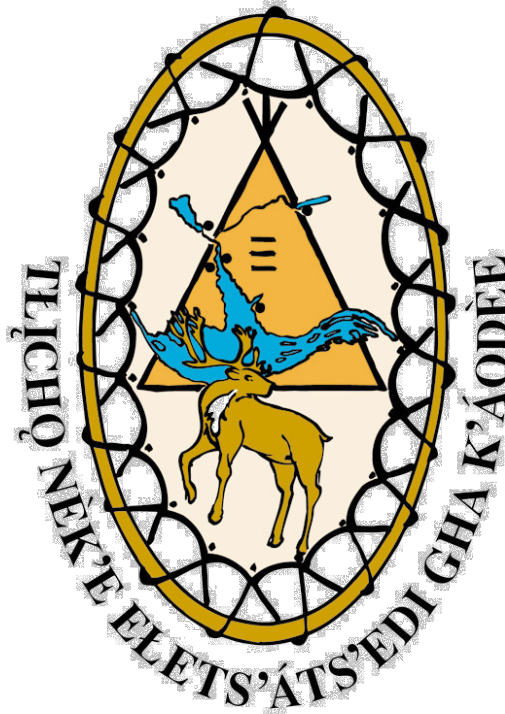


Tlicho Community Services Agency



School Advisory Councils

Background:

District Education Authorities (DEAs) exist through the GNWT's Education Act as a means of ensuring public governance of public entities. In our context, the intended role of a DEA is multi-layered. Apart from providing oversight and accountability around school operations, DEAs are also supposed to ensure that the cultural values and beliefs of the Tlicho people are interwoven in all aspects of the school. Where most school administrators are non-Tlicho, the DEA is supposed to assist in ensuring that cultural education and Tlicho beliefs are manifested in school practice. When effective, DEAs are a critical part of developing a culturally responsive school.

Issue:

While DEAs have experienced periods of success, there have also been periods where they have not functioned effectively. In recent years, all DEAs in our region have experienced challenges that have resulted in little or no oversight of schools in our region.

Issues have included:

- Not enough interested people to develop a DEA
- Not enough members present for a quorum
- Chairpersons not pushing for meetings/ principals not pushing for meetings
- etc

The scope of the DEA has changed a great deal over the years as has the socio-economic makeup of our communities. This has changed how DEAs are perceived.

- DEAs were once very powerful with the ability to hire and dismiss employees, negotiate contracts, and make important decisions around all aspects of school operations
- The authority of DEAs has been greatly diminished as formal systems replace local level decision making. Employees are centralized, HR manages policy, money is managed outside of the school etc
- Where once DEA honoraria was a valued component of income, other employment opportunities have made participation in DEAs less critical to household income.

In general, as the authority and appeal of the DEAs declined, so too did community interest in participation. As the actual authority of DEAs declined, inservicing of DEA members did not occur at the same rate and a situation emerged where DEA members continued to believe in a certain level of authority and decision making that did not reflect the realities of the existing system. This led to a number of instances of conflict between DEA members and school administrators which, in the end, resulted in a system that did not function.

All of this results in a loss of contact between the schools the cultural values of the communities in which they exist.

Solution:

As a pilot project, the TCSA sought and received permission to suspend DEAs in lieu of developing a more responsive system. It is recognized that input from the community, especially in our context, is vital to the successful operation of our schools. To support ongoing, growth-oriented communication and input, the TCSA has developed a multi-layered strategy to ensure that the essential goals once achieved by the DEAs are being met.

Component 1: The development of School Advisory Councils

The School Advisory Council is a volunteer committee of parents and caregivers with a genuine interest in the development and welfare of community schools.

The principal of the school will work with interested parents to develop a volunteer committee of parents and caregivers to establish a School Advisory Council.

See Appendix A for SAC outline

Component 2: Open House Events

Schools will host 4 open houses per year. ‘Open houses’ can be interpreted as substantial events which bring parents, caregivers, and community members into school. At least 2 of the open houses need to be developed as stand alone opportunities for community school engagement.

Component 3: School Communications

-Each school will develop a monthly/ bi-monthly newsletter

-Within the shell of the TCSA wiki, each school will develop a section intended for public communication

Component 4: Reporting to Chief and Council

School administrators will request to be added to the meetings held by Chief and Council at least 1 time per semester.

Component 5: Reporting to Tlicho Government/ Assembly

The chairperson, the CEO and the Director of Education will meet with the Tlicho Government Assembly/Grand Chief to report on regional educational activities a minimum of 2 times per year

School Advisory Councils

Terms of Reference

Role of the SAC

- To promote communication, collaboration and involvement between home, school and community.
- To ensure that the Tlicho culture evident in instruction, school culture, and practice.
- To contribute to the school's learning environment by providing advice and recommendations regarding school goals and educational issues.
- To encourage parent education and provide a forum for the discussion of educational issues.

