

RCL HANDBOOK



A GUIDE FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS – **YOUTH LEADERS IN SCHOOLS**



basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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YOUTH MOVEMENT

RCL **HANDBOOK**

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REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS -
YOUTH LEADERS IN SCHOOLS**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


The RCL handbook was developed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) as a guide for the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) in South African schools. The RCL serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance in schools. The policies of the department of Basic Education looks at the School Governing Bodies (SGB) as well as the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) in its quest to develop and entrench a democratic ethos and adherence to the founding values of our new democratic dispensation.

A consultative process was undertaken with the relevant Directorate within the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Provincial Education Departments (PED), School Governing Body Associations (SGBA), South African Principal Association (SAPA) to foster constitutional values through the advancement of the rights of the child.

The DBE acknowledges Agape Youth Movement (AYM), National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), MieT Africa, Amnesty International, Ngangezwe foundation

The graphic designers - BizM8, editors, and production team worked diligently to transform ideas into a visually engaging and informative handbook.

This handbook stands as a testament to the collaborative spirit that drives positive change in education. May it serve as a valuable resource for schools, educators, and learners alike, inspiring a new generation of leaders committed to making a meaningful impact.





DBE'S FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that DBE introduces the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) Handbook, a comprehensive guide that outlines the significance and impact of learner leadership in schools. The RCL plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of responsibility, engagement, and empowerment among learners. As DBE navigates the ever-evolving landscape of education, it is imperative to recognize the instrumental role that learner leaders play in shaping the culture and environment of our schools.



MR. MATHANZIMA MWELI

**Director-General of the
Department of Basic Education**

This handbook not only explains the essence of the RCL but also provides valuable insights into its formation, functions, and the overarching benefits of active learner participation. By serving in the RCL, learners not only ensure our schools become centers of care, learning and support but also positive spaces for cultivating essential skills that will serve them well beyond the classroom.

As the Director-General of Basic Education, I am proud to support initiatives that empower learners to take an active role in their educational journey. The RCL serves as a testament to the belief that every learner has the potential to be a positive force for change. By engaging in the activities outlined in this handbook, RCL members contribute to the creation of a vibrant and inclusive learning environment, laying the foundation for their own growth and that of their peers.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the creation of this handbook, recognizing the collaborative effort that went into compiling this valuable resource. I encourage educators, administrators, and, most importantly, learners to leverage the information within these pages to enhance the effectiveness and impact of their respective RCLs.

Together, let us continue to invest in the leadership potential of our learners and cultivate an educational environment that promotes active participation, responsibility, and a commitment to excellence.



ACRONYMS

BELA: Basic Education Law Amendment Act 32 of 2024

CSTL: Care and Support for Teaching and Learning

PRO: Public Relations Officer

QLTC: Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign

RCL: Representative Council of Learners

SBST: School Based Support Team

SGB: School Governing Body

SMT: School Management Team

TLO: Teacher Liaison Officer



PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK



The Representative Council of Learners (RCL) Handbook serves as a guide designed to equip RCL members with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. This handbook aims to:

1.

Provide Clarity and Guidance: The handbook highlights the roles and responsibilities of RCL members, offering clarity on their duties from their election throughout their term in office. It outlines the expectations placed upon RCL members and serves as a roadmap for their activities and initiatives within the school community.

2.

Empower RCL Members: By offering practical guidance, the handbook empowers RCL members to become effective leaders and advocates within their schooling environments. It provides them with the tools and knowledge needed to address challenges, champion causes, and effect positive change through their respective roles.

3.

Highlight Support Structures: The handbook identifies and explores the various support structures available to RCL members, including Teacher Liaison Officers, Principals, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), and other stakeholders.

4.

Promote Collaboration and Engagement: By fostering an understanding of the roles played by different stakeholders, the handbook promotes collaboration, and meaningful engagement between RCL members and other key players within the school community. It encourages dialogue, cooperation, and shared responsibility in working towards common goals, making schools conducive environments for teaching and learning.

BELA Act 32 of 2024 provides that the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) responsible for Education must determine the functions and procedures for the establishment and election of representative councils of learners at schools by publishing a notice in the Provincial Gazette. This handbook is a general national guide for learners, schools, Teacher Liaison Officers (TLOs), officials and NGOs supporting RCLs on participating meaningfully in schools.

WHAT IS THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS (RCL)?



