



# SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Abstract

A comprehensive list of common questions regarding the duties, responsibilities, and membership requirements of school advisory councils.

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# Table of Contents

Section I: SAC Overview .....	2
Section II: Membership Composition .....	7
Section III: Roles and Responsibilities of SAC Members .....	11
Section IV: Noticing and Conducting SAC Meetings .....	12
Section V: Additional Information .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

# Section I: SAC Overview

## 1. What is a School Advisory Council?

The School Advisory Council (SAC) is a school-based group intended to represent the school, the community, and those persons closest to the students that shares responsibility for supporting the school's continuous improvement.

The district school board is responsible, by Florida law, for establishing an advisory council for each school in the district and developing procedures for the election and appointment of advisory council members. Each SAC must include in its name the words "school advisory council." For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

## 2. What is the role of the SAC?

The SAC is responsible for final decision-making at the school relating to the annual implementation of a school improvement plan (SIP). The SAC assists in the annual preparation of both the SIP and the school's annual budget, as well as the evaluation of the SIP. For further information, see [Section 1001.452 \(2\), F.S.](#)

## 3. Who serves on the SAC?

A SAC should be composed of the principal and an appropriately balanced number of teachers, education support employees, students, parents, and other business and community citizens who are representative of the ethnic, racial, and economic community served by the school. Certain members are elected by their peers, business and community members are appointed by the SAC, and the principal automatically serves. Only students in secondary schools serve on a SAC. It is also a requirement that the majority of the members of the SAC are not employed by the school district. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

In alignment with Best Practices in Inclusive Education (BPIE), BSI encourages the inclusion of parents of children with disabilities on SACs, as well as teachers or support employees whose primary role involves working with students with disabilities, in an effort to achieve representation of an entire school community.

## 4. Is a charter school required to have a SAC?

No. [Section 1002.33\(16\)\(a\), F.S.](#), exempts charter schools from most statutes in chapters 1000-1013, including s. 1001.452, F.S.—establishment of school advisory councils.

## **5. Are virtual schools, alternative and ESE centers required to have a SIP and SAC?**

Yes. The FDOE offices of school improvement, virtual schools, and general council met in 2016 to discuss requirements for virtual schools, alternative and ESE centers to develop and maintain school improvement plans and school advisory councils. The department's Office of the General Council subsequently determined that no law exists to exempt these programs from the statutory requirements identified in the annual collection of [SIP/SAC Assurances](#).

Florida Virtual School (FLVS) Full-Time K-8 and FLVS Full-Time 9-12, FLVS district franchises, and full-time district virtual instruction programs are required to have school improvement plans and subsequently school advisory councils. Virtual instruction programs managed by an approved provider, as described in section [1002.45 F.S.](#), are only required to submit a SIP if the school has received a grade of D or F in the most recent grades release.

As for alternative and ESE centers, they are considered non-charter public schools and as such, are required to adhere to the same rules as their traditional school counterparts.

## **6. Are Department of Juvenile Justice programs required to have SACs?**

Yes. Pursuant to [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#), district school boards are required to establish a SAC and annually approve a SIP for each non-charter school in the district, including schools operating for the purpose of providing educational services to students in Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) programs.

However, [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(c\), F.S.](#), allows districts the flexibility of establishing a single district school advisory council for the purpose of developing and monitoring a district school improvement plan that encompasses all DJJ programs within the district.

## **7. Do SAC meetings fall under the Sunshine Law?**

Yes. All meetings of any board or commission of any state agency or authority, or of any agency or authority of any county, municipal corporation, or political subdivision, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution, at which official acts are to be taken, are declared to be public meetings open to the public at all times. As such, all SAC meetings may be attended by any parent, student, community member, teacher or staff member. No resolution, rule, or formal action of a SAC shall be considered binding unless taken or made by voting members at meetings that have been made open to the public. The board or commission must provide reasonable notice of all such meetings and designate a

specified period of time for public comment during each meeting. For further information, see [Section 286.011\(1\), F.S.](#), [Sunshine Manual](#), and [Informal Opinion, February 17, 1995, Attorney General's Office](#).

## **8. May members of a SAC vote by secret ballot?**

No. Because SACs fall under the purview of the Florida Sunshine Laws, votes may not be taken by secret ballot as that is a violation of open government determined by the Attorney General's Office. Please see AGOs [72-326](#) and [71-32](#) for more information.

However, the [Sunshine Law Manual](#) states that "council members are not prohibited from using written ballots to cast a vote as long as they are made openly at a public meeting, the name of the person who voted and his or her selection are written on the ballot, and the ballots are maintained and made available for public inspection in accordance with the Public Records Act."

