

PREFACE

In 1992 the Kansas Legislature enacted K.S.A. 72-6439 and then amended the original statute in 1995. This comprehensive piece of legislation includes the school performance accreditation system; pupil assessments; curriculum standards; performance levels to represent academic excellence; school site councils; public education performance and school building report cards; study to evaluate changes in pupil performance. The relevant language establishing school site councils in Kansas is as follows:

(d) Each school in every district shall establish a school site council composed of the principal and representatives of teachers and other school personnel, parents of pupils attending the school, the business community, and other community groups. School site councils shall be responsible for providing advice and counsel in evaluating state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives and in determining the methods that should be employed at the school site to meet these goals and objectives.

The School Site Councils for Kansas Schools and Districts document was developed by the Kansas State Board of Education as a service to local districts in implementing this requirement. Since this document's original publication, a study of site councils in Kansas was conducted in 1996. The primary purposes of the 1996 study were to comply with the legislative requirement to evaluate the work of the site councils and their effectiveness in facilitating educational improvement and restructuring and to report to the Kansas State Board of Education. The secondary intent was to offer policy recommendations to both the State Board and the Legislature to enhance the effectiveness of school site councils in the QPA process. In its 1995 session, the Kansas Legislature changed the original legislation by eliminating the "sunset" provision in the law (which could have meant discontinuation of site councils; school site councils became permanent requirements) and removed the provision allowing school boards who operate only one school to serve as the school site council.

Information contained in this guide is intended to be available as a resource. Councils are encouraged to use it to whatever level and extent is appropriate to meet their needs and assist in their work.

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School Site Councils

INTRODUCTION

School site councils (SSC) are a part of the broader school reform movement, representing shared decision making and grassroots governance at its best and more involvement by teachers, parents and community members at a minimum. On March 12, 1991, the Kansas State Board of Education adopted the Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) system, a policy choice directed at school improvement, accountability, and individual student performance at the building level. Then, in 1992 the Kansas legislature enacted the *School District Finance and Quality Performance Act* (K.S.A. 72-6439, requiring all districts to participate in QPA. As a part of that legislative requirement, each school in every public school district was mandated to establish a school site council. Under this legislation, the council has two roles. First, each council is to advise the school and the school district's board of education on state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives. The second mandated role is that the council will provide input on determining the methods that should be employed at the school site to meet these goals and objectives. Non-public schools and those schools accredited as special purpose schools are not required to have school site councils.

The ideal school site council is broadly representative of the school community and blends people with diverse experiences and viewpoints in order to make sound advise for the improvement of teaching and learning. No one individual can have all the knowledge or skills necessary for the development and implementation of school improvement plans. Increasing the pool of participants in the decision making process can be a very helpful component of school renewal and reform.

The Importance of Parent/Citizen Involvement

Years of research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. When parents and families are involved in support of children and their education, children perform better in school. Effectively engaging families and communities in the education of children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform. Parents and the school community can bring great wisdom to the work of the school site councils if they are truly part of the decision making process.

The research studies leading to the development of the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs indicate that gains for students are greatest when parents participate in activities within six areas: communicating; parenting; student learning; volunteering; school decision making and advocacy; and collaborating with community.

Schools that actively enlist parent and community participation and input, communicate that they value effective partnerships in the educating of children.

Part I

What is a School Site Council?

School Site Council:

Local school boards are ultimately responsible for all the educational decisions of the district; therefore, board approval must always be sought. Site councils have no independent authority and are strictly advisory to the local board of education. The legal responsibility of a school site council (SSC) is to provide advice and counsel in two areas:

- In evaluating state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives; and
- In determining the methods that should be employed at the school site to meet those goals and objectives.

Summary points:

- 1) SSC work is advisory only; it is to make recommendations, not decisions.
- 2) Recommendations made by a SSC should address state, district and school site goals and objectives.
- 3) Recommendations made by a SSC fall into just two areas: the evaluation of goals and objectives and the methods to use in meeting those goals and objectives at the school site.

