

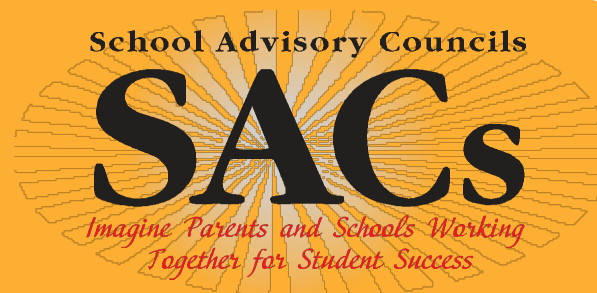


# RENAISSANCE CHARTER SCHOOL SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL HANDBOOK

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A Resource Guide for SACs in  
Renaissance Charter Schools

Effective March 14, 2013



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# Background and Introduction

School Advisory Councils (or SACs) are the central component of community engagement in the Renaissance Charter School initiative.

The District facilitates the formation of School Advisory Councils for each Renaissance Charter School to ensure active parent and community involvement. The Council members serve as liaisons between the School District, communities, and turnaround teams to ensure that Renaissance Charter Schools offer high quality educational options that match the community's needs and interests.

While the primary role of SACs is an advisory function, SACs are critical in reporting to the School District of Philadelphia on the progress and implementation of the reforms of the charter manager, a function that does not exist in any other charter school's relationship to the District.<sup>1</sup>

School Advisory Councils are comprised of peer-elected representatives from parents and various other stakeholder groups at the school. The main purpose of SACs is to contribute to overall student achievement.

The initial role for a SAC is to review the proposals from Turnaround Teams for its Renaissance Charter School, including by soliciting input from the broader community, and make recommendations to the Superintendent on which proposal best meets the needs of the school community. After a Turnaround Team is selected, the SAC plays an active role in the transition, monitoring, and ongoing support of the Renaissance Charter School. The District will provide some technical assistance and training to ensure that each Council member is prepared to play this critical role in the Renaissance Charter School turnaround process.

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<sup>1</sup> Research for Action (2011).

# Section 1: Membership, Voting, and Bylaws

## Membership

Initially, each school SAC shall be comprised of a total of 7 to 27 members. After the completion of the match process, SAC are permitted to expand beyond the initial 26-member cap. At least 75% of SAC members must be parents of current students. (The SACs already in place at the Year I, II, III Renaissance Charter Schools will have until March 2014 to meet the 75% parent threshold, if they do not yet have that level of parent membership.) For high schools, SAC membership must include at least two students.

## Representation and Guidelines for Key Stakeholder Groups

### **1. Principals, Teachers, and School Staff**

Principals are not permitted to be members of the SAC, but are an important resource for SACs. Principals should attend SAC meetings, at the SAC's request, and help provide information to the SAC about the school's progress against the goals set forth in its charter agreement.

If so determined by vote of the majority of the parent/community SAC members, one current teacher may serve as a member of the SAC during the matching process. After the match, however, anyone who is employed the school, including teacher, must forfeit his or her SAC membership.

Likewise, if the charter school hires or adds to its board a SAC member, that member must forfeit his or her SAC membership.

### **2. Students**

As the direct recipients of school services, students bring important practical experience to the SAC and offer a unique perspective on school operations. SACs in high schools are required to have at least two student member at all times.

### **3. Families and Community**

School Advisory Councils offer parents and communities an opportunity to participate in the school improvement and accountability process.

The following may serve as parent members on SACs:

- Individuals whose children currently attend the school
- The primary caregiver(s) with whom the child resides (legal, custodial, grandparent, foster parent). The term "parent" includes, in addition to a natural parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare).

Community members are identified as individuals who have an interest in the school's welfare. The following may serve as community member representatives on SACs:

- Individuals residing in the school's geographic area (catchment area)
- Individuals owning, operating or working in a business or organization within the school's community (catchment area)
- Alumni of the school

### **Voting**

SAC decisions are made by formal vote. No SAC decisions can take effect without a quorum present during the vote. A quorum is **at least 51%** of the membership.

### **Bylaws**

Bylaws provide the framework within which the Council will operate. Sample bylaws are included in this resource guide.

# Section 2: Roles and Responsibilities

## SAC Roles and Responsibilities

### SAC Officers

Each SAC must have elected officers including a Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary. SACs may have other elected officers (for example, Communications Liaison, Community Outreach Liaison, etc.) as they see fit. Only voting members of a SAC may be elected as officers.

### Duties and Responsibilities of SAC Officers

#### 1. Chair

- Presiding at all meetings
- Signing letters, plans, reports, and handling all external communications as directed by the SAC
- Preparing an agenda for each SAC meeting, providing it to the Secretary, and ensuring that it is posted at least seven (7) days before the meeting
- Notifying SAC members of meetings/events by phone or email at least seven (7) days before the meeting/event
- Submitting two semi-annual reports to the School District
- Attaching to the reports copies of agendas, sign-in sheets, and meeting notes for each SAC meeting, as well as a current list of SAC members, including their names, addresses, and affiliations
- Submitting the SAC's adopted bylaws to the School District
- Participating in city-wide SAC officer meetings
- Ensuring that all SAC members are knowledgeable of and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as members

