



**Trustees Perspectives: Practices and Processes to Support**

- a) school councils providing meaningful input
- b) recruiting community members
- c) developing umbrella groups

**Qualitative Research Evaluation  
Summary of Findings**

**Presented to: Alberta School Boards Association**

*Prepared by: ANNE JACOX  
CUE RESEARCH INC.*

Date: January 2005

10311 – 140 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5N 2L7

780-488-1123  
ajacox@attglobal.net

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

	Page
<b>1.0 THE RESEARCH INVESTIGATION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	4
1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	5
1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH .....	6
<b>2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 OVERVIEW – Trustee perspectives towards promoting meaningful involvement by school councils; attracting community members and developing umbrella groups .....	8
2.2 MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT BY SCHOOL COUNCILS .....	10
2.3 ATTRACTING COMMUNITY MEMBERS .....	16
2.4 DEVELOPING UMBRELLA GROUPS .....	18
<b>3.0 APPENDICES: MODERATOR’S GUIDE; PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE ; PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS .....</b>	<b>20</b>

## **1.0 THE RESEARCH INVESTIGATION**

## 1.1 Research Objectives

---

### Background:

The Alberta School Boards Association is required to research and write a report that identifies school board and school council processes and practices which support:

- a) school councils providing meaningful input in areas they choose to be involved;
- b) recruiting community members to school councils; AND
- c) developing umbrella groups.

The report for this evaluation builds on several components, some of which have been commissioned by other departments, and conducted by different research firms:

- Alberta Learning – literature survey
- Alberta Learning – research the characteristics of effective school councils; characteristics of effective umbrella groups and strategies for recruiting community members. *(Research conducted by Kaleidoscope Consulting, July, 2004) \**
- Alberta Learning – identification of outcomes achieved by effective school councils and umbrella groups. *(Research conducted by Kaleidoscope Consulting, July, 2004)*

➤ **ASBA - Identification of processes and practices for supporting a), b) and c) above based on consultation with school boards.**

Although previous research provides a number of observations and recommendations regarding effective school councils, it was felt that further investigation should be conducted with trustees regarding their views on these specific issues. This report addresses the overall objectives of this study from the viewpoint of school trustees.

\*The Kaleidoscope research report, *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation*, is available at <http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/schoolcouncils.asp>

## 1.2 Research Methodology

---

Five focus groups were conducted with trustees during the ASBA's annual conference in Edmonton on November 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004. Focus group participants were recruited by the ASBA. The focus groups were held in a meeting room at the ASBA's Fall General Meeting. (Originally six groups were scheduled but two were combined due to conflicts with other meetings that ran longer than scheduled.) Focus groups participants were also invited to complete a questionnaire. They were asked to make recommendations to different stakeholders with regard to processes and procedures to support meaningful involvement by school councils, attracting community members and developing umbrella groups. The responses to these questionnaires are reported separately from the focus group results and can be found in the appendix section of this report.

In order to cover a broad range of jurisdictions and trustee experience levels, the groups were segmented as follows:

Group No.	Date/Time	Description
1	Monday November 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> <li>▪ Work with successful School Councils</li> </ul>
2	Monday November 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> <li>▪ Would like to see improvements in School Councils</li> </ul>
3	Combined with group 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> <li>▪ Would like to see improvements in School Councils</li> </ul>
4	Tuesday November 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rural Trustees</li> </ul>
5	Tuesday November 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Trustees</li> <li>▪ Umbrella Group Trustees</li> </ul>

Participants were further recruited to ensure the following mix within each group:

- males and females
- Catholic, Public and Francophone
- jurisdictions where there is no umbrella group; where there is an umbrella group
- jurisdictions where school councils have a public member/do not have a public member
- jurisdictions where school councils are members/not members of AHSCA
- mix of urban and rural in "experienced trustees" groups

A total of 41 trustees participated in this study. The ASBA hired an independent contractor to phone randomly selected individuals to achieve the desired demographic and board mix in each focus group. Anne Jacox, Cue Research Inc. conducted the focus groups.

### **1.3 Limitations of the Research**

---

Focus group discussions are intended as moderator directed, informal, non-threatening discussions with participants whose characteristics, habits and attitudes, are considered relevant to the topics of discussion. The primary benefit of a focus group discussion is that it allows for in-depth probing with identified segments on behavior, habits, usage patterns, perceptions, and attitudes related to the subject matter. The group discussion allows for flexibility in exploring other areas that may be pertinent to the areas under investigation. Focus groups allow for a more complete understanding of the market segment, in that the thoughts and feelings are expressed in the respondents' "own language", and at "their own levels of passion".

