

## Guidance for School Governance Councils

# Membership and Election Procedures

School Governance Councils (councils) provide a remarkable opportunity for Connecticut schools to engage with families and community members in a partnership to make our schools centers of excellence that prepare all students for success. Councils are intended to represent the diverse interests of the families, teachers, students and community members that make up the school population. *To that end, every effort should be made to engage broad participation in a fair and open council election process.*

The law that created School Governance Councils (C.G.S. Sec. 10-233j) states that the parents, teachers, students and community members who serve on local councils must be elected in the numbers indicated in the table below. The law, however, does not specify a process for conducting the elections. A School Governance Council should develop bylaws to provide them with guidance for conducting elections and other council business. The development of operating bylaws should begin as soon as possible after a council meets for the first time.

The first councils established will not have the benefit of bylaws to guide their elections because they must be elected before bylaws are put in place. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to assist schools in conducting the election process for those initial council members. The following pages provide advice on the election process, term length for council members and a sample process and checklist for elections.

### School Governance Council Membership and Election Process

The councils consist of 14 voting members plus up to three nonvoting members depending on the type of school involved. The following tables describe the category of membership, the number of members and how they are elected.

MEMBER	NUMBER	ELECTION PROCESS
Parents or guardians of students at the school	7	Elected by the parents or guardians of students attending the school, each household with a student attending the school will have one vote.
Teachers at the school	5	Elected by the teachers of the school.
Community leaders within the school district	2	Elected by the parent or guardian members and teacher members of the council.
School principal or designee (nonvoting)	1	Principal may participate directly or name a designee.

Additional members and election process in high schools:

MEMBER	NUMBER	ELECTION PROCESS
Students, high school council members only (nonvoting)	2	Elected by the school's student body.

## Creating a Valid Election Process

The election process should signal to the entire school community that the School Governance Council will be a collaborative body that represents the diversity of the students they serve. The following steps are intended as suggestions to help ensure an inclusive and valid election process.

### Election Committee

- It is recommended that an election committee be formed that is representative of the diversity of the school and is unaffiliated with any potential candidates. The principal may serve as the coordinator of this committee.
- The election committee should assist in conducting the election activities such as scheduling dates, posting announcements, collecting nominations, overseeing the voting itself and formally announcing the results.
- Representatives of existing groups should be enlisted to help with the election process (for example, the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and the teachers' unions).

### Call for Nominations for Parents and Teachers

- A call for nominations should be sent to all parents or guardians in the school to nominate themselves or other parents or guardians for the seven available positions on the council. Every effort should be made to provide nomination and election materials to parents in a language they understand.
- A call for nominations should also be sent to all teachers to nominate themselves or others for the five positions on the council.
- The election committee should verify that those nominated are eligible and willing to serve.

### Voting

- The ballot for the parent or guardian election should be distributed to each household.
- The ballot for the teacher election should be distributed to all teachers.
- Voting procedures that will maximize participation should be determined by the election committee. For example, parents and teachers should be given sufficient time and multiple opportunities to cast their ballot – whether through dropping the ballot off at the school office or another community location outside of school hours to accommodate work schedules or through the U.S. mail.

### Results

- Immediately following the election, ballots should be counted with supervision by either the election committee or, if no committee was formed, at least a school administrator, one parent and one teacher who are unaffiliated with any candidates.
- The principal should announce the results in a newsletter or other publication and post the new membership of the council on the school's Web site and key locations in the school.

## Term Length for School Governance Council Members

### Parents, Teachers, and Community Members

- State statute requires that voting members (parents or guardians, teachers, and community members) serve two-year terms, and that no member can serve more than four terms on a council.

### Students

- Nonvoting student members serve a one-year term, and no student member can serve more than two terms.

All council members' terms will expire in two years, potentially causing significant disruption to a council's ability to function effectively. To avoid having the terms of all council members expire at the same time, it is recommended that the first elections create staggered terms of office. One strategy for doing this is to use a lottery system, such as drawing straws, to establish two-year terms for half of the council and one-year terms for the other half. For example, the four parents, three teachers and one community member who drew a long straw would serve two-year terms, and the remaining three parents, two teachers and community member who drew short straws would serve a one-year term. Under this example, an election process would then continue each year.

