



HAWAI‘I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

Informing the Education Community

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School Community Councils

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“Act locally” is the concept behind School Community Councils mandated by the Reinventing Education Act of 2004 (Act 51 as amended by Act 221). Unlike the old School/Community-Based Management councils that were optional, SCCs are required and now operating at all public schools (excluding charter schools).

Members on the council are elected by their constituencies—teaching staff, non-certificated staff, parents, students, and community members. The principal is a member but may not serve as the council chair. The community stakeholders (students, parents and community members) must be equal in number to the number of school staff on the council.

The SCCs are advisory groups helping principals act locally on behalf of their schools. Their first major task was to evaluate their school’s academic and financial plan (AFP) initially prepared by the principal. When approved by complex area superintendents, the AFP becomes the school’s blueprint for spending its money allocated under the new weighted student formula. The AFP will help the school align resources with identified school needs for the purpose of improving student achievement.

Superintendent of Schools Pat Hamamoto says SCCs are a “new way [for members] to contribute to the education of students in your school.” Remember that Act 51 is all about new ways, about doing things differently, about thinking outside the box. So how are the SCCs doing? Are they thinking outside the box? Time will tell, but the preliminary answer is yes.

The SCC at a small elementary school suggested a merger to the SCC at a nearby school. Both are projected to lose considerable funding when the proposed weighted student formula (WSF) goes into full effect. Another SCC after reviewing the school’s draft AFP made three additional recommendations that were then included in the final plan: finding ways to add music to the curriculum, funding for science materials and equipment, and establishing curriculum work days for the school’s special education teachers.

The SCCs at many smaller schools are struggling with the looming loss of considerable funding under WSF, and the minutes of their meetings reflect this. “Small schools have to fight for whatever they have; we’re getting less and less—feels like a penalty. How do we get our voice heard to let others know how we feel.” From another school projected to lose money: “Two half-positions will have to be cut.”

Clearly SCCs are keeping their eyes on the prize—optimizing learning conditions. One SCC says, “Of the projected total school budget, most of the WSF funds will be used to provide student-to-teacher ratios as low as possible.”

The SCC at a school whose sixth graders will be moving to the neighborhood middle school asked for a joint meeting with the middle school’s SCC to discuss and coordinate transition issues. Many SCCs have invited their schools’ Parent Teacher Association to send a liaison to SCC meetings.

Act 51 envisioned SCCs would be a major part of the overall decision-making structure at a school. In practice, this is not the case; they function as advisory boards and forums for the exchange of ideas. In addition, although council members are elected by constituencies, they do not represent these groups, according to the *SCC Handbook* (on the DOE website at <http://doe.k12.hi.us>).

These reshapings of the SCC concept seem reasonable. Schools are multi-million dollar businesses and shouldn’t be run by committee. Principals must be in charge, and SCC members should not promote personal or constituency agendas, but, rather, attempt to see the big picture.

On the other hand, SCCs were never meant to be mere rubber-stamps. The 2004 legislation described SCCs as a mechanism whereby “...parents, the community and other key stakeholders can have a substantially increased voice in the affairs of their local schools...”

Principals believe SCCs are advisory, but there is some feeling among principals that it’s their job to explain to the council the direction the school wants to move and get the council’s cooperation. Yet the SCC is the perfect venue for thoughtful and fruitful discussions about this very direction—the ‘road to be taken’ by the school.