

SCHOOL COUNCIL PROFICIENCY

A Definition from the Kentucky Association of School Councils • 2006 Edition

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FOCUS

A proficient school council keeps its FOCUS on:



1. Student achievement.

a. Council members understand key issues in the school's current CATS scores and its future Accountability Goals and Gap Targets.

b. Council members understand how the school gathers and uses performance data beyond CATS, including analysis of student work.

c. Most recent council decisions were driven by student performance concerns.

d. Parents, teachers, and other staff members see the council's work as focused on helping all students learn at higher levels.

e. The council spends most of its meeting time working on student achievement issues.



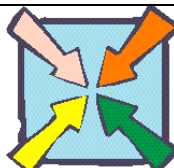
2. Research-based practices, including those outlined in Kentucky's Standards and Indicators for School Improvement.

a. Council members understand the school's main strategies for raising student performance and the research that supports them on:

- Curriculum.
- Classroom Assessment.
- Instruction.
- Culture/Learning Community.
- Support.
- Professional Growth.

b. Members understand the school's recent successes and challenges in implementing those strategies.

c. Parents, teachers, and other staff members see the council as focused on finding and using the best ways to help students learn.



3. Community-wide participation in understanding and meeting school challenges.

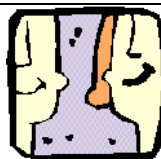
a. The council and its committees gather and use input from parents, teachers, and other staff and community members on major challenges facing the school.

b. Recent council decisions are understood and supported by teachers, parents, and other staff and community members.

c. For current school challenges, council members understand the options being considered, the concerns of varied stakeholders, and the steps being taken to understand and address those concerns.

d. The council and its committees take age-appropriate steps to understand and address student concerns.

e. The council collaborates with the local board of education, the superintendent, and the central office staff to understand and meet student needs.



4. Positive relationships that support effective teamwork.

a. The council works to build relationships where all stakeholders feel:

- Welcome as participants in council meetings and the rest of the school's work.
- Sure that their efforts and ideas are valued in council meetings and other work.
- Confident that the school's students can learn at high levels and the school team is committed to helping students succeed.
- Excited about the school's strategies.
- Supported and effective in each role they play in the school's work.
- Free to handle their own responsibilities with flexibility, within shared rules they understand.

b. The council works to build the relationships described above with:

- Each council member.
- Students.
- Parents.
- Teachers and other school staff.
- School administrators.
- District leaders.
- School board members.
- People of varied ethnic and economic backgrounds.

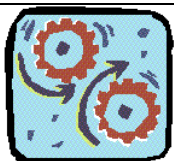
DECISIONS

A proficient school council makes DECISIONS that create or sustain:



5. A school improvement plan that is clear, complete, and credible.

- a. Priority Needs statements describe past weaknesses in student performance that the council has identified as priorities for school improvement.
- b. Goals are measurable statements of how far the school must move each year to move all students to proficiency by 2014.
- c. Causes describe past weaknesses in school practice that help explain why the Priority Needs exist.
- d. Objectives are measurable statements of steps the school must take to implement research-based practices to enhance learning.
- e. Gap Targets are set to reduce each substantive achievement gap over two years and are included in the plan, along with a time schedule for eliminating those gaps entirely.
- f. Activities are organized in clear, practical, orderly steps capable of meeting the Goals, Objectives, and Gap Targets.
- g. Appropriate individuals are responsible for completing activities and managing components.
- h. The timeline for activities, shown in starting and ending dates, is clear, practical, and focused on implementing change quickly enough to meet the Goals, Objectives, and Gap Targets.
- i. The school improvement plan includes a summary of how the plan was developed and assurances that relevant laws have been followed.
- j. The current school improvement plan can easily be found on the school or district website.
- k. The school improvement plan uses the format specified in board policy, if any.



6. A planning process of needs assessment, plan development, implementation, monitoring, and revisions.

- a. Based on active discussion of CATS results, the council makes annual decisions on revising Priority Needs, Goals, and Gap Targets.
- b. Committees analyze the school's work in comparison to research-based practices such as those in SISI on a regular schedule, and the council uses those reports to revise or reaffirm Causes and Objectives.

c. An appropriate committee develops or updates each component of the school improvement plan each year for council approval.

d. The council discusses at least two drafts before it sees and approves new and updated components.

e. The council gives all stakeholders adequate opportunities to comment on draft components.

f. The council checks school improvement plan progress briefly each month and discusses Implementation and Impact Checks at least twice a year.

g. The council receives regular reports from the principal on how the plan is being implemented in classrooms.

h. The planning process reflects the timetable and methods specified in board policy, if any.



7. Professional development that supports school strategies and individual needs.

a. All professional development is designed to meet the goals in the school improvement plan and individual professional growth plans.

b. Some professional development goes beyond facilitator-led workshops to include collaborative activities such as study groups, mentoring, peer coaching, job-imbedded applications in the classroom, and other techniques.

c. Most professional development activities go beyond single-day activities to allow participants to apply ideas being studied, reflect on the results, and engage in follow-up work to apply the ideas more effectively.

d. The council uses three scheduled professional development days (or equivalent flexible time) and any early-released day time to support the school improvement plan and individual growth plans.

e. The council ensures that each professional development activity has clear goals and is evaluated to see how well it met those goals.

f. The council revises professional development plans as needed based on data about student performance and the learning needs of teachers and other staff.

g. A systematic, unified approach is used to organize professional development.