## **9. How much funding is allotted to each SAC?**

[Section 1001.42\(18\)\(d\), F.S.](#), requires districts to provide schools with "school improvement funds" for the purpose of developing and implementing school improvement plans. In accordance with [section 24.121\(5\)\(c\), F.S.](#), these funds shall include "discretionary lottery funds" as described below.

In Specific Appropriation 9 of the annual General Appropriations Act, funds are provided for the Florida School Recognition program to be allocated as awards of up to \$100 per student to qualified schools, pursuant to section 1008.36, F.S. If there are funds remaining after the disbursement of recognition awards, the balance must be allocated to all districts based on their K-12 base funding. From these funds, districts must allocate up to \$5.00 per unweighted, full-time enrolled (FTE) student to be used at the discretion of the SAC for implementing the school improvement plan. If funds are insufficient to provide \$5.00 per student, the available funds will be prorated.

These "discretionary lottery funds," reported under funding code 3344, are distributed by FDOE to each district, which then forwards allocations to each local school's SAC.

The funds may be expended only on programs or projects selected by the SAC, and neither district staff or the principal can override the SACs recommendations. The funds may not be used for capital improvements or for any project or program that has a duration of more than one year; however, a SAC may independently determine to continue funding

a program or project formerly funded with these funds in a subsequent year. For further information, see [Sections 1001.42\(18\)\(d\), F.S.](#) and [24.121\(5\)\(c\), F.S.](#)

## **10. What other funds do SACs have authority to manage?**

In addition to the school improvement funds described in Question 7 above, SACs also play a role in determining how to distribute Florida School Recognition funds, or “A+ funds.”

In accordance with [section 1008.36, F.S.](#), schools that receive a school grade of “A,” improve by at least one letter grade, or improved more than one letter grade and sustain the improvement the following year qualify to receive school recognition funds.

The funds may be used for nonrecurring bonuses to the faculty and staff, nonrecurring expenditures for educational equipment or materials to assist in maintaining and improving student performance, or temporary personnel for the school to assist in maintaining and improving student performance. This determination must be approved jointly by the SAC and school staff by February 1. If the groups are not able to reach an agreement by the deadline, the funds must be equally distributed to all classroom teachers currently teaching in the school. See [s. 24.121\(5\)\(c\), F.S.](#)

Schools and SACs are expected to work collaboratively in support of student success by promoting representative stakeholder engagement and building unity among their many stakeholders: parents, students, support staff, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders.

If a school selected to receive a school recognition award is no longer in existence at the time the award is paid, the district school superintendent shall distribute the funds to teachers who taught at the school in the previous year in the form of a bonus.

## **11. Who provides training for new SAC members?**

The district office is responsible for training. Some education consortia also provide training. The Bureau of School Improvement provides technical assistance and guidance on statutory requirements pertaining to SACs.

## **12. What topics are typically covered in SAC trainings?**

Topics generally covered in SAC trainings include, but are not limited to

- Structure, purpose, and role
- Family involvement
- Way of work

- Needs assessments
- Data collection and analysis
  - Local demographic data
  - School test scores
  - School grades and AYP
- School climate surveys
- Developing and communicating the SIP to stakeholders
- Evaluation of the SIP

## Section II: Membership Composition

### 1. Does the law require the composition of SACs to reflect the racial balance of the student population attending the school?

No. An advisory legal opinion from the Florida Attorney General's Office issued on April 8, 2008, indicates that the composition of the SAC must reflect the ethnic, racial, and economic community in the geographic area served by the school—rather than the district at large or the actual student population attending the school. For further information, please see [Advisory Legal Opinion AGO 2008-16, Attorney General's Office](#).

### 2. How do schools designated as Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) sites ensure their SACs represent the economically disadvantaged populations served by the school?

Because CEP schools are not required to collect Free and Reduced Lunch forms, districts may refer to their direct certification lists in order to achieve optimal representation from the economic community served by the school. Under direct certification, school districts use information provided by the State welfare or food assistance offices to certify children receive free meals.

### 3. Who serves as chair of the SAC?

Any member can be elected to serve as chair. The Bureau of School Improvement recommends that neither a principal (in order to invite greater shareholder involvement) nor a student (due to limited experience and maturity) fills this role. Some schools elect co-chairs so that a parent or community member and a school-based member can lead jointly.

### 4. Who serves as the SAC secretary?

Any member of a SAC may serve as the council's secretary. Depending on the SAC's bylaws, the secretary may be appointed by the chair or selected by the committee through majority vote.

### 5. Who serves as the SAC treasurer?

As with the secretary, any SAC member may serve as the council's treasurer. Depending on the SAC's bylaws, the treasurer may be appointed by the chair or selected by the committee through majority vote.