SAC Membership

- Every parent, guardian, or caretaker of a student enrolled in our schools is a member of the SAC.
 - An Executive consisting of four members-at-large will be elected during the 1st SAC meeting of each year.
- An appointed member from the Community Government is a member of the SAC.
- A community elder is a member of the SAC.
- The school Principal is an ex-officio member of the SAC.

SAC Operations

- The SAC meets 4-6 times per year with the first meeting being held within 40 days of the school year.
- The Principal delivers a report to the SAC at each meeting.
- The Principal prepares an agenda and chairs the meeting.
- SAC meetings should be held at times most conducive to participation.
- SAC meeting should be one hour in duration.
- Minutes kept from SAC meetings should be sent to the SAC Executive, TCSA Office, and posted in a public place.
- The Principal ensures that the minutes are kept. Minutes can be kept in a variety of forms ranging from literal notes to summary notes. Consistency is important.
- Simple Rules of Order should be followed (see appendix B)

Making Decisions about SAC Business

The way School Advisory Councils make decisions may vary, depending on the issue. Two typical models for making decisions are consensus and majority vote. School Advisory Councils may combine both strategies to seek consensus from the school community and then confirm the decision by a majority vote.

The Role of the Principal

The principal is the instructional leader who manages the day-to-day operations of the school and is a key member on school council who promotes cooperation between the school and the community. The



principal implements the policies of EC&E and the TCSA, ensures instruction is consistent with the curriculum, ensures the standards of education are met, evaluates the programs, maintains order and discipline within the school, evaluates and supervises teachers and supervises the evaluation and advancement of students.

On the SAC, the Principal:

- Promotes cooperation between the school and the community it serves
- Seeks input from parents and community on major decisions that affect the school
- Establishes, facilitates, communicates and encourages opportunities for parent and community involvement in school matters
- Encourages and supports the formation and continuous improvement of school council
- Interprets and shares results of territorial achievement tests and diploma exams
- Shares information about the school community
- Provides information on the programs in the school and the needs of the students
- Refers school council to the appropriate resource for information on laws, regulations and policies that affect school council
- Provides an opportunity for the school council to provide input into the school's education plan.

The Role of SAC Members

- Operate with a philosophy that enhances the team approach to education and community development, viewing the school and the community as a working team
- Encourage feedback and participation from community groups and individuals
- Keep current on community events
- Communicate information of interest to the school council and the school community
- Share information from school council meetings with the community
- Have a clear understanding of the school council's goals
- Respect confidentiality
- Attend school council meetings
- Identify topics for agenda
- Work toward building a positive consensus within the school environment
- Create an inviting school council environment.

Advising the Principal

School Advisory Councils may, at its discretion, advise the principal on any matter relating to the school. Some of the more common topics for discussion include:

- School's overall mission, philosophy, policies, rules and goals
- School's improvement planning
- School volunteers
- Fundraising
- School policy on use of facilities by the larger community
- Ways of reporting student achievement results to parents and public
- Methods of communicating with the public



- Promotion of the school in the community
- Programs offered in the school
- Extracurricular activities offered in the school
- Student attendance procedures, standards of student conduct and bullying issues
- Graduation and other school celebrations.

Advising vs. Directing

The advisory role is intended to involve parents, high school students and the community in school-based decision making for which the principal is responsible. It is always important to respect authority and legal accountability. The principal has authority for instructional leadership and school management and the TCSA has authority for governing the school jurisdiction. School Advisory Councils also play a decision-making role in its own operations by:

- Deciding on which matters to advise
- Creating operating procedures to carry out its functions, which may be in the form of by-laws/operating procedures
- Developing operational policies in the school that are considered necessary to carry out its functions, with the support of the principal
- Choosing goals, setting plans and organizing activities to support the school council's purpose

Roles that are not to be taken on by a School Advisory Council include:

The School Advisory Council is not a forum for the discussion of individual school personnel, students, parents or other individual members of the school community. With regard to individual concerns, the role of SAC is to advise the parent on how to present his/ her concern and to ensure that there is an appropriate protocol to hear about individual concerns or complaints at the school as well as the Regional level. It is important to be mindful that, as with all partners in education, there are limits to the work that can be done by a school council. Roles that are not to be taken on by a School Advisory Council include:

- School governance
- Employment issues
- School management
- Addressing parent/ community complaints
- Working on policies that deviate from school board policy
- Taking on the role of the teacher, principal or school board, each of which has professional and legal responsibilities within the school system
- Discussing performance or conduct of individual students, teachers, other employees, parents or community members during activities related to school council

Content Selected from:
Alberta School Council Resource Manual