The focus group technique is used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures of data. Due to the inherent biases in this technique, the data presented cannot be projected to any universe of individuals. Consequently, respondents recruited for focus group discussions must be considered a sample of convenience, hence, not representative of all targeted segments.

## **2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **2.1 Overview – Trustee Attitudes re Processes to Promote Meaningful Involvement by School Councils, Attracting Community Members and Developing Umbrella Groups**

---

Focus groups with trustees were held in November 2004 concurrent with the ASBA Fall General Meeting. A total of 41 trustees representing a range of jurisdictions and years of experience participated in this study.

The majority of trustees who participated in this study had previous experience with school councils, either having served on a school council or having knowledge of school councils through their previous career as a teacher or principal. Most focus group participants had also served more than one term as a trustee.

Some trustees seem to have a more involved relationship with their boards as well as a better understanding of their relationship with school councils because of practices and procedures implemented and ongoing at the board level.

Other trustees are limited by geographic restrictions and/or impeded by working with a larger number of schools in their jurisdiction. Other trustees are not entirely sure of what the role of school council is.

### **Trustee attitudes:**

Trustees indicated that the following contribute to school councils providing meaningful involvement. These are not presented in order of importance as all are felt to contribute significantly.

- Listening and advising as appropriate;
- Ensuring school council (as well as trustees) are aware of the mandate of school council (and the appropriate policies and procedures to follow);
- Encouraging school council to include membership that is representative of the varied interests of the school and the community;
- Encouraging school council to develop a three year plan that can be adapted by future school councils (to ensure consistency and interest in activities appropriate to school council);
- Encouraging the board to provide opportunities for school councils from different schools to meet (i.e. umbrella groups); and



- Encouraging professional development opportunities (which might be developed at the board level or through associations such as the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Home and School Councils Association that are known to provide seminars and workshops relevant to school councils).

Discussions with trustees also indicate that support from the principal is a key enhancement or barrier to an effective school council. (While most trustees felt unsupportive principals are in the minority, this was brought up, without prompting, in all groups).

Further details regarding the above points are included in the following sections of the report.

**Note:**

This research paper focuses on trustees' perspectives with regard to specific questions related to meaningful involvement by school councils; attracting community members and developing umbrella groups. Alberta Learning conducted separate, but related, research, which explored the broader question of school council effectiveness and touched on the questions of meaningful involvement and attracting community members.

The Alberta Learning research saw a facilitator conduct 11 focus groups with members of school councils representing the range of schools and jurisdictions in the province (public, separate, francophone, rural, suburban, urban, north, central and south). Twelve trustees and 16 principals were also interviewed.

The resulting report titled *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation* is available at <http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationssystem/schoolcouncils.asp>

## 2.2 Meaningful Involvement by School Councils

---

Among trustees, there is a broad range of experience with school councils and the way in which they interact with school councils.

- Different boards approach school councils in different ways, with some having clear policies and procedures while others do not seem to have any established protocol.

*“I don’t know what ASBA could do. Since each board “culture” is different, so perhaps ASBA is not pertinent.”*

- Some trustees are not aware of what their involvement with school councils should be, e.g., whether they should be attending school council meetings, whether they are welcome at school council meetings, and what their role should be at school council meetings.
- A number of trustees indicate they are not aware of what the mandate of school councils is, hence, they are not certain of what their involvement or role with school councils should be.

*“... ensure that school councils are following their mandate. My question is, what is the mandate of the school council?”*

- Some trustees feel their involvement with school councils is limited due to geographic impediments, while others have a larger number of schools within their jurisdiction, thereby limiting the amount of time available to visit school councils.

Longer term trustees and those who have established protocols through their board indicate their role is one of attending school council meetings (as much as possible) and acting in an encouraging, advisory, and information-sharing capacity. Many of these trustees indicate that the role of the board is critical in ensuring the proper flow of information between school council and board.

*“Just by being there, and listening to the conversations, seeing what’s on their agenda, what kinds of things or issues are in their school. Sometimes if we have things as a board that we are discussing, we might after a while, you know, “what do you think about this policy that we’re in the process of discussing?””*

*“They deal with policy. They deal with their three- year development plan. They look at the evaluation of their principal. They do other things than just fund-raising. They organize their volunteers so that it’s an effective use of volunteers.”*

When asked to define “meaningful involvement by school councils”, trustees stated the following:

- A clear understanding of what the role of school council is – many study participants stated that due to the turnover and type of support (from the board or the principal), many school councils do not have a clear understanding of the role of school council.

