

## School Councils

### Questions & Answers on School Councils

#### Part Two: Legal Responsibilities

#### D. Councils' Responsibilities: General

#### What are the main areas of responsibility for school councils?

The law outlines four major areas of responsibility for councils. School councils are to assist principals in:

1. Adopting educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards
2. Identifying the educational needs of students attending the school
3. Reviewing the annual school building budget
4. Formulating a school improvement plan

For any school that contains grades nine to twelve, inclusive, the council shall review the student handbook each spring to consider changes in disciplinary policy to take effect for the following school year. (See Appendix B)

In addition, the law states that "nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy; provided, however, that school council shall have no authority over matters which are subject to chapter one hundred and fifty E of the General Laws." (Question 34, below, addresses Chapter 150E.)

#### What is the council's role in the school budget?

The law specifies that the school council "shall assist [the principal] .... in the review of the annual school budget." This language refers to the school building budget, not to the district budget. "Review" means that the council and the principal read through documents that describe the budget in order to understand the implications for items in the school improvement plan that will be developed by the council. In many communities, the school budget is prepared by mid-year in order to allow for negotiation with other municipal agencies, i.e., finance committee, city council, town meeting. A council's review of the budget, therefore, enables it to predict better which improvement projects that require funding could be implemented in the next school year under a budget that was constructed in the previous fall. Also, in school districts that encourage building-based budget planning, a school's improvement plan objectives developed in any given year can guide the development of the school's budget in the next year. In these cases, the council's review of the budget helps in the implementation of the previous year's school improvement plan.

#### May councils make recommendations that pertain to district wide policies or to other schools in the district?

Yes. School councils may make recommendations, which would be non binding, to school committees on issues that are of keen interest to the school and that have district-wide or multi-school implications. In addition, school committees have discretion in the responsibilities they give to councils through the provision of the law that reads: "Nothing contained in this section shall prevent the school committee from granting a school council additional authority in the area of educational policy."

#### What are some areas in which councils cannot be involved?

The law enables school committees to grant school councils additional authority in the area of educational policy except for matters covered by Chapter 150E of the General Laws. Chapter 150E governs labor relations and collective bargaining for public employees including teacher contracts. This provision leaves such issues as compensation, workload, conditions of work and worker evaluation procedures subject to collective bargaining.

Good practice suggests that a council should not become involved as an ombudsman or a grievance committee in individual cases that involve students, parents, teachers and other school staff.

**does the prohibition against exercising authority over areas subject to Chapter 150E mean that councils' improvement goals and plans cannot make reference to school schedules?**

Chapter 150E refers to the state statute governing collective bargaining for public employees. Normally, councils will not be involved with Chapter 150E because they will not be discussing employment or personnel issues. However, councils may make recommendations, such as changes in the schedule of a school day, that impinge on working conditions. When this occurs, the council's recommendations should acknowledge that the issues may be subject to collective bargaining.

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