

# LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY

## SCHOOL COUNCILS POLICY

Date Approved by  
School Committee:

2/15/94

Signature of Chair:

On File

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### I. BACKGROUND

This policy is designed to implement the provisions of Chapter 71 of the Acts of 1993, Section 53, which requires the establishment of school councils in all of the public schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Lexington School Committee supports and encourages the intent and purpose of School councils. The Committee believes that parents, teachers, high school students and other members of the community working collaboratively to assist the principal will enhance the education of all the children in Lexington. In fulfilling their statutory responsibility, school councils should adopt a leadership role in creating a climate in the schools in which faculty, parents, administrators, students (where appropriate), and other community participants, working together, share responsibility for school improvement, better student performance, increased satisfaction among professional educators and greater commitment to, and involvement with, parents and the broader community.

While the School Committee supports the attempt to foster a collaborative effort at the local school level, it also recognizes its responsibility to provide a common direction for all the students in Lexington, regardless of which school they attend. To that extent, it is the expectation of the Lexington School Committee that school councils, when developing school improvement plans, will address the areas contained within the Reform Act in the context of the system-wide goals, known as the core values of the school system.

The purposes of the school councils are to:

- 1) assist the principals in adopting educational goals for the schools;
- 2) assist principals in the identification of the educational needs of the students;
- 3) assist principals in the review of the annual school budget; and
- 4) assist principals in the formulation of a school improvement plan.

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## II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

### Background: School-Based Management

As school systems move toward shared decision making, traditional roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and participants will change. In particular, the role and responsibility of the Central Office

(including the School Committee); curriculum coordinators; constituents at the local site, including principal, teachers and parents; and the local association will experience particular review.

At the Central Office, increased participation at the site level in decision making generally will require that the Central Office and its personnel move from a role of enforcers and monitor to one of facilitator, encourager and coordinator. In moving decision making closer to the classroom, research shows that school committees and superintendents have an increased responsibility to articulate a vision for the system as a whole. A strong central vision combined with a variety of implementation strategies at individual sites should become the operating norm. In this context, the School Committee and Superintendent will retain legal responsibility for the system and for the compliance with various state and federal mandates. Schools will operate within the larger vision and core values for the system. Individual means to achieve the vision and the values will necessarily vary from school to school depending upon the local context.

Perhaps the greatest changes will occur at local school. Here the roles of teachers, the principal, parents and even the community at large must be explicitly considered. Once again, the articulation of a shared vision for a school that is consistent with the vision for the system is important. Although the extent to which the various stakeholders will participate in decisions at the school will vary, changes in role will likely be the most dramatic for the principal. The experience of principals involved in the reform of decision making processes indicates that they often spend greater time promoting effective teaching and learning in their buildings. Changes for teachers and parents also will be significant. Teachers and parents will have greater say and concomitant responsibility for activities that affect teaching and learning.

The third group directly affected by a move toward shared responsibility is the local teachers' association. Once again, a key role for the leadership of the association is to promote shared values and visions. Previously litigious relationships with the Superintendent and School Committee will now be enhanced by a process that is characterized by trust, respect and open communication. However, as in the case of the ultimate legal responsibility residing with the school board and the Superintendent,

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school based management does not replace the process and benefits of a collective agreement between the association and the school committee.

Throughout any reform, individual parties must keep a close eye on why the reform is being undertaken. The loci of control and responsibility within this system is not being changed for the sake of change, but rather to enhance the learning of students in the schools. Specialized knowledge and leadership from individuals, parents, teachers, principals, the Superintendent and the School Committee will continue to be important to the creation of successful learning opportunities for all children, but the relative roles and responsibilities may necessarily change.

### **III. APPLICATION**

#### Membership

Each school council will be composed of the school principal who will serve as co-chair; teachers elected by the professional staff of the school; parents elected from a process identified by the school parent-teacher association in consultation with the principal; non-parent community persons recruited by the principal, with informal assistance from the Lexington Town Meeting Members' Association (TMMA); support staff, including custodians, secretaries, and aides; and at the secondary level, at least one student elected by the student council. The number of parents has to equal the number of teachers plus the principal. The selection/election of parents, staff, students and other community members should produce a council that is broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and the community.

Each school council shall determine its own procedure for electing members, provided that the procedure shall be approved initially by the Superintendent. A term of office is either two (2) years or (3) years, with each school council having the prerogative to decide term lengths. Members may serve, but are not limited to, two (2) consecutive terms in office. After a lapse of at least two years (one term), former members are eligible for re-election. Provisions for staggering terms and conditions for re-election should be considered.

#### Meeting Procedures

At the first meeting of a council, a member will be elected to serve as co-chair with the principal. All meetings are to be conducted according to the requirements of the Open Meeting Law. In addition, an agenda for each meeting, prepared by the co-chairs, will be provided to the council members and posted prior to the meeting date. Every effort will be made to inform the parent community of the agenda prior to the meeting in a timely manner. The Superintendent, any member of the staff, any parent, any student, or any member of the council who wishes to have an item included on an agenda

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may request its inclusion to the principal no later than three days prior to the meeting. Any item of interest may be placed on the council's agenda, and the council will decide whether individual items will actually be discussed. All meetings will be conducted in accordance with the prepared agenda. Decisions should be reached only on agenda items; other issues may be brought up for discussion, but decisions should not be reached on them until they are formally placed on a future agenda. Minutes of each meeting should be available for distribution to the school community. The official records for each school council meeting will be kept at the school.

### Ground Rules

It is expected that a council will operate by consensus. Lack of agreement will be viewed as a signal that the best option may not yet have been developed and put forth. If the council cannot reach an agreement by consensus, and a majority decision needs to be reached, the decision of the council will require a majority vote.

In the event that a council reaches a deadlock on some important issue or repeatedly fails to reach consensus on issues, and three (3) members may request that the Superintendent designate a mediator to help improve the council's process. In the event that mediation is requested, the Superintendent may seek a mediator from among the members of another council. All members of a council are obligated to cooperate in good faith with any such mediation.

### School Improvement Plans/Educational Goals

The principals, in consultation with school councils, shall adopt educational goals for the schools and shall formulate a school improvement plan to advance such goals. Each school's educational goals must include the student performance standards adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Education and, consistent with any educational policies established for the district, shall assess the needs of the school in light of these goals. The school improvement plan also shall be consistent with the system-wide goals/core values.

The plan shall identify ways to meet the diverse learning needs of children; the establishment of a welcoming school environment characterized by tolerance and respect for all groups' professional development for the school community; the allocation of resources toward enhancement of parental involvement in the life of the school; safety and discipline; extracurricular activities; and such further subjects as the principal, in consultation with the school council, shall consider appropriate.

Each school improvement plan shall be submitted to the School Committee for review and approval every year. If the school improvement plan is not reviewed by the School Committee within thirty days, the plan shall be deemed to have been approved.

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### Training

The School Committee will include in its annual budget a plan to train members of school councils. Training will be arranged by a system-wide Steering Committee whose purpose will be to support and encourage the continued operation of school councils. The Steering Committee shall be composed of the Superintendent or his/her designee, the President of the teachers' association or his/her designee, and a member of the School Committee. They shall jointly appoint up to four additional members representing school principals, teachers, parents, and community members. Steering committee members may serve up to two (2) consecutive two-year terms, with a possibility of re-election following a two-year absence from the Steering Committee.

In addition, the Steering Committee will coordinate and stimulate the flow of information among the councils and various stakeholders; review the overall implementation of school-based management in the context of the system-wide core values as well as the education reform law; distribute occasional newsletters and informational items to school councils; and provide technical assistance to the councils as requested.

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