Guidelines for P-16 Community Engagement Councils

Mission

School Districts and schools have the duty and responsibility to build quality first-rate schools accessible to all children regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability or status. This requires meaningful participation of parents, students and other parts of the community in the formation and implementation of policy at the school district and school levels.

Community Engagement Councils, also known as P-16 Councils, are an essential opportunity to build this process. The Community Engagement Councils are intended to be community-based and independent. The Councils are charged with the duty and responsibility to build strong, healthy communities. In order to build strong, healthy communities it is necessary, among other things, to create a quality public education delivered to students in healthy schools which are accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, status, gender or disability. Since these goals cannot be achieved within a year or two the Councils will need to develop a "comprehensive plan" that attempts to answer these two questions:

a. "What will a strong, healthy community, rooted in a quality public education system, need to look like 10, 15 or 20 years from now?"

b. "What do we have to do this year, next year and the years that follow in order to build this process in the right direction?"

Membership in the Councils

The Councils shall have participation from a broad-section of the community, with a special emphasis on the inclusion of parents and students who are the primary constituents of any school district and school. Participation should be shared among these six (6) constituent categories, which are broad enough to encompass and represent the widest range of interests:

1. Members of local community-based organizations working on public education issues within the local school district;
2. Members of local public school district Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations;
3. Members of local public school-based student councils and local public school student government associations;
4. Community leaders, public officials and members of the business community, all within the local school district;
5. Community members *at large* interested in public education issues who may or may not be part of the other four (4) categories. In a school district wide Council there should be one *at large* member to represent each school board election district or ward; and
6. **a.** For *School District-based Councils*: members of the School District, which should be selected from the School District Board of Trustees, the School District Administration, the School District Faculty, and School District staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

b. For *Individual School-based Councils*: members of the Individual School, which should be selected from the School Administration, the School Faculty, and School staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

Persons who are ***employed*** by the local school district at the time of these proceedings are expressly **excluded** from the definition of membership in each of the first five (5) constituent categories, **1 – 5**, as set forth above, but are included in category **6**.

Student members of the Councils must be at least 12 years of age.

P-16 Council Participation

Smaller school districts may elect to have a single district-wide Council. Larger school districts may elect to have individual school-based Councils.

The number of Council members should be based on the size of the school district or the size of the individual school. The *minimum* number for the smallest districts or schools should be 12 persons, and the *minimum* for the largest districts or schools should be 24.

P-16 Council Membership Selection

There are 3 stages to the process for the selection of sitting members of the P-16 Councils.

Stage One: Representatives of the School District or School, working with members of the community, should serve as the Initiators to create the P-16 Council. **Items A through D of Stage One set forth below apply *only* to the initial meeting of the P-16 Council.**

A. The Initiators shall agree upon a Mission Statement for the P-16 Council that focuses on the need to create healthy schools and healthy communities, noting that healthy schools are a pre-condition to sustaining healthy communities.
B. The Initiators shall determine the *initial* number of persons to sit on the P-16 Council and the equitable distribution of the membership among the categories. Once the Council is formed the Council shall have the right to increase the membership in the Council.
C. The Initiators *shall call a public meeting* at a time and place which is convenient for a substantial cross-section of the community to attend. This public meeting shall NOT be held during or at the same time as a regularly scheduled school district board meeting or school meeting at the school level. This restriction shall apply only to the initial meeting of the Council.
D. *Prior to the initial meeting* the Initiators shall provide copies of the Mission Statement to the public so that the public will know why it is important to come to the Council and to participate in the Council.

Stage Two: The selection of the P-16 Council members

A. At the first meeting participants should divide themselves into groups based on the categories as set forth in the Membership section of this document.
B. In these groups the participants shall select from among themselves the number of members as previously determined by the Initiators. Initiators may participate in the groups based on the six (6) categories and are eligible to be selected as individuals on the same basis as any other person. The selection process within each group preferably shall be by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved then a vote shall be taken by written secret ballot.
C. When all of the members have been selected the role of the Initiators ends and the new members take responsibility for the conduct of the P-16 Council.

Stage Three: The P-16 Council becomes an independent organization

A. At this point the Council becomes independent of the local school district or school.
B. The Initiators shall let the P-16 Council know that training and technical assistance is available. The Mississippi Department of Education may be contacted for a list of possible providers.
C. The Council is strongly encouraged to participate in training.

Core Values of P-16 Community Engagement Councils

A. The Council shall hold open meetings on dates, times and places accessible to the broad spectrum of education stakeholders and others in the community;
B. The Council shall have a governance structure that is democratic and seeks, to the extent possible, to build consensus to carry out the work of the Council;
C. The Council shall be independent of the local school district and each of its schools, and shall have a perspective in working to build strong, healthy communities that is broader than the school system itself.
D. The authority of the Council to fulfill its mission stems from state statutes and Accreditation Standard 18. The authority of the Council does not extend to the management or operation of the school district or individual schools.
E. The Council shall have the capacity to create working committees that may include members of the community to assist Council members;
F. The Council is responsible for making accurate assessments of the strengths and limitations of the school district and its schools as a basis for recommending effective approaches to create quality, healthy schools;
G. The Council needs to understand how to gather relevant data and how to utilize the data to monitor and evaluate the schools and school district; and,
H. The Council, upon written request, shall have the authority to request and obtain data from the school district and the individual schools, so long as the content of the data sought does not compromise any existing Federal or State privacy law.