

Chatham Elementary School Council – 2018-2019

Agenda: 9/5/2019 2:30pm CES conference room

Members:

Members present:

Meghan Lampert (parent/teacher)

Ann Barnard (teacher)

Lenore Chieffo (teacher)

Kathy Ware (teacher)

Joy Jordan (Community Outreach MRSD)

Our agenda for our 1st meeting on September 5th (2:30pm; CES Conference Room- will be:

1. Welcome-new members and elections

No new members were present. Parents that have expressed interest in participating on the council this year are: Lindsay Bierwirth (called but could not be here today); Jessica Rogers (expressed interest); and Deb Lopes (expressed interest)-Robin will confirm interest and also make a request for more at Curriculum Night and again in Scoop.

2. Review of roles and responsibilities of school council members

What are the main areas of responsibility for school councils?

The law outlines four major areas of responsibility for councils. School councils are to assist principals in:

1. Adopting educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards
2. Identifying the educational needs of students attending the school
3. Reviewing the annual school building budget
4. Formulating a school improvement plan

For any school that contains grades nine to twelve, inclusive, the council shall review the student handbook each spring to consider changes in disciplinary policy to take effect for the following school year. (See Appendix B)

In addition, the law states that "nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy; provided, however, that school council shall have no authority over matters which are subject to chapter one hundred and fifty E of the General Laws." (Question 34, below, addresses Chapter 150E.)

What is the council's role in the school budget?

The law specifies that the school council "shall assist [the principal] in the review of the annual school budget." This language refers to the school building budget, not to the district budget. "Review" means that the council and the principal read through documents that describe the budget in order to understand the implications for items in the school improvement plan that will be developed by the council. In many communities, the school budget is prepared by mid-year in order to allow for negotiation with other municipal agencies, i.e., finance committee, city council, town meeting. A council's review of the budget, therefore, enables it to predict better which improvement projects that require funding could be implemented in the next school year under a budget that was constructed in the previous fall. Also, in school districts that encourage building-based budget planning, a school's improvement plan objectives developed in any given year can guide the development of the school's budget in the next year. In these cases, the council's review of the budget helps in the implementation of the previous year's school improvement plan.

May councils make recommendations that pertain to district wide policies or to other schools in the district?

Yes. School councils may make recommendations, which would be non binding, to school committees on issues that are of keen interest to the school and that have district-wide or multi-school implications. In addition, school committees have discretion in the responsibilities they give to councils through the provision of the law that reads: "Nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy."

What are some areas in which councils cannot be involved?

The law enables school committees to grant school councils additional authority in the area of educational policy except for matters covered by Chapter 150E of the General Laws. Chapter 150E governs labor relations and collective bargaining for public employees including teacher contracts. This provision leaves such issues as compensation, workload, conditions of work and worker evaluation procedures subject to collective bargaining.

Good practice suggests that a council should not become involved as an ombudsman or a grievance committee in individual cases that involve students, parents, teachers and other school staff.

Does the prohibition against exercising authority over areas subject to Chapter 150E mean that councils' improvement goals and plans cannot make reference to school schedules?

Chapter 150E refers to the state statute governing collective bargaining for public employees. Normally, councils will not be involved with Chapter 150E because they will not be discussing employment or personnel issues. However, councils may make recommendations, such as changes in the schedule of a school day, that impinge on working conditions. When this occurs, the council's recommendations should acknowledge that the issues may be subject to collective bargaining.

What are the elements of the annual school improvement plan?

The school improvement plan, as described in the legislation, has the following elements:

1. An assessment of:
 - The impact of class size on student performance
 - Student-to-teacher ratios
 - Ratios of students to other supportive adult resources
2. A scheduled plan for reducing class size, if deemed necessary
3. Professional development for the school's staff and the allocation of any professional development funds in the school budget
4. Enhancement of parental involvement in the life of the school
5. School safety and discipline
6. Establishment of a school environment characterized by tolerance and respect for all groups
7. Extra-curricular activities
8. Means for meeting, within the regular education programs at the school, the diverse learning needs of as many children as possible, including children with special needs currently assigned to separate programs
9. Any further subjects the principal, in consultation with the school council, shall consider appropriate

In addition, in school systems with language minority populations, the professional development component of the council's plan shall address the need for teachers' professional development on second language acquisition and on working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The spirit of the law calls for collaboration between the council and the principal. The principal needs to create an environment of openness, collegiality and respect for all participants.

When should the annual school improvement plans be submitted, and to whom?

Plans are submitted annually to the school committee. As reviewing and approving authorities, school committees have the discretion to set their own schedule and timelines for the submission and review of the improvement plans. School committees are strongly encouraged to support the efforts of councils and work collaboratively with them.

May a school committee approve or disapprove parts of a school improvement plan?

Yes. Planning is a dynamic and interactive process. The process of review can be an ongoing conversation between the school committee and the school site councils in its school district. Unapproved elements of the plan can be sent back to the sites for further development and can be resubmitted in a revised form. Unnecessary barriers which hinder the process should be avoided.

May a school committee reject a council's plan even if nothing in it violates current school policy?

The law gives school committees final authority to approve the individual school plans:

Each school improvement plan shall be submitted to the school committee for review and approval every year. If said school improvement plan is not reviewed by the school committee within thirty days of said school committee receiving said school improvement plan, the plan shall be deemed to have been approved.

A clear and published set of school committee expectations regarding individual school plans can reduce the possibility of disapproved plans.

What happens if there is no regularly scheduled school committee meeting within 30 days of the submission of a school improvement plan?

If a school committee fails to take action within 30 calendar days, the plan is automatically approved. In order to avoid having to approve an unreviewed plan or schedule a special meeting, school committees should specify in advance the date on which plans must be submitted.

Does the superintendent have to approve the school improvement plan?

The law is silent regarding the superintendent's role in the building level school improvement plans. A common sense interpretation is that the superintendent may be involved in a prior review and approval of school plans, but he or she does not have to be. Because principals are responsible and report to the superintendent, they may be asked to provide the superintendent with copies of anything they plan to bring before a school committee. In addition, the superintendent may be asked by the committee to do a technical review of the school improvement plans on its behalf.

3. Reflections and review of 2018-2021 Schoolwide Improvement Plan-a new one year plan

Discussed the objective to write the one year plan as directed by the Superintendent and discussed at retreat. Council members will review the "live" and updated version of the school improvement plan to bring forth thoughts on what should be the action steps for this school year. They will also continue to collect information on issues/topics that pertain to the roles and responsibilities of the council.

4. Curriculum Night presentation-not discussed.

5. Other