

**SCHOOL COMMITTEES:  
REGIONAL AND DISTRICT MUNICIPAL LEGISLATURE FOR SCHOOLS  
CHIEF POLICY MAKERS FOR MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

To appreciate the roles and responsibilities of School Committees, it is important to understand the changes that took place under the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA'93). This law and subsequent court decisions have defined the very dynamic and important you have in the governance structure of Massachusetts public schools.

By understanding your role as a School Committee member, you can have a significant impact on your school district and student achievement.

MERA'93 made significant changes to school governance, administration, and finance through an interlocking program of:

- A. Redefined roles for administrators, school committees, and parents.
- B. Processes for goal setting in each school and district.
- C. New systems of school finance with significant increases in aid to provide the resources for success.
- D. Establishing standards for schools and school districts.
- E. Accountability systems through measurement of performance of students and teachers.
- F. Redefined credentialing of faculty for greater flexibility.
- G. Parent empowerment.
- H. Continuing review of Education Reform

**HOW ARE WE IMPACTED TODAY:**

- A. Redefined Roles:
  - Executive and Administrative Operations: Superintendents are chief administrative officers with specific responsibilities and authority.
  - Site-Based Management: Principals are educational and administrative managers of their schools.
  - Personnel Administration: School Committees gives up most, but not all hiring responsibilities. Boards are "employers" for collective bargaining.
  - School Committees retain and focus on policy. Policy includes:
    - Setting district policy in hundreds of areas.
    - Approving budgets including line items.
    - Negotiating collective bargaining agreements.
    - Approving process for electing School Council and preparing guidelines for School Improvement Plans.

B. Processes for Goal Setting in each School and District

- School Committees engage in strategic planning.
- Superintendent's goals are part of contracting process.
- Principals responsible for school goals and plans.
- School Councils take a role in reviewing school plans.

C. New Systems of School Finance

- Foundation Budget matrix determines what is required to provide a basic level of support.
- State increases aid to local school districts, in part based on foundation budget, but with other criteria.
- State pours billions in additional state aid into public schools.
- **School Councils** have a role in reviewing individual school budget.

D. Establishing Standards for Schools and School Districts.

- Curriculum Frameworks in disciplines to identify what should be learned.
- Comprehensive testing program (MCAS).
- Board of Education to determine "competency" for graduation.

E. Accountability systems through measurement of performance of students and teachers.

- Reporting of outcomes for student testing.
- Processes for remediating "underperforming" schools and districts.
- Testing program for new teachers.
- Five year process for "professional status" for teachers.
- Testing for veteran teachers (rescinded).
- Heavy emphasis on professional development for faculty.

F. Redefined Credentialing of Faculty for Greater Flexibility

- Alternative credentialing to encourage non-traditional career paths for teachers and administrators.

G. Empowerment of Parents

- Creation of School Councils to Enhance Role of Parents and Citizens.

H. Continuous Review of Education Reform

- Education Reform Review Commission

## **A CRITICAL REMINDER:**

While there are many post-MERA93 cases (mostly arbitrations) related to teacher termination, there have been few adjudicated conflicts over interpretation of the law. Key questions remain including:

- When does the school committee's role in end and the superintendent's and principal's administrative responsibility begin? Key areas of potential conflict exist in:
  - Collective Bargaining and other personnel related issues
  - Budget Development and Implementation
  - Certain Hiring Decisions
  - Approval of Grant Applications
  - School Organization where budget and policy may be at issue
- The role of **school councils** has not been well studied. Most data are anecdotal.

## **CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEES**

Do you have a vision and mission statement that reflects your goals and purpose?

Do you focus your work on:

- Standards
- Assessment
- Accountability
- Alignment
- Climate
- Collaboration
- Continuous Improvement
- And Vision and Mission?

Is policy linked to student achievement?

Do you use district, school, and student data to expedite your work?

# **SCHOOL COUNCILS: Working Collaboratively to Make them Effective**

## **SCHOOL COUNCIL: Key Roles**

The school council is designed to empower parents and community members, foster collaboration, and open dialogue under the premise that greater involvement leads to better schools. Key roles for the school councils, as defined by law, include:

- Adopt educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards.
- Identify educational needs of students attending the school.
- Review the annual school budget.
- Formulate a School Improvement Plan.
- High Schools: Review the student handbook to consider changes in disciplinary policy.
- Make recommendations to school committees on issues of interest to school, multi-school, or district.
- Such additional responsibilities as School Committees may assign except those under Chapter 150E (Collective Bargaining)
- Follow the state's Open Meeting Law ! (Public meetings with advance notice, allow recording, keep minutes, and adhere to a quorum.)

## **WHAT'S IN A SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SIP)?**

SIP is prepared annually for School Committee review and superintendent approval.

- Assessment of the impact of class size on student performance, student teacher ratios, and ratios of students to other support services.
- Plan for reduction in class sizes.
- Professional development (PD) plan for school staff and allocation of PD funds.
- Enhancement of parental involvement.
- School safety and discipline.
- Extra-curricular activities.
- Plans for meeting diverse needs of student population.
- Other areas as identified by the council.

## **GOVERNANCE OF THE SCHOOL COUNCIL**

- Principal co-chairs the school council
- Various processes may be deployed for (s)electing members.
- Faculty may not outnumber parents.
- Community members may serve.
- High School Council must include at least one student.
- Membership should reflect diversity of the school.