

## **School Advisory Councils Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is a School Advisory Council (SAC)?**

The School Advisory Council is a school-based group intended to represent the school, the community and those persons closest to the students. The group shares responsibility for guiding the school toward continuous improvement. The district school board is responsible, by Florida law, for establishing an advisory council for each school in the district and shall develop procedures for the election and appointment of advisory council members. Each School Advisory Council shall include in its name the words "school advisory council."

### **What is the role of the School Advisory Council?**

The School Advisory Council is responsible for final decision making at the school relating to the implementation of the provisions of the annual School Improvement Plan. Each School Advisory Council assists in the annual preparation and evaluation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and in the preparation of the school's annual budget.

### **Who serves on the School Advisory Council?**

Beginning July 1, 2008, a majority of the members of each School Advisory Council had to be persons who were not employed by the school district. Each advisory council should be composed of the principal and an appropriately balanced number of teachers, education support employees, students, parents, and other business and community citizens who are representative of the ethnic, racial, and economic community served by the school. Certain members are elected by their peers, while business and community members are appointed, and the principal automatically serves. Only students in secondary schools serve on a SAC.

### **How are business and community members selected?**

The district school board is responsible for establishing procedures, for use by schools in selecting business and community members, that include a means of ensuring wide notice of vacancies and seeking input on possible members from local businesses, chambers of commerce, community and civic organizations, and the public at large.

### **How are elections conducted?**

Each chairperson is responsible for overseeing the elections. Each SAC must represent teachers, education support employees, parents, and students who are elected by their respective peer groups at the school in a fair and equitable manner as follows:

- Teachers shall be elected by teachers.
- Education support employees shall be elected by education support employees.

- Parents shall be elected by parents.
- Students shall be elected by students.

Voting can occur at meetings or by mail, using written ballots or show of hands. Ballots are counted, recorded, and retained. Ballots and voting records should be kept by a SAC officer, and the results are reflected in the official SAC minutes.

**Do elections have to be recorded?**

Elections can be by written, signed or computerized ballots as long as the ballots are recorded officially for auditing purposes. Elections must be open and fair.

**Does the law require the composition of School Advisory Councils to reflect the racial balance of the student population attending the school?**

No. An opinion (AGO 2008-16) from the Florida Attorney General's Office issued on April 8, 2008, indicates that the composition of the SAC must reflect the ethnic, racial and economic community in the geographic area served by the school (rather than the district at large or the actual student population attending the school). For further information, please see:

<http://myfloridalegal.com/ago.nsf/Opinions/5634E57A908E25D8852574250071E799>

**Who serves as Chair of the School Advisory Council?**

Any member can be elected to serve as Chair. We recommend that neither a principal (in order to invite greater shareholder involvement) nor a student (due to lack of experience and maturity) fills this role. Some schools elect co-chairs so that a parent/community member and a school-based member can lead jointly.

**Are persons serving as a School Advisory Council member required to be screened?**

No. If the SAC member is a parent or business volunteer, no screening is required. However, districts are required to check volunteers' names with the sexual offender/predator database. For further information, please see Section 943.04351, Florida Statutes

[http://www.flsenate.gov/statutes/index.cfm?mode=View%20Statutes&SubMenu=1&App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=943.04351&URL=CH0943/Sec04351.HTM](http://www.flsenate.gov/statutes/index.cfm?mode=View%20Statutes&SubMenu=1&App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=943.04351&URL=CH0943/Sec04351.HTM)

**What is a quorum?**

A majority of the membership of the council (more than half) constitutes a quorum. (Section 1001.453(1)(d)1, Florida Statutes)

**Who develops the bylaws?**

Each School Advisory Council adopts its own bylaws. The district may require procedures, policies, sample by-laws or a uniform template for all School Advisory Councils in their district. (Section 1001.453(1)(d), Florida Statutes)

**How much money is allotted to each SAC?**

For the last several years, each SAC has received \$10.00 per student. On July 1, 2008, the SAC allocation dropped to \$5.00 per unweighted FTE student. The amount for 2009 is up to \$5.00 per unweighted student and could be prorated depending on availability of funds. A portion of the funds provided in the annual General Appropriations Act for use by School Advisory Councils must be used for implementing the School Improvement Plan. The money is sent by DOE to each district, which forwards allocations to each local school SAC. Expenditures are reported to the State and are subject to annual audit. (For further information, please see Section 1001.42(18)(f), F.S. and Section 24.121(5)(c), F.S.)

**How much notice is given to School Advisory Council members for agenda items?**

The law states that each school is required to give at least three business days advance notice in writing to all members of the SAC of any matter that is scheduled to come before the council for a vote. (Section 1001.453(1)(d)2, Florida Statutes) Meeting dates can be posted on school Web sites, marquees or bulletin boards, published in newsletters, announcements or local newspapers, or broadcast on TV.

