent reputational and integrity risks to individuals, schools and school councils, and the Department.

For school councillors, a COI may occur most commonly when school council procures goods or services, in employment of staff by school council and involvement in a recruitment process (such as employment of a principal). A conflict of interest would arise if the school council is undertaking these activities and a councillor has a personal or business interest in a matter that is being discussed or a decision that is being made.

If a councillor identifies that they have a COI, they should declare it to school council and ensure that the declaration is recorded in the school council minutes. They should then act to mitigate the risk created by the COI. This most commonly would require removing themselves from a meeting where the matter is to be discussed or a decision made.

Case studies in COI

#1. Recruitment: The school council president, as chair of a principal selection panel, becomes aware that a relative is a candidate for the position.

The president should declare this conflict to the school council and ensure the declaration is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The president should stand aside from the selection panel and the school council should select another member to be on the panel.

#2. Procurement: A member of school council wishes to provide maintenance services to the school.

The school councillor should declare a COI to council prior to council discussing the school's maintenance contracts. The declaration should be minuted and the member not be present in the discussions and in those parts of the meetings where the maintenance contracts are discussed and decisions made.

For further guidance on managing conflicts of interest, see the section of the Improving School Governance training materials, Governance module, on page 19, [High risk areas for conflicts of interest](#). This section also contains links to Department resources.

The Department has resources for managing conflict of interest on its website at, [Conflict of Interest](#). Resources on this link include the Conflict of Interest Policy, Conflict of Interest Quick Guide and Conflict of interest Toolkit (which includes an interesting case study about school council procurement, on its final page).

Members may also seek advice from their principal or from the School Operations and Governance Unit. Email: school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au

Tips and support

Code of conduct for school councillors

School councils in Victoria are public entities as defined by the Public Administration Act 2004.

School councillors must abide by the 2016 Directors' Code of Conduct for Directors issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission. The Code of Conduct is based on the Victorian public sector values and requires councillors to:

- Act with honesty and integrity (be truthful, open and clear about their motives and declare any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest and duty)
- Act in good faith in the best interests of the school (work cooperatively with other councillors and the school community, be reasonable, and make all decisions with the best interests of students foremost in their minds)
- Act fairly and impartially (consider all relevant facts of an issue before making a decision, seek to have a balanced view, never give special treatment to a person or group and never act from self-interest)
- Use information appropriately (respect confidentiality and use information for the purpose for which it was made available)
- Use their position appropriately (not use their position as a councillor to gain an advantage)
- Act in a financially responsible manner (observe all the above principles when making financial decisions)
- Exercise due care, diligence and skill (accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school)

- Comply with relevant legislation and policies (know what legislation and policies are relevant for which decisions and obey the law)
- Demonstrate leadership and stewardship (set a good example, encourage a culture of accountability, manage risks effectively, exercise care and responsibility to keep the school strong and sustainable).

Personal tips

There are obvious ways to personally put into practice these things, including how all councillors:

- Value diversity of opinion and a wide range of perspectives and view disagreement and debate as opportunities to learn more about an issue and to make a better-informed and wiser collective decision
- Focus on the issues, not the person; it is the 'glue' that unites a diverse community and helps a council to build consensus
- Use 'perspective taking' – seeing an issue through the eyes of others
- Declare any conflict of interest when it arises
- Distinguish solid facts from what may be only conjecture, speculation and generalisations
- Treat fellow councillors, school community members and staff with courtesy and respect
- Speak and write without judging, blaming, naming or undermining
- Use inclusive language, not language that divides people or creates suspicion and distrust
- Deliver appropriate criticism in private
- Build openness and transparency
- Listen with an open mind and really hear what may be the two or more sides of 'the story'
- If there are concerns, problems or conflicts, use the appropriate informal processes and formal processes that are available.

Resources and links

- [Victorian Public Sector Commission – Code of Conduct for Directors](#)
- [Department of Education and Training Values – Code of Conduct for the Victorian Public Sector](#)
- [School Policy and Advisory Guide – Ethical Decision-Making](#)

About the School Governance Network (SGN)

Owned by member school councils, the School Governance Network will:

- Develop new services, support and tools for the 17,500 Victorian government school council members
- Assist schools with accessing the Department's training and other support materials
- Provide a voice for all councils
- Support links between school councils and the Department
- Support a network to share ideas, information and best practice in governance.

How was the SGN formed?

School councils were strongly supported over the past 100 years by two organisations that evolved into School Governance Australia Limited (SGAL) and the Victorian Council of School Organisations (VICCSO).

The SGN combines the two. It is a totally new organisation, with the potential to provide a whole new level of services, support and tools for the 17,500 council members in government schools.

An interim board is developing the SGN. Members of the new board will be elected at a state conference this year.

Contact us or offer feedback

We're here to help

Contact the Department by email at school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au

Contact the School Governance Network. Your council may also want to become part of the new network. Email admin@sgn.org.au or phone 0402 152 634.

The School Governance Network would love to hear your stories of good governance practice. We also welcome any suggestions you may have for articles, features or information you would like to see in upcoming School Council News.

Share your feedback

Do you have an idea for how to improve the School Council newsletter? [Tell us what you think](#)





The School Council newsletter is a publication for all Victorian Government School Councillors in partnership with the School Governance Network and the Department of Education and Training.

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The Department acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their elders, past and present.