*“ ... some school councils just plain and simply don't know what's expected of them. I would like to see some sort of, not a directive, but some sort of book of suggestions as to how you could be an effective school council ... make it an easy to source for all parents that says, “this is what parent council does” ... if it were produced province-wide, then everybody would be working on the same page.”*

*“School councils do not know their role. There is no role definition given by the principals. You'll have the eager beaver who will seek out the information. It'll only last that term that that person is in council. Then, they take the information home, and the school has lost it again. Nobody ensures that school councils have their role descriptions. There's nothing.”*

- Membership that is representative of various interests and various sectors of the community – many trustees indicated that school council can often become a very small group of interested parents, or a group of parents with specific agendas that are inappropriate to what a school council is designed for. In order to avoid this, school council not only needs a clear understanding of its role, but an appropriate representation of parents that includes the interests of the different grades of the school as well as the community.
- Involvement with board (e.g., input into policy issues, budget) – School councils who have a strong involvement with their board are felt to have a more effective school council, as they become aware of the broader responsibilities at the board level and have the opportunity to interact with other school councils. Some trustees also indicate that relationships are better when the school board gains insight from school councils by sharing information and asking for input on policies and issues.

*“I think the flow of information is one problem because some school councils prefer ... would like more information. If it is not coming down through the pipeline the way it should, then they feel they are being shut out because the flow is being blocked.”*

- Access to professional development opportunities – several trustees indicated the importance of professional development opportunities in creating effective school councils as well as maintaining the interest of school council members. Topics for professional development ranged from seminars regarding the role of school council and developing a three year plan, to having guest speakers in to address topics of interest at school council meetings (e.g., having an RCMP officer discussing drug issues in the community). While some boards set up professional development for school council chairs, other professional development is available through AHSCA or initiated through the council itself.

*“I think the other thing to remember that according to legislation, it’s the school board’s responsibility to provide training for the council. In a lot of cases, when we’ve lost that in our schools, it’s our fault.”*

- Support from principal – all groups indicated that school councils are more effective if the principal is supportive and includes the school council in decisions that affect the school, such as budgets, etc.

*“School council is only as effective as the principal lets it be.”*

- Focused – specific goals and strategies to meet those goals – many trustees indicated that without specific goals to create interest and achieve accomplishments, interest in school councils often fades or becomes focused on fund raising.

*“Well, at the beginning, like when you set up your council, you should have certain goals and so on that you’re looking at. To the best of your ability, plan some strategies, and your strategies should match your goals. You should work towards that. Otherwise, after the first couple of meetings ... if there’s no big concern or issue, they tend to fall apart.”*

**Note:**

See page 36 of the *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation* report for a discussion about a definition of meaningful input. Participants in the Alberta Learning research identified the following as characteristic of, or a result, of meaningful input: school council advice is considered in significant decisions; parent input is sought and considered in the decision process; school council involvement is timely; school council members are able to participate in an informed conversation; decision making is transparent; school council feels valued and valuable; school council members feel like equals on a team serving a common goal; dialogue is open and welcomes diverse opinions and diplomatic communication that is respectful of all is the norm.

Trustees also suggested that school councils can be ineffective under the following condition

- Council members (parents) that are focused on their own agenda, e.g., parents bringing school problems related to their children to council for resolution
- Not enough members/poor attendance
- Fund-raising mentality – not knowing what their roles and responsibilities are and how they could impact schools
- Lack of focus/objectives
- Principal who is not supportive of school council or uses school council for his own agenda

*“Some school councils are puppets to the school administration.”*

- Lack of interest in anything outside of school (e.g., policies and procedures that impact the jurisdiction or other schools with similar situations)
- No succession planning (e.g., no strategies that the next council will have to work on)

**Note:**

See pages 36 and 37 of the *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation* report for a discussion of the barriers to meaningful input. Participants in the Alberta Learning research project identified the following barriers to meaningful input: not enough time to educate school council members and to participate in discussion; lack of skilled facilitators to lead the discussion; parents do not feel knowledgeable and confident enough to provide insights; lack of respect and trust; vested interests; unfocussed discussions; lack of interest in policies, finances or plans; exclusion by presentation style; lack of accountability; and historical biases or entrenched attitudes as all parties hold on to past experiences.

## SUMMARY PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS – Practices that Support Meaningful Involvement by School Councils

Focus groups participants were also invited to complete a questionnaire. They were asked to make recommendations to different stakeholders with regard to processes and procedures to a) support meaningful involvement by school councils, b) attract community members and c) develop umbrella groups.

