



SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS – BACKGROUND

The Utah State Legislature first authorized school community councils (SCCs) in 1992. The councils, sometimes referred to as “site based councils,” were established to address the academic needs of students with decisions being made at the most local level. Some schools and districts began to implement the law and establish decision making bodies at the school level that represented school administration, staff, and parents. Initially there was more flexibility than is currently outlined in the law regarding the responsibilities and membership of the school community council. Schools brought their councils together and prepared school improvement plans to improve academic achievement in their school. However, there was an important piece missing for successful implementation—a funding source to implement the plans.

In 1999, the Legislature established the School LAND Trust Program, which intended to improve student academic performance in each public school. This legislation created School LAND Trust Committees composed of parents and educators and directed the committee to create plans to improve academic achievement with the interest and dividends from the State School Fund. Because the committees actually had funding from a revenue stream that promised to grow over time, trust land committees experienced some success.

In 2002, the Legislature restructured the membership of school community councils to mirror the School LAND Trust Committees, and made the SCCs responsible for approving the School LAND Trust Plans, which became an academic subset of the school improvement plan. The new legislation provided additional responsibilities including the development of a reading achievement plan in elementary schools, a child access routing plan for all but high schools, and directed councils to assist in the creation of the professional development plan. School community councils were charged to develop plans and became authorized advisory groups to school and district administrators and local school boards. Parents were granted a majority voice on the council, elected by parents of students attending the school. The staff elected staff members, and the principal was authorized to serve as a voting member.

Over the years the law authorizing school community councils (53A-1α-108) has been amended. In 2008 the law was amended with three separate pieces of legislation and the same year, the State Board of Education adopted a rule on school community councils, answering the often asked questions of council members and outlining the rights and responsibilities of those involved with the councils. The State Board of Education was also directed to make rules to carry out the statute on school community councils. The law and State Board rule outline the membership, elections, reporting requirements, rights, responsibilities, and a compliance to law. A compliance checklist is provided in this handbook. Effective councils go beyond the requirements in the law requiring collaboration and team building, as well as training about how to make decisions based on valid data so students can thrive and resources are used effectively. Councils should know how to develop and use action plans that can positively affect school change. This handbook and the associated resources will supply school community councils with the tools they need to play that vital role in the educational process assigned to them by the legislature.

More information, and a copy of applicable laws, are available at www.schoollandtrust.org



SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL FRAMEWORK

Effective school community councils consist of parents and professionals working together to address the needs of students. Some of the councils' activities are required by rule and law, but most are simply an expression of community-spirited individuals trying to do what they know must be done to help students succeed. In the sections that follow, you will find a collection of checklists or guides that offer council members some direction in forming, conducting and managing the process of school improvement. The first of these guides, "School Community Council Compliance Standards", identifies and explains the activities and procedures required by state law as well as by rules established by the Utah State Board of Education. Additional guides are in development and will be available shortly. These guides will contain statements and brief descriptions of "best practices", or recommended strategies for school community council members to follow as they strive to assist one another in their important work. We have chosen to organize these guides in two broad sections: (1) Compliance, and (2) Quality Indicators and Processes.

Compliance (Guide Currently Available)

Compliance items are designed to determine the extent to which a school community council is meeting the requirements concerning the structure and conduct of the council. These requirements can be found in state law (Utah Code) and in the rules approved by the Utah State Board of Education.

Quality Indicators and Processes (Guides Available Soon)

In addition to the basic compliance standards for school community councils are highly recommended strategies for developing and maintaining quality. Following these recommendations for best practice will likely produce a collaborative school community, more successful in addressing the needs of a diverse studentbody and community. As is the case in virtually all successful efforts to construct and maintain a building, organization, or enterprise, a school community council's efforts to build and maintain a truly effective school program will require (1) an efficient and durable structure, (2) a commitment to high standards and values, (3) a process for working collaboratively, and (4) a blueprint or plan, collaboratively developed, that clearly specifies the vision, the goals, the tasks and activities, the individual assignments and responsibilities, and the expected outcomes and benefits of the plan. Maintaining quality processes will require (5) a systematic and on-going evaluation of the entire process, including (6) strategies for correcting missteps, refining the process, and sustaining effective practices.