A Representative Council of Learners (RCL) is an organized learner body that represents the interests of learners in schools. The BELA Act envisions the RCL as a democratic structure established to ensure that learners have a voice in the decision-making processes within their schools. It is a platform that allows learners to express their opinions, contribute to school policies, and actively participate in shaping their educational experiences. It aims to foster learner leadership, empowerment, and a sense of ownership among learners.

Every year, each class across the grades must elect two representatives of different genders to serve on the RCL. Together these learners, as a group of class representatives, make up the official council of learners that represents all the learners in the school. They elect an executive to lead the whole council and delegate about two from the executive to serve on the School Governing Body (SGB) together with parents and educators, and these elected learners are full members of the SGB. The number of learners elected to serve on the SGB can be informed by the size of the learner population in each school. The RCL works with the SGB and the School Management Team (SMT) to achieve the goals of the school. It is important that the adult members of the SGB respect the voice and input of learners. The RCL is supported by a Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO). This role belongs to the Deputy Principal or an educator(s) delegated by the Deputy Principal to provide support and capacity building of the RCL at school level.

WHY DO WE HAVE THE RCL IN OUR SCHOOLS??

The main aim for establishing RCLs is to uphold democracy in our schools. The RCL structure and operation provide a platform for learners' voices to find expression in a school.

Learner participation was brought into South African law in 1996 by the South African Schools Act No. 84. The law mandates the election of a representative council of learners (RCL) in schools with 8th grade and higher. Internationally, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also supports the inclusion of learners in decision-making processes in schools (Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

The Representative Council of Learners (RCL) serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance within our educational institution, embodying core values that underscore its commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment. Rooted in principles of democracy, equality, non-racism, and non-sexism, the RCL endeavors to uphold these fundamental tenets in all its endeavors. With a deep-seated reverence for respect, accountability, and the rule of law, the RCL operates within the framework of an open society, promoting transparency and inclusivity at every turn. Furthermore, guided by the principle of ubuntu, the RCL strives to cultivate a sense of interconnectedness and community among learners, recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of everyone within the school community.



RIGHTS COME WITH RESPONSIBILITIES

In the learning environment, responsibilities are just as important as rights. While rights provide individuals with certain freedoms and entitlements, responsibilities ensure that these rights are exercised in a responsible and ethical manner. Having responsibilities as a learner means recognizing the role you play in your own education and respecting the learning environment.

RCL members also have both rights and responsibilities. They have the right to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns with the SGB. However, they also have responsibilities to fulfil. These include being good role models for their peers, promoting respect and discipline among learners, organizing events and activities that benefit the learner community, and communicating effectively between learners and school staff. By having responsibilities, RCL members actively contribute to the betterment of their schools.



1. Democracy: This value entails ensuring that decision-making processes within the school are participatory, transparent, and fair, allowing every student to have a voice and a vote in matters that affect them directly.

2. Equality: RCLs should strive to promote equality by advocating for fair treatment and opportunities for all learners regardless of their background, abilities, or characteristics, ensuring that each student has access to the same resources and opportunities.

3. Non-racism and Non-sexism: RCLs should actively work to combat discrimination and prejudice based on race or gender within the school environment, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and respect for all individuals regardless of their race or gender identity.

4. Respect: RCLs should foster a culture of mutual respect among learners, staff, and stakeholders, valuing each person's dignity, opinions, and contributions while promoting positive and constructive interactions.

5. Accountability: RCLs should hold themselves and others accountable for their actions and decisions, ensuring transparency, honesty, and responsibility in all aspects of their work and representing the interests of the student body effectively.

6. The Rule of Law: RCLs should uphold and adhere to the rules, policies, and regulations established within the school community, promoting a culture of lawfulness, order, and fairness in all their activities and decisions.

7. Open Society: RCLs should advocate for openness, inclusivity, and transparency within the school environment, promoting dialogue, collaboration, and engagement among learners, staff, and stakeholders.

8. Ubuntu: This African philosophical concept emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all individuals within a community. RCLs should embody ubuntu by fostering a sense of solidarity, empathy, and shared responsibility among learners, promoting a supportive and nurturing school community where everyone feels valued and included.

WHAT DOES A FUNCTIONAL RCL LOOK LIKE?

