

Best Practice for School Councils and Fundraising Societies in Regards to Personal Information of Parents and Students

School Councils are considered to be an organization under the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA). Information that school councils collect and use must be done so under the requirements of PIPA.

Role of the School Council

School council is a collective association of parents, teachers, secondary students, principal, staff and community representative(s) whose purpose is to advise the principal and the Board respecting matters relating to the school. It is a means for parents and community members to work together with the school to support and enhance student learning. (Alberta School Council Resource Manual, p. 9)

Members of the School Council

Membership in the school council is defined in regulation and in the Education Act. The majority of the members are parents of children enrolled at the school. Other members are the principal, one or more teacher representatives and a high school student, if the school has a senior high program. A school council may also have a community member and an Early Childhood Services (ECS) parent, if the school has an ECS program. (Alberta School Council Resource Manual, p. 9)

Collection and use of personal information

Personal information (name, contact information of parents and/or students, images, etc.) must be collected directly from parents. The school can also provide the information to the school council if parents have consented for the school to provide the school council with the information.

School councils must inform parents how the personal information they have collected will be used. Typically, school councils use the information to contact parents regarding school council business (e.g., newsletters, meetings and events hosted by the school council).

The school council is responsible for ensuring:

- the information is used for the purpose it was collected
- the information is kept confidential and secure
- only individuals who require the information to carry out their duties have access to it
- the school council has a plan to manage and keep secure the personal information of parents and students:
 - how long consent forms will be kept, and where
 - at the end of the year, the lists are deleted, paper copies are shredded, etc.
 - that all members understand their responsibility and requirement to protect and use personal information in accordance with the reason it was collected
- someone on the school council executive can respond to questions that may arise about the council's handling of personal information
- the personal information is not used for any other purpose without consent

Newsletters (purpose and practice)

The purpose of a school council newsletter is to communicate school council business with parents. The school council should not include school news in the school council newsletter. The school has its own platforms to communicate with parents and school councils may not have access to the most current information that parents require. It is appropriate to direct parents to SchoolZone to access school communication for parents.

School facilitation

Schools can assist school councils and fundraising societies by sending and collecting forms (e.g., consent forms) but it is up to the principal to decide what information is sent home by the school. Forms and newsletters must meet Division standards and have the principal's approval.

SCHOOL COUNCIL CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

Council members are responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of all members of the school community. Personal information that the school council executive collects is subject to the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).

- Do not share personal information for any purpose other than of school council business.
- Promote high standards of ethical practice within the school community.
- Always be professionally discreet. School council meetings are not the appropriate place to discuss students, staff or family situations.
- Limit discussions at school council meetings to matters of concern to the school community as a whole.
- Respect the confidential nature of school business and respect limitations this may place on the operation of the school council.
- Use the appropriate communication channels when questions or concerns arise.
- When acting as a volunteer on behalf of the school council, you are responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of the personal information you may have access to. This information can only be used for school council business and may not be shared with other parents.
- When pictures are taken on behalf of the school council for school council use, parents must be notified (this is considered to be a collection of personal information under PIPA).

Thank you for your concern and respect for the confidentiality of all families and staff within our school community.

Note: When you are volunteering on behalf of the school you are considered to be an employee under the FOIP Act and subject to the same requirements of all Division staff. As a parent volunteer in the school, you may have access to personal information of students to perform your volunteer duties. The information you have access to, and things that you may observe must remain confidential. This information can't be shared with others, including school council members. Photographs can only be taken in the school or at school events with the principal's permission, unless it is a public event (e.g., Christmas concert).

Resources

Not legal advice

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions for School Councils and Fundraising Societies -

<https://www.alberta.ca/personal-information-for-non-profits-and-other-organizations>

Alberta Education School Council Resource Guide - <https://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/public/download/files/181387>

Alberta School Council Association - <http://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/>

Not legal advice