



School Councils: Organization and Procedure

This presentation is intended to accompany the
Georgia School Council GuideBook.



Why were school councils included in education reform?

- To improve communication and participation of parents and the community in the management and operation of schools.
- Parents and the community are critical to the success of students and schools.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-85 (a)



How can school councils make a difference?

- Bring communities and schools closer together in a spirit of cooperation to solve difficult education problems
- Improve academic achievement
- Provide support for teachers and administrators
- Bring parents into the school-based decision making process

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-85 (a)



What is the purpose of school councils?

- To help the local board of education develop and nurture participation
- To bring parents and the community together with teachers and school administrators to create a better understanding of and mutual respect for each other's concerns
- To share ideas for school improvement

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-85 (a)



What is the local governance structure of public schools?

- The management and control of schools is the responsibility of the local board of education. The board determines the policies and procedures and sets the expectations for the system.
- The board of education is accountable to the voters in their districts.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-85 (b)



What is the local governance structure of public schools?

- The superintendent is hired by the local board of education to run the school system.
- The superintendent is accountable to the board of education.
- The principal is the school leader.
- The principal is accountable to the superintendent.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-85 (b)



What is the role of school councils?

- School councils are policy level advisory bodies.
- School councils represent the community of parents and businesses.
- School council members are accountable to the constituents they serve.



What are some topics school councils can address?

- The law specifically mentions 14 topics on which school councils may offer advice and make recommendations. The law also states that the school council is not limited to these topics.
- The 14 topics fall into three broad categories:
 - Student Learning
 - Local School Board Policies
 - Communication and Collaboration



Student Learning

- School improvement plans
- Curriculum and assessments
- Reports from the school principal regarding progress toward the school's student achievement goals, *including progress within specific grade and subject areas, and by school personnel*

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (s)



Student Learning

- Report cards issued or audits of the school conducted by the Office of Student Achievement
- School-based and community services
- The method and specifications for the delivery of early intervention services or other appropriate services for underachieving students

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (s)



Local School Board Policies

- School board policies
- Extracurricular activities in the school
- Community use of school facilities
- School budget priorities, including school capital improvement plans
- Student discipline and attendance

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (s)



Communication and Collaboration

- Developing a school profile, containing data identified by the council to describe the academic performance, academic progress, services, awards, interventions, and environment of the school
- School-community communication strategies
- Methods of involving parents and the community

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (s)



What is a school council legally authorized to do?

- Advise and make recommendations to the principal, local board of education, and superintendent on matters relating to student achievement.
- Participate in the selection of the school principal in accordance with the written policy of the local board.
- Review and approve the School Improvement Plan.



What is a school council legally authorized to do?

- Review school site budget and expenditure information and class size by grade.
- Request and receive data relative to the use of an academic coach and whether the use of the coach has led to increased student achievement
- Writing and submitting an annual report to the local school board.



What are the expectations for all school council members?

- Maintain a school-wide perspective on issues
- Regularly participate in school council meetings
- Participate in information and training programs
- Act as a link between the school council and the community
- Encourage the participation of parents and others within the school community
- Work to improve student achievement and performance

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (k)



What are other responsibilities of the Local Board of Education to School Councils?

- To provide all non-confidential information including school site budget and expenditure information and class sizes by grade to the council *as requested* or as required by state law or state board rule **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (p)**
- To designate a system representative to attend council meetings when requested **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (p)**
- To receive and consider all recommendations of the school council and the annual report **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (q)**



How does the local Board of Education respond to school council recommendations?

- Public notice shall be given to the community of the local board's intent to consider school council reports or recommendations.
- Written notice shall be given to the members of the school council at least seven days prior to a local board meeting, along with a notice of intent to consider a council report or recommendation.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (q)



How does the local Board of Education respond to school council recommendations?

- The members of the school council shall be afforded an opportunity to present information in support of the school council's report or recommendation.
- The local board shall respond to recommendations of the school council within 60 days after being notified in writing of the recommendation.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (q)



Obtaining Information

The central administration shall be responsive to requests for information from a school council.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (p)



Who serves on a school council?

- **The school principal**
- **Four parents or guardians** of students enrolled in the school, excluding employees who are parents or guardians of such students to make up the majority of the council



Who serves on a school council?

- **At least two certificated teachers,** excluding any personnel employed in administrative positions, who are employed at least four of the six school segments at the school.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (d)



Elections

- The school council shall specify in its bylaws the month in which elections are to be held and shall specify a nomination and election process. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (g)**
- Officers shall be elected at the first meeting following election of council members.



What is the term of school council members?

- Two year terms or as specified in the council's bylaws **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (e)**
- Terms beginning after July 1, 2004 must be staggered. One half of the parents and teachers will be elected to one year terms; the others will be elected to two year terms to begin the staggering process. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (e)**
- Terms shall begin and end on the dates specified in the council's bylaws. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (n)**



When does a vacancy occur?

- A member withdraws by submitting a written resignation to the council **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (c)**
- An inactive member, as defined by the bylaws of the council, is removed by a majority vote of the members of the council **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (c)**
- A member no longer meets the specified qualifications **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (e)**



How is a vacancy filled?