USING SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL GUIDES AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

The following guides can be used to assist school community councils in their efforts to implement best practices. The first of the guides, Compliance Standards, is to help the school community council determine if its work is consistent with the state of Utah's rules and regulations. Any deviation from the stated standards requires immediate attention and corrective action.

Additional guides, when included, consist largely of statements of best practice or recommended actions to be followed by the school community council. Alongside these statements of best practice are opportunities to rate the performance of your school community council. These ratings become valuable when they result from discussions of each statement, reflecting upon and reviewing evidences of performance in a systematic fashion. Evidences may include copies of correspondence, examples of policy statements, reports of programs and activities, and other tangible products of conditions or activities.

After the members of the council thoughtfully review evidences for each statement of best practice, they determine a rating for that statement: 1, if there are significant evidences of deficiency in the council's performance; 2, if there are few evidences of deficient performance; and, 3, if the evidences indicate that the council has met the criteria for excellent performance. Reviewing the ratings helps the school community council to identify the highest priorities to be reflected in the school improvement plan.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School improvement is the responsibility of everyone, from students and parents, to professionals and public officials. As we clarify roles, expectations, and responsibilities, we increase the likelihood of each one contributing significantly to this most important enterprise. Our children's future successes are at stake. School community councils are simply one way we can work together to make schools more successful. These guides and implementation tools currently being developed are intended to help school community councils work smoothly and effectively. In the descriptions that follow, we offer some insights regarding the roles and responsibilities of some of those who have an interest, direct or indirect, in the work of school community councils.

These guides are designed to be used as an overall assessment of school community councils. We anticipate these guides may be reviewed at least once or twice per year during school community council meetings. These guides and implementation tools are intended to be useful for any community council working with public schools. Given the range of school types that employ these councils, the roles and responsibilities of participants can vary, and may lack clarity. To avoid misinterpretation and to provide a tool useful to a wide audience, we will start by sharing our assumptions about the roles different parties play in broad school management.

Parents – Parents act as the primary advocates for children. By working as a group, parents ensure the representation of various viewpoints and values within the community. Parent involvement is key to student achievement and student progress. *Parents make up the majority of a school community council, and are often the driving force. A parent will serve as either chair or vice-chair.* It is important that parents on the council understand the responsibilities of the council, and are able to collaborate well with the other members of the council to effect meaningful school improvement for all children.

School Faculty – Teachers, counselors and other professional staff are responsible for the academic and social well being of students in their charge. They evaluate student skills and knowledge, and design and implement instruction best suited for each child. They work as partners with local, state and federal entities to determine academic goals, but are generally in charge of decisions related to methods of

instruction. They are also partners with other personnel to manage school functions, extracurricular activities, and classroom resources. When most effective, the various school employees combine their efforts in teams and avoid isolation. *They welcome the viewpoints of parents to receive input and show them respect.* They are responsible to the school principal.

The School Principal – The school principal is the Chief Executive Officer and instructional leader of the school. He or she is responsible for providing clear expectations for faculty and other school employees, to create an atmosphere of trust and enthusiasm, to provide opportunities for employees to succeed and grow, and to reward excellence and progress toward excellence. In addition, as managers, principals are expected to assure the legal compliance of school processes, to be accountable for all fiscal matters, and to manage human and other resources while creating a safe, creative, and productive school. They encourage participation from students, staff, parents, and the community as they work toward having a successful school of which all can be proud. *Principals are responsible to the district administration and have many specific responsibilities and timelines related to school community councils but may not act as chair or vice-chair.*

The District Superintendent – The superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer of the school district and is also an instructional leader with responsibility for the overall instruction program in the school district. Instruction is, after all, the major reason school districts were created. Superintendents seek additional funding, allocate resources, engage the community, and provide an attractive place for highly qualified teachers and administrators. They coordinate all programs and assessments universally delivered to the school district, and are responsible for the school district in the same way principals are responsible for their schools. And although they should also collaborate with other interested parties where possible, they are responsible to the entire community as well as the locally elected school board.