The existence of a functional RCL has many positive effects on the school, the SGB, the learner population, and the individuals serving on the RCL. Having an effective RCL enables learners to actively participate in decision making processes, activities and policies that impact their school community. A well-functioning RCL will work as a team, and will:

- ★ Have a clear plan of how it intends to promote and support learner needs, and to empower learners in line with the vision and mission of its school.
- ★ Have a constitution.
- ★ Hold monthly meetings to discuss learner matters and coordinate RCL activities.
- ★ Be represented in the SGB.
- ★ Initiate and lead activities and programmes that address academic, social and other issues that hinder the general wellbeing and academic performance of learners.
- ★ Ensure that the school code of conduct exists and observed by the learners.
- ★ Establish links with RCLs of other schools as well as with youth organisations for the benefit of all learners in the school.
- ★ Promote sport and cultural activities in conjunction with the school management and governing body.
- ★ Be accountable to the learners, because the RCL is a representative body given authority and mandate by learners to speak and participate in decision-making processes on their behalf.

2023 – PROVINCIAL RCL PRESIDENT LIMPOPO PROVINCE



**JEREMIAH
RAGEDI**

RCLs are a channel, a bridge between learners and educators within the schooling environment. Therefore, RCLs are important when it comes to learner-educator affairs. Without functioning RCLs, it becomes difficult for learners to initiate solutions that address the problems they face daily. The representation of learners in the school management promotes the spirit of inclusivity and ensures that schools are conducive environments for teaching and learning.

As an RCL member, you function as a linchpin of balance between the learners and the school management. RCL leaders function as a link to ensure proper communication between the learners and the school management to instill mutual understanding. As an RCL leader, you need to be able to understand and accommodate the different perspectives of different learners and educators. You need to have the intention to ensure functionality in the school, and even at higher levels such as circuit, district, and provincial levels. You need to be committed to your responsibilities and duties as a learner leader and be as committed to your academic duties as a learner.



2023 – PROVINCIAL RCL: FREE STATE PROVINCE



**ANTJIE
KOEKEMOER**

Being a leader in school is really important because it means you get to have a say and be heard. Good leaders create a friendly and welcoming space where everyone can share their thoughts and worries. This helps build trust, makes you feel like you belong, and gives you the power to be a part of your own education. When you know there's someone you can talk to, it makes a positive difference in how well you do in school, how you feel, and your overall experience.

Being a leader in school is a substantial change that helps you learn how to speak up and stand up for yourself. It's a special chance for young people to speak out for their peers and do things that matter for their school. When you're a leader, you also learn how important it is to communicate clearly, convince others, and negotiate. Being a part of discussions and decisions not only makes you more confident but also gives you important skills that will help you succeed in school and in future.

2023 – PROVINCIAL RCL PRESIDENT: EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE



**SMILE
AVUYILE**

Part of representing learners includes making sure their academics are not struggling. The RCL should be able to voice out opinions of learners on how to improve the culture and quality of teaching and learning. The academic needs of learners should be made known to the school management by the RCL. RCL members should be able to identify gaps in the school environment that affect the quality of education that learners receive. We always need to bear in mind that the main purpose of being at school is to learn. RCL members should ensure that they do not neglect their academics, as leaders lead by example. Seeing your RCL leaders perform well academically also motivates the learners we lead to follow in our footsteps. As RCL leaders, we need to set the trend of academic excellence and have study groups and peer education groups to help each other perform as we should.

HOW IS THE RCL CREATED?

The structure of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) begins with the democratic election of learner representatives across grades or classes in a school. These representatives, nominated by their peers, undergo a selection process that may include campaigning and voting by the learner body. Once elected, the RCL members form the core leadership body tasked with representing the interests and concerns of their fellow peers. The RCL structure has executive positions such as president, deputy president, secretary, treasurer, and committee chairs, each with specific responsibilities and duties. Additionally, the RCL may establish subcommittees or working groups to address specific issues or initiatives within the school community. Overall, the creation of the RCL structure is founded on principles of democracy, inclusivity, and learner participation, aiming to empower learners to actively engage in the decision-making processes that affect their educational experience.



HOW IS THE RCL FORMED: THE PROCESS

SCHOOL LEVEL ELECTIONS:



The RCL elections provide an excellent opportunity for learners to elect leaders that are representative of the school community and who will represent the interests of all learners. In addition, school electoral teams are encouraged to develop their own advocacy strategies to encourage learners to participate in the elections, and to ensure that capable candidates are elected.

RCL elections at school level must be held in the first two to three weeks of the first quarter of the school academic year. The TLO takes the role of the Election Officer, and must supervise and oversee the election process, and may appoint class teachers as Electoral Assistants.

