

KENTUCKY SCHOOL UPDATES

SCHOOL-BASED DECISION MAKING

THE BASICS OF THE LAW

- **School-based decision making (SBDM)** is a shared process, in which most of the policies and plans for instruction are made at the local school. It gives teachers, principals, and parents the power to determine the direction of their schools. It was enacted to **improve student learning** by letting the people closest to students make educational decisions.
- School councils usually include six people: the principal (usually the chairperson), three teachers (elected by teachers), and two parents (elected by parents). These elections are usually held in the spring of each year.
- In schools with a minority student population of eight percent or greater, schools must have **minority representation** on the council. If after the regular election there is no minority member on the council, all parents may vote to elect a minority parent. In addition, all teachers vote to elect a minority teacher. If there are no minority teachers in the school, another teacher is elected by the faculty. If minority teachers at the school do not want to serve, no additional teacher is elected.
- Each school council is required by law to make **policy decisions** in the following areas.
 - ✓ curriculum
 - ✓ instruction and instructional materials including textbooks
 - ✓ instructional practices
 - ✓ assignment of students and use of space
 - ✓ master school schedule
 - ✓ staff positions at the school
 - ✓ assignment of staff time
 - ✓ school budget including professional development funds and use of school reward money (All of these decisions are included in school plan due each March.)
 - ✓ how the principal will consult with the council when there are vacancies
 - ✓ discipline and classroom management
 - ✓ extracurricular programs and student participation policies
 - ✓ alignment with state standards
 - ✓ use of technology
 - ✓ program evaluation
 - ✓ wellness policy (See What's New? below.)

School councils set **policies**, but principals continue day-to-day operation and management of the schools, and principals and faculties implement the policies.

- **Councils must develop comprehensive school improvement plans (CSIP)** using school assessment data to ensure that each student makes academic progress. This data must be provided by the Department of Education no later than November 1 of each year and be disaggregated or broken out by race, gender, disability, English proficiency and participation in the federal free and reduced lunch program. The department must identify gaps in achievement and notify schools when significant gaps exist. These schools must set two-year targets and develop plans for closing these gaps by February 1 in each odd-numbered year. The superintendent and the school council must agree on the council's targets and submit them to the local school board. Councils must work with parents, faculty and staff to develop the targets and plans and present their plan in a public meeting at the school. The local board must determine if each school meets its targets. Schools failing to meet the targets must revise their plans and submit them to the superintendent for review and approval a second time. Schools failing to meet targets for two two-year cycles may be reported to the Commissioner of Education and the state school board for review and approval of improvement plans. The department may provide assistance if deemed necessary. (Enacted 2002.)
- When there is a **vacancy**, the council selects the principal. For other vacancies, the principal makes the final hiring decision after consulting with the council. (This may vary if the school has not met achievement goals and council authority has been transferred.) Hiring usually takes place in the spring and summer. The required **consultation policy** must include a process for meetings, timelines, interviews, reviews of written applications, reviews of references, and how to address situations when the council is not available for consultation.
- **School council authority** in schools failing to meet state accountability goals for two two-year cycles in a row and undergoing their second scholastic audit, may be **transferred** to the superintendent or a highly skilled educator. The school team and a district audit team must jointly recommend a transfer for the decision-making authority to be removed. School and district improvement plans must include ways to strengthen the school council and the decision-making process within the school. School council authority is restored when the school meets its goal for school accountability. See chapter on Assessment and Accountability. (Enacted 2004.)
- **Use of three of the four professional development days** required by law is determined by the school council and must be consistent with the professional development called for in the school's comprehensive school improvement plan. The principal can work with individual teachers to determine needs for teachers' individual growth plans.
- School-based decision making councils at every high school must adopt a policy on the **recruitment and assignment of students to advanced placement**, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, or dual credit courses recognizing that all students have the right to be academically challenged and encouraged to participate to the extent possible. Councils must make available a core of courses (one course in four of six areas — English, science, mathematics, social studies, foreign language and arts) that may be provided through on-site instruction, the Kentucky Virtual High School, or other on-line alternatives. Councils should also consider making arrangements for students to take

these classes at local colleges or universities. To prepare for success in these higher level courses, councils need to find ways to help students plan ahead through their individual learning plans to take any necessary prerequisite courses. (Enacted 2002.)