The following table is a summary of key recommendations made by trustees through this self-completion questionnaire to different stakeholder groups in order to support meaningful involvement by school councils. (Verbatim comments from this exercise are located in the Appendix section of this report.)

<b>SUMMARY: Participant Questionnaire results: Practices that Support Meaningful Involvement by School Councils</b>	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend school council meetings (observe and listen).</li> <li>▪ Share information from the board and vice versa.</li> <li>▪ Encourage reading School Council Handbook.</li> <li>▪ Promote separate organization for fundraising.</li> <li>▪ Ensure school principals empower school council.</li> <li>▪ Encourage membership in AHSCA.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involve school councils in decision-making. Set up appropriate procedures to communicate both ways. Share information.</li> <li>▪ Set policy regarding school council participation.</li> <li>▪ Provide professional development; ensure school councils are following their mandate; have information sessions to inform them of their roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>▪ Have regional meetings of school councils or have school council chairs attend board meetings.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage participation from all parents.</li> <li>▪ Be aware of roles and responsibilities of school councils.</li> <li>▪ Avoid fund raising.</li> <li>▪ Set goals.</li> <li>▪ Create Council of School Councils.</li> <li>▪ Be up-to-date on issues (through AHSCA and local Board).</li> </ul>

<b>SUMMARY: Participant Questionnaire results: Practices that Support Meaningful Involvement by School Councils</b>	
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide training on roles and responsibilities for school councils by either holding regional seminars, producing video, possibly using ASBA website.</li> <li>▪ Offer seminars on how to hold effective meetings.</li> <li>▪ Help trustees understand the role of school council and what we should do to help with school councils.</li> <li>▪ Provide a mechanism by which school councils in Alberta can share information.</li> <li>▪ Clear processes and guidelines given to boards as to what school councils should/shouldn't be involved in.</li> <li>▪ Newsletter on ideas from different school councils.</li> <li>▪ Promote parental input through school councils.</li> </ul>

**Note:**

See page 37 of the *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation* for a discussion of strategies to facilitate meaningful input by school councils.

Participants in the Alberta Learning research identified the following as contributing to meaningful input by school councils: the need for training and education, ensuring the council chair has the skills to convene and facilitate a meaningful process; ensuring information provided to school council members is in plain English; planning to enable participation in key decision points; allowing time for discussion and dialogue on agendas; convening meetings of groups of school councils and education and information in advance to familiarize school councils with the issues.

## 2.3 Attracting Community Members

---

In discussions regarding attracting community members, it was apparent that many school councils do not have community members on council. Some trustees feel it is extremely difficult to attract community members, while others do not feel there is a need for a community member on every school council and feel this should be optional.

Those who have had positive experiences with community members on school council recounted stories of their valuable contributions to school council as they were effective in bringing different views relevant to the community to the school, or had experience that was valuable to the needs of school council (e.g., police officer, accountant).

*“It’s unrealistic. It’s useful when they exist, extremely useful, because then you’re building up a partnership between your community and your school so your school’s getting the community information provided they’re going back to their leagues, you know and giving that information and vice versa.”*

Most school councils with a community member on council had recruited that member through an informal process, often just identifying the type of person who might be helpful to council and asking them to join.

A summary of suggestions (from self-completion questionnaires) regarding how different stakeholder groups could help school councils to attract community members is as follows.



<b>SUMMARY: Participant Questionnaire results: Attracting Community Members</b>	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help make connections.</li> <li>▪ Campaign publicly to attract community members.</li> <li>▪ Offer suggestions.</li> <li>▪ Encourage administration and school council to contact stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help make connections.</li> <li>▪ Communicate their value; share how their input is used in planning.</li> <li>▪ Advertise the requirements and importance of community members.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Invitation to participate out in community and school population.</li> <li>▪ Know your community and keep a good contact with them.</li> <li>▪ Determine the type of input and skill sets needed to accomplish goals of school council and find someone with these skills.</li> <li>▪ Change the Act to say "may have" rather than "shall have" in regard to having a community member on council.</li> <li>▪ Advertise meetings and topics.</li> </ul>
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advertising.</li> <li>▪ List of possible contacts.</li> </ul>

**Note:**

See page 27 of the *Alberta School Council Effectiveness: Summary and Findings of the Provincial Consultation* report for a discussion about strategies school for obtaining meaningful involvement by a community representative.