THE TLO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THE RCL IS ESTABLISHED AND FUNCTIONAL AND THEIR ROLE INCLUDE.:

- * Coordinating and attending RCL meetings; promoting communication between the principal, staff and the RCL.
- * Supporting, guiding, and mentoring the RCL.
- * Ensuring that all documents relating to the RCL are safely kept in their designated area.
- * Avail documents of the RCL to officials of the Department upon request.

THE ROLE OF THE TLO ALSO INCLUDES ASSISTING IN DEVELOPING THE SKILLS OF THE ELECTED RCL MEMBERS THROUGH, FOR EXAMPLE, LEADERSHIP TRAINING INITIATIVES AND MENTORING THE RCL MEMBERS DURING THEIR TERM IN OFFICE. THE TLO MAY ALSO BE DELEGATED TO SERVE ON THE RCL STRUCTURE AT THE CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT LEVELS.

STEP I

ELECTING CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

- * Each class in the schools elects at least two representatives, who serve as the leaders of the class and represent the class in the RCL, which consists of all class representatives.
- * Each candidate shall be nominated and seconded by class members, and the nominated candidates shall accept or decline the nomination.
- * Once the nominations are closed the Electoral Assistant will draw up a list of all candidates and display it on the Class Notice Board.
- * The Electoral Assistant must check the names of learners eligible to vote against a class register which serves as a voters' roll. Each learner has one vote for each available position and the election should be by secret ballot.

Voting for the "right" people for the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) is crucial. When choosing candidates, learners should think about the roles of the RCL and pick those who can fulfill these duties effectively. It's vital to elect individuals who will work towards improving the school for everyone, represent their class and school well, communicate learners' needs effectively, and make decisions in the best interests of everyone. Learners should vote for those who are ready to act and make positive changes.



STEP 2

ELECTING THE RCL EXECUTIVE

RCL elections at school level must be held in the first two to three weeks of the first quarter of the school academic year. The TLO takes the role of the Election Officer, and must supervise and oversee the election process, and may appoint class teachers as Electoral Assistants.

1. A PRESIDENT WHO:

- * Leads the RCL and give overall direction of the structure.
- * Chairs the Executive Committee Meetings as well as Council meetings.
- * Coordinates the Council to ensure that proper policies and procedures stipulated in the School Code of Conduct and the RCL Constitution are in place and adhered to.
- * Provides support and supervision to committee conveners.
- * Represents the council as its figure head.

- * Handles grievances submitted by all learners (academic, social, and otherwise)
- * Manages disciplinary matters in the RCL executive.

3. SECRETARY:

- * The secretary will be the administrative head of the RCL. He/she must keep all RCL records, minutes and provide reports on programmes and decisions of the RCL.
- * Manage the RCL management plan and serve as a communication link with other stake holders. Communicate and engage with the learner population on the status of the school and any feedback about tabled issues on behalf of the RCL.

2. DEPUTY PRESIDENT:

- * The Deputy President will deputise for the President in his/her absence or as and when delegated to do so by the president.

STEP 2

ELECTING THE RCL EXECUTIVE

4. DEPUTY SECRETARY

- * The Deputy Secretary will deputise for the Secretary in his/her absence.
- * The Secretary and Deputy Secretary can share the Secretariat duties amongst themselves.
- * Keep records of funds (paper budget) allocated and donated to the RCL.
- * Keep records of all funds spent and present financial reports to the executive committee and the Council as a whole.

5. TREASURER:

- * The school shall make a budget provision for RCL activities. The treasurer leads fundraising, financial planning, and budgeting for the RCL's programmes. In executing his/her duties, the treasurer will:
- * Lead the budgeting process within the financial management context of the RCL.
- * Remain responsible for the financial oversight aided by the TLO.

SUBCOMMITTEES

Additional members of the RCL are elected to lead sub-committees, which will address the specific needs and interests of the RCL and the school. All sub-committees of the RCL should meet regularly as per the RCL Action Plan to ensure that matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

THE RCL SUB COMMITTEES MUST:

- * Consist of the other members of the RCL (i.e. non-executive members) and members of the general learner body. In this way, the RCL will have enough people to perform its duties and also increase the participation of other learners in RCL activities.
- * Report regularly and be accountable to the RCL.
- * Have a link with and understand what each one is doing so as to avoid duplication and confusion of roles; and
- * Have a chairperson who will direct, guide and report on all activities. The chairperson must always be an RCL member.
- * Be given specific activities and functions to perform.



