



HAWAI'I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

Informing the Education Community

Perspectives #4 **School Community Councils**

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[Perspectives are quick takes on Reinventing Education (Act 51) issues that are in transition. These issues will be revisited periodically as new developments warrant.]

Schools work best when they are part of their local community. Why is it important for schools to be “neighborhood” schools?

Each one of us “owns” our schools, particularly the ones closest to where we live. We know that when families participate in their children’s education, their children and the school become more successful. These beliefs are embedded in Act 51, the Reinventing Education Act of 2004. “One of the most important means of improving educational outcomes and public confidence in these outcomes is by enhancing community involvement.” (Act 51)

Act 51 mandates that School Community Councils (SCC) be established in all public schools (except charter schools) by the 2005-2006 school year. Are SCC’s just another version of the School/Community-Based Management councils, another method of shared educational management enacted into law in 1989?

Unlike the old SCBM councils, members of the SCC will be elected by their peers, and the number of community stakeholders on the SCC (students, parents, and community members) must be equal to the number of school staff.

Each SCC must be composed of the principal and at least one member representing teachers, non-certificated personnel (non-teaching school employees), students, community members (those living in the school’s geographical area, graduates of the school, and those owning, operating or working in a business within the school’s community), and parents (including primary caregivers). A draft of the SCC Manual is available for review on the DOE web site (<http://doe.k12.hi.us/>).

The legislature envisioned SCC’s as a vehicle for shared decision making, and the DOE’s SCC brochure (<http://reach.k12.hi.us>) defines the council as “a major part of the overall decision-making structure at each school.” Yet in practice the council will be advisory, its primary purpose being to review and evaluate the school’s academic and financial plan (AFP) that, initially, will be developed by the principal. The council will offer recommendations, and, as a group, forward a recommended AFP to the Complex Area Superintendent for adoption.

The AFP will become the blueprint for a school's goals, priorities, programs and activities and will guide every academic and financial decision made at the school level. Money coming to schools under the new weighted student formula (starting in 06-07) will be spent in alignment with the plan.

Each year the SCC will evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the plan based on analysis of student performance data, and make changes accordingly. It will also participate in principal selection, and it will be a forum for local community dialogue about teaching and learning at the school. SCC's will be able to seek waivers of Board of Education policies and exceptions to collective bargaining agreements.

Twenty-two pilot schools are currently modeling SCC's and the development of academic and financial plans, and the state DOE is providing extensive training for these schools. Training will be provided also for SCC's at all schools. A list of pilot schools can be accessed on the DOE web site.

What do pilot school principals think of SCC? They say the council provides a means for greater ownership and buy-in. One says "community involvement changes the whole culture of the school." School budgeting and expenditures will be more transparent and better understood, and this will open the door to informed discussion about ways to improve student performance.

School Community Councils will differ considerably from the old SCBM's. Each one of us has a responsibility to make our schools work and help Hawaii's children succeed. We can all help by volunteering to stand for election, by recruiting SCC candidates, and by attending SCC meetings.