

## **SCHOOL COUNCILS**

**INTRODUCTION:** This policy is designed to implement the provisions of Chapter 71 of the Acts of 1993, Section 53 which requires the establishment of school councils in all of the public schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The School Committee believes that the school is the key unit for educational improvement and change. Successful school improvement is better accomplished through a planning and decision-making process that seeks meaningful participation from teachers, parents and others at the individual school level. The School Committee believes that this will create ownership by those responsible for and benefiting from the education offered at the school.

The School Committee supports and encourages the intent and purpose of school councils. The School Committee believes that parents, teachers, and other members of the community working collaboratively to advise the principal will enhance the education of all of the children in New Salem and Wendell. The School Committee recognizes that the need to keep the size of the council manageable makes it difficult, if not impossible, for all segments of the school community to be represented as part of the council. The School Committee urges PTOs and faculties, when defining the election/selection process, to remind their membership of their need to ensure that the council itself is as broadly representative of all of the different groups within the school as possible. The law clearly states the importance of councils reflecting the racial and ethnic diversity of the building and school community.

### **The purposes of the school councils are to:**

1. Assist and advise principals in adopting educational goals for the schools that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide performances standards;
2. Assist and advise principals in the identification of the educational needs of the students;
3. Assist and advise principals in the review of the annual school budget; and
4. Assist and advise principals in the formulation of a school improvement plan.

The School Committee believes that the school is the key unit for educational improvement and change and that successful school improvement is best accomplished through a school-based decision-making process. By involving those directly affected by any action or decision of the school council in the process of determining that action or decision, it helps to strengthen the commitment to those decisions by those most affected by its implementation.

Under this policy, the Principal shall have primary responsibility for the management of the school. Decisions which are made at the school level must be aligned with the budget, policies, curriculum, and mission and vision, and long-range and short-range goals adopted by the School Committee. In addition, decisions must comply with any state and federal laws and regulations and with any negotiated agreements of the school district.

As enacted by the state legislature in the Education Reform Act of 1993, a school council shall be established in each school to advise the Principal in specific areas of school operation. The Principal, except as specifically defined in the law, shall have the responsibility for defining the composition of and forming the group pursuant to a representative process approved by the Superintendent and School 'Committee.

### **Organization of Council**

The Council shall consist of:

- Three parents of students attending the school, none of whom are employees of the school. Elections will be held by the local recognized parent teacher organization and the principal will ensure that the process is publicized in advance and open to all parents. Parents will have parity representation with professional school personnel, including the principal, on the Council. Elections will be held at Open House under the direction of the parent organization. For those parents unable to attend, ballots will be available that day at the principal's office during school hours.
- Two Teachers and other professional faculty staff elected by their peers within the building
- One community representative, neither parents of District students nor employees of the District, selected by the principal, with advice from the Council, and not to exceed 50% of the voting membership.
- Vacancies – If a parent or community representative vacancy occurs on the School Council prior to January 1 of the school year, an election consistent with the above guidelines shall be conducted. If the vacancy occurs after January 1, of the school year, the co-chairs of the School Council will nominate individuals to be a temporary member. This person must receive a majority of affirmative votes from the remaining members of the School Council.
- School Council composition should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the community.
- Each School Council shall determine the term limits for membership and develop a staggered membership selection to encourage only a partial, annual turnover of council membership.

### **The following guidelines define the role of the school council:**

The School Council shall meet regularly with the Principal of the school and shall assist in:

1. Adoption of educational goals for the school that are consistent with state and local policies and standards.
2. Identification of the educational needs of the students attending the school.
3. Review of the school building budget.
4. Formulation of a school improvement plan that may be implemented only after review and approval by the School Committee.

### **Conduct of School Council Business**

The principal shall, by law, serve as co-chairperson of the council. The second co-chairperson will be elected annually by the council members at its first meeting of the school year subsequent to the elections of new council members. The co-chairpersons will be responsible for the preparation of the agenda for the council meetings.

The school council shall meet at least once monthly from October to June. Meetings will be held outside of school hours. At its first meeting of the school year, the council will set its calendar of regular meetings for the year. Where circumstances warrant, the council may choose to call additional meetings.

Consensus shall be used by school councils as the primary method to resolve issues and to formulate recommendations. Votes by majority may be taken at the discretion of the principal and Roberts Rules of Order shall prevail if there are questions of procedure.

All meetings of the school council shall conform to the Open Meeting Law, Sections 23 A, B, and C, which stipulate that all meetings be open to the public, that meetings be posted at least forty-eight (48) hours (excluding Sundays and Legal Holidays) in advance, and that minutes of the meeting shall be maintained as required. The scope of the school council does not require, and therefore does not qualify for, executive session.

The Superintendent shall receive agendas and minutes of all school council meetings. The Superintendent shall provide copies of these materials to members of the School Committee for information.

SOURCE: MASC

LEGAL REFS: M.G.L. 71:38Q, 71: 59C

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