Participants in the Alberta Learning research explored the barriers to attracting a community member and successful strategies for overcoming these barriers. Some of the strategies identified included: identifying a specific need the council had and reaching out to the community to find someone who could fill that need, developing a partnership with a specific organization like the Chamber of Commerce or local parish; using council member connections to find the right person to fill a niche on the school council; searching out a non-parent who is passionate about education and valuing and honoring the community member once they join the school council.

## **2.4 Developing Umbrella Groups**

---

Those trustees who participated in this study and have umbrella groups (sometimes referred to as Council of School Councils) indicate this is a very valuable means of helping school councils become more effective. Having an umbrella group creates the opportunity to get members of different school councils together to share information (with different school councils as well as the board), discuss policy issues that impact the jurisdiction, and educate school council members as to the broader perspective of their role in education.

Some trustees have not heard of umbrella groups before or feel they would not be able to accommodate them due to financial or geographic restrictions.

Trustees had the most recommendations for the board regarding developing umbrella groups, indicating they view this more as a board responsibility. Suggestions for developing umbrella groups (from self-completion questionnaires) were as follows:

<b>SUMMARY: Participant Questionnaire results: Developing Umbrella Groups</b>	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage school councils to be active in these groups and attend meetings.</li> <li>▪ Encourage central office administration to work on this.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facilitate and validate the existence of umbrella groups.</li> <li>▪ All trustees and admin staff should attend these meetings.</li> <li>▪ Encourage the councils to share info and meet for professional development.</li> <li>▪ Listen to the results of these groups so they are meaningful.</li> <li>▪ Support school councils financially to attend workshops.</li> <li>▪ Work with school council to form them.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All school councils in the district should send representatives to each umbrella meeting.</li> <li>▪ Elect representatives to umbrella groups so it's not always the chair.</li> <li>▪ Work together.</li> </ul>
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide seminars for trustees/boards on the value of school council umbrella groups.</li> <li>▪ Sponsor a provincial meeting of councils?</li> <li>▪ Work with AHSCA to jointly do workshops for school councils or school council chairs.</li> <li>▪ ASBA should play a role in determining the importance of this.</li> </ul>

**3.0 APPENDICES: MODERATOR'S GUIDE  
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE; PARTICIPANT  
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

## APPENDIX A: MODERATOR'S GUIDE, PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

### Westin Hotel – November 22 and 23, 2004

November 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2004	November 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2004
Group 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> <li>▪ Work with successful School Councils</li> </ul>	Group 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> </ul> Would like to see improvements in School Councils
Group 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experienced Trustees</li> <li>▪ Would like to see improvements in School Councils</li> </ul>	Group 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rural Trustees</li> </ul> Group 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Trustees</li> <li>▪ Umbrella Group Trustees</li> </ul>

#### Introduction:

Introduce moderator, function of moderator and focus group discussions.

Today we will be talking about school councils and the role of school boards with school councils. I will be asking a variety of questions regarding your experiences and attitudes and just exploring some areas that might be helpful in developing these relationships.

This is not a right or wrong answer kind of discussion.

I will be audio-recording the discussion so that I can review the tapes after the groups are finished and write a report. Once the report is finished, the tapes are destroyed. Your name will not be appearing in the report or passed along to anyone as a result of this study.

Introductions – please tell us a little bit about yourselves – how long you have been a trustee, what made you interested in becoming a trustee, whether you had any experience with school councils, i.e., as a member, prior to becoming a trustee, etc.

#### Meaningful Involvement of School Councils:

Tell me a little bit about meaningful involvement of school councils.

Probe: How do you gain input from school councils – at the school level?

At the jurisdiction level?

Examples – what kinds of things have you sought input on?

In your jurisdiction, what supports are there to school councils being involved meaningfully?

What can the school board do to help promote more meaningful involvement – at the school level, at the board level?

What can the school council do to help – at the school level, at the board level?

What does school board do that hinders meaningful involvement?

What does school council do that hinders meaningful involvement?

#### Umbrella Groups:

How many of you work with (have) an umbrella group (a group of school councils that get together)?

What does the umbrella group do in your jurisdiction? Why[not] do you have one in your jurisdiction?

Probe: Benefits/challenges  
What could a board do to promote establishing an umbrella group?  
What could school councils do to help establish an umbrella group?  
What is needed to help sustain this kind of group?

**Community Member of School Council:**

Do your school councils have community members?

Probe: Benefits  
Best approaches to attracting a community member?  
Role of board in getting a community member?  
Role of principal in attracting a community member?  
Role of council in attracting a community member?

