



# GUIDELINES FOR PARISH SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS DIOCESE OF SAN JOSE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Guidelines For School Advisory Councils

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# **Diocese of San Jose**

## ***Introduction***

Since the diocese of San Jose was established in 1981, the staff of the Department of Education has been in contact with a number of school advisory councils offering consultation and in-service. Each year, there are additional requests for assistance in establishing or reviewing school advisory councils and their function.

These Guidelines are offered to all of our parish schools. They may be of help for those with already established school advisory councils as they review their by-laws and functions. Parishes that are considering the establishment of a school advisory council/board should find this document helpful.

The Department of Education is willing to honor request for on-site in-service and consultation for local school advisory councils/boards.

## **1.0 RATIONALE**

The Bishops clearly state in their pastoral, TO TEACH AS JESUS DID, that "planning and implementing the educational mission of the Church must involve the entire Catholic Community and that such involvement is achieved through structures and processes representative of the Community" (IT JD - 139) The basic principle underlying the Bishops' statement is that those responsible for the funding and administration of school and parish educational programs should provide a means for conferring with those members of the community who are in any significant way (1) affected by policy, e.g., parents with regard to tuition rates, or (2) responsible for implementation of policy, e.g., administration of the school.

## **2.0 PARISH SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS**

These guidelines are directed primarily to those bodies responsible for the well being of a parish school. Titles for these bodies commonly used are: "School Advisory Council".

## **3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL**

### **3.1 Relationships to the Pastor/Parish Council**

The Pastor/Parish Council is responsible for establishing goals and policies that give direction to, and assist in, the development of the parish as a whole.

The Parish School Advisory School Council assists the pastor and principal in the recommendation of policy for the school. Some of its responsibilities would include:

- a. Recommending policies that relate to the overall operation of the school to insure quality Catholic education.
- b. Building a relationship of the parish school to the entire parish community, civic and cultural groups, and public schools of the area.
- c. Developing and reviewing a long-range plan in the school.

## **3.2 Relationship to the Administrators**

The School Advisory Council is responsible for recommending policy for school programs. Policy gives direction; it does not tell how to get there.

The Administrators are responsible for developing methods and programs to implement policy, i.e. how it is to be done.

## **3.3 Relationship to the Parish Community**

"The School Advisory Council", through its words and actions, must seek to represent the full spectrum of the parish community. Its deliberations should be marked by a spirit of "Catholicity" which works to break down barriers displaying a sense of concern and compassion for all, especially the most needy. In a very real sense, the school advisory council/board s should see itself as both conscience and voice of the full faith community as it seeks to realize, through education, the ministry of Christ.

## **4.0 MEMBERSHIP**

The parish school advisory council should be large enough to include a variety of opinions and abilities, but not so large that discussion would be hampered. The general recommendation is that there be neither more than seven elected/appointed members, nor less than five.

### **4.1 Pastor and Administrators**

The pastor and educational administrator, as *ex-officio* members of the school advisory council/board, are *nonvoting members*. The principal of the school is designated as the executive secretary of the school advisory council/board.

### **4.2 Lay Members**

It is recommended that at least two of the lay members of the parish school advisory council of education be appointed, not elected.

No school advisory council member should have the legal right or authority to represent the school advisory council except when so delegated. It is recommended that no one whose exclusive work is subject to the school advisory council be proposed for school advisory council membership. This could set up a conflict of interest.

### **4.3 Appointment**

If some of the lay members of the school advisory council are to be appointed, care should be exercised that the persons appointing, terms of membership, and constituencies are specified in the By-laws.

### **4.4 Nominations and Elections**

If an electoral process is established, it can be handled in a number of ways. The following procedures are samples for consideration. One possibility, when establishing a new school advisory council/board, is to have the pastor, the administrator, and the parish associations each nominate a certain number of persons. Another possibility is to have a nominating

committee submit a slate of names to the school advisory council/board for election. Names on the slate are drawn from recommendations from the parish and school.

#### **4.5 Term of Membership**

On many school advisory councils, members hold a three-year term, renewable once. A one-year term does not allow a person to become knowledgeable and/or effective. Terms of members should be staggered so that at no time will every member of the school advisory council be newly elected or appointed. Members of a newly established school advisory council might draw lots for one, two or three-year terms.

#### **4.6 Attendance**

A member absent without cause for three (3) meetings in the course of a year should cease to be a member and be so notified.

#### **4.7 Vacancies**

In the event of a vacancy of an elected member of the school advisory council, the pastor and principal, in consultation with the remaining members, shall fill the vacancy by appointment for the rest of the term. In the event of a vacancy of an appointed member of the school advisory council/board, the person or association appointing shall fill the vacancy by appointment for the rest of the term.

### **5.0 OFFICERS**

A general rule is to have only officers that are needed. For most school advisory councils, a president or chair, a vice-president or vice-chair, and a secretary suffice.