## **6. How are business and community members selected?**

The district school board is responsible for establishing procedures for selecting business and community members. This includes a means of ensuring wide notice of vacancies and seeking input on possible members from local businesses, chambers of commerce, community and civic organizations, and the public at large. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\) \(a\), F.S.](#)

## **7. How are elections conducted?**

The nomination and election procedures should be fair, equitable, and clearly outlined in the SAC's adopted bylaws. The SAC must represent teachers, education support employees, parents, and students who are elected by their respective peer groups at the school as follows:

- Teachers must be elected by teachers
- Education support employees must be elected by education support employees
- Parents must be elected by parents
- Students must be elected by students

Voting can occur at meetings or by mail, using written ballots or a show of hands. Ballots are counted, recorded, and retained. Ballots and voting records should be kept by a SAC officer, and the results are to be reflected in the official SAC minutes. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

## **8. How closely must the percentage of community demographics (i.e., ethnicity, race, economic status) on the SAC match the community served by the school?**

Neither state statute nor an attorney general's opinion offer a specific range for meeting category percentages on school advisory councils. As stated in the [AGO 2008-16](#), ". . . while the composition of the advisory council must represent each ethnic, racial, and economic community, there need not be a precise percentage or ratio of each community category equal to the percentage of the general population served." Therefore, school districts should work with their attorneys to establish an acceptable range for exceeding or falling short of the identified percentage of membership categories.

## **9. Are assistant principals allowed to serve on School Advisory Councils?**

No. For the purposes of SAC, the term "teacher" includes classroom teachers, certified student services personnel, and media specialists; "education support employee"

includes school employees not defined as instructional or administrative personnel. Per [section 1012.01, F.S.](#), the term "administrative personnel" includes school principals and assistant principals.

As such, assistant principals would not fall under the "teacher" or "education support employee" stakeholder groups for SAC membership. Assistant principals are welcome to attend SAC meetings, as is any member of the general public; however, they are not members of the council.

## 10. Are students serving on the SAC considered full voting members?

Yes. All appointed or elected members of the SAC have equal voting rights.

## 11. If an individual falls into more than one membership category (e.g., is a teacher and a parent of a child at the school), which group do they represent?

The membership group is determined by the method in which the person came to be a member. Using the example above, if a person is both a teacher and parent, their membership on the SAC would be determined by the group that elected them (teachers or parents). Note: the individual does not need to be elected by both groups in order to serve.

The method by which a membership category is determined **does not** exempt a SAC from adhering to composition requirements outlined in law (i.e., having less than 50 percent of district staff serving on the SAC). The following three calculations ensure compliance with state statute:

- **Membership Group** – This would be the number and percentage of members that fall into each membership group (i.e., principal, teacher, education support employee, student, parent, business citizen, and community citizen). Note: There should be at least one representative member for each group. As stated above, the membership group is determined by the method in which the person came to be member.
- **District Employee** – This would be the number and percentage of members who are employees of the district. The percentage of district employees should be less than 50 percent of the total SAC membership.
- **Member Demographics** – Ethnicity, race, and economic status.

## **12. Are persons serving as a SAC member required to submit to background checks?**

Yes. Districts are required to check volunteers' names with the sexual offender/predator database pursuant to [Section 943.04351, F.S.](#) However, districts have the authority to develop additional policies regarding criminal background checks for school-based volunteers. Please contact your local school district office for further information.

## Section III: Roles and Responsibilities of SAC Members

### 1. What are the responsibilities of the SAC chair?

The chair is responsible for notifying members of upcoming meetings and votes. The chair, or designee, will facilitate the SAC meetings and inform the SAC of relevant issues related to school improvement activities. They also ensure that a quorum is present before an action item on the agenda comes to a vote and works in collaboration with the SAC secretary to ensure minutes are recorded and filed promptly.

### 2. What are the responsibilities of the principal?

The principal ensures the council is comprised of properly elected representatives, provides leadership in the development, revision, and implementation of the school improvement plan, submits the SAC-approved SIP to the district for school board approval, and keeps members informed of relevant policies and activities of the school, district, and state. Principals are required to serve on their school's SAC. For more information, see [Section 1001.452 \(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

### 3. What are the responsibilities of the secretary?

The secretary is responsible for keeping accurate, complete minutes and ensuring those records are accessible to the public (e.g., posted on school or district website). They also ensure that a copy of the minutes and agenda are kept in an official, designated location in the front office of the school. Additionally, the secretary is responsible for keeping accurate record of the council's membership, attendance, duties, and special assignments.

### 4. What are the responsibilities of the treasurer?

In general, a treasurer manages an organization's finance and operating budgets. SAC treasurers maintain accurate record of a school's school improvement fund allocations and budget for the year. The treasurer may provide guidance to the council on allowable and unallowable (e.g., capital improvements at the school, programs that extend more than one year) expenditures. See [Section 24.121\(5\) \(c\), F.S.](#) for more information on allowable expenses.