**Effective Trustees:**

What makes an effective trustee in regard to school councils? What are some of the things that the trustee can do to help school councils?

What are the barriers to trustees helping school councils or making school councils more effective?

Are there things about the trustee role that should change in regard to school councils? What changes might improve relationships with school councils? What changes might aid you in your role with school councils?

What could you do as a trustee that could enhance school councils?

Based on this discussion, how would you describe "the ideal relationship" between trustees and school councils?

Does your board have policies with regard to school councils?

Are there policies about school councils?

Probe: Awareness of policies  
Are they helpful/effective?  
Should other things be included?

**The Role of ASBA:**

Tell me a little bit about the role of ASBA. How do they help you in your role with school councils? Are there things ASBA should be doing to help you in your role with school councils?

**Summary**

Final recommendations/suggestions. What final suggestions do you have in regard to things you could do to enhance school councils?

Are there any processes and practices that would positively impact effective school councils? (See QUESTIONNAIRE)

**Summary.**

**Thank you.**

**APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Recommendations Regarding Processes and Procedures to Support Meaningful Involvement by School Councils**

To:	Trustee (individuals)	Board (corporate body)	School Council	ASBA
Re: Effective School Councils				
Attracting community members				
Developing umbrella groups				
Other				

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following tables include verbatim comments from the participant questionnaires completed by trustees who participated in these focus groups. Trustees were asked to provide recommendations to different stakeholders in regard to enhancing school councils, attracting community members and developing umbrella groups.

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Meaningful Involvement by School Councils (SC).</b>	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be responsive to SC invitations and listen to concerns.</li> <li>▪ Attend SC meetings regularly.</li> <li>▪ Attending meetings; listening; encourage membership in AHSCA.</li> <li>▪ Spend more time with SC.</li> <li>▪ Ward/area councils; policy issues passed through principals to SC for evaluation.</li> <li>▪ Communicate at beginning of school year – newspaper, radio, bulletins, etc.</li> <li>▪ Honest messages from the Board and from Community to Community with the Division.</li> <li>▪ Do SC development.</li> <li>▪ Listening and taking messages from the Council.</li> <li>▪ Provide support and assistance at PAC meetings; ensure trustees are present and report.</li> <li>▪ Process of regular attendance at meetings to promote contact and communication.</li> <li>▪ Show up at SC meetings.</li> <li>▪ Attend meetings yearly – at least some.</li> <li>▪ Attend as many meetings as possible. Two-way communication.</li> <li>▪ Be at SC meetings as observers.</li> <li>▪ Attend meetings. Be good listeners. Reports to SC of what is happening at the Board.</li> <li>▪ Attend SC meetings.</li> <li>▪ Show up! Bring relevant info.</li> <li>▪ Campaign in the neighbourhood. Talk to parents.</li> <li>▪ Attend SC meetings as observer and conduit.</li> <li>▪ Go to SC meetings – two way street to communicate concerns and information.</li> <li>▪ Attend SC meetings. Share info with SC from Board and board from SC. Encourage SC involvement and reading SC handbook. Promote separate organization for fundraising.</li> <li>▪ Attend regular meetings.</li> <li>▪ Attend SC meetings. Ensure school principals empower SC.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involve SC in decision-making, e.g., have councils provide input on policies that affect students and schools. Boards host an information evening for SC to begin school</li> </ul>



Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Meaningful Involvement by School Councils (SC).</b>	
body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>year.</li> <li>▪ Ensure that policies are sent to SC for input. Need to know what the function of SC are. Maybe with the "SC" Regulation Review it might direct ... ensure that SC are ensuring that they are following their mandate. My question is what is the mandate of the SC?</li> <li>▪ Communication; provide PD; share how their input is used and needed.</li> <li>▪ Input to inform SC.</li> <li>▪ Policy review.</li> <li>▪ Setting appropriate procedures to communicate effectively both ways. Having information sessions to help them know their roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>▪ Do SC development.</li> <li>▪ Acting on Council requests if possible.</li> <li>▪ Offer workshops and bring entire division of SC together for meetings.</li> <li>▪ Have regular meetings drawing together with SC to share whatever.</li> <li>▪ Regional meetings of SCs or have SC Chairs attend Board meetings.</li> <li>▪ Meet with SC groups on annual basis.</li> <li>▪ Stay in contact with SC.</li> <li>▪ Set policy regarding SC participation.</li> <li>▪ Listen to what SCs have to say.</li> <li>▪ Support these SCs. Meet with them.</li> <li>▪ Joint meetings to keep in touch.</li> <li>▪ Involve SC in all budget, policy, teacher recruitment and administration.</li> <li>▪ Respond to input.</li> <li>▪ Offer PD. Take part in meetings.</li> <li>▪ Value/honour the involvement and input from SC members. Share "good news" and opinions from SC at Board meetings.</li> <li>▪ Hear reports of Board Trustees who attend meetings. Ask for input on all issues.</li> <li>▪ Providing opportunity to SC to present info to BofT at Board meetings.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss items that affect student learning. Don't focus solely on fundraising.</li> <li>▪ Be up-to-date on issues; through AHSCA and local board.</li> <li>▪ They must feel meaningful!</li> <li>▪ Feel that their concerns are being heard and dealt with.</li> <li>▪ Invite them to attend Board meetings.</li> <li>▪ Appreciate staff member on the SC – but need to remember to focus on the fact it's a "parent" advisory group. Be cautious of parents who attend who also teach in the school – discussions get swayed easily.</li> <li>▪ Regular organized meetings.</li> <li>▪ Focus on broad-based issues, goal setting, prioritize initiatives to ensure a broad appeal.</li> </ul>