#### **5.1 President or Chair**

The president/chair plans meetings with the executive secretary and the pastor, guides meetings so that issues are discussed adequately and decisions reached without undue delay. The president/chair will be called upon periodically to represent the total school advisory council. It is the duty of the president/chair to see that the council/board fulfills its responsibility of policy recommendations, budget decisions and other specified functions. It is the responsibility of the administrators, not the school advisory council, to see that the educational programs function well and that school advisory council policies are implemented, but it is the responsibility of the president/chair of the school advisory council, not the administrators, to make sure that the school advisory council operates well.

#### **5.2 Vice-president or Vice-chair**

The vice-president assumes the duties of the presidentV chair in case the latter is temporarily unable to perform such duties. The vice-presidenVvice-chair is often called upon to take over special duties, e.g., parliamentarian, chairperson of important committees, etc.

### **5.3 Secretary**

The secretary of the school advisory council should handle council business. A non-school advisory council/board member could be designated to take the minutes to allow the secretary to participate fully in discussions.

### **5.4 Nominations and Election of Officers**

Officers should be elected by the full school advisory council membership. No elective officer should be elected to the same office for more than two consecutive terms. The practice is discouraged of having a nominating committee suggest prospective officers, one candidate for each office. This practice allows a small group, rather than the full school advisory council, to elect the officers, because a school advisory council rarely rejects the recommendations of its nominating committee. The Rules of Procedure should stipulate that officers be elected by ballot rather than by voice or hand vote. These stipulations will guarantee that each school advisory council member will be able to vote freely for the person he/she considers most qualified.

### **5.5 Pastor**

Because of his other duties and special relationship to different educational programs and parish, and because of the importance of the lay involvement issue, the pastor should not be an officer of the school advisory council/board.

### **5.6 Executive Secretary**

The Principal of the school should be designated "Executive Secretary" in accord with 9.0 of these guidelines.

## **6.0 COMMITTEES:**

As with officers, committees should not be multiplied needlessly. It is useful to keep in mind the difference between on going (standing) committees and temporary (ad hoc) committees. The president\chair of the school advisory council ordinarily appoints all committee members.

### **6.1 Effectiveness**

The primary responsibility for committee effectiveness lies with the committee chair. If he/she fails to exercise this leadership, the school advisory council president should tactfully but firmly apply pressure. Implementation steps and evaluation process should be part of each committee recommendation to the school advisory council.

### **6.2 Responsibilities**

A common mistake of school advisory councils and committees is to become over-involved in what is essentially staff work. For example, the finance committee should analyze the school budget in detail and advise the school advisory council, but it is not their responsibility to prepare the budget. That is the responsibility of the administrators. Another example is the collection of tuition and fees, which is the function of the administration, not

the school advisory council. (For further information concerning the responsibility of the school advisory council, refer to 3.2 of these guidelines.

### **6.3 Committee Membership**

A school advisory council committee may include people who are not school advisory council members. Certain members of the parish may have expertise in areas such as finance, or maintenance, and they could certainly be members of appropriate committees, though not currently members of the school advisory council.

### **6.4 Committee Charges**

The following committee charges are suggested charges. A board may wish to modify these charges, add additional charges, or build additional committees. Committees are structured to provide advice and recommendations to the pastor and principal through the board. Therefore, actual committee charges will depend on local administrative needs.

### **6.5 Standing Committees**

**Development:** The primary purpose of the development committee is resource development and the implantation of development programs. This committee has the additional responsibility of reviewing and monitoring the public relations, communications, and marketing efforts of the school, and making suggestions for improvement.

#### ***Facilities Committee:***

The primary purpose of the facilities committee is to develop a long-term maintenance plan for the school.

#### ***Finance Committee:***

The primary purpose of the finance committee is to provide oversight to the budget and budgeting process. In addition to budgeting, this committee may be involved in developing and recommending financial policy, determining tuition assistance, and monitoring the accuracy of financial procedures used by the school.

#### ***Mission Effectiveness Committee:***

The primary purpose of this committee is to work with administration to maintain and enhance the Catholic nature of the school and to help design and implement programs that promote this nature.

#### ***Strategic Planning:***

The primary purpose of this committee is to develop, help implement and monitor long-range plans for the school. In addition, this committee coordinates the efforts of the various committees to insure a unified *effort* at promoting and developing the school.

## **6.6 Ad Hoc Committees:**

### ***Policy Committee:***

This committee develops and recommends policy to the pastor.

## **7.0 MEETINGS**

Generally, the school advisory council should meet every month except July or August, or both. The meetings should be scheduled on the same day of the month, e.g., the third Tuesday and at the same time, so that school advisory council members can plan ahead and parents and parishioners will always know when the school advisory council is to meet.

### **7.1 Open Meetings**

All meetings of the school advisory council/board should be open unless the president thinks it necessary to call an executive session. The By-laws should contain a definition of "open meetings", and clearly state the conditions justifying "executive sessions." No member of the school advisory council is to be excluded from executive sessions unless the matter under discussion directly affects him/her. All voting must be done in open sessions. Notice of school advisory council meetings should be given through the parish bulletin and/or bulletin sent home to parents. Observers at the open meetings do not address the school advisory council until Item VI on the agenda. Information from these observers may be given a place in future agendas.

