

# School Accountability Committee Best Practices and Guidelines

## School Accountability Committees

The following is a brief overview of the responsibilities and best practices of School Accountability Committees (SAC). If you have any questions or need help with your SAC, please contact the District Accountability Committee (DAC) Chair (dcsddac@gmail.com) or Kathy Brown, DCSD Parent Liaison (kathy.brown@dcsdk12.org), either Deputy Superintendent, Steve Cook (steven.cook@dcsdk12.org), or Assistant Superintendent, School Leadership, Ted Knight (ted.knight@dcsdk12.org.).

### **SAC BACKGROUND**

In 2009, the State of Colorado passed SB 09-163, the Education Accountability Act. This legislation mandates that every public school have a School Accountability Committee (SAC). In 2013, the state passed SB 13-193, legislation focused on increasing parent engagement in public school, which added to the statutory responsibilities of the SAC.

**SAC Purpose.** The purpose of the SAC is to inform, encourage and provide opportunities for parent and community members to be involved in the planning and evaluation of the school's instructional program and quality improvement processes.

### **SAC RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. **Unified Improvement Plan.** One of the main responsibilities of a SAC is to define the school's academic goals and action plans in a clearly understood and communicated Unified Improvement Plan, or UIP. This plan is submitted to, and reviewed by, the district. The goals and action plans must fit within the district's goals established by the Board of Education and state standards. They must also reflect the school's performance data, community concerns and the philosophy of the school.
2. **Budget priorities.** The SAC makes an informed recommendation to the principal regarding spending priorities for budget expenditures of the building. The committee should review the staffing design, discretionary and nondiscretionary funds, carryover, and all other funds available to the school. The SAC is responsible for sending a copy of its recommendations to the DAC and the Board of Education (BOE).
3. **Topical discussions.** The SAC must discuss on a quarterly basis:
  - a. Whether school leadership, personnel, and infrastructure are advancing or impeding implementation of the public school's accreditation contract with the BoE.
  - b. Safety issues relative to the school environment.
  - c. Community concerns and input regarding aforementioned duties and
  - d. responsibilities.

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4. **General community feedback.** The SAC is required to gather and provide information to the principal and DAC on the needs or concerns of the school's community.
5. **Advice on accreditation contract plan.** The SAC will advise the principal, superintendent and/or BoE as required concerning the preparation of their performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan, whichever is applicable. The SAC will also submit recommendations concerning the content of the plan.
6. **Annual report.** As the district prepares an annual report to the community and BoE on the school's performance, the SAC is encouraged to provide input and assistance.
7. **Principal evaluations.** SACs shall provide input and recommendations on an advisory basis to the DAC and district administration concerning:
  - a. Principal development plans for the school's principal, and
  - b. Principal evaluations (This does not mean SACs evaluate their principals.)
8. **Other duties as assigned.** Perform such other duties and responsibilities as may be required by Board policy and comply with Superintendent policies and directives.

### **Best Practices**

- Schools should send out information at the beginning of the year to all parents explaining what a SAC is and when the school SAC meets. The SAC should have an information table at any school-wide event, i.e. back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, etc.
- Upon completion, the UIP should be shared and available to the school community. This can include website posting, e-mail newsletters, etc. The school should publish a summary of the UIP in a manner similar to the way it publishes other school communications.
- Community input should be sought on spending priorities. Again, this should take place via a school's usual method of communication.
- Recent statutory changes have given the SACs the responsibility of assisting the district in implementing, at the school level, the district's parent engagement policy. Watch for upcoming SAC bylaw changes that incorporate this important responsibility. For now, the SAC should assist school personnel as appropriate to increase parent engagement with teachers, including parents' engagement in creating students' READ plans, Individual Career and Academic Plans, and plans to address habitual truancy.