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Meaningful Involvement by School Councils (SC).</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More parent participation in developing meaningful ...</li> <li>▪ Set goals.</li> <li>▪ Be involved in budget process at school level.</li> <li>▪ Goal setting.</li> <li>▪ Create Council of School Councils.</li> <li>▪ Attendance by all parents. Follow policies and procedures.</li> <li>▪ Agenda. Come forward with their questions.</li> <li>▪ Control agenda with inclusive input.</li> <li>▪ Meetings – roles, responsibilities – understand these.</li> <li>▪ Do not fundraise. Active in advisory capacity.</li> <li>▪ Learn what is their role and their responsibilities. Don't focus on fundraising and "feel good" activities.</li> <li>▪ Professional development. SC offering workshops for parents on SC.</li> </ul>
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide training on roles and responsibilities for SCs by either holding regional seminars, producing video, possibly using ASBA website.</li> <li>▪ Offer PD opportunities; express the value of parent involvement.</li> <li>▪ Providing a mechanism by which SC in AB to share information.</li> <li>▪ <u>Help trustees understand the role of SC and what we should do to help with SC.</u></li> <li>▪ Workshops on role of SC; How to Hold Effective Meetings. Recognize there are some coming available – could trustees be trained to be facilitators as well?</li> <li>▪ Help trustees understand the role of SC and what we should do to help with SC.</li> <li>▪ Produce a "newspaper"-type of information sheet to all K-3 parents to encourage membership and participation at an early stage.</li> <li>▪ Offer PD support to trustees.</li> <li>▪ Courses helping trustees sort roles and role of Councils.</li> <li>▪ Could put on provincial workshop for SC Chair.</li> <li>▪ Clear processes and guidelines given to Boards as to what SCs should/shouldn't be involved in.</li> <li>▪ Workshop for both Trustees and Parent Councils.</li> <li>▪ Promote professional development regarding roles of trustees and SC.</li> <li>▪ Could send newsletter out on ideas from other divisions.</li> <li>▪ Value/honour input and promote, promote, promote parental input through SC.</li> </ul>

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Attracting community members.</b>	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trustees can help make connections.</li> <li>▪ Being available; encouraging others to be involved; sharing past successes; express their value.</li> <li>▪ Collaboration with other groups – e.g., service groups.</li> <li>▪ People who have some personal connection to the school.</li> <li>▪ Responsibility shared by trustees and members of SC.</li> <li>▪ Invite people's input. Asking shows respect for their input and need for their advice.</li> <li>▪ Public campaigning and soliciting of involved parents.</li> <li>▪ Offer suggestions as to who might be willing to do it.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for public education publicly and make it known that input and involvement is available to them and appreciated.</li> <li>▪ Perhaps suggestions made.</li> <li>▪ Be willing to ask.</li> <li>▪ Only ask who is interested in children.</li> <li>▪ Knowledge in all avenues.</li> <li>▪ Placing ad in local school newsletter.</li> <li>▪ Encourage admin and SC to contact stakeholders.</li> <li>▪ Help find them if asked.</li> <li>▪ Speak to people in "local politics".</li> <li>▪ Tell people about the "awesome" roles of SC.</li> <li>▪ Encourage and invite interested community.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Board can help make connections.</li> <li>▪ Communicate their value; share how their input is used in planning.</li> <li>▪ Advertise via media the requirements and importance of Community members.</li> <li>▪ Set goals to attract members who have common goals, interests, etc.</li> <li>▪ Support the SC to bring in outside help as necessary (maybe AHSCA).</li> <li>▪ Suggestions to the Council on trustee at large. Provide regional Council meetings two times per year.</li> <li>▪ Have admin identify community members who have brought forth concerns.</li> <li>▪ Have a meeting inviting the public.</li> <li>▪ Again, lobby through your schools. Ads in newsletters.</li> <li>▪ Suggest stakeholders.</li> <li>▪ Share info each trustee brings. Financial support for PD and conferences.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Actively seek out parents who may operate a business in the school catchment area.</li> <li>▪ Invitations to participate out to community and school population.</li> <li>▪ Look for community reps.</li> </ul>