- The council must consult with the librarian on **maintenance of the library media center** including purchase of instructional materials, information technology, and equipment. Schools are required to have a library media center, with services from a certified media librarian. Librarians may serve more than one school.
- The **school safety bill** requires that school councils have a school safety plan along with policies on discipline and behavior that are consistent with school district policy. These plans must be reviewed and amended as often as needed to ensure a safe learning environment. (Enacted 1998.)
- School councils that use **committees** to do their work must establish policies to facilitate the involvement of parents, classified staff members such as secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodians, and other interested persons on these committees.
- School council members are required to receive **training** each year, usually in the summer. New members must attend at least six hours of training, which must include information on the authority, duties, and responsibilities of council members, the state accountability process, and the tools available to councils. Those who have served one year or more must attend at least three hours. Training for new members must be conducted by persons endorsed by the Department of Education and must be completed no later than 30 days after members have taken office. Experienced council members have 120 days to complete their training. The cost of training or professional development for parent members of school councils or committees may be paid for with school's professional development funds.
- The principal must **submit the names and addresses of school council members, along with verification that they have completed required training**, to the superintendent, who will communicate this information to the Department of Education by November 1 of each year. (The Department reviews this information after November 1 each year after it is posted on school district web pages.)
- Council members who will be hiring a principal must complete **training on recruitment and interviewing for principal selection prior to beginning the principal selection process**.
- The **definition of parent** for school council purposes includes parent, stepparent, or foster parent of a student, or a person who has legal custody of a student pursuant to a court order and with whom the student resides.
- **Parents may vote** for school council members only if their child will be a student attending that school during the term in which the council serves. For example, parents of seniors may not vote in the high school election unless they have another child who will


attend high school the next year, and parents of middle school graduates may vote in the high school council election where their student will attend.

- **Parents may not serve as members of the school council** if they or their relatives work in the school in which the parent will serve or in the district central office. They may serve if they work or have relatives working in another school in the district.
- Local school boards may require **annual reports** from councils to describe a school's progress in reaching the educational goals set by law and the district.
- **Councils may adopt terms for longer than the one-year** specified in the law, but that rule will apply only to councils elected after the change is made. Members may serve more than one term in a row. There is no limit to the number of terms served.
- **Teachers elected to school councils cannot be involuntarily transferred** during their term of office. **Teachers may serve** as members of the school council regardless of their place of residence. In the past teachers could not serve if they lived outside the school district.
- All schools must have councils, with three exceptions:
 - ✓ a district with only one school is exempt
 - ✓ schools that have met school accountability goals on CATS may be exempt if teachers and parents vote not to have a council
 - ✓ certain district-operated entities such as vocational, alternative, special education schools, and preschools are exempt

WHAT'S NEW?

- New state and federal laws require schools to plan **to improve student health**. Federal law requires school districts to adopt local wellness policies. State law requires districts to assess the nutrition and the physical activity environment and adopt a plan for improving nutrition and physical activity. Councils in schools with students in kindergarten through grade 5, are required to adopt a wellness policy that “includes moderate to vigorous physical activity each day” and encourages students to make “healthy choices.” In addition, councils in schools that serve any grade between kindergarten and grade five must adopt an assessment tool to determine each child's level of physical activity. These policies must comply with state and federal laws. (Federal law enacted 2004; state law enacted 2005.)

WHAT TO EXPECT

-  Schools with gaps in achievement between different groups of students should be setting targets and developing plans for reducing those gaps, which should result in more focus on curriculum and instruction for every student.

- ✓ Councils should be paying more attention to professional development that helps teachers work with students to improve academic achievement.
- ✓ Nearly 1,200 school councils with 1,200 principals, 3,600 teachers, and nearly 2,400 parents are making important school decisions. Many of the parents who have served on school councils are serving on their local school boards.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- ★ **Get involved.** Run for a school council seat or volunteer to serve on a council committee. Attend council meetings and share your opinions with your parent and teacher representatives.
- ★ **Work** to elect parent and teacher representatives to your school council who care about education for all children in your school. People with a broad perspective instead of a focus on one issue, usually make the best council members.
- ★ If there is a PTA/PTO/PTSA in your school, **volunteer** to help with school council elections to inform parents and work to elect good council members. If there is no PTA in your school, form one. Call the Kentucky PTA office at (502) 226-6607.
- ★ **Suggest** that your school council join the Kentucky Association of School Councils. You can attend its fall conference and use its training opportunities whether your school is a member or not. See below for more information.
- ★ **Recognize** the contributions of school council members as they work to improve your school. Let them know you appreciate their time and commitment to your school. Recognize administrators and board members who support school councils.
- ★ **Attend** local school board meetings. Ask school board members how they are supporting school councils and helping them make the best decisions for students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

- **Kentucky Association of School Councils** (organization of school councils that is the approved provider of school council training, offers information, workshops, and literature) (859) 238-2188 or visit the Web site at <http://www.kasc.net/>.
- **Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Leadership and Instructional Support** (502) 564-4201, or visit the Web site at <http://www.education.ky.gov> (numerous technical assistance documents available for free download by searching for SBDM Technical Assistance)

- **Kentucky PTA**, (502) 564-4378 (parent handbook on school-based decision making, \$3 each for PTA members, \$5 for non-members plus \$3 for shipping and handling)
- **Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence**, P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588-1658; (859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111; e-mail: admin@prichardcommittee.org or visit the Web site at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org/>

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