

Florida Department of Education

School Advisory Councils Basic Information for SAC Members

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Welcome

As a member of a School Advisory Council (SAC), you are a very important person. You and your fellow council members are entrusted with the improvement of your public school.

Underlying the law that created these councils is a belief that all children can learn, and that the public schools can and will change to better prepare students for today's and tomorrow's workplace.

Each public school is unique. It has its own community setting, resources and challenges, and most importantly, a student population unlike any other. The people best suited to decide what will be effective in helping our students learn are the people closest to each school. These are the principal, faculty, parents, students, local business people and community members. These "stakeholders" are represented on your advisory council.

The law that created School Advisory Councils was enacted in 1991 by the Florida Legislature out of concern about the effectiveness of public schools. Today, every public school has a SAC like yours to plan for school improvement and increased student achievement.

You are about to learn a tremendous amount about your school and how it works. Then, together with your fellow council members, you will use that information to come up with a plan that will help your school and its children become more successful.

What Is The School Advisory Council's Job?

The School Improvement and Education Accountability system, which includes School Advisory Councils, sets up priorities and student performance standards that serve as guiding principles for everything the councils do.

Simply put, each School Advisory Council's job is to look at aspects of their school as suggested by the priorities and to come up with a written plan for school improvement.

The council must look at what is known about their school and decide which areas need improvement. An analysis of student achievement and school performance data should occur. Then the SAC must decide which needs are most pressing and most important.

Next, the group will develop strategies – the "how-to" for improving the areas most important to their school. Finally, they will decide how to measure the results of what they plan to do.

The end product of this work will be a master plan for improving the school that addresses issues relative to budget, training, instructional materials, technology, staffing, student support services, school safety, discipline strategies, student health and fitness, indoor environmental air quality, and other matters of resource allocation.

Getting Started

All the members of your school advisory council, like you, were elected or chosen to represent a cross-section of the community that has a stake in the success of your school.

The different types of council members---school principal, faculty and staff, parents, students, business people, community members---represent “stakeholders” in the school and in public education. They also must be representative of the ethnic, racial and economic community served by your school.

Each SAC must adopt bylaws on their procedures.

The councils are designed to operate like teams. As the person ultimately responsible for the school, the principal is concerned with all the areas addressed by the goals.

Training is provided by school districts that are eager to help council members learn how to develop consensus, resolve conflicts, develop helpful ways to work together, and make sound decisions that are based on research and data regarding school performance.

The council will need a timeline for completing its work to meet district and state deadlines.

Council meetings should be scheduled at times convenient for most members and must be publicly announced at least 3 working days in advance of the meeting.

Minutes of SAC meetings must be recorded along with a list of members who are absent.

A quorum must be present before a vote can be taken. A majority of the SAC membership constitutes a quorum.

Other individuals, organizations and institutions in the community may be valuable as you develop your school improvement plan.

Developing the Plan

If you are a new council member, you will be part of a process that has been underway for a few years. The goal of this process is to write a School Improvement Plan for your school that follows local school district policies and guidelines.

To develop the plan, your council will:

- Assess the need for improvement at your school by using district, state and federal goals as a guide and by reviewing student performance data.
- Put the school's needs in priority order.
- Identify problems and barriers that underlie the needed improvements and their causes.
- Identify and evaluate possible solutions and develop strategies---specific "how-to" steps---to accomplish the needed improvement.
- Specify what will be done, when it will be done, by whom, and what resources are needed.
- Specify precisely what results (outcomes) you expect to achieve and how they will be measured.
- Specify which indicators of success will serve as "adequate progress" for strategies in the plan.
- Decide how you are going to measure success.

This work can be accomplished in various formats ---work groups, subcommittees, task forces---and may involve people in addition to SAC members from the school or community.

One of the important parts of this process is to not let your thinking be limited by the way things have been done in the past. A primary reason for the School Advisory Council is to encourage innovation. Though some education practices persist because they are effective, many excellent ideas fell by the wayside in the past because they no longer fit existing school system practices.

The intent of the School Improvement and Accountability legislation is to encourage and use strategies that work, even when they are different from what has been done in the past.

Communicate with other SACs to share ideas and support each other. You might especially want to talk with those SACs in your school's "feeder pattern" (elementary, middle and high schools that share the same student populations).

There is no one "right way" to do your school improvement plan.

Remember that you are charged with working on what will enable your school and your students to be the best they can be.

Once the plan is developed, you need to provide an opportunity, such as a meeting at the school or a community center, to allow the public and the school community an opportunity to review the plan and offer input. Then the plan is submitted to your District School Board for approval.

The plan will be evaluated, updated and revised each year, so your school will have additional opportunities to incorporate new ideas or work on areas that were not a top priority this year.

Each Fall, the school will distribute a report to the public on how well the school did last school year and what progress was made.

Florida's Open Government Law

Florida government at all levels operates under the principle that the public has the right to know what its government is doing.

Therefore, under the Florida Sunshine Law and the state public records law, work conducted by public officials on behalf of the citizens, and records of that work, must be available for inspection by any interested person.

As a member of a School Advisory Council you are, in effect, doing work for the public, even if you are a volunteer.

This means your SAC's work, its plan, the information developed and/or used in writing the plan and your meetings all must be open and accessible to anyone who is interested, for whatever reason.

The vast majority of public school records and actions, with few exceptions such as labor negotiations, student records and some personnel matters, have long been public under these laws.

If you have special concerns or a specific question arises, your school principal should consult the school board attorney, who customarily handles these issues.

The Sunshine Law aside, the basic philosophy of school improvement and accountability legislation would have us involve and inform all stakeholders as much as possible in the development of a school improvement plan.

Your Partners in School Improvement

Your School District:

There are many resources to assist you and your SAC team members at the district school office in your county. The local county staff has a great deal of information and expertise

to offer your team. There is also a school improvement contact person in your district. This person can be reached at the main school district office or the Department of Education can provide you with this name and contact information.

Florida Department of Education:

This statewide agency offers technical assistance and resources to help local schools develop and implement their school improvement plans.

Information Resources

In doing your job as a SAC member, you will need information and data. This information is available from many sources, including:

- Your school principal
- Your school faculty and non-teaching staff members
- Surveys of parent, students and faculty at your school
- Reports about specific characteristics of your school and its students available from your district school board and online websites
- Budget and program information available from your district school board
- Students at your school
- Your School Resource Officer (SRO) or, if you don't have a SRO program, the law enforcement agencies that protect your school
- Specialists who work at your school such as school nurses, social workers, guidance counselors, media specialists, technology specialists and others
- Your school PTA/PSA/PTO and your district PTA council
- Community groups and agencies that are actively concerned with the welfare of children and youth
- Florida Department of Education and your district websites