- * Support and complement one another as they pursue the objectives of the RCL and utilize the resources. **Because resources are forever limited and priorities ever competing, the RCL has to prioritise its goals and activities. The examples of RCL subcommittees are:**

- ⑥ Education Committee
- ⑥ Media and Entertainment Committee
- ⑥ Safety Committee
- ⑥ Sport Committee



SGB REPRESENTATIVES

The TLO as the Election Officer must assist the RCL to delegate learner representatives to serve on the SGB. This should take place as soon as possible after the RCL elections. Only members of the Executive may be delegated to the SGB. Delegated RCL members to the SGB have the right and duty to attend all SGB meetings and have equal voting rights. However, these will not be exercised when the SGB wishes to enter into a contract with a third party. If elected learners are excluded from any other of the formal proceedings of the SGB then the results of these proceedings are not only invalid, but are, according to the law, illegal. This provides learners with a legitimate role in the governance of the school.

SECTION 32 OF SASA SAYS THAT LEARNERS CAN BE EXCLUDED FROM DECISION-MAKING IN THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES:

01. A member of a governing body who is a minor may not contract on behalf of a public school.
02. A member of a governing body who is a minor may not vote on resolutions of a governing body which impose liabilities on third parties or on the school.
03. A member of a governing body who is a minor incurs no personal liability for any consequence of his or her membership of the governing body.

IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE, THE ABOVE JUST MEAN THAT:

01. If you're under 18 and part of SGB, you can't sign contracts on behalf of the school.
02. Also, if you're under 18 and on the SGB, you can't vote on decisions that might legally bind the school or other people.
03. All the above, are to protect you as a minor (under 18 years) so that you do not get in any legal trouble if something goes wrong because of the decisions made by the adults.

"The elected learners have full voting rights on the SGB. Equally important is that the other SGB representatives listen to what the learners are saying and allow them sufficient opportunity to raise issues of concern on behalf of those they represent. It is important for the RCL to work with the SGB and SMT to achieve the common aim and objectives of the school."

James Ndebe, Director Education Management and Governance Development, Department of Basic Education

RCLS AT OTHER LEVELS

SCHOOL LEVEL ELECTIONS

- * As explained above, each class from Grade 8 to 12 elect class reps. These class reps from the RCL Council. The Council then elects the RCL executive.
- * These elections are organised and overseen by the TLO.
- * The RCL Executive elects the SGB reps, who represent the learner population in the SGB. These SGB reps have full voting rights on the SGB.



2.

CIRCUIT LEVEL ELECTIONS

- * The Circuit Office manages the establishment, coordination and functioning of the Circuit Level RCL.
- * Each school RCL delegates its President, Secretary and, in some cases, more members from the executive (depending on the number required by the Circuit Office) to sit in the Circuit RCL (Circuit Council).
- * Circuit Council members will elect from among themselves the Executive Committee.
- * The main aim of this structure will be to provide a platform for school RCLs.
- * Within the circuit to engage and interact on common issues of learner interests.
- * This will also afford RCLs opportunities to consult with education authorities and other relevant stakeholders within the circuit/cluster.
- * The Circuit Manager is expected to aid and support circuit level RCLs with the necessary operational resources and logistical support.

3.

DISTRICT LEVEL ELECTIONS

- * The District Director delegates the responsibility to establish and coordinate the functioning of the District Level RCL to a district official dealing with governance issues.
- * The objectives of the District Level RCL is to allow a coordinated functioning of all RCLs in the District as well as developing a uniform approach to matters of common interest for RCLs in the district.
- * The President, Secretary, and some executive members of each Circuit Level RCL sits in the District Level RCL Council and from among themselves elect an Executive Committee with the duties and organisational structure determined in the provincial RCL Regulations.
- * An official delegated by the District Director must provide support to the District level RCL in the form of capacity building, intervention, problem solving, coordination and material resources.

4.

PROVINCIAL LEVEL ELECTIONS

- * Provincial Departments of Education develop Regulations that inform specific RCL operations.
- * The Provincial RCL is established and coordinated by the relevant provincial Governance officials as delegated by the provincial Head of Department.
- * The President, Secretary and some executive members of District Level RCL in a province will form part of the Provincial RCL Council.
- * Members of the Provincial Council elect from among themselves an Executive Committee whose composition and organisational functioning will be determined by the provincial RCL Regulation.
- * The RCL will be able to consult with education authorities and other stakeholders at this level on matters concerning learners in particular and their education in general.