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### **DUTIES OF THE SAC SHALL NOT INCLUDE:**

1. Personnel issues, including hiring or evaluation of individual staff members. The SAC's responsibility is limited to providing input and advice on principal evaluations.
2. Individual student discipline issues.
3. Any issue dealing with a specific student, staff member, or parent.

### **SUNSHINE LAWS:**

SACs, as a local public body, must conform to Colorado sunshine laws for open meetings. Meetings must be posted on the school calendar at least 24 hours prior to schedule meeting. The posting place must be designated at the first regular meeting of the calendar year, and if possible, the notice should include agenda information. Meeting minutes must be posted on the school website and kept indefinitely.

**SAC COMPOSITION:** There shall be seven voting members consisting of the principal of the school or the principal's designee, one teacher who provides instruction at the school, three parents or legal guardians of students enrolled in the school, a PTA/PTO adult, and one community member with no children attending the school. Non-voting members may be added but are not required.

**SAC ELECTIONS:** Election, appointment or designation of members shall occur by October 1.

### **Best Practices:**

- The school should consider completing elections in May. This allows the SAC to be in place when the new school year starts. This should not be construed to limit the opportunities of new parents.
- Composition of the SAC should be representative of the school population
- Yearly elections and other opportunities to serve on the SAC should be well publicized using the school's customary method of communication as described above.
- The SAC should meet at least quarterly, and often as needed. The school should set the SAC meeting time as appropriate for its community. It should be a goal for SACs to maximize attendance and representation. SACs may also wish to consider offering incentives such as snacks, coffee and/or child care dependent on the needs of attendees.
- The meeting schedule for the entire school year, as well as each upcoming meeting agenda and past meeting minutes, should be established and publicized on the school's website and its customary communication channels. Agendas should be posted at least a week in advance, but in no event shall they be posted fewer than 24 hours ahead of the meeting.
- Discussions at SAC meetings should revolve only around prescribed duties and responsibilities as outlined in SAC bylaws and state statute.
- Review open forum policies as outlined in the SAC bylaws at each meeting for new attendees who may not understand the SAC's expectations. Visitors are encouraged to sign in to provide a comprehensive record of attendance.

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- Two-way communication between the DAC liaison and the SAC should be maintained, with the DAC information provided in the school newsletter and on the website.
- Members of the committee should receive, on a regular basis, the background information and training needed to carry out their responsibilities. Administrators and school staff will offer supporting information on particular issues of concern to the SAC.
- Speakers from the district should be utilized regarding issues of concern to the school, for guidance purposes and to provide information with regard to district policies. The DAC or principal can assist SACs in determining which staff member(s) can best address the topic at hand.

### **INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC:**

Information on SAC meetings must be made available to the public according to state law. In order to ensure that the information reaches a wide range of people, the school should have data available in a manner to which parents at each school are accustomed. This information might be contained in a binder in the office, conspicuously placed on its website using the SAC and DAC logos, and/or included in any newsletters to parents. Note that it is a district requirement to maintain a SAC page on all school websites.

### **School Office:**

A binder can be made available to be reviewed by parents or community members regarding the activities of the SAC. If provided, the binder should include the following information.

- List of School Accountability Committee members
- Name and contact information of the SAC Chair and DAC liaison
- List of meeting dates, times and locations for the current school year
- Agendas for all meetings
- Approved meeting minutes
- Copy of the SAC bylaws

### **Website:**

The district requires that branded SAC information be available on the individual school website. At a minimum, the following should be available as a separate, conspicuous SAC page with a button on the home page of the website.

- List of current School Accountability Committee members
- Name and contact information of the current SAC Chair and DAC liaison
- List of meeting dates, times and locations for the current school year
- Agendas for all meetings
- Approved meeting minutes
- Copy of the SAC bylaws

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### **Newsletter:**

If your school produces a parent newsletter, include a copy of the minutes as a way to communicate with parents or as a stand-alone email after the meeting in order to encourage involvement. In addition, the time and location of the next meeting should be listed as well as the contact person for more information.