

# Utah's School Community Councils

## Background

School Community Councils (SCC) play a vital role in the educational process as they strive to ensure that students receive the best education possible. SCCs act as a shared voice for the school and the parents, always acting in the best interest of the students. They were created by the Legislature.

**The Utah State Legislature first authorized SCCs in 1992.** The SCCs, 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 establish decision making bodies at the school level that represented school administration, staff and parents. Some prepared school improvement plans. **However, there was an important piece missing for successful implementation - a funding source to implement the plans.**

**In 1999 Representative Mel Brown** sponsored legislation that **established the School LAND Trust Program, the focus of which was to improve student academic performance in each public school.** This legislation **created School LAND Trust Committees made up of elected parents and educators** and directed the committee to create plans to improve academic achievement with the interest and dividends from the permanent 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 SCCs to mirror the School LAND Trust Committees making the SCC responsible for approving the School LAND Trust Plans, which became an academic subset of the school improvement plan.** The new legislation **provided additional responsibilities** that have changed over the years. SCCs became **authorized advisory groups** to school and district administrators, and local school boards. **Parents were granted a majority voice on the SCC,** elected by parents of students attending the school. The staff elected staff members, and the principal was authorized to serve as a voting member.

## Responsibilities of School Community Councils

*SCCs may appoint subcommittees/task forces to carry out responsibilities and projects with final SCC approval, increasing parent and community involvement and utilizing expertise outside the SCC.*

- **School Improvement Plan (SIP)** - annually review, edit, update – Final approval by the local school board
- **School LAND Trust Plan** (academic subset of the SIP) – annually create and implement– Final approval by the local school board
- **Digital Citizenship**
  - Receive, discuss and provide feedback about an annual report from the district and school about internet filtering, other practices, opportunities, threats and issues for students related to internet activity
  - Prepare plans to address concerns and opportunities, as needed and practical
  - Ensure students receive annual training about safe and appropriate use of the internet

- Ensure parents are provided with annual training about how to talk to their students about safe and appropriate use of the internet
- **Advise school and district administration** about the school, district, school and district programs, and issues related to the community environment for students
- **Local boards may ask SCCs to assume other responsibilities.** For instance, some local boards use the elected SCCs to be involved in realignment of boundaries.
- **Many SCCs assume other projects/tasks directly related to their school.** Subcommittees and task forces are often appointed to carry-out these projects.

## Seating a School Community Council

- Notice of an annual election of open seats on the SCC is provided to parents and employees with instructions about how to file. Each member serves a two year term with half the open seats up for election each year.
- Parents vote for parent positions and employees vote for employee positions.
- Membership of the SCC – Must have a two parent member majority  
*Six members is the smallest a SCC may be. SCCs determine the size of the council.*  
The principal, at least one employee, and at least four parents makeup the SCC membership.
- Vacant parent positions are filled by parents on the SCC. Employees on the SCC fill vacant employee positions.
- The SCC elects a parent member to chair the SCC.

## Effective School Community Councils

**Every regular public school in Utah has a school community council.** Our work now is to increase their effectiveness. Due to the considerable turnover with annual SCC elections and principal and local board turnover, **training is critical and ongoing.** Local school boards are responsible for annual training of the SCCs in their district. The chair of the local school board is responsible for annual board training about their responsibilities with SCCs. The School Children’s Trust at the Utah State Office of Education provides training for education conferences, upon request of local school boards, and encourages SCC members statewide to attend one of six statewide trainings each fall.

Concerns are addressed as they arise to encourage and increase the effectiveness of SCCs. For instance, a task force chaired by Representative Angela Romero is in the third year of work to welcome and increase parental involvement within minority populations. As parents express concern that principals are ‘taking charge of’ or ‘running the SCCs,’ we increase (or target) the training for principals and parent chairs about their roles on the SCC. Compliance reviews are conducted annually of the School LAND Trust Program and SCCs. Compliance reviews include interviews of the SCC chairs and principals to receive candid input about how SCCs are functioning.

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