#### 2. Vice-Chair

- Assuming the duties of the Chair in his/her absence
- Performing other duties as assigned by the Chair or the SAC
- Assisting in providing notice by phone or email to SAC members in advance of meetings/events

### **3. Secretary**

- Maintaining a current roster of SAC members that includes name, address, phone/email, and affiliation
- Keeping the minutes of all meetings; maintaining records of attendance and summary reports
- Coordinating the posting of the notices and agendas of public meetings on the school's website (if available) and in the school building, as well as sharing them with SAC members
- Assisting in providing notice by phone or email to SAC members in advance of meetings/events

### **Duties and Responsibilities of School Advisory Councils**

- Organizing and conducting elections for SAC officers; adopting bylaws
- Creating a schedule of meetings for the year and making it available to all stakeholders
- Holding regular meetings (at least six per year)
- Preparing meeting agendas and sharing them in advance of meetings with stakeholders
- Maintaining active, two-way communication with stakeholders
- Holding at least two community meetings each year to share information with parents, students, and community members about what is going on at the school, and to get feedback from those stakeholders
- Working with community partners, parents, and school staff to disseminate information on the work of the SAC and solicit input from stakeholders
- Completing semi-annual (twice-a-year) reports about the school's progress toward meeting its goals and providing those reports to the School District

## Section 3: Holding Effective Meetings

**Effective meetings are key to the success of any organization.**

Possibly the most important factor in considering the effectiveness of the meeting is the PLANNING. The SAC chairperson should understand the items on the agenda and know effective meeting procedures. The meeting should be announced in advance, publicized, and advertised. Members should know the time, date, location, and agenda of the meeting. The following steps from “Eight Steps to More Effective Meetings,” an article in Leadership Magazine (October 1997, p. 23), will assist leaders who are planning a meeting:

### **1. Define the purpose of the meeting.**

The purpose of a meeting should be clear and acceptable to all participants, and should be to work towards a goal or desired outcomes.

If there is no reason for a meeting, then the meeting should be cancelled.

### **2. Plan the agenda.**

Once the desired outcomes or meeting objectives are determined, write an outline of the items to be handled during the meeting in order to meet the desired outcomes. List them in the order in which they are to be addressed. Determine how much time will be spent on each item, what method will be used for each item (large group discussion, brainstorming, work groups, etc.), and who will be responsible for that portion.

The agenda should have been discussed and decided upon by the chairperson with input from SAC members, either during a separate planning meeting or through memos or e-mail. Future agendas and minutes should be printed right after the meeting and handed out or e-mailed to all the attending members, plus posted on the school's website and in conspicuous areas in the school building. Guest speakers or outside instructors should be notified of their engagement well in advance with written instructions as to time and place of the meeting.

### **3. Consider your time limit.**

Meeting times will vary greatly. Plan your agenda so that everything can be handled within the time allotted.

### **4. Plan the meeting for those who will be in attendance.**

“Consider who will be present at the meeting. Are they familiar with the business at hand? If not, how can you bring them up to speed? How motivated will they be to participate? Who will be leading the activities? Answering these questions will help determine the activities of the meeting.” (Leadership Magazine, October 1997, p. 23)

### **5. Schedule the meeting in an appropriate setting.**

The location of the meeting should be conducive to the purpose of the meeting. An adequate



number of chairs should be placed correctly according to the size of the group and the function of the meeting. Temperature, lighting, and noise should all be taken into consideration.

## **6. Follow your plan.**

Meetings should start on time. Punctuality is the sign of an organized group. The agenda that was prepared before the meeting should be followed. The chairperson should work through the agenda, in order, being careful to adhere to time limits and avoid getting off track. However, the chairperson should be flexible enough to adjust the plan, if necessary.

The chairperson should be able to discern the best type of procedure(s) to be used by the group: Interaction Method (Facilitative Leadership), parliamentary procedure (*the larger the group, the more parliamentary procedure would need to be used*), and/or a combination of both.

- The focus of the meeting should be upon real differences, not technicalities; arguments should be avoided if they are only for the sake of arguing.
- It is the job of the chairperson to draw out shy people and to hear everyone's opinion.
- Debate should be limited to concise statements and not lengthy orations, which have little or nothing to do with the question at hand.
- The chairperson should not dominate the discussions or allow another person in the group to do so.
- The chairperson should get all opinions, both pro and con, out into the open and work towards consensus, because the group as a whole can see farther than one individual.
- The problem-solving process should be used to its fullest capacity.
- Brainstorming, work groups, and debate all add to intelligent decision-making
- Most of all, meetings should be interesting, exciting, and fun.
- The average person has an attention span of 23 minutes or less. Remember to keep the meeting moving. **Review decisions made.** At the end of the meeting, all agreements made, such as tasks assigned, chairs appointed, and committees formed, should be verified.

## **7. Evaluate the meeting and follow-up.**

At the end of the meeting, review the desired outcomes and evaluate how successful the meeting was. What went well and what could be improved? The end of the meeting does not mean that the job is finished. Clean-up is in order, and it should be extremely efficient. The minutes of the meeting need to be reviewed with the secretary. The minutes and any information that was reported in the meeting must get out to the people who need to be informed as soon as possible. Follow-up on the people who volunteered to do jobs must also be done to ensure that they