

## Site Councils

"The school is the significant unit for improvement and those associated with the individual school are the persons to effect change."

*John Goodlad, A Place Called School*

In 2003-2004 the legislature approved Senate Bill 304 which added responsibilities to the School Site Councils, thereby amending K.S.A. 72-6439. The amendments added as a result of SB304 are:

- Site Councils may make recommendations and proposals to the school board regarding budgetary items and school district matters including but not limited to, identify and implementing the best practices for developing efficient and effective administrative and management functions.
- Site councils also may help school boards analyze the unique environment of schools, enhance the efficiency and maximize limited resources, including outsourcing arrangements and cooperative opportunities as a means to address limited budgets.

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In 1992, the Kansas legislature enacted K.S.A. 72-6439, a state statute that instituted the Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) system. This legislation required all schools to establish site councils, composed of the principal, teachers and other school personnel, parents, business representatives, and other representative community groups. Specifically, the site councils were charged with the following responsibilities:

- Providing advice and counsel in evaluating state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives, and
- Determining the methods that should be employed at the school site to meet these goals and objectives.

The original purpose of school site councils was to transform schools into effective learning environments by providing school staff and school community members with the authority, flexibility and resources they need to solve educational problems and implement change. Site councils give ownership to those responsible for carrying out decisions by involving them directly in making the decisions. It also enables the school community to create school conditions that facilitate improvement, innovation and continuous learning. The ultimate goal of site-based management is to improve the teaching and learning environment for all

students.

National studies of site councils and site-based management found that the following strategies were needed:

- Dispersed power: *effective site councils disperse power throughout the school by involving many stakeholders in providing advice and assist in making decisions to bring about change in teaching and learning practices.*
- Timely and needed professional development: *Professional development must be established and provided to site council members as an ongoing school-wide activity that is directed toward building school-wide capacity for change, creating a professional community, and developing a shared knowledge base.*
- Provided information: *Thriving site councils disseminate information broadly so that participants can make informed decisions about the school and stakeholders are informed of school performance.*
- Effective leaders: *Effective councils have principals who lead and delegate, disperse power, promote a school-wide commitment to growth in skills and knowledge, get all teachers to participate in the work of the school, collect and use information about student learning, distribute rewards, and promote an organization and climate in which teachers are the leaders in instruction and curriculum.*
- Visionary: *Schools where site-based management has worked well have adopted a well-defined vision of their mission, values, and goals regarding student outcomes--a vision that guides curriculum and instruction as well as other decision-making forums.*
- Accomplishment rewarded: *Effective site councils frequently reward individuals and groups on progress they have made toward reaching school goals.*

A study of site councils in Kansas was conducted both in 1996 and again in 2001. The 1996 Kansas site council survey results showed that the average respondent ratings were positive regarding the following characteristics: a clear sense of purpose; clearly stated benchmarks and task-oriented strategies; an understanding of their role and responsibility; a method for orienting new members to the work of the council; members who understood effective schools literature and the goals of the school; action oriented meetings that had an agenda and were held regularly; and a membership that used effective decision-making skills.

The 2001 survey found the following results:

- *Clearly Defined Purpose, Power and Roles:* 80% of principals and site council members reported that they have clearly defined roles and authority. However, 30% of council members stated that they need more training and 24% of the respondents mentioned that the purpose and expectations of the council needed to be clarified. Site council members also reported that they most often dealt with the school improvement plan (76%) and focused on instructional improvement (52%).
- *Regular Meetings of Key Stakeholders:* Site council members reported that the principal was the most important factor in terms of motivating teachers and others to become involved as 80% of council members joined because they were asked to serve. 63% of the principals reported that they asked underrepresented groups to serve. The average size of a council in Kansas was 12 members with 60% of the council non-school employed. In addition, 60% of the site councils met at least six times during the year.
- *Established Methods for Input:* 80% of council members reported that they provide input to their local school board. In addition, 83% of the councils used the school newsletter as a major form of information dissemination.
- *Available Resources:* 75% of council members stated that data is readily accessible. Written meeting rules were available for more than two-thirds of the councils and an overwhelming 87% of council members reported that they had their principal's support. However, only 40% of the council members stated they had their local school board support.
- *Effective Training:* More than half of the site council members reported that they received training on school improvement and student assessment. In addition, 42% reported that they received training on curriculum and instruction as well as basic orientation training. However, almost 60% of site council members reported that they received the least amount of training in open meeting laws, conflict resolution, consensus building, group decision-making, and leadership skills.
- *Ongoing Evaluation of Impact:* One-fourth of the site council members reported that they have had a major impact on school improvement plans but conversely, one-fourth of the respondents felt they had little or no impact on school improvement plans.

### **Proposed Local Site Council Guidelines**

*Purpose:* The purpose of the school Site Council is to advise the school on such matters as student learning, education programs, school improvement planning, and accreditation issues. The site council also plays an advocacy role for the school regarding the same issues.

Specifically, the purpose is to:

- Provide advice and counsel to the school in developing, implementing, and evaluating school performance goals and objectives, and
- Provide ongoing support for the students and staff of the school.

In addition to the above two purposes, school site councils may:

- Make recommendations regarding budgetary matters for efficient and effective administrative and management functions.
- assist school boards analyze the unique environment of schools, enhance the efficiency and maximize limited resources.

### *Membership*

- The site council consists of at least six to twelve members and includes the principal, teachers, other school personnel, parents of students attending the school, the business community and other community groups.
- Membership on the site council is representative of the demography the school serves.
- Community membership exceeds school staff membership with special attention given toward underrepresented groups.
- Local school board policies clearly delineate site council member selection, rotation, terms of service, eligibility for service and selection of leadership.

### **Meetings**

- Councils meet at regularly scheduled times agreed upon by site council members.
- Councils meet at least six times annually but optimally once a month during the school year.
- Council agendas include discussion of student learning, educational programs,

school improvement planning, and accreditation issues.

## **Responsibilities of Site Council Members**

- The chair, in consultation with the building principal or his or her designee(s), establishes agendas, conducts meetings, and communicates site council advisement.
- Site council members participate in sanctioned school improvement meetings and visits in an advisory capacity.
- Site council members periodically communicate with the school community and, at least annually with the local board, on site council activities and other council matters.
- Site council members take part in ongoing training to build their knowledge and skills related to site council work.