**When are SAC meetings scheduled?**

SAC meetings are to be scheduled when parents, students, teachers, businesspersons, and members of the community are able to attend. Location and time of day are important considerations for promoting attendance and participation. (Section 1001.453(1)(d)3, Florida Statutes)

**Can members who have been absent be replaced?**

Yes. When replacing any member who has two or more consecutive unexcused absences from school advisory council meetings, the SAC follows procedures in its bylaws or in district policies. (Section 1001.453(1)(d)4, Florida Statutes)

**Are meeting minutes required?**

Yes. Minutes should be written or tape recorded and kept for one to three years. (For further information, please see Section 1001.453(1)(d)5, Florida Statutes, and Florida's current records retention schedule for local government)

**When is the best time to start the school improvement planning process?**

Even though the school improvement planning process is ongoing, it is useful to start the evaluation and needs assessment processes in the spring. Districts select planning cycles that accommodate local needs.

**Is a charter school required to have a School Advisory Council?**

Yes. However, charter schools are sometimes able to have their governing body serve as their SAC. Refer to agreements in the charter contract on a school-by-school basis.

**Does a charter school need to have a School Improvement Plan (SIP)?**

Yes. It is a public school; therefore it must have a school improvement plan approved by the district or, if stated in the terms of its contract agreement, it may substitute its charter contract and annual report as the annual SIP.

**Are DJJ programs required to have a School Improvement Plan?**

Yes. According to HB 991 passed in the 2009 Legislative Session, each DJJ program must have a School Improvement Plan.

**Are schools required to include their dropout prevention and academic intervention programs in their School Improvement Plan?**

Yes, according to Section 1003.53(2)(b), Florida Statutes, schools must “reflect” those programs in their SIPs. **Response to Intervention (RtI)** is among the academic interventions which should be reflected in the SIP. For further information, please see:

[http://leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=Ch1003/SEC53.HTM&Title=->2008->Ch1003->Section%2053#1003.53](http://leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=Ch1003/SEC53.HTM&Title=->2008->Ch1003->Section%2053#1003.53)

**Do SAC meetings fall under the Sunshine Law?**

Yes. According to Chapter 286, Florida Statutes, all meetings of any board or commission of any state agency or authority or of any agency or authority of any county, municipal corporation, or political subdivision, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution, at which official acts are to be taken are declared to be public meetings open to the public at all times. No resolution, rule, or formal action shall be considered binding except as taken or made at such meetings. The board or commission must provide reasonable notice of all such meetings. For further information, please see:

<http://myfloridalegal.com/ago.nsf/Opinions/69EDFFAEB2FE3C8C85256B27005F4371>

**Are SACs allowed to sponsor fundraisers?**

It is generally preferable to have the PTA, PTSO, Education Foundation, or another group conduct school fundraisers in order to keep SAC allocations separate. Consult with your local district office about school board policy.

**If SAC funds are left over at the end of the school year, can they be carried over to the following year?**

The intent of the Legislature is to have funds used during the school year in which they are awarded. A school board might allow funds to be carried forward, but always check with your District Finance Director first, and consult with your local district office about school board policy.

**Can funds be used to pay stipends for members?**

No. The Florida Attorney General has written an opinion that funds may not be used to pay a stipend to any member since a School Advisory Council is not a “project” or “program.” For further information, please see:

<http://www.fldoe.org/ogc/opinions/2000/00-03.asp>

**Who provides training for new SAC members?**

The district office is responsible for training. Some education consortia also provide training. (Section 1001.42(19), Florida Statutes)

**What topics are typically covered in SAC training?**

- Structure, Purpose and Role
- Parent Involvement
- Way of Work
- Needs Assessments
  - Data collection and analysis
    - Local demographic data
    - School test scores
    - School grades/AYP: <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/default.asp>
    - DOE reports: <http://www.fldoe.org/evaluation/>
  - School Climate Surveys (optional)
- Developing and Communicating the SIP to shareholders
- Evaluation of the SIP

**How can a school obtain a Five Star rating?**

The Five Star School Award was created by the Florida Department of Education, Commissioner's Community Involvement Council and is presented annually to those schools that have shown evidence of exemplary community involvement.

In order to earn Five Star school recognition, a school must show documentation that it has achieved 100% of the established criteria in the categories of:

- *Business partnerships,*
- *Family Involvement,*
- *Volunteerism,*
- *Student Community Service, and*
- *School Advisory Councils.*

Obtain guidelines, application forms and information from your District Volunteer Coordinator. Application forms are located at:

<http://www.fldoe.org/family/fivestar.asp>