



# MAPSSS

Maltese Association of Parents  
of State School Students

# The Role of School Councils

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## MAPSSS POSITION ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

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Date: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015

## MAPSSS POSITION ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

### General

This document reflects the position of the Maltese Association of Parents of State School Students (MAPSSS) on the role of School Councils in view of the Association's objective to improve the home-school communication and enhance further parental involvement in State Schools.

### Aim of this Position Paper

The School Council should have the right to information about all matters involving school life. It should be consulted prior to introducing changes to school regulations and it has the responsibility to provide advice on the general organisation and operation of the school, planning, guidance and evaluation of pupils. In order to fulfil these tasks, School Council members should be informed of any change in policy on a ministerial, departmental, and college level.

The School Council can support the work of the school in a variety of ways. It can:

- be involved in drawing up the school development plan and consider how parents might support its implementation
- consider ways parents can be involved in children's learning to improve educational and personal achievement
- build positive relationships between parents and school staff
- support the school in drafting school policy decisions and other matters
- fundraise to provide additional resources for the school
- facilitate school events and work with the head teacher and staff to devise events which are enjoyable, encourage parental participation in a way that suit the needs of parents and fit into their schedules

We strongly recommend that on a college base there is cooperation or at least communication among School Councils in order to ensure continuity in policy. For instance the healthy eating policy adopted in primary schools may sometimes be neglected in secondary schools hence the education value for life of the efforts done in the primary cycle is lost in the secondary cycle. Establishing college based committees representing each school in the college to reach this aim is greatly encouraged.

To this effect it is recommended that a seminar be held on college basis once or twice yearly whereby School Council members can interact by exchanging their experiences and proposals. This seminar should be attended by the college principal and school heads, but it should include sessions where School Council members may interact solely and directly with the school principal.

The following list encompasses the core activities for a School Council:

- Actively participate in the School Development Plan
- Actively participate school policies such as HW policy, behaviour policy
- Discuss and contribute in organising extra-curricular activities and School outings for students
- Discuss and analyse the school's overall results and achievements

- Manage budget allocations
- Organise a number of informative sessions between Education Officers and Parents
- Organise social events to instil networking and teambuilding between parents and school staff
- Prepare a school handbook to distribute to parents in the beginning of the scholastic year that shall consist of; school calendar, SMT & teachers LSA details, parents on council details, school policies, objectives/ mission statements, action plans, check lists / evaluation forms.

An Action Plan should be set at the beginning of the scholastic year. Eventually the School Council should evaluate their work and the events organised on pre-established criteria.

The School Council end-of-year report should be made available to parents and ideally shared among the other schools for best practice knowledge sharing. On a college basis, every year, each Head of School should have the opportunity to present the School Council's achievements and the College Principal should agglomerate the college's achievements and present it during the meeting of College Principals.

### **School Development Plan**

As the School Council's responsibility to provide advice on general organisation and operation of the school, planning, guidance and evaluating pupils, MAPSSS strongly believes that School Councils should participate in the School Development Plan. The importance of such an input from the School Councils is evident from the number of European Countries that actually adopts this practice including Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and even some schools in Malta.

### **School Infrastructure, Security and Cleanliness**

We believe that the school infrastructure has a direct and indirect influence on the school achievements. A large number of schools have seen minimal investment since they were built decades ago. Schools with open unsheltered corridors, old timber or steel apertures, non-laminated glass panes and unlocked and unattended main entrance doors – just to name a few examples – contribute to unhealthy and insecure environments.

School security is another issue which should be considered with a greater impetus since the lack of security at school access points offers a serious security threat to both students and teachers. Various schools do not offer a secure environment, especially as far as access is concerned, and both parents and teachers are concerned about such situations.

School cleanliness is another aspect of serious concern. There are certain schools where the level of cleanliness has improved but there are other schools where the level of cleanliness is still at an unacceptable level and must be tackled to ensure improvement.

We believe that the School Council should be involved to give its recommendations as to which aspects of school infrastructure, security and cleanliness may be improved. It is the competence of the technical persons and of MEDE to prepare proposals on how this may be achieved, but parents

can definitely contribute to highlight which infrastructural, security and hygienic aspects of their children's schools need urgent attention.

### **Home–School Cooperation**

The School Council should determine the home-school cooperation and communication. This is a valid point as the School Council members can determine the means of cooperation and communication according to the availability and disposition of the parents. Even within the Maltese context the parents lifestyle may vary from area to area in such a way that an activity in one area may be more successful than the activities in other areas. The role of the School Council is to liaise between parents and the school's Senior Management Team

The School Council should prepare a strategy document setting out its policies for parental involvement. An evaluation of this strategy should be included in the end-of-year report. The parental involvement strategy should be acknowledged and/or revised whenever a new School Council is elected. Such a strategy will ensure that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on matters affecting the education of their children.

The School Council should consider a variety of methods that are effective, proportionate and meet the needs of parents. This may include involving parents as part of a working, planning or reference group; use of focus groups, open forum/open space events for parents to discuss issues in small groups; surveys, workshops, consultation documents, and so on.