Understanding State, School District, and School Goals and Objectives:

Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) is “a school performance accreditation system based upon improvement in performance that reflects high academic standards and is measurable” [K.S.A. 72-6439(a)]. Adopted by the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) in 1991, QPA addresses school improvement, accountability and individual student performance at the building level.

The KSBE has developed two separate sets of measures, or criteria, that must be met to become accredited. The state criteria are divided into quality criteria and performance criteria. It is essential that site council members understand the QPA system if they are to evaluate and make recommendations for the methods to be used at the district and school levels for meeting these criteria.

Council Member Responsibilities:

Site councils are charged with making recommendations based on their study of school improvement and student performance data and the specific needs these data reveal. The site council also plays an advocacy role for the school regarding student learning, education programs, school improvement planning, and accreditation issues. This role is one of advising and recommending rather than decision-making. In carrying-out its advisory work, SSC members might be involved in collecting, reviewing and analyzing data/information to show progress in student performance and school conditions relating to the state’s QPA system.

Kansas curriculum standards and assessments have been developed in core academic areas. All students are required to take the assessments. State performance criteria for each assessed area has been set by the KSBE; meeting the target in these assessments will factor into the school’s accreditation status.

Each school must develop a multi-year school improvement plan that specifies actions for achieving continuous improvement in student performance and which includes a results-based staff development plan. Site councils should have the opportunity to provide suggestions during the plan’s development; and before the plan is submitted to the local school board, the school should seek endorsement and input from the site council.

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

Council members should be expected to: Attend all council meetings; act as a communication link between the council and staff, students, parents and community; contribute to the group and help members function as a team; and accept responsibilities for council work to assure that proposed objectives are achieved.

Who May Serve on a School Site Council?

SSC Membership:

Every public school building accredited by the Kansas State Board of Education must have an individual site-based council. The KSBE does not have the authority to grant a variance or waiver of this statutory requirement. Non-public schools and those schools accredited as special purpose schools are not required to have school site councils.

K.S.A. 72-6439 (c) requires that site councils be composed of the principal and representatives of teachers and other school personnel, parents of pupils attending the school, the business community, and other community groups. It is clear that school site councils are to be oriented more toward community and parent membership than toward school staff. The law does not limit the number of persons who can serve on a SSC; however, to meet the minimum membership requirements, a site council must consist of at least six individuals.

Each local board of education will determine how the selection and appointment of site council members will be made throughout the district. Local school board policies should clearly delineate site council member selection, rotation, terms of service, eligibility for service and selection of leadership.

A district may wish to examine existing parent/community based councils and determine how existing groups can support common purpose and goals. (Information is provided in Appendix B about which councils might be adapted to serve as a school site council). ***(We might want to insert here the idea of using SSC membership within the district for QPA "external technical assistance teams")***

Council Community Membership:

SSC membership should be representative of the demography the school serves, and community membership should exceed school staff membership, with special attention given toward under-represented groups. Effective councils will consist of local residents who have accurate knowledge of families in the community and who are willing to make a commitment to the school community. Each member should have specific contributions to make in terms of information, contacts, and resources that will support the school in meeting its goals and objectives. Self-motivation, enthusiasm, and reliability are important characteristics for council members.

Members from business and other community groups can come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Valuable members on other advisory groups have included:

• Mayor, city commissioner	• Medical personnel
• Local newspaper editor	• Bankers
• Retired persons	• Representative of higher education
• Local/state legislators	• Members of Chamber of Commerce
• Students	• Representatives of local retail stores
• City employees	• Farmers
• Parents of ESL or SPED students	• Law enforcement officials
• Employees of SRS, mental health	• Contractors

Open Meetings Law:

Each school site council will operate within the *Kansas Open Meetings Law*. An orientation and briefing should be provided for council members, reviewing the open meetings law and the Kansas Open Records Act.

What are the Characteristics of Effective School Site Councils?

The following areas include recommendations which might be addressed to help councils work as effectively as possible.