5.

NATION LEVEL ELECTIONS

- * The Department of Basic Education through the relevant directorate will facilitate the establishment and coordination of the RCL at national level.
- * The structure will assist in creating a platform from which general issues affecting RCLs are discussed, and good practice shared.
- * The structural composition of the National level RCL will be made up of provincial presidents and secretaries and they will from among themselves elect office bearers as may be decided by the DBE

SUPPORT TO RCLS



Additional members of the RCL are elected to lead sub-committees, which will address the specific needs and interests of the RCL and the school. All sub-committees of the RCL should meet regularly as per the RCL Action Plan to ensure that matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

TEACHER LIAISON OFFICERS (TLOs)

TLOs serve as mentors and facilitators, offering invaluable guidance to RCL members as they navigate the complexities of learner leadership. Through mentorship, training sessions, and ongoing support, TLOs help cultivate the essential capabilities and willpower needed for RCLs to excel in their roles.

- A.** To co-ordinate the establishment of an RCL and its annual election.
- B.** To serve as the Election Officer for the elections of the RCL and its Executive.
- C.** To ensure that there is a formal, well-organised transfer of all documentation and financial records by the outgoing Executive to the newly elected Executive.
- D.** To provide capacity-building for the newly elected Executive so that the members are able to undertake their functions.
- E.** To ensure that the RCL is supported by the SMT and the SGB.

- F.** To ensure that the RCL supports the vision and mission of the school.
- G.** To ensure that the RCL still is functional and fulfils all of the requirements of its own constitution and the school's Code of Conduct.
- H.** To ensure that opportunities are taken to include learners in the school's decision-making processes.
- I.** To ensure that members of the RCL are recognised and accredited for their tasks.
- J.** To ensure that the RCL is able to hold regular meetings.
- K.** To ensure that the school community accepts the activities of the RCL.

PRINCIPALS, THE SGB AND THE SMT



Principals, as leaders within the school, provide direction and create an enabling environment for RCLs to thrive. Their guidance and advocacy ensure that RCL initiatives align with the broader goals and values of the school community, maximizing the impact of learner leadership efforts.

The BELA Act 32 of 2024 provides for greater participation of learners in stabilising and improving the quality of education in our schools through their involvement in governance matters. The principal, working together with the SMT and the SGB should encourage and support the RCL's active involvement in school governance. The RCLs involvement is dependent on the enabling environment that the principal, SMT, and SGB create in the school and the support that the structure receives from officials of the department.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity-building efforts are integral to enhancing the effectiveness of RCLs in executing their functions. Capacity building provides RCLs with the opportunities and support needed to harness their individual and collective skills for the benefit of the schooling community.

Capacity-building activities for RCLs should be designed to enhance their leadership skills, foster personal development, and equip them with the knowledge and resources necessary to fulfil their roles effectively. Some capacity-building activities that can be provided to RCLs include:

- 1. Leadership Training Workshops:** Conducting workshops focused on leadership development, communication skills, conflict resolution, decision-making, and teamwork can empower RCL members to lead with confidence and competence.
- 2. Peer Mentorship Programs:** Setting up peer mentorship programs where experienced RCL members mentor new or less experienced members can ease knowledge sharing, skill development, and the transfer of institutional knowledge.
- 3. Project Management Training:** Providing training in project management principles and techniques can help RCL members plan, implement, and evaluate projects and initiatives more effectively, enhancing their ability to drive positive change within the school community.
- 4. Policy and Governance Training:** Providing training on school policies, governance structures, and decision-making processes can help RCL members understand their roles within the broader context of the school's administrative framework, enabling them to advocate effectively for learner interests.
- 5. Personal Development Workshops:** Offering workshops on time management, goal setting, stress management, and self-care can support the personal growth and well-being of RCL members, ensuring they have the resilience and motivation to fulfil their duties effectively.

By offering a diverse range of capacity-building activities, RCLs can develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to serve as effective leaders and agents of positive change within their school communities.



Mr. Nkosana Thakgedi Deputy Director of the Education Management. Development and Governance (EMDG) Directorate, Department of Basic Education, explained that “After the RCL elections, it is important that Principals ensure that, in compliance with the BELA, the newly elected RCL must undergo an induction process facilitated by the District RCL Coordinator. After the induction, the RCL body should develop workplans that include peer to peer capacity building and developing youth leadership skills at schools. It is also important that the RCL forms part of the development of these aims and objectives and takes ownership of them.



