

The Role of the School Site Council

The School Site Council plays an important role in decision-making at many schools.

Who is best qualified to make decisions about a school? Policymakers in states across the country agree that those who are involved with schools and students on a day-to-day basis— teachers, parents, and other school employees—can make some of the best decisions. This belief led to the creation of the school site council.

What the School Site Council Does

The school site council is a group of [teachers](#), [parents](#), classified employees, and students (at the high school level) that works with the [principal](#) to develop, review and evaluate school improvement programs and school budgets. The members of the site council are generally elected by their peers. For example, parents elect the parent representatives and teachers elect teachers.

The exact duties of school site councils vary from state to state and even between districts in the same state, but site councils generally either make decisions or advise the principal on the [school budget](#) and the academic or school improvement plan.

In addition to academic planning, many site councils are also responsible for making decisions about [parent engagement](#), [safety](#) and [discipline](#).

Over the course of a year, a typical council might consider the goals of the school or district and then work with the principal to evaluate the school's progress toward those goals. In this evaluation, the council might consider school test scores, attendance and discipline records, parent surveys and input from students.

After looking at the big picture of the [school's progress](#), the council and the principal create a plan for improvement. This plan might involve a new academic program, staff member or parent outreach strategy. For example, one council might use funds to develop a new math program, while another might decide to hire a reading specialist. Another council might decide that hiring an additional teacher to reduce class sizes in a particular grade or a parent liaison to get more parents involved would be the best use of its money. Because school budgets are limited and many funds can only be spent in certain ways, there are always tough decisions to make.

In some schools, the site council merely advises the principal and does not have any authority to make decisions. In other schools, site councils are powerful and have the last word on [staffing](#) and budgeting decisions, including evaluating the principal and hiring teachers. Even at schools where the official duties are the same, some site councils generally defer to the principal's judgments, while others are actively involved in developing new programs or overseeing major school change.

Successful school site councils, regardless of their specific agendas, are more than a "rubber stamp" committee, and always ask thoughtful and challenging questions.

School site council members don't just represent their own interests. They have an obligation to make decisions that will best serve the whole school community. In fact, many site councils are specifically charged with finding ways to close [gaps in achievement](#) between groups of students.

How to get involved

If you are interested in school policy or budgets, you might enjoy serving on your school's site council. To find out more about what your school site council does, attend a meeting or talk to the school principal. If you would like to participate on the council, call the [school secretary](#) to find out how the selection process works at your school. You can learn more about the official roles of school site councils in your state from the [Education Commission of the States](#).