

## The Role of SBDM School Councils

### COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITY

The school council shall have the responsibility to set school policy consistent with district board policy which shall provide an environment to enhance the students' achievement and help the school meet the goals established by KRS 158.645 and KRS 158.6451. The principal or head teacher shall be the primary administrator and the instructional leader of the school, and with the assistance of the total school staff shall administer the policies established by the school council and the local board.

### TO MEET THIS RESPONSIBILITY, COUNCILS SHOULD:

- Collect, interpret, analyze information;
- Set priorities;
- Establish committees, review committee reports, consider committee recommendations;
- Monitor implementation;
- Evaluate achievement;
- Develop school plans;
- Make reports and recommendations;
- Work as a team;
- Act as a link;
- Hold regularly scheduled meetings;
- Conduct meetings in a democratic manner;
- Request expert assistance when needed;
- Maintain comprehensive minutes from each meeting;
- Solve problems;
- Solicit ideas from others on problems to be solved;
- Cooperate/collaborate with the school district, with other districts and other public and private agencies;
- Work cooperatively with groups such as the PTA or PTSA [councils have no jurisdiction over the activities or budget of a non-profit, independent, incorporated organization that works in the school, e.g., PTA].

### THE ROLE OF ALL SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERS IS TO:

- Attend all school council meetings and actively participate;
- Study education reform laws and district policy;
- Attend training sessions;
- Solicit input/give reports to people they represent.

### THE ROLE OF THE PARENT MEMBERS IS TO:

- Report at all PTA meetings to keep parents informed and solicit parents' opinions on issues before voting;
- Increase broad based parent involvement at all levels through council committees, as well as school organizations, e.g., PTA.

### BY LAW, SBDM COUNCILS:

- Are subject to open meetings laws;
- Set their own meeting agendas and frequency of meetings;
- Receive training;
- Develop their own bylaws/operating procedure;
- Have liability insurance provided by the local school board for all members;
- May request an alternative model to:
  - 1) Include members other than principal, teacher, parent (such as students) [request is made to Kentucky Board of Education – 1/3 of the voting council members must always be parents];
  - 2) Have someone other than principal as the chair.

### WHEN MAKING DECISIONS, COUNCILS SHOULD KEEP IN MIND:

- Are the decisions legal?
- Are they in line with board policy?
- Are they within the budget?
- Are they targeted to student needs?

# School Councils

## WHAT COUNCILS DO:

- Develop policies to enhance student achievement and meet education reform goals.
- When a vacancy occurs, select a principal from a list of candidates recommended by the superintendent.
- Decide how many people to employ in each job classification, *i.e.*, decide how many teachers, how many aides, how many custodians, and so on.
- Provide consultation to the principal whenever there is a vacancy on staff.
- Select the following resources:
  - 1) Textbooks
  - 2) Instructional materials, *i.e.*, materials that help students learn or help teachers teach, other than textbooks;
  - 3) Student support services, *i.e.*, services that help students become ready and able to learn; and
  - 4) Professional development (65% of funding).
- Determine
  - 1) The local school budget;
  - 2) The organization of ungraded primary; and
  - 3) A comprehensive school safety plan.
- Set policy in the following areas:
  - 1) Enhancing the school environment;
  - 2) Curriculum, *i.e.*, what to teach;
  - 3) Assigning staff time for both instructional and non-instructional programs;
  - 4) Assigning students to classes and programs;
  - 5) Developing the school schedule;
  - 6) The use of school space;
  - 7) Instructional practices, *i.e.*, how to teach;
  - 8) Discipline and classroom management;
  - 9) Committees; and
  - 10) Extra curricular activities and programs.
- Develop processes for deciding:
  - 1) Whether school is in line with state standards;
  - 2) How the school will use technology; and
  - 3) How the school determines whether its programs work.

## WHAT COUNCILS DO NOT DO:

- Run the school on a day to day basis.
- Break local, state or federal laws.
- Risk health and safety.
- Risk lawsuits.
- Break contracts.
- Spend money the school does not have.
- Make decisions outside their areas of responsibility.

