

School Site Councils

January 30, 2020





School Site Councils and Site-Based Budgeting

- LPS is prioritizing funding to allocate directly to schools.
- Site-based decision making places the school at the center of planning, goal setting, and budgeting for school improvement.
- Site-based decision making provides additional opportunities for teachers and administrators who are closest to the teaching learning process to be innovative and creative.
- Site-based decision making allows teachers and administrators to work with parents and the community to become more responsive to the needs of a particular school's population.
- School-site councils will be expected to recommend how the dollars will best be used to address school priorities.



What is a school council?

A school council is a representative, school building-based committee composed of the **principal, parents, teachers, community members** and, at the secondary level, **students**, required to be established by each school pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 59C.

Membership on the school council can also include **additional school staff** such as custodians, lunchroom staff, and others who are not education professionals.



What are the responsibilities of a school council?

School councils are to assist principals in **four major areas of responsibility**:

- Adopting educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards
 - Identifying the educational needs of students attending the school
 - Reviewing the annual school building budget
 - Formulating a school improvement plan
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- For high schools, the council shall review the student handbook each spring to consider changes in disciplinary policy to take effect for the following school year.

What is the council's role in the school budget?

- The law specifies that the school council **"shall assist [the principal] in the review of the annual school budget."**
- "Review" means that the council and the principal read through documents that describe the budget in order to understand the implications for items in the school improvement plan that will be developed by the council.



What are the elements of the annual school improvement plan?

The school improvement plan, as described in the legislation, has the following elements:

An assessment of:

- The impact of class size on student performance
- Student-to-teacher ratios
- Ratios of students to other supportive adult resources
- A scheduled plan for reducing class size, if deemed necessary
- Professional development for the school's staff and the allocation of any professional development funds in the school budget
- Enhancement of parental involvement in the life of the school
- School safety and discipline
- Establishment of a school environment characterized by tolerance and respect for all groups
- Extra-curricular activities
- Means for meeting the diverse learning needs of as many children as possible, including children with special needs currently assigned to separate programs
- Any further subjects the principal, in consultation with the school council, shall consider appropriate

In school systems with language minority populations, the professional development component of the council's plan shall address the need for teachers' **professional development on second language acquisition and on working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.**



What are some areas in which a school council cannot be involved?

The law enables school committees to grant school councils additional authority in the area of educational policy except for matters covered by Chapter 150E of the General Laws.

- Chapter 150E governs labor relations and collective bargaining for public employees including teacher contracts.
- This provision leaves such issues as compensation, workload, conditions of work and worker evaluation procedures subject to collective bargaining.

Does the prohibition against exercising authority over areas subject to Chapter 150E mean that councils' improvement goals and plans cannot make reference to school schedules?

Chapter 150E refers to the state statute governing collective bargaining for public employees. Normally, councils will not be involved with Chapter 150E because they will not be discussing employment or personnel issues.

However, councils may make recommendations, such as changes in the schedule of a school day, that impinge on working conditions. When this occurs, the council's recommendations **should acknowledge that the issues may be subject to collective bargaining**



School Site Council Requirements

- At each public elementary, secondary and independent vocational school in the commonwealth there shall be a school council consisting of the **school principal**, who shall **co-chair** the council;
 - The other **co-chair** is to be **selected by the council** as a whole rather than appointed by the principal.
- The law leaves it up to each council to determine its own rules of operation except that "meetings of the school council shall be subject to the provisions of sections twenty-three A, twenty-three B and twenty-three C of chapter thirty-nine."
- These sections of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law require councils to:
 - Hold all meetings in public and allow anyone in attendance to audio and/or video-tape the proceedings as long as it is not disruptive to the meeting.
 - Post a notice of each meeting at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.
 - Keep minutes indicating the date, time, place, members present and absent, and actions taken.
 - Adhere to a quorum, which is to be defined as a majority of the council members.
 - Under the Public Records Law, documents made or received by a state or local government agency (including a school council) are "public records."



Additional School Site Council Requirements – Principal Responsibilities

- The law explicitly gives the school principal responsibility for **defining the composition** and **overseeing the formation** of the council pursuant to a representative process
 - However, the principal may not exert any influence over the nomination and election process.
- The principal is also responsible for convening the first meeting of the council. At this meeting, the other co-chair is to be selected.
- The spirit of the law calls for collaboration between the council and the principal. The principal needs to create an environment of openness, collegiality and respect for all participants.
- The principal is responsible for accountability of the site council process such as member election/appointment, and adherence to the school site council requirements.



Composition of the School Site Council

The law leaves it up to each principal to define the size and composition of the council. It does, however, make three stipulations about membership.

- **1- Parents shall have parity with professional personnel** on the school councils
 - Regardless of the size of the council, the number of parent representatives must be equal to the number of teachers who serve on the council plus the principal.
 - When lay people are outnumbered, they are not likely to articulate their special perspective as "customers" of the school.
 - "Parity" creates pressure for compromising and reaching consensus, since neither side can override the other with its numerical majority.
- **2- Not more than fifty percent of the council shall be non-school members.**
Non-school members are defined as members who are "other than parents, teachers, students and staff at the school."
- **3- The membership of school councils "should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community."**

Additional Considerations:

- Other school staff may be appointed to serve as "other person" members.
- Other "school staff" includes custodians, lunchroom staff, and others who are not education professionals can provide an important perspective on the needs of the schools and students
- However, it is important to maintain a balance so that the council's "other person" membership category is not filled exclusively or even predominantly by school employees.