### **7.2 Responsibility for Planning**

Meetings should be well planned before the day of the meeting, preferably by the executive secretary in consultation with the chair and the pastor. They should decide what issues are to be placed on the agenda and in what order of priority. School advisory council members should have the right to request items be placed on the agenda by contacting the chair. A specific amount of time should be allocated for each item.

### **7.3 Agenda Materials**

Agenda and other pertinent materials should be sent to the members of the school advisory council/board at least one week prior to the meeting. This is especially important when there are major decisions to be made on policy or budget.

### **7.4 Length of Meetings**

It is the responsibility of the president/chair of the school advisory council to see that each meeting is well planned, and to have some idea of the amount of discussion time to be given to each agenda item, and thus to know the overall time of the meeting. The president/chair should keep the meeting moving rather than allow it to drift into long discussion of little value. He/she should not be afraid to take a strong hand in cutting off lengthy and/or irrelevant discussion. If the agendas are well planned with an eye to total time, and if the president/chair runs the meetings well, there should be no concern about the length of the meetings. Meetings of longer than two hours, usually become counter-productive.

## **7.5 Structure of the Meetings.**

It is strongly recommended that school advisory council/board meetings be divided into two main sections, action items and information items, with action items placed first on the agenda. The agenda should approximate the following model:

- I. Call to Order
- II. Prayer
- III. Action Items
  - a. Approval of Minutes
  - b. Decision on Preliminary Budget Proposal
  - c. Decision on Recommended policy/proposal (second reading)
  - d. Decision on Recommended policy/proposal (first reading)
- IV. Reports
  - a. Finance Committee
  - b. Administrators
  - c. Other School Advisory Council Members
- V. School Advisory Council Member Items
- VI. Comments from the Floor
- VII. Adjournment

Items requiring school advisory council decisions should be placed first on the agenda when there is flexibility of time, the important decisions preceding those of lesser importance. Some school advisory councils proceed through a long series of reports and miscellaneous discussion, and after nearly two hours come to the most important issues. School advisory council members are tired and some may have to leave early.

## **7.6 Method of Procedure**

A regularly established set of procedures, e.g., Robert's RULES OF ORDER recently revised, should be adopted. Although a very informal decision-making process is adequate much of the time, there are cases when the process needs to be more formal. The by-laws should state clearly the parliamentary procedures and the operating procedures, e.g., whether policy proposals must be introduced at a meeting prior to that in which the final vote is taken. They should also state that ordinarily only matters on the prepared agenda be considered.

## **8.0 ROLE OF THE PASTOR**

The pastor is vitally important to the effective functioning of the Catholic Parish School Advisory Council/Board. The pastor should support the school advisory council in every way possible, *and attend all meetings*. He is an exofficio member of the school advisory council. Experience suggests that the school advisory council is successful in direct proportion to the positive involvement of the pastor.

### **8.1 Veto Power**

If the jurisdiction of the school advisory council and its relationship to the pastor/parish council are properly understood and respected, "veto situation" should be avoidable, especially if the planning and documentation of the school advisory council agenda are in accord with the guidelines (7.2 and 7.3)

## **9.0 ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR(S)**

The Administrator(s) is responsible for identifying policy issues and presenting policy proposals, entering into discussion of issues before the school advisory council, reporting to the school advisory council on program operation, and implementing school advisory council decisions. As in the case of the pastor, it is important that the administrator(s) work closely with and support the school advisory council. The principal of the school is the executive secretary of the parish school advisory council. In this role, the person would be responsible for planning school advisory council meetings together with the president/chair.

## **10.0 BY-LAWS**

Every school advisory council should have written by-laws incorporating the concepts of these guidelines. See insert #1.

## **11.0 PARISH SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL BOARD AND PARENT-TEACHER GROUPS**

The function of parish Parent-Teacher Groups is to provide opportunities for parents to meet together and to become involved in the educational programs of the parish. Parent-Teacher Groups are organizations that build unity among parents, foster relationships between faculties and parents, and support the educational programs financially and in other ways. It is not the purpose of the Parent-Teacher Groups to recommend policy. That is the duty of the parish school advisory council. The school advisory council and the PTG perform different but complementary roles. Because the two organizations are and should be distinct, it is not recommended that the PTG be considered as the parish school advisory council of education. It is important, however, that there be communication between the school advisory council and the Parent-Teacher Group.

### **Insert #1**

The By-law template to the Diocese of San Jose is appended. Each School Advisory Council's By-laws must include everything in the template and may not include anything that contradicts or conflicts with the template. Each School Advisory Council is to review the council's By-laws during the first year of reparation for the WCEAIWASC Self-Study. At that review, By-laws are to be revised in accordance with the template and submitted to the Superintendent of Schools for approval.

## **12.0 ORIENTATION/IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

It is strongly recommended that all members, including the principal, of parish school advisory councils of education be assisted to understand their role through annual orientation/in-service workshops. These workshops would focus on such topics as:

- a. The jurisdiction of the school advisory council/board and its relationship to the Pastor and Administrator (cf.3.0, 8.0 and 9.0 of the Guidelines).
- b. The structure and conduct of meetings (cf.7.0 of the Guideline)
- c. The structure and direction of the Catholic School, including the study of Church documents.
- d. The structure and direction of the Diocesan Department of Education.