RCLS AND THEIR ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE CSTL PRIORITY ACTION AREAS

CSTL is a teamwork approach by all community stakeholders to address challenges that learners are facing or might face that can make learning hard, like health problems or poverty. It is a plan of the Department of Basic Education to ensure that all learners receive the help they need. It ensures that all relevant government departments providing services to children work together to provide services quicker and help learners do well in school.



The goal of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme (CSTL) is to implement strategies that realize the educational rights of all children, including those who are most vulnerable, through schools breaking down barriers to learning and becoming inclusive centers of learning, care and support.



Many of the strategies, programmes, and activities that empower learners fall within the CSTL 10 priority action areas, namely,

- Nutritional support,
- infrastructure, water and sanitation,
- A rights-based social inclusive and cohesive school,
- Safety and protection,
- Curriculum support,
- Material support,
- Co-curricular support,
- Health promotion,
- Psychosocial support, and
- Social welfare services.

RCLs play a vital role in advocating for the rights and well-being of learners for sustainable developments of their livelihoods.

- 1. Nutritional Support:** An RCL can propose strategies to ensure learners have access to proper nutrition at schools and beyond, through raising awareness about nutrition and available services to enhance nutrition in the school. For example, lead campaign to raise awareness on the importance of food gardens in schools.
- 2. Safety and Protection:** The safety and protection of learners is paramount. The RCL can serve on the School Safety Committee. Additionally with external stakeholders like community leaders and NGOs raise awareness about issues such as violence, bullying, sexual harassment, and substance abuse. The RCL can also establish peer support networks to ensure learners have someone to turn to if they feel unsafe or threatened.
- 3. Curriculum Support:** The RCL can organize study groups, tutoring sessions, champion awards giving ceremonies or peer mentoring programmes to assist and encourage learners who may be struggling academically.
- 4. Material Support:** Many learners cannot afford the materials or even uniforms necessary for their education. The RCL can initiate material support programmes, such as stationery donation campaigns, to ensure that all learners have access to essential learning materials.
- 5. Co-curricular Support:** Engagement in co-curricular activities is vital for holistic development. The RCL can collaborate with teachers to organize a range of co-curricular programmes such as sports, poetry clubs, arts, and cultural activities including promoting peer education.
- 6. Health Promotion:** Promoting health and well-being among learners is a critical aspect of the RCL's responsibilities. They can organize and lead health campaigns, inviting healthcare professionals to conduct workshops on topics like hygiene, nutrition, sexual health, and mental well-being.
- 7. Psychosocial Support:** They can organize peer support programmes where older learners mentor and guide their younger peers through academic and personal challenges.
- 8. Social Welfare Support:** The RCL can play a vital role in addressing social welfare concerns affecting learners. They can collaborate with social workers, counsellors, and community organizations to provide support systems for learners facing difficult circumstances.
- 9. Rights-based, Socially Inclusive and Cohesive School:** This ensures that all school community members know, respect, protect and promote children's rights to education, equality, freedom from discrimination and violence, dignity, and all other rights necessary to enjoy their right to education equally. RCLs can promote the School Democracy Programme (SDP) in order to enculture a rights-based approach to learning.



HOW DOES THE RCL WORK?

The RCL plays a vital role in our school community, representing the voice of the learner population and contributing to decision-making processes. To ensure effective operation, RCL members must adhere to several key documents that outline their responsibilities and guide their actions.

- 01.** Firstly, the constitution of the RCL. By understanding and upholding the constitution, RCL members ensure transparency, accountability, and democratic representation in their activities.
- 02.** Secondly, the Code of Conduct of the school provides a framework for the behavior and conduct expected of all learners, including RCL members.
- 03.** Finally, Provincial regulations govern certain aspects of RCL operations, providing additional guidelines and requirements. These regulations may include protocols for meetings, procedures for handling funds, or guidelines for organizing events. By familiarizing themselves with Provincial regulations, RCL members ensure compliance with legal requirements and promote professionalism in their endeavors.

By adhering to the constitution of the RCL, the Code of Conduct of the school, and Provincial regulations, RCL members can effectively fulfill their duties, represent the learner body, and contribute to a positive school environment.