Apart from the general need to give parents (particularly those not familiar with the Education System in Malta) information on school life and events, the curriculum and others, it is important to identify and develop effective communication systems in each school.

Schools should consider what methods are most effective for communicating with parents.

Schools that successfully manage to stay in touch with the views of their parents employ a wide range of formal and informal approaches that are reviewed and updated regularly. Successful parent partnership is often strengthened with informal face to face contact and other forms of communication such as telephone calls, letters, e-mails, text messaging, newsletters, school websites, parent information evenings, parent workshops and social gatherings. Workshops led by parents, supported by school staff, can help to engage with other parents.

MAPSSS believe that School Council members should provide their email contact details to parents in order to facilitate communication between the school and the parents.

Schools in Finland engage the parents even with the use of social media such as by including informational videos supporting students and parents with current events going on at school. One cannot ignore that the Maltese Education System has already set-up the required infrastructure for such and even safer communication: Fronter

Home-school cooperation does not depend only on the involvement of the parents in matters related directly to the education of their children, but also on the community spirit that is developed between schools and parents. To our knowledge, some schools organise tea parties (as a means of fund raising) for mothers in the morning. However, there are various ways how School Councils may embark on this. Refer to the following list for suggestions:

- Welcome drink and meeting with teachers at the beginning of the scholastic year
- Cultural tours/walks for the family
- Parents direct involvement in the organisation of school activities such as costume making and scenery
- Informative talks (themes may range from nutrition, parental skills, cultural debates, educational policies)
- Life-Long learning courses such as IT skills and literacy.
- Community work in conjunction with the local council such as visiting old people's home, Charity marathon
- Farewell event with teachers at the end of the scholastic year
- Observers' day (parents visit classes as observers)
- Create a community fund where bank account details are made available for those wishing to make donations
- Organise at least one annual social activity for all parents & teachers (ex. BBQ. Sports event, School Open Day where activities such as Parents' talent show /craft / hobbies, pets' show can be held)
- Book Fair
- Celebration Soiree

School Councils should explore the possibility to organise such events after school hours in order to make it possible for working parents to attend. In some schools, school activities take place only during school hours. This approach should be revised as even the education department has acknowledged the reality of working parents and has indeed provided facilities such as Klabb 3-16 and recently free child care. Thus, one cannot truly achieve parental involvement if parents needs to work in today's economy is encouraged by the Government but schools on a regional level fail to accommodate and plan activities in accordance with the parents' working life. Lack of parental involvement and participation in the school's activities directly impinges on the efforts made at Governmental level to increase school parent communication. In return a disparity in the opportunities for parental involvement is created. This disparity indirectly benefits a sector of the parental community whilst isolating other sectors especially since working parents will fail to integrate with the school system and therefore they cannot possibly be in a position to provide to their children the interrelation such school events are usually aimed for.

A practical approach in the organisation of the event that may encourage attendance should be adopted in order to increase the parents' participation, this includes child minding services, (if necessary at a minimal cost). Considering the feasibility of the organisation of an event and even the low attendance of parents, Councils of Heads within Colleges may consider organising such events jointly or College based.

Voluntary participation of parents in the organisation of the above mentioned activities and other activities which may be held more regularly, such as reading sessions after school, should be encouraged.

School Councils should ensure that parents feel welcome in the school and that they can easily communicate with the persons who care for their own children in the educational setting.

### **Procedures for School Council elections**

The following points should be taken into consideration in the organisation of School Council elections for better communication with the parents and the school community as a whole:

The dates of the School Council elections should be brought forward such that the School Council term coincides with the scholastic year. For this reason, it is being suggested that such elections are held during the month of November to coincide with the parents' evening. This way, besides giving the necessary time for the schools to settle, it would encourage more parental participation.

MEDE should take a central and active role in the promotion and organisation of the School Council elections to encourage as many parents as possible to participate. Amongst other approaches, this can be achieved by disseminating the necessary information to parents about this important event using different media tools.

The nomination forms and related elections information should be available to parents both at the school reception and even online; as this will avoid speculation on who is interested or not in such a role before the closing date.

Candidates for the School Council (both parents and teachers) should be given the possibility to express their vision for the School Council by distributing such material in school. Also candidates should be able to insert a brief description on ballot papers especially in secondary schools where parents do not know each other as much as in primary schools. Schools should make all candidates aware of any free marketing space such as notice boards. While School Council elections should be transparent and supported using school media, any additional 'self-promotion' of the candidates should take place at the candidates' own expense.

School Council meetings should be encouraged to be held after school hours to allow for a more democratic participation from all parents; men and women, working parents and not.

### **Way Forward**

A small committee consisting of parents, college principals and MEDE representatives should be set-up, answerable to the Permanent Secretary MEDE, to implement the desired changes in the School Councils, in view of the forthcoming amendments in the Education Act.

MAPSSS Committee

April 2015

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