The School Board – The locally elected school board acts as the board of directors for the school district. School board members are responsible to their community and its values and have the final authority in school governance issues consistent with state law and State Board of Education rules. They should establish a vision and direction for improving student achievement, and align policies, budgets, staff and other resources to that vision. While board members should take an active role in creating the vision and ensuring accountability within the district, they should rely on the expertise of the district and school administrators to carry out the day to day operations of the district. *Local school boards review school improvement plans, and review and approve School LAND Trust plans.*

The School Community Council – The school community council is a group of parents, staff, and school employees that evaluate the current status of the school and plans for meaningful school improvement. This is done by first evaluating overall school progress, and then by proposing a School Improvement Plan. The council also proposes a School LAND Trust plan to implement a portion of the School Improvement Plan. The makeup of the council and many of its duties are outlined in law and rule. By complying with the laws and rules governing school community councils, collaborating, basing decisions on data, and proposing and implementing action plans, the school community council can effect meaningful school improvement. The school community council is an advisory body. All of its plans and actions are overseen by the local school board. The council seeks to ensure that each professional in the educational process is well supported, and that information flows from one party to the next. The council does not deliver instruction, does not manage the school or district, and council members are not elected by the community at large. However, the school community council makes sure that all parties, especially parents and students, are heard and that students receive the best educational services possible. *The council gathers and disseminates information, creates a school improvement plan based upon the information, and reviews evidences of school improvement.*



SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL WORKING GROUP

The school community council Working Group consists of representatives of various educational and advocacy organizations, including, but not limited to the Utah State Office of Education, the School LAND Trust Program, Utah PTA, the Utah Education Association, the Utah Family Partnership Network, Utah School Boards Association, Utah School Superintendents Association, the Utah Elementary and Secondary Principals Associations, and Utah State University. The Working Group seeks broad participation from diverse interests in developing curriculum, tools, and training aids to assist school community councils in accomplishing their assigned tasks. The mission and objectives of this group are presented below:

MISSION

Focus school community councils on empowering students to live and contribute meaningfully through knowledge, continual learning, innovative thinking, and problem solving.

OBJECTIVES

- Promote systemic, continuous improvement for every school in Utah.
- Provide tools and resources that support the work of effective school community councils.
- Promote partnerships that engage the family, school, and community to support student success.
- Promote and celebrate each school's success stories (students, teachers, administrators, volunteers, school community council, etc.).
- Accelerate the effectiveness of school community councils.
- Promote decision-making that is:

Based upon and responsive to data
Conducted regularly and re-evaluated as necessary
Representative of constituencies and viewpoints



STANDARDS FOR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students. Partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. As educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with their school in children's education and development. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all children succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.

(Dr. Joyce L. Epstein)

These standards were developed to promote meaningful parent and family participation, to raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs, and to provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve their programs. They clearly delineate practices that have been shown to lead to success and high-quality parent-involvement programs.

Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the community

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Standard 2: Communicating effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way and meaningful communication about student learning.

Standard 3: Supporting student success

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child

Families are advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

Standard 5: Sharing power

Families and school staff are partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standard 6: Collaborating with community

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expand learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.





SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL COMPLIANCE STANDARDS

ABOUT SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL GUIDES

The purpose of the school community council guides is to provide school leaders with a checklist for developing and managing effective school community councils. These guides serve as a standard for exemplary practice and are based on empirically supported performances and statements of best practice.

ABOUT COMPLIANCE

Since 2000 the Utah State Legislature has required every traditional public school to establish a committee at the school-site level made up of parents, staff and the principal as a requirement to receive School LAND Trust Program funding. Compliance items determine if a school community council is meeting requirements in the Utah Code and State Board Rule.