THE CONSTITUTION OF THE RCL

Every school must have a constitution in place which governs how the RCL functions. The constitution sets out the rules, principles and duties of the RCL and should be developed in consultation with learners and the SGB. The constitution must be in alignment with the school's and the SGB's constitution and code of conduct.

THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE CONSTITUTION:

- * Aims and objectives of the RCL.
- * The process for the election of RCL members
- * When RCL elections take place
- * The process for the election of office bearers
- * The duties of the office bearers
- * Procedures for meetings of the RCL and its Executive, including how often they take place.
- * Processes and rules regarding the formation of RCL committees
- * Processes regarding the attendance of SGB meetings

General stipulations or rules, such as:

- * Term of office
- * How to make changes to the constitution
- * How one's membership gets terminated

THE SCHOOL

Code of Conduct

A school's Code of Conduct is a set of rules and guidelines that outline the expected behaviour and standards of conduct for learners within the school community. It typically covers various aspects of learner behaviour, including academic integrity, respect for others, attendance, dress code, and disciplinary procedures.

For members of the RCL, understanding and adhering to the school's Code of Conduct serves as a framework for keeping a safe, respectful, and conducive learning environment within the school. As learner leaders, RCL members play a significant role in upholding these standards and setting a positive example for their peers.

Adherence to the Code of Conduct fosters trust and credibility within the school community. By showing their commitment to the rules and values outlined in the Code of Conduct, RCL members earn the respect and confidence of both learners and staff.

The Code of Conduct empowers RCL members to address issues and conflicts within the school community effectively. By understanding the consequences of certain behaviours and the procedures for addressing misconduct outlined in the Code of Conduct, RCL members can provide guidance and support to their peers, promote accountability, and contribute to a culture of fairness and equity.

Overall, the school's Code of Conduct serves as a cornerstone for maintaining order, promoting respect, and fostering a positive school climate. By knowing and adhering to it, members of the RCL demonstrate their commitment to serving as responsible leaders and advocates for the well-being of their fellow learners.

PROVINCIAL REGULATIONS

South African provinces have a mandate to develop provincial policy regarding the election and functions of the RCL and these can differ from one province to another. For example, some provinces have stipulated that Grade 12 members may not serve on the Executive Committee, while others state that only Grade 12 members may serve on the Executive Committee. RCL members and their TLOs need to confirm the provisions of their provincial gazettes.



CLOSING REMARKS

The primary aims of the RCL handbook are to equip members with a comprehensive understanding of the legislative landscape that governs their operations. By familiarizing themselves with the legal frameworks, including the constitution of the RCL, the Code of Conduct, and Provincial regulations, RCL members will gain clarity on their roles and responsibilities. It is our hope that this handbook will ensure that each office bearer within the RCL is well-versed in their specific duties, fostering effective leadership and accountability. Moreover, that members will be guided on the establishment of RCLs, understanding their mandate, and recognizing the expectations placed upon them within the school community. Importantly, we hope that the handbook will serve as a compass, directing RCL members to the proper channels of support when faced with challenges, ensuring they know where to turn for assistance and guidance.

As learners first and foremost, RCL members are reminded that certain issues may extend beyond the scope of their responsibilities. The handbook emphasizes the importance of referring matters beyond their purview to the relevant authorities, acknowledging the need for collaboration and cooperation within the broader school framework. Additionally, it underscores that academic pursuits should remain a top priority for RCL members. While the responsibilities of student leadership are significant, the handbook emphasizes that academic commitments should always take precedence. In adhering to these principles, RCL members can strike a balance between their roles as student representatives and their primary focus on academic excellence, ensuring a holistic and successful educational experience.

Overall, this RCL Handbook serves as a resource designed to empower, guide, and support RCL members in their endeavours to serve as effective leaders and agents of positive change within their school communities.

USEFUL NATIONAL HELPLINES

please use the space at the end to write local contact numbers

CHILDLINE 08000 55555	TEDDY BEAR CLINIC 011 484 4554
LIFELINE 011 781 2337/ 0861 322 322	CHILD WELFARE SOUTH AFRICA 0861 424 453
CHILD PROTECTION UNIT 012 393 2359/ 2362/ 2363	GBV COMMAND CENTRE SMS "HELP" TO 31531
NATIONAL GBV HELPLINE 0800 150 150	SAPS EMERGENCY NUMBER 10111
TEARS FOUNDATION DIAL *134*7355#	SUICIDE HELP 080 056 7567

LOCAL NUMBERS

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