Clear Sense of Purpose:

Effective councils set short and long term goals and objectives. Council members need to share a common vision of the ideal future school and community. This vision must change and evolve over time. Clearly stated benchmarks and task-oriented strategies give the council a sense of purpose and direction, which provide a barometer of the council's impact on the school and the community.

Each council member must be aware of his/her responsibilities. Orientation of new members is vital. Awareness of effective schools research, the change process, and the Quality Performance Accreditation system is important to the successful work of the council.

Action-Oriented Meetings:

Council meetings need to be guided by well-planned agendas. Decisions must be made and plans of action developed and implemented. These actions will provide evidence to members and constituents that council meetings are worth their personal time and effort.

Size of the Council:

Ideally, a council will have 6 to 12 members. Research has found that this size group provides enough people to perform the council's duties and functions without causing collaborative decision-making to become unwieldy.

Council Leadership:

Experience has shown that effective councils have chairpersons elected by council members rather than appointed by principals. It is also recommended that the group select a secretary or recorder.

Scheduled Meetings:

It is recommended that councils meet at regularly scheduled times agreed upon by site council members. Optimally, SSC's will meet at least once per month during the school year; certainly, they should meet at least six times annually since the complex process of assessing, planning, and monitoring cannot be accomplished without sufficient time devoted to it.

Consideration will need to be given to scheduling meetings at times and in places comfortable and convenient to large numbers of people to obtain the greatest amount of participation of persons representing a cross-section of interests.

Council agendas include discussion of student learning, educational programs, school improvement planning, and accreditation issues.

Service on Council:

The length and schedule for serving on a council will be determined at the district/school level. To involve more participants over a period of time, it is suggested that some mechanism to ensure rotation of council membership be outlined initially.

Recognition of Council Members:

Each council member should have a personal sense of accomplishment and receive public recognition for his/her services. People need to know they are appreciated; by being appreciated they are more willing to give of their time.

Decision Making

Although the councils have no legal powers of decision-making (these are designated by law to the board of education), it is still advisable to provide training in group process skills in order for the council to function effectively and make appropriate recommendations. Within the council operations, a statement of operational procedures could address the methods to be used to reach decisions or recommendations.

Evaluation and Monitoring:

The major purpose for each school site council, as stated in law, is to provide advice and counsel in evaluating state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives. As the building council representatives become involved in the QPA process, the council may participate in the evaluation of the building progress toward achieving the identified improvement plan goals.

An annual report of the work of the council will be required of each school site council; each report is to be sent to the local board of education and then submitted to the state board.

A process for self-evaluation should be designed so as to help each site council understand their roles and responsibilities; to help members learn to work together as a team; to help the council improve its ability to study significant issues; and to make recommendations to the board of education. The process of self-evaluation provides a number of positive benefits to the site council; MONF RHWA

Role of the Principal:

The principal is a key member of the school site council

Role of the District:

The district's superintendent and board of education play a key role in determining the effectiveness of their school site councils. For councils to be most effective, district staff and board members should:

- **Establish district level coordination.(continue with what is in old Manual)**

- **Clearly define the role and purpose of the councils.(continue with what is in old Manual)**

- **Review the work of the councils.** Each council will prepare a summary report annually to be submitted with the QPA annual report to the local board of education and Kansas State Board of Education. The local board should provide support for council activities whenever possible. Prior to their participation in the QPA process, schools/districts will submit this annual report to the local board and then to the KSBE.

- **Demonstrate that they believe school site councils are a valuable part of the operation of their schools.....(continue with what is in old Manual)**

- **Provide information on district level policies and procedures.(continue with what is in old Manual)**

- **Provide councils with training and technical assistance.(continue with what is in old Manual)**

- **Acknowledge the effort council members put into their work.(continue with what is in old Manual)**

Loebel: 03/17/04

The following resources have been used in developing this guide:

Kansas Legislative Report, August 5, 1992

A Guide for Kansas School Site Councils, KASB,