### 5. Can members who have been absent be replaced?

Yes. When replacing any member who has two or more consecutive unexcused absences from SAC meetings, the SAC will follow the procedures outlined in its bylaws or in district policies. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(d\)4, F.S.](#)

## Section IV: Noticing and Conducting SAC Meetings

### 1. How much notice is given to SAC members for agenda items?

Section [1001.452\(1\)\(d\)2., F.S.](#), requires SACs to give at least three business days advance notice in writing to all members of the SAC on any matter that is scheduled to come before the council for a vote. This requirement ensures that members are notified of the vote to take place so that the SAC will have the necessary quorum. Meeting dates can be posted on school web sites, marquees or bulletin boards, published in newsletters, announcements or local newspapers, or broadcast on TV. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(d\)2, F.S.](#)

### 2. How and when should a SAC notice an upcoming meeting to the public?

Because SACs fall under the purview of open government laws, reasonable notice of all meetings must be provided to the public. More information can be found in the [Government in the Sunshine Manual](#), which is provided by the Attorney General's Office. Though "reasonable notice" is not defined in law, the following notice guidelines are suggested:

- The notice should contain the time and place of the meeting, and if available, an agenda, or if no agenda is available, a statement of the general subject matter to be considered.
- The notice should be prominently displayed in the school front office and accessible upon request.
- The notice should be made to the public at least 10 days in advance, as many stakeholders in education are parents who may need ample notice to make childcare arrangements or request time off from their employers.

### 3. Can SAC meetings be held virtually?

No, SAC meetings cannot be held virtually. According the Attorney General's Office, the authorization in [s. 120.54\(5\)\(b\)2., F.S.](#), meetings conducted entirely through the use of communications media technology are only permitted for state agencies. A quorum of any other public board must be physically present at a meeting – (e.g., school advisory councils, school boards, etc.).

However, if a quorum of a local board is *physically* present, "the participation of an absent member by telephone conference or other interactive electronic technology is permissible when such absence is due to extraordinary circumstances such as illness... whether the absence of a member due to a scheduling conflict constitutes such a

circumstance is a determination that must be made in the good judgment of the board” ([AGO 03-41](#)).

#### **4. When should SAC meetings generally be scheduled?**

SAC meetings are to be scheduled when parents, students, teachers, businesspersons, and members of the community are able to attend. Location and time of day are important considerations for promoting attendance and participation. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(d\)3, F.S.](#)

#### **5. How often are SACs required to hold meetings within a school year?**

Statute does not establish a number of times SAC meetings are to be held. Given the SAC’s responsibilities to assist in the development and approval of the school improvement plan (SIP), school annual budget, and evaluation of the SIP, it is important that meetings occur often enough to fulfill those duties.

For those schools designated as Focus or Priority, the DA-2 Checklist requires schools to provide updates to the SAC three times per year (baseline, mid-year, and end-of-year) on the implementation of the SIP and make updates to the SIP as needed.

*Note: Among other requirements, schools interested in applying for the Five Star School Award must hold a minimum of eight SAC meetings per year. Applications can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/family-community/activities-programs/volunteer-community-involvement/>.*

#### **6. What is a quorum?**

A majority of the membership of the council, i.e., more than half, constitutes a quorum. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(d\)1, F.S.](#)

#### **7. Are meeting minutes required?**

Yes. Minutes should include the name of the school, a list of those in attendance, the date and location of the meeting, an official call to order, old and new business, the date and location of the next meeting (if known), and the time the meeting adjourned. Any actions items voted on by the SAC should also be reflected in the minutes.

#### **8. Who develops the SAC bylaws?**

Each School Advisory Council adopts its own bylaws. The district may require procedures, policies, sample by-laws or a uniform template for all SACs in their district. For further information, see [Section 1001.452\(1\)\(d\), F.S.](#) or contact your district SAC liaison.

## Section V: Additional Information

### 1. Are schools required to include their dropout prevention and academic intervention programs in their SIPs?

Yes. Schools must reflect those programs in their SIPs. For further information, see [Section 1003.53\(2\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

### 2. When is the best time to start the school improvement planning process?

Even though the school improvement planning process is ongoing, it is useful to start the evaluation and needs assessment processes in the spring of the preceding school year.

### 3. How can a school obtain a Five Star rating?

The Five Star School Award was created by the Florida Department of Education, Commissioner's Community Involvement Council and is presented annually to those schools that have shown evidence of exemplary community involvement. In order to earn a Five Star School Award, a school must show documentation that it has achieved 100 percent of the established criteria in the categories of

- Business Partnerships;
- Family Involvement;
- Volunteerism;
- Student Community Service; and
- School Advisory Councils

Obtain guidelines, application forms, and information from your district volunteer coordinator. Application forms are located at: <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/family-community/activities-programs/volunteer-community-involvement/>.