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Attracting community members.</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Door prizes; parent education.</li> <li>▪ Ensure useful, active involvement opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Not just "I hear you".</li> <li>▪ By trying to know your community and keep a good contact with them, you can attract them to your SC.</li> <li>▪ Request participation of Council members from other schools within same community, i.e., liaison members – Elementary, Middle School, High School. Request participation from Community, i.e., Town Council, Chamber.</li> <li>▪ Ask yourselves what type of input and skill sets you need to accomplish your goals and find someone who can offer it.</li> <li>▪ Needs to be done here.</li> <li>▪ Changing the act to say "may have" instead of "shall".</li> <li>▪ Better advertising of meetings. Advertise topics. Short meetings. Guest speakers. Door prizes. Phone individuals to welcome them. Pay for parents to go to conferences. Parent PD, i.e., Roberts Rules of Order and agenda preparation.</li> <li>▪ Talk to other local parents who may have ideas.</li> <li>▪ Formal and informal invitations.</li> <li>▪ Work together to find someone interested.</li> <li>▪ Word of mouth (invite people, encourage involvement).</li> <li>▪ Share good experiences. Plan fun activities with a "smattering" of business.</li> </ul>
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not sure.</li> <li>▪ Possible publicizing of involvement via major advertisements across the province – a media support would be effective if possible.</li> <li>▪ List ideas of who may be contacted.</li> </ul>

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: Developing umbrella groups.	
Trustees (individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trustees as well as senior administration should attend SC umbrella meetings to provide information and Q/A sessions at these meetings.</li> <li>▪ Encourage your SCs to be active in umbrella groups.</li> <li>▪ Encourage administration to work on this.</li> <li>▪ Communication. Communication.</li> <li>▪ Talk to church groups, etc.</li> <li>▪ Work with SCs.</li> <li>▪ Aware so they will tell.</li> </ul>
Board (corporate body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Board should facilitate and validate the existence of umbrella groups.</li> <li>▪ Key communication system meetings.</li> <li>▪ Encourage or mandate Ward Council meetings (three or four per year) or open forums.</li> <li>▪ Bring them together – feed them, let them share concerns; listen to them.</li> <li>▪ All Trustees and Admin staff should attend COSC meetings.</li> <li>▪ Encourage the Councils to share info and meet for professional development opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Regional SC meeting three to four times per year is working quite well.</li> <li>▪ Listen to the results of these groups, so they are meaningful.</li> <li>▪ Too many groups within group already.</li> <li>▪ Support SCs financially to attend workshops.</li> <li>▪ Should be done by Board so have a better communication tool and can report information more than a couple of times per year.</li> <li>▪ Support Council/Council organizing meetings.</li> <li>▪ Set policy.</li> <li>▪ Through committees meet with other local groups such as DARE, etc.</li> <li>▪ Standing public agenda item.</li> <li>▪ Work with SC to form them and it is a committee of the Board.</li> <li>▪ Support meetings of all SC in area or division.</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All SCs in the district should send reps to each umbrella meeting.</li> <li>▪ Elect reps to umbrella groups so it's not always the Chair.</li> <li>▪ Work with other parents as there must be other parents who have contacts.</li> <li>▪ Work together.</li> <li>▪ Multi-jurisdictional COSC.</li> </ul>
ASBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide seminars for trustees/boards on the value of SC umbrella groups.</li> <li>▪ Could ASBA sponsor a provincial meeting of Councils? Even an ASBA sponsored workshop on goals could be a help.</li> <li>▪ Could work with Home and AHSCA to jointly do workshops for SCs or SC Chairs.</li> </ul>

Trustee recommendations regarding processes and procedures to support: <b>Developing umbrella groups.</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ ASBA should play a role in determining importance of this.</li><li>▪ Again, list some good contacts, i.e., DARE, community school liaison, other such groups.</li></ul>