This guide covers required actions and is necessarily more detailed and explicit than guides that describe only suggested practices. For more detailed information for each part, visit the following web sites: www.schoollandtrust.org, www.le.state.ut.us/Documents/code_const.htm, www.schools.utah.gov/board/rules.htm

I. SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS (SCC) AND ELECTIONS

- NY** A. The SCC has more parent/guardian members than school employee members, including the principal.¹ *Throughout the remainder of the document, parents and guardians will be referred to as parents.*
- NY** B. The school principal is a voting member of the SCC.²
- NY** C. All SCC terms are for two years, with the beginning dates determined by the school, consistent with local school board policies.³ *Members may serve up to three consecutive terms. Parent members may work at the school for up to six hours per week (average). Parents working more than six hours per week must run as school employees.*
- NY** D. Notice of the SCC election is provided to parents and school employees at least two weeks in advance of the election, and includes: (1) the positions that are available, (2) dates and times of the elections, and (3) instructions for becoming a candidate.⁴
- NYNA** E. When more candidates file for parent positions or school employee positions than there are vacancies, the school holds a formal election.⁵ *When races are not contested (more candidates than positions), positions may be filled either by formal election or by appointment.*
- NY** F. Elections are overseen by the principal, or designee, and are conducted by means of secret ballots, deposited in a secure ballot box.⁶ *Parents elect parent members, and school employees elect school employee members.*



- NYNA** G. When elections are held before the school year begins, only parents of students who will attend the school in the upcoming year run for a seat on the SCC.⁷ *Parents of both current and incoming students may vote for parent members.*
- NY** H. Approximately half of the SCC seats are up for election each year.⁸
- NYNA** I. If voting is conducted by mailed ballots or secure electronic systems, such voting is conducted consistent with the Utah State Board of Education Rule on SCCs.⁹
- NY** J. Results of each election are kept and made available to the public upon request.¹⁰
- NYNA** K. If positions are vacant following the elections, parents on the council appoint parent members to fill the vacancies, and school employee members appoint school employee members.¹¹
- NY** L. The SCC members elect a chair and a vice-chair, one from the parent members and the other from the school employee members.¹² *The principal may not serve as either officer.*
- NY** M. Each fall, the council submits, on-line, the Committee Membership Form to the local board, as part of the fall reporting for the School LAND Trust Program.¹³

II. OPEN AND PUBLIC MEETING LAW AND OTHER NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- NY** A. SCC meetings are open to the public.¹⁴
- NY** B. SCC meeting agendas are posted on the school’s web site at least one week prior to the meeting, and include the date, time, and location of the meeting, and the minutes of the previous meeting.¹⁵
- NY** C. SCC meeting agendas are posted at the school at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, and include the date, time, and location of the meeting.¹⁶
- NY** D. All SCC minutes include the date, time, and location of the meeting; the names of members present and absent; the substance of all matters proposed, discussed, or decided; a record of votes; the name of each person who was not a member of the SCC, but who was recognized by the chair to speak during the meeting, and the substance of what was said. Minutes are marked as a draft until approved.¹⁷
- NY** E. A recording of each meeting is kept and labeled with the date, time, and location of the meeting.¹⁸
- NY** F. A simple majority of those present approves all actions.¹⁹ *A quorum (majority of council members) is present before official votes are taken.*
- NY** G. No final action is taken on substantive issues not listed on the agenda.²⁰ *Issues not listed on the agenda can be discussed, and assignments pertaining to these issues may be made, if those assignments are designed to help the SCC make a proper decision at a later date.*
- H. The following report summaries are presented on the school’s web site and via required means (1) to each household with a student attending the school, and (2) according to the following schedule:
 - NY** a. Within the first two weeks of the school year, a meeting schedule for the year that includes the date, time, and location of each meeting;
 - NY** b. In the fall of the year, a summary of the final report of the School LAND Trust Program implementation for the previous year; and
 - NY** c. During the year, a mid-year summary of the SCCs actions and activities to date.²¹ *“Required means” is interpreted that the SCC provides the above information through individual delivery to each household by: (1) posting the information on the school’s web site AND (2) mailing the information, (3) delivering a voice message describing the information and explaining where to obtain it, (4) sending an e-mail message containing the information, (5) providing an information packet that is delivered to the student’s parent, (6) including the information with the school’s annual registration materials, (7) including the information with the student’s report card, OR (8) using a combination of these methods.*
- NY** I. Parents are notified of parent member election policies and timelines established by the SCC.²²

III. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCC

- NY** A. The SCC reviews U-PASS data and other information to determine the needs of students.²³
- NY** B. The SCC develops a school improvement plan (SIP).²⁴
- NY** C. The SCC develops and submits the online School LAND Trust Plan, an academic subset of the SIP.²⁵
- NY** D. The SCC assists in the creation of a professional development plan.²⁶
- NY NA** E. If the school is an elementary, the SCC develops a reading achievement plan.²⁷
- NY NA** F. If the school is an elementary, middle, or junior high school, the SCC develops a child access routing plan.²⁸
- NY** G. The SCC submits any required reports to the local school board for its approval.²⁹
- NY** H. The SCC appoints subcommittees or task forces as needed.³⁰ *Subcommittees and task forces may include participants who are not elected SCC members, including but not limited to parents, staff members, students, or community members.*
- NY** I. The SCC advises school and district administration, and the local school board, on local and district school issues.³¹
- NY NA** J. When requested by the local school board, the SCC provides information to assist the local board in resolving issues of local concern. The SCC is encouraged to advise and inform the local board members.³²
- NY** K. The SCC provides ongoing support in the implementation of approved plans.³³
- NY** L. The SCC assumes other tasks and responsibilities relating to its school, such as safety, school climate, student and teacher recognition, and other issues for which it is well-suited.

NOTE: References are to the original source document that created requirement. References that begin with "R" refer to the Utah State Board Rules on school community councils and the School LAND Trust Program. The other references are to Utah State law. Further information can be found at the following web sites:

www.le.state.ut.us/Documents/code-const.htm

www.schools.utah.gov/board/rules.htm

REFERENCES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ¹ 53A-1α-108(4) ² 53A-1α-108(5)(a) ³ 53A-1α-108(1); (5)(a); (5)(g)(i) and R277-491-3F ⁴ 53A-1α-108(5)(c) ⁵ R277-491-3E ⁶ 53A-1α-108(5)(a) and (b) ⁷ 53A-1α-108(5) and R277-491-38 ⁸ 53A-1α-108(5)(f) ⁹ R277-491-3C and D ¹⁰ 53A-1α-108(5)(d) ¹¹ 53A-1α-108(5)(e) ¹² 53A-1α-108(5)(h) ¹³ 53A-1α-108(5)(e) and R277-477-3F ¹⁴ 52-4-103(7) and 52-4-201(1) ¹⁵ 53A-1α-108(8) and R277-491-4(7) ¹⁶ 52-4-202(1) ¹⁷ 52-4-203(1-2) and 52-4-203(4)(c) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ¹⁸ 52-4-203(1) and 52-4-203(4)(c) ¹⁹ 52-4-103 (4) and (9) and 52-4-206(2) ²⁰ 52-4-202(6) ²¹ 53A-1α-108(7) ²² R277-491-5D and 6C ²³ 53A-1α-108.5(1) ²⁴ 53A-1α-108(3)(a)(i) ²⁵ 53A-1α-108(3)(a)(ii) ²⁶ 53A-1α-108(3)(a)(iii) ²⁷ 53A-1α-108(3)(b) ²⁸ 53A-1α-108(3)(a)(iv) ²⁹ 53A-1α-108.5(5), 53A-16-101.5(6)(a)(i), 53A-3-701(3), 53A-1-606.5(4) ³⁰ 53A-1α-108(6) ³¹ 53A-1α-108(3)(v) ³² R277-491-6F and G ³³ 53A-1α-108.5(7), 53A-16-101.5(6), 53A-3-701(1), 53A-1-606.5(3) |
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