- An election to fill a vacancy must occur within 30 days unless there are 90 days or less remaining in the vacated term.
- The election fills an unexpired term. It does not begin a new term.
- The election should follow the procedures in the council's bylaws.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (e)



Who are the officers of a school council?

- Chairperson– Must be a parent member
- Vice chairperson
- Secretary
- The officers shall be elected at the first meeting of the council after the election of the council members.
- The term of office for the officers shall be specified in the council bylaws.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)



The principal shall:

- Set the initial agenda, meeting time, and location; and notify all school council members of the same
- Perform all duties required by law and the bylaws of the school council
- Communicate all council requests for information and assistance to the local school superintendent and inform the council of responses or actions taken

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (r)



The principal shall:

- Develop the school improvement plan and school operations plan *and submit the plans to the school council for its review , comments, recommendations, and approval*
- Aid in the development of the agenda for each meeting after taking into consideration suggestions of council members and the urgency of school matters

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (r)



The vice chairperson shall:

- In the absence or disability of the chairperson, perform the duties and exercise the powers of the chairperson
- Perform such other duties as shall from time to time be required by the school council

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)(2)



The school council secretary shall:

- Attend all school council meetings
- Act as clerk of the council, and be responsible for recording all votes and minutes of all proceedings in the books to be kept for that purpose
- Give or cause to be given notice of all meetings of the council
- Perform other duties as may be prescribed by the council

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)(3)



Quorum

- A quorum must be present in order to conduct official business.
- A quorum is comprised of a majority of the members.
- A *majority* of the members present, representing a quorum, must vote yes for a motion to pass.
- Adopting and amending bylaws requires two-thirds majority of the school council.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (f)



Bylaws

- The school council adopts bylaws as it deems appropriate to conduct business. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (h)**
- The State Board of Education shall make available model council bylaws. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (h)**
- A Bylaws template is available at www.GeorgiaEducation.org under “School Councils”



Meetings

- Must be held *at least* four times a year – the number of meetings must be specified in the bylaws
- Must be open to the public
- Must be notified by mail at least 7 days prior to the meeting of the date, time, and location of the meeting
- May be called by the chair or by the request of the majority of the members of the council
- Are subject to Open Meetings and Open Records laws

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (f)



Voting

- Each council member has one vote
O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (f)
- Votes must be recorded in a book kept for that purpose **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)(3)**



Agenda

- Items may be added at the request of 3 or more members. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (r)**
- The agenda must be posted at the meeting site within two weeks of the meeting. **O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 (e)(2)**



Minutes

- The school council secretary must make the council minutes available to the public at the school site.
- The school council secretary must provide a summary of the meeting, subjects acted on, and members present within 2 business days of the meeting. **O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 (2)**
- The school council secretary must send the minutes to school council members within 20 days.
- The school council adopts the minutes, as may be amended, at the next meeting.
- The school council secretary must make the official minutes available to the public following adoption. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (I)**



Minutes

- The school council secretary keeps minutes and records votes in a book kept for that purpose. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)(3)**
- Minutes must include:
 - Names of all council members attending **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (j)(3)**
 - A description of each motion or proposal **O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 (e)(2)**
 - A record of all votes **O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 (e)(2)**
- Roll call votes must be listed with the name of each person voting for or against. **O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1 (e)(2)**



Parliamentary Procedure

- School council meetings should be conducted using parliamentary procedure which can be summed up as:
 - Make a motion
 - Second a motion
 - Debate a motion
 - Vote on a motion

See the *Georgia School Council GuideBook* for additional information.



School Council Meetings

- School councils are subject to the Open Meetings Act.
O.C.G.A. § 20-2-86 (f)
- A meeting is defined as a gathering of a quorum of the members of the school council at which any public matter, official business, or policy is to be discussed with official actions taken.
- All meetings are open unless specifically allowed by law to be closed.
- “Open” means open to public attendance. It does not require that the meeting be open to public participation.



School Council Meetings

- Meetings may be called by the chair or at the request of a majority of the members of the council.
- When discussing candidates for a principal vacancy, the school council may go into executive session. All votes must be taken in public.

See the *Georgia School Council GuideBook* or the Open Meetings Act for the rules on called meetings and executive session.



Violations of the Open Meetings Act

- Anyone conducting or participating in a meeting in violation of the Open Meetings Act is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500.
- Any action taken in violation of the Open Meetings Act is not binding.



School Council Records

- School councils are subject to the Open Records Act.
- School council records are public and open to the review of any citizen at a reasonable time and place.
- Response to a request for open records must be made within three business days.
- Reasonable charges may be charged for time and labor to produce and copy requested records.



Confidential Records

- Student records are not accessible to school council members.
- Personnel evaluations are not accessible to school council members.
- School personnel personal information is not accessible to school council members.



What are school councils doing?

- School councils spend a lot of time learning about:
 - Test scores and assessments
 - School budgets and teacher allocations
 - Student interventions and support teams
 - Curriculum and instruction
 - Discipline and other student policies



What are school councils doing?

- The most frequently addressed topics are math, reading/literacy, attendance, and parental involvement.
- Linking parent workshops with school improvement plan.
- Developing plans to reduce absenteeism and tardiness.
- Publicizing school improvement goals and achievements.
- Addressing a variety of needs in their schools.