Establishing Councils that are Representative of the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the School Community

- The membership of school councils "should be broadly **representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community.**"
- Schools have an affirmative responsibility to undertake the outreach needed to ensure an opportunity for all racial and ethnic groups to participate in the council.
 - This responsibility may not involve setting quotas or developing proportional representation plans that guarantee seats on the council to members of particular racial or ethnic groups.
 - However, there are several strategies schools can pursue to enhance racial and ethnic representation such as the yielding candidates from the "subgroups."



Establishing Councils that are Representative of the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the School Community

Strategies:

- Request existing parent groups to nominate candidates from among their members and coordinate a run-off election from among these candidates (e.g. Parents Advisory Committees, Bilingual Parents Advisory Committees, and sports and booster clubs, etc)
- Hold elections at the conclusion or beginning of cultural assembly programs, school plays, open-house nights, or other educational or social events that bring parents into the school.
- Hold "at-large" elections from among the parent body by soliciting nominations through direct mail and school and community newspapers. Request that parents nominate themselves or others for membership on the council.
- Invite all parents to a evening informational meeting at which the school council is explained and parent council members are elected.
- Announce that elections will be held in conjunction with a forum, possibly with a respected guest speaker, on an issue of current concern to parents. Elect parent members at the conclusion of the forum.



School Site Council Selection Process

- The law provides local leeway in the election process. It does, however, affirm the principle of peer selection.
- The process needs to be fair, open and without the influence of the school committee, superintendent, or principal.



School Site Council Selection Process

- **Parents** of students attending the school shall be **selected by the parents** of students attending such school who will be chosen **in elections** held by the local recognized parent teacher organization under the direction of the principal
 - A teacher at a school who also has a child at the same school can serve only as a **teacher member** of a council.
 - An individual who is supervised and evaluated by the principal cannot be elected as a parent member of a council that is co-chaired by that same principal.
- **Teachers** shall be **selected by the teachers** in such school **in elections** held by teachers
 - Other professional personnel — resource room teachers, specialists, counselors, etc. who provide services to students may serve in the “teacher” membership category if elected
- **Other persons**, *not parents or teachers of students at the school*, drawn from such groups or entities as municipal government, business and labor organizations, institutions of higher education, human services agencies or other interested groups, including those from school age child care programs who are **appointed** by the principal
 - Teachers from other schools may serve as parents at their child’s school; however, it is important to maintain the “parity” standard referred to in the law.
- For high schools, at least one such **student selected by students** in an **election**.



School Site Council Selection Process

Additional Considerations:

- Other administrators **may not serve** on the school site council as one obtains a seat on the council through election by one's peers (parents, teachers, students) or by appointment (as in the case of community members and other staff).
- Department heads may serve as teacher representatives if they have no supervisory authority over other teachers.



Immediate Considerations

- What is the composition of your school site council?
(principal, teacher, family, HS student, community partner, other staff)
 - Does it follow the parity guidelines of the law?
- Do you have documentation of the member selection process?
 - If you did not have an election earlier in the school year for elected positions (teacher/parent/student) for justifiable reasons, is there the opportunity to add additional seats which follow the election process?
- Does your council reflect the diversity of your school community?
 - If not, what new strategies can you employ to support the increase of diversity on your councils?
- Have your members received information/training on the open meetings act and public records?
 - Are your agendas posted in advance and minutes posted in a timely manner?
 - Are the members of your committee listed on your website?



Technical Assistance and Support for School Site Councils

- Ongoing training and technical assistance will be a key ingredient in maximizing school councils' effectiveness.
- For all council members, some training and orientation will be useful in the following areas:
 - An explanation of the state law establishing the councils (recruitment materials being developed for teachers in collaboration with UTL and with parents in collaboration with the city-wide family council)
 - Information on the system's goals and philosophy, constraints placed by federal and state laws and collective bargaining agreements, and laws and policies on who makes the final decisions on specific issues
 - A district-specific orientation regarding local expectations for school councils
 - The district's budget making process and calendar
 - "Basic training" and orientation sessions could be included in each council's initial set of meetings or school systems may choose to hold a system-wide orientation meeting for all council members
 - Skill-building sessions on some or all of the following topics:
 - Sensitivity training on "active listening" for all council members.
 - Consensus decision making.
 - Operations - Agenda setting, effective meetings, strategic planning, and consensus decision making.



School Site Council Timeline

January

- Assessment of current school site councils at each school
- Recruitment of candidates for open seats on site councils
- Training for principals around school site council requirements

February

- Finalization of school site councils for remainder of 2019-2020 school year
- Updating of school site council information on school websites
- Training of school site councils around general role of school site councils and school budgeting process
- Development of School Plans and Priorities
- Review of data
 - Identification of achievement and opportunity gaps, disproportionalities and disparities

March

- Continuation of the development of school plans and priorities
Review of data for achievement and opportunity gaps, disproportionalities and disparities
- School budget preliminary allocations and school site council decision-making
- Central office budget support drop-in sessions
- School stakeholder outreach and input



School Site Council Timeline

April

- Final budget decisions
- School site council sign off of school budget
- Individual school budget review and collaboration with central office

May

- School site council and budget process debrief session
- Preparation for 2020-2021 school site council improvement