[For example, evaluate or fire staff, set salaries, raise taxes, set bus routes, assign students to schools, decide when to build new buildings, pay utility bills, etc.]

### Local School Boards' Areas of Responsibilities

- Matters relating to formation of councils.
- Policies to facilitate the implementation of SBDM.
- Long range district planning.
- Equity for all students.
- District budget.
- Facility issues.
- Salary issues.
- Enter into contracts.
- Property sales and acquisition.
- Assignment of students to schools.
- Formats for school improvement plans.
- Professional development plans.
- Parent and community support and involvement.
- General personnel policies.
- Student outcomes.
- Student progress reports. (report cards)
- Requirements for record keeping for councils.
- Policies for appeal of decisions of a council.

## Parent Council Members' Responsibility to their Constituents

All publicly elected officials have a responsibility to their constituents. Elected members of school-based decision making councils are no exception. The elected teacher members are responsible to the teachers and the elected parent members are responsible to the parents. This responsibility is to **ALL** parents, not just those who voted for or supported the parent member and not just those who might belong to the same parent group.

### **REPRESENTING YOUR CONSTITUENCY**

The two parent members of a school council represent all the parents and legal guardians of every student in the school. It is important for the parent member to remember this fact whenever speaking on issues, taking part in consensus decision making, or voting. Most parent members of councils truly want to do a good job representing the other parents, but often do not know how. It is easy to rely on what friends and acquaintances say and it is easy to believe that their opinions are truly representative of all parents. But actually, they are just the opinions of a few. The question is how to know what most parents really want.

### **FINDING OUT WHAT PARENTS WANT**

The best way to learn what parents want is to ask them. That is not always practical, however, for most schools have too many parents for any one person to talk to them all on a regular basis. Therefore other methods need to be sought. The best methods are ones which involve regular opportunities for open communication between **ALL** parents and the parent council members. Two of the best methods are:

#### **THE PTA MEETING**

The PTA meeting is a good place for communication between the parent council members and other parents to take place. It is recommended that there be time on the agenda of every PTA meeting for the parent council members to give a report of what the school council is doing and what decisions they are considering. There should be time for questions and comments, an opportunity for parents to speak with the council members either before or after the meeting, and an opportunity for written questions for those who do not feel comfortable asking in front of others. For this method of communication to be effective, it is necessary for the PTA to invite every parent to the meetings and to let them know they will have the opportunity to give input to the parent council members.

#### **THE PTA NEWSLETTER**

The PTA newsletter goes to all families that have

children in the school and is an ideal tool for written communication between parent council members and parents. It is recommended that the PTA set aside a section of each newsletter for council information. The newsletter can also be used to survey parents to determine their opinion on various issues.

**The way to get these two methods of communication started** is for the PTA president, PTA program chair, PTA newsletter chair, and the parent council members to meet either in person or over the phone and for all parties to agree to do this regularly. For parent council members to attend meetings, it is important to be aware of their work schedules and other commitments so meetings can be scheduled at times when they will be able to attend. **It is recommended that all PTA meetings be scheduled at time that the parent council members are able to attend.** Be sure to give the parent council members plenty of advance notice of the date, time and place of all meetings. For parent council members to put information in your PTA newsletter, they must be informed of the deadline dates for each issue of the newsletter at least a month ahead to give them time to prepare their articles.

### **THOSE WHO DON'T COME OR RESPOND**

There are always going to be people who do not come to PTA meetings and people who will not respond to written requests for information or opinions. The question is often asked, "How can we reach these people?" The best way is to go where they are. Together with the PTA, contact neighborhood groups, churches and other organizations which have members who have children in the school. Put information in their newsletter and attend their meetings. Reach out to them.

### **TRUST**

It is important to develop trust between the parent council members and the parents they represent. Trust means many things, including having confidence in a person; relying on a person's integrity; the stability of action or conduct and the absence of deception. There are several ways to build trust including: opening the budget; treating everyone as an equal to yourself; treating everyone as equal to each other; being accessible to constituents; acknowledging mistakes.

### **OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER**

- Examine your personal motives for wanting to be on the school council.
- Don't bypass the steps that bring in parent input.
- Commit your time.