8. Budgets that use all school resources to support school strategies.

a. The council's allocation budget determines how the school will use:

- Section 4 and 5 personnel dollars.
- Section 6 materials/other dollars.
- Section 7 dollars (if available).
- Professional development funds.
- Activity fund dollars.

b. The council's school improvement plan shows how all state and federal categorical funding will be used.

c. Council budgets are organized to support the Goals, Objectives, and Gap Targets from the school improvement plan as well as ongoing school operations.

d. The council participates actively in the budget development process (for example, by discussing two or more drafts before final approval each year).

e. The council asks the board of education for appropriate Section 7 funding to support Goals, Objectives, and Gap Targets identified in the school improvement plan.

f. The council reviews monthly spending reports and adjusts spending plans to get maximum learning benefits from available funds.

g. The council follows a clear process for delegating authority to choose specific items for purchase.



9. Policies that support school strategies.

a. The council has all policies required by law:

- Enhancing achievement.
- Committees.
- Curriculum.
- Staff time.
- Student assignment.
- Schedule.
- Space Use.
- Instructional Practices.
- Extracurricular Programs.
- Discipline.
- Procedures for state standards, program evaluation, and technology use.
- Consultation.
- College-level courses (secondary schools only).
- Wellness (elementary schools only).
- Parent engagement (federal requirement for Title 1 schools only).

b. The council also uses policy to create effective methods of handling its other responsibilities, such as budget,

planning, principal selection, and (where appropriate) the primary program.

c. Each policy provides clear information on how that part of the school's work will be done and how the policy will be monitored, evaluated, and revised.

d. Teachers, staff, parents, and other interested parties can easily find and understand the council's policies.

e. Most policies reflect explicit focus on improving student performance and building a collaborative school culture.



10. A consultation process that supports school strategies and sound personnel practices.

a. The council follows a consultation policy with clear provisions on:

- Applications.
- References.
- Interviews.
- Timelines.
- Procedures for when the council is unavailable.

b. Diverse candidates receive fair treatment based on explicit hiring criteria and other fair employment practices required by school council policy.

c. Explicit criteria are used consistently throughout the consultation process to identify employees who can best meet student needs, as required by council policy.

d. Either the council or a committee with teacher and parent members interview selected applicants.

e. The principal selects the person to be hired after completing consultation.



11. Principal selection based on school needs and sound personnel practices.

a. The council follows a clear principal selection policy that addresses the same best practice issues as the consultation process.

b. The council receives principal selection training from a trainer of their choice and understands how to conduct interviews effectively and lawfully.

c. The council sought and considered input from the school community and district leaders the last time a principal was selected.

d. The council provided ongoing support and assistance to the new principal to help the principal learn about the school the last time a principal was selected.

PROCESS

A proficient school council does its work through a PROCESS that includes:



12. Meetings that are inclusive and lawful.

- A regular schedule of monthly council meetings is easily available to the public.
- Special meetings are called by chair or majority, with written notice of date, time, place, and agenda delivered to all members and posted at the school.
- Stakeholders can easily have items placed on the council agenda, and they regularly do so.
- The council approves its agenda at the beginning of each meeting and revises it as needed.
- Parents, staff, and other members of the public have meaningful opportunities to speak on all council decisions.
- All parts of all council meetings are open to the public except for closed sessions to discuss individual job applicants or litigation.
- The council by-laws specify the process for setting a regular schedule, calling special meetings, setting the council agenda, allowing public comment, and going into closed session.



13. A decision-making process that is clear and participatory.

- The council makes most decisions by consensus, with the option of voting if sustained efforts to reach consensus fail.
- Most council decisions are made after obtaining and considering recommendations from appropriate committees, with a few exceptions for minor matters or genuine emergencies.
- Council decisions are shared with parents, staff, and other members of the public using clear language and effective methods of communication.
- Council by-laws spell out the procedures for consensus, consensus failure, committee advice, public input, and publicizing decisions.



14. Records that are complete and accessible.

- Council minutes clearly show all motions made, who made each motion, and what action the council took on each one.

- Minutes of council decisions are taken at each council meeting, circulated within a week after each meeting, and approved at the next meeting. The version circulated initially is clearly marked as a draft.

- Up-to-date council by-laws, minutes, policies, plans, and budgets are kept in a central, well-organized location.

- Stakeholders have easy, well-publicized access to council documents.



15. Committees that operate lawfully, collaboratively, and effectively.

- Each committee has clear responsibilities, operating procedures, and member recruitment methods established by council policy.
- Parents, staff, people of varied backgrounds, and other interested parties participate in SBDM committee work, as called for in the council's committee policy.
- Each committee sets a regular meeting schedule, follows legal procedures for calling special meetings, keeps minutes, and makes those minutes accessible to others.
- Each committee understands its charge from the council, analyzes research and input from the community, and brings recommendations to the council.
- Each committee reports to the council on a regular basis, and each council meeting includes reports from some or all committees.
- Alternatively, a very small school community may use another collaborative structure that leads to wide parent and staff involvement in developing decisions for council action.



16. Ongoing learning about effective SBDM practices.

- In recent years, all council members have completed required training by the legal deadline.
- Experienced council members choose their training based on an assessment of their learning needs, choosing from the full list of available topics and trainers and knowing about the options for covering costs of that training.
- Council members use varied resources to expand their SBDM knowledge, such as district leaders, state organizations, publications, and websites.
- Committee members receive clear and complete information on their roles and responsibilities.
- Parents, teachers, and school staff receive information about the SBDM process regularly and have easy access to further information.

Questions? Suggestions? Please share your thoughts about this definition by sending e-mail to kasc@kasc.net or calling us at 859/238-2188. Our next updating and revision of this document will start in September 2007.