



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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New Guidelines for School Advisory Boards, formerly known as Local School Restructuring Teams

[What is a good new name for school advisory boards?]

Draft #1

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Overview

Across DC Public Schools, the existence of school advisory boards is inconsistent, and the purpose and roles of such groups are often unclear. Some schools have Local School Restructuring Teams, or LSRTs. Some, as designated by the No Child Left Behind Law, have School Improvement Teams, or SITs. Some schools have School Improvement Teams, or SITs, that have nothing to do with NCLB but are advising the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization on improvements in their school buildings. Some schools have all of these groups, and some have none at all.

In some schools, these groups are robust and high-functioning, adding great value to the life of the school. Some schools have difficulty recruiting enough participants. Other schools have LSRTs that rarely meet.

Local School Restructuring Teams were put in place under Superintendent Franklin Smith (1991-1996), and pre-date by several years the No Child Left Behind Act which became law in 2001. The LSRT Guidelines were last updated in 2004, under Interim Superintendent Robert Rice. Over the course of the last two years, many school communities, principals, and individuals have bemoaned the uneven and often dysfunctional state of school advisory boards—either in their school or across the system.

The desired state seems clear to all stakeholders: every school should have an elected, well-functioning advisory body—and that from school to school, these groups should be consistent with respect to name, purpose, composition, and scope of work.

This draft is a point in a process that has involved extensive consultation with parents, teachers, principals, and other community members. Results of this process will be:

- Newly clarified definition of a school advisory boards—name, purpose, composition, and scope of work
- Suggested qualifications for members
- Expectation that each principal will facilitate the election of members, and will use her/his school advisory board well
- Elections for members to serve on boards in the 2010-2011 school year informed by these new guidelines
- Professional development for principals and for members during the summer and fall of 2010.

Work of a School Advisory Board

Existence

Every District of Columbia public school must have a school advisory board.

The No Child Left Behind law requires that Title I schools have a School Improvement Team. The new school advisory boards in all Title I schools will also serve as the School Improvement Team. This has been deemed acceptable and in keeping with the NCLB law by the DC Public Schools Office of Federal Grants.

Purpose

The purpose of a school advisory board is to advise the principal with the goal of creating and/or continuing to grow a school and school community that is focused on high expectations and high achievement for all students. Ideally, the school advisory board provides the principal with a range of smart thinking and diverse voices and perspectives. School advisory boards do not have to come to consensus as much as, with the principal, work through potential strategies and outcomes. Such valuable discussion and advice will enable principals to make the best decisions possible, ones that ensure the success of all students.

The School Advisory Board's focus is not on school operations or management but on long term strategy and initiatives leading to academic success.

Priority

The priority of all school advisory boards is the growth and achievement of all students within the school.

Scope of Work

The school advisory board meets at least quarterly. Its purpose is to work with the principal on the long-term vision and key initiatives that will increase the levels of achievement for all children in the school. Meeting agendas should include presentation and discussion of relevant information, review of data, updates, and assessment of progress toward goals.

At the beginning of the school year, the principal and school advisory board members will agree on specific areas of focus for the coming year, and school-wide goals pertaining to these areas. Ideally, they will use the Comprehensive School Plan to determine focus. With or without the Comprehensive School Plan as specific guide, however, the school advisory board and the principal will agree on 3-5 areas on which to focus their collective attention over the course of the school year. *One on-going focus will be to participate in the school budgeting process.* Others may involve curricular and academic considerations, aspects of school culture, or other areas that are related to student achievement and important to the school.

From time to time, a school advisory board may engage on topics other than the major ones decided upon annually. These topics may originate from DCPS central office, from the principal, or from advisory board members themselves.

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Composition of School Advisory Boards

The composition of school advisory boards is as follows:

- 1 Building Representative (WTU) or designee
- 1 Parent Group Leader or designee (must have a child or children currently in the school)
- 4 Teachers
- 4 Parents (must have a child or children currently in the school)
- 1 Non-instructional staff member
- 1 Community Representative
- 2 Students at the High School level

Since school advisory boards are advisory to the principal, the principal is not a member of the board. The principal will attend all meetings of the school advisory board.

Additional Members

Since every school community is unique, in some cases, the above composition may not adequately represent the school community in full. If all members of the school advisory board and the principal agree that an additional member would be essential, they may request this from DCPS' Office of Family and Public Engagement.

Possible requests could be:

- Adding a parent slot to ensure language diversity
- Adding a parent slot for a parent of the incoming, youngest class, to be chosen during the beginning of the school year
- Adding additional students to the group to give a greater voice to students

Convening and Reporting

Scheduling

School advisory boards meet four times, at a minimum, starting in September and finishing in June. These meetings will be open to the public. During specific projects, including the school budget process, meeting will probably have to be more frequent.

LSRT meetings will be scheduled so that as many members as possible can attend. Parents shall be given preference in deciding the time of meetings to ensure that meeting times do not overlap with work hours. This discussion shall take place at the initial meeting after elections.

