



A Union of Professionals

Alternatives to parent trigger laws: Meaningful parent empowerment policies

Mandated school-based parent and teacher councils: two examples

Connecticut's School Governance Councils

The state of Connecticut has had, for a number of years, School Governance Councils in a select number of its low-performing schools. In 2012, the state enacted comprehensive education reform legislation that ensures that School Governance Councils are now in all low-performing schools.

Each council is composed of: seven parents, two community leaders, five teachers and the principal. (A student is included on the council at high schools.)

The governance councils serve in an advisory capacity, and their responsibilities include:

- analyzing school achievement data and school needs as they relate to the school's improvement plan;
- reviewing the fiscal objectives of the school's draft budget, and advising the principal before the budget is submitted to the superintendent;
- participating in the hiring process of the school principal or other school administrators by interviewing candidates and reporting on such interviews to the superintendent of schools and the local and regional board of education;
- assisting the principal in making programmatic and operational changes to improve the school's achievement;
- developing and approving a written parent involvement policy for the school that outlines the role of parents and guardians; and
- working with school administrators in developing and approving a school compact for parents and students that outlines the school's goals and academic focus, identifying ways that parents and school personnel can build a partnership to improve student learning.

Additional responsibilities may include:

- assisting in developing and reviewing the

school improvement plan, and advising the principal before the plan is submitted to the superintendent of schools;

- working with the principal to develop, conduct and report on an annual survey of parents and teachers on the school climate and conditions; and
- providing advice to the principal on policy matters, except on matters relating to collective bargaining agreements.

After being in place for three years, the governance council may vote to recommend the implementation of one of the federal school improvement grant models or other school reform models. Up to 25 schools per year can reconstitute under this governance council reform provision, and implementation is subject to approval by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Chicago's Local School Councils

Under state law, Chicago Public Schools' Local School Councils play a role in decision-making at the local school level. The Local School Councils have responsibility for:

- approving how school funds and resources are allocated;
- approving and monitoring the implementation of the annual school improvement plan; and
- hiring and evaluating the school's principal.

Elections to the Local School Councils are monitored, uniform and run by secret ballot. All members of the councils are required to participate in 18 hours of professional development on the roles and responsibilities of Local School Councils. Each council is composed of:

- six parents (the chair must be a parent);
- one principal;
- two teachers;
- one non-teacher staff member;
- two community members; and
- one student (for high schools).

Community Schools

The Community Learning Center model in Cincinnati establishes a community school coordinator to ensure that schools are hubs of their community and that social, medical and academic services are provided to students and their families at the school site.

Depending on the needs of the community, community schools can offer adult basic education or English as a Second Language classes at times convenient to parents.

Parent Academies

Unions can partner with school districts, community groups or others to provide parent academies, which are classes or workshops on a variety of parenting skills.

Ideas from the AFT's Innovation Fund work

- Offer competitive grants to partnerships that include parents, teachers and districts for communications campaigns on an area of interest—for example, the Common Core State Standards.
- Offer incentives to parents and guardians for participation in their children's education to increase parental involvement in the schools.

Additional ideas

- Require surveys of parents on satisfaction with their children's schools, including instruction, safety, communication and facilities. Include these results in school "report cards" available on district and school websites and in principal evaluations.