# Voting and Ballots: Frequently Asked Questions

## PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

### ***What names will appear on a school's ballot?***

All of the names of parents who were nominated and who have a child enrolled in the school the council serves are included on the ballot. A parent is a person who is the natural, adoptive or stepparent of a child enrolled in the school and includes those people acting as legal guardian or registered custodian of the child, such as grandparents.

### ***How many candidates can a household vote for on the ballot?***

A household can cast a vote for each open parent seat on the council. For the first election, all seven seats are open. For example, if ten names appear on the ballot, each household may vote for up to seven parents on the ballot.

### ***How are ballots distributed?***

State statute requires that each household with a student attending the school shall have one vote to elect the parent or guardian members of the council. The law is silent as to how ballots should be distributed. One potential distribution method is to mail a ballot to each household via U.S. mail. If more than one family resides at the same location, each family should be sent their own ballot. Another alternative to mailing out ballots is to ask the parents or guardians to come to the school and vote over a period of a few days or evenings. Schools should consider using multiple methods of communication to inform families that ballots have been distributed.

### ***Who receives a ballot?***

Each household with a student or students enrolled in the school for the current school year should receive one ballot.

### ***What happens if the number of candidates is less than or equal to the number of positions?***

The council's membership must comply with the provisions in the statute. Therefore, if there are not enough nominees received during for the first election, the full membership of the council will be completed by repeating the process of seeking nominations and holding a second election.

### ***Is there a minimum number of voters required to consider the election fair?***

While not required, schools should consider setting a threshold of participation they hope to achieve in order to encourage maximum outreach and participation in the process.

## TEACHERS

### ***How are the teacher representatives determined?***

State statute requires that the teacher members of the council be elected by the teachers of the school. A nomination process should be conducted, followed by a vote. It is recommended that the teachers eligible to serve on the council be those certified staff who perform the majority of their duties in a teaching capacity at that school. Paraprofessionals are not eligible to serve as teacher members of the council.

## STUDENTS

### ***How are student representatives determined?***

State statute requires that the nonvoting student members on the high school councils shall be elected by the student body of the school. It is recommended that these representatives be elected by the student body through existing student government procedures. If no student government exists, students may be permitted to campaign for the position of council representative at a general assembly of the student body and the student body may make their selection by voting.

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

### ***How are community members elected to the council?***

State statute requires that the community leader members be elected by the parent or guardian members and teacher members of the School Governance Council. The parent and teacher representatives should determine a process for soliciting interest from community members. The law requires only that the community members of the council be a leader within the school district and that they be elected by the parent and teacher members of the council. This definition was intentionally left open by the drafters of the legislation, and it is intended to incorporate community leaders of influence in each community, including, but not limited to, religious leaders, nonprofit leaders and business leaders.

## Sample Process and Checklist for Parent Elections

The table below presents a sample process for conducting School Governance Council elections. Schools should determine the timeline they will use to solicit nominations and conduct the election.

PROCESS	INSERT DATE
1. Notice of election and call for nominations distributed to all parents.	
2. Closing date for nominations. Once the nomination forms come back, notify the persons(s) and determine if they are eligible and if they accept or decline.	
3. Date by which the list of candidates will be displayed. Prepare your ballot with all names of nominees.	
4. Date by which voting ballots will be prepared and distributed. Send out ballots to every household with deadline for return.	
5. Provide an opportunity for parents to meet the candidates.	
6. Close of ballot. Provide various times and methods for parents to cast their ballots.	
7. Vote count. Once ballots are returned, determine election results.	
8. Announcement of new council members. Send election results out to school community and post on Web site.	
9. First council meeting to introduce new members and discuss election of community members (principal will preside). Begin following FOI procedures.	
10. Second council meeting to elect community members and begin setting the council's goals, agenda and operational procedures (principal will preside).	

## Resources for Conducting School Governance Council Elections

The Connecticut State Department of Education has a Web page dedicated to School Governance Councils at [www.ct.gov/sde/SGC](http://www.ct.gov/sde/SGC). The Connecticut state statute and other guidance documents can be found there. Look for these sample documents to assist you in conducting the election process:

- Recruitment Flyer (English and Spanish)
- Nomination Form (English and Spanish)
- Candidate Information Form (English and Spanish)
- Election Ballot (English and Spanish)