Notes

At every meeting, notes must be taken by the Secretary. Notes shall be representative of what occurred during the meeting including difficult or contentious conversations. Confidential information shall not be included. Meeting notes shall be approved by board members quickly, then posted on www.dcps.dc.gov and in the front office of every school within 48 hours of each meeting.

Public Access

The regularly scheduled school advisory board meetings are open to the public. Public meetings should include a short report to the public, as well as a question and answer session. Meetings that deal with confidential information will not be open to the public.

The school advisory group will decide on ground rules for observers at the beginning of the school year.

The principal may call additional meetings on sensitive topics that may not be open to the public.

Qualifications and Requirements for all School Advisory Board Members

Overall

In order to ensure high quality, productive teams, effective school advisory board members exhibit certain qualities:

- They are already knowledgeable about much of what is occurring at school, or they are prepared to learn fast
- They consistently show good judgment
- They are professional in their actions toward and treatment of others
- They are focused on student achievement for all students
- They are advocates for their school's success
- They are good listeners
- They are excellent collaborative workers
- They understand the importance of hearing all voices

Priority and Scope

School advisory members have an important role to play in raising student achievement levels in DCPS. It is critical that both DCPS staff and school advisory board members understand their role in advancing student achievement, and work actively to fulfill the responsibilities of that role. Six core beliefs guide our work in DCPS, and in order to hold the board position, members should make all decisions guided by these beliefs:

- All children, regardless of background or circumstance, can achieve at the highest levels.
- Achievement is a function of effort, not innate ability.
- We have the power and the responsibility to close the achievement gap.
- Our schools must be caring and supportive environments.
- It is critical to engage our students' families and communities as valued partners.
- Our decisions at all levels must be guided by robust data.

Trust and Confidentiality

From time to time, school advisory boards may be asked to discuss topics that are sensitive and confidential. The principal will set clear expectations at these junctures, and explicitly inform board members when discussion topics are not appropriate to share. Board members must abide by the principal's guidance. Sound judgment and respect for those who may be impacted by decisions being discussed are imperative for all board members. Moreover, the principal may choose to keep certain kinds of information confidential and apart from advisory board discussions. Such decisions are at the discretion of the principal.

Representation

School advisory board members represent groups larger than their own individual interests. For the purpose of these advisory boards, for example, teachers represent the concerns, ideas and opinions of *all teachers* and parents represent the concerns, ideas and opinions of *all parents*.

Effective school advisory board members will engage in regular outreach to those whom they represent—keeping them appropriately informed of school advisory board activities as well as soliciting opinions and sentiments from them.

Collaboration

Effective school advisory board members as well as the principal work together to understand all perspectives represented. Part of good collaboration includes listening to others, recognizing the validity of ideas that originate with others and having strong opinions and an open mind simultaneously.

Within effective collaboration, there is room for disagreement and discussion of various points of view. Members of the school advisory board may not agree with one another, and on certain matters, the principal and various advisory board members may not agree. Consensus is not required. This in no way prevents the principal from soliciting advice from the school advisory board or the school advisory board from providing productive advice to the principal. Through disagreement, creative solutions may be born. Everyone is working for the same end goal—student achievement.

School Advisory Board Officers

School Advisory Board Chair

The advisory board chair leads the board. This position is elected by the board from among its members. She or he must be the parent of a current student or a current teacher, and be able to work well with the principal. The Chair is the primary liaison to the principal and the advisory board's point of contact for the principal. The Chair:

- Works with the principal on logistics, meeting planning, and agenda development.
- Encourages other members to attain the knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully. This may include identifying external resources or distributing information on relevant DCPS professional development sessions.
- Serves as liaison between the school advisory board and DCPS central office, specifically the Office of Family and Public Engagement, distributing key information from central office as well as asking questions of or voicing concerns to central office.
- Participates in mandatory meetings and professional development sessions for chairs and members.

Secretary

Each school advisory board identifies a member to act as the Secretary and take notes during meetings. These notes will be posted on the web (on dcps.dc.gov at least) and emailed to the team members within 48 hours of every meeting to ensure accuracy and completeness. While confidential information must be omitted at the discretion of the principal, the notes will reflect the discussion even if some portions were difficult or contentious.

The position of secretary may rotate throughout the year if no member wishes to take on the responsibility for a full term.

Outreach Specialist

Each school advisory board will identify a member to act as an Outreach Specialist. This position will be responsible for sharing meeting notes with the broader community, and, in turn, encouraging the school community to attend advisory board meetings open to the public. Each school community is unique and actual practice will vary, but common outreach methods include:

- Meeting announcements in local newspapers
- Meeting announcements and headlines in school newsletters
- Emails to all staff
- Emails to parents
- Materials made available in the front office, library, parent center or other high traffic areas

This position shall be filled for an entire term.

Role of the Principal

The principal plays a vital role in expecting that the school advisory board is productive, and plays a successful role in supporting student success. The principal attends all school advisory board meetings, and works with the Chair and membership to guide the board toward topics that will most benefit the school. The principal is expected to use the school advisory board authentically and regularly, to share his or her thought process on major decisions, and use the board as a sounding board for new ideas. While the principal is not required to follow recommendations from the school advisory board, she or he is required to engage members in rich and meaningful discussion. The school advisory board is an important management and community tool. The principal:

- Works with the Chair on logistics, meeting planning and agenda creation
- Ensures elections are held during the election window
- Facillitates the use of necessary resources for outreach efforts
- Ensures all parents feel welcome to participate on the school advisory board

Role of DCPS' Office of Family and Public Engagement

School Advisory Boards are the responsibility of each school, and of the Office of Family and Public Engagement.

Orientation and Professional Development

The Office of Family and Public Engagement (OFPE) will provide orientation and on-going professional development to all school advisory board members and to principals. These sessions will include an overview of new guidelines, expectations and upcoming events. These sessions will be mandatory.

In turn, school advisory boards should request professional development and other kinds of training from OFPE on specific topics as needed. Examples include:

- Using and understanding data in order to make recommendations
- Creating and monitoring a school plan

Collaboration Among School Advisory Boards

In order to promote collaboration and exchange of information and best practices among schools advisory boards and their respective school communities, OFPE will:

- Maintain a web presence that encourages the exchange of information among advisory boards
- Maintain a list of all school advisory board chairs, including their contact information, to distribute to all chairs and members to encourage collaboration
- Host an annual meeting or conference for school advisory board chairs, members, and principals

Oversight

Questions concerning the interpretation of the guidelines or questions on specific topics not covered within the guidelines will be resolved by OFPE.

In the event a member is unable to participate as a productive member of the board and other strategies have been exhausted, a member may be removed from the board by OFPE.

Governance Team

The Office of Family and Public Engagement will maintain the existence of a Governance Team to review the guidelines and recommend improvements on an annual basis.

Composition

The Governance Team will include but not be limited to the following:

1 Chancellor or designee
4 Parents

Appointed by Chancellor
Appointed by Chancellor

4 WTU Members (must include 2 teachers)
2 CSO Members
2 Principals
1 Instructional Superintendent
2 Community Members

Appointed by Washington Teachers Union
Appointed by Council of School Officers
Appointed by Chancellor
Appointed by Chancellor
Appointed by Chancellor

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Elections

Elections should take place between May 1 and the last day of school. Election results should be submitted to the Office of Family and Public Engagement by the school advisory board chair and the principal. In addition, the principal will submit the names and contact information of newly elected board members in the principal's report at the end of the school year.

Parents, teachers, and non-instructional staff will be notified of an upcoming election through a Connect Ed message or letter, or both. The outgoing Outreach Specialist shall be responsible for ensuring adequate notification occurs.

Prior to the election, those voting should be provided with written information on the candidates.

Eligibility

Teachers

All ET-15/EG09 personnel employed at the local school, and included under the Washington Teachers' Union Bargaining Unit, are eligible to vote for and run as teacher representatives on the local school restructuring team. The Building Representative at each school shall conduct the election of ET-15/EG09 personnel.

Parents

Only parents/custodial parents/guardians of a child enrolled in the school are eligible to serve on the school advisory board as parent representatives or are eligible to vote in the election. Membership in the local school parent organization is not required.

The sitting school advisory board president, after consultation with the principal and the president of the local parent organization, sets the date of the election of parent representatives between May 1 and the last day of school. The date should be set so that as many parents as possible can participate in voting. The voting window shall last for a full day (24 hours) to allow for parents with varying schedules to participate.

Non-Instructional Staff

The principal shall facilitate the election of the non-instructional staff representative. All non-instructional staff assigned to the building are eligible to vote for the non-instructional staff representative and to serve on the LSRT as the non-instructional staff representative.

Students

If a student government president is elected, the student government president shall serve as the representative on the school advisory board. The second student position may be appointed by the principal.

Student representatives are only required at the high school level.

Community Member

The community representative shall be appointed by the school advisory board. If multiple candidates are presented, the school advisory board shall vote. The principal must be present for the vote and will break a tie vote.

Term of Service

The members elected to the school advisory board may serve one or two year terms. The length of service for each position on the school advisory board should be decided before the election. Neither members nor officers may serve more than two consecutive terms.

Reaching out for Candidates

Current members and the principal must recruit parents, teachers, and, when necessary, community members who will add value to the advisory board but would not ordinarily enter such an election. Supporting parents who are not members of the local parent organization to participate in elections is encouraged in order to diversify the perspectives on the team.

Filling Vacancies

Vacancies may occur during the school year. They shall be filled according to the following:

Teachers

The building representative is responsible for filling teacher vacancies as needed through school wide elections.

Parents

The election rules shall be consistent with the above guidelines on parent elections.

Non-Instructional Staff

The principal shall facilitate an election for a new non-instructional staff representative.

Students

The principal has the option to appoint a new representative based on how much of the school year remains.

Community Member

The appointment rules shall be consistent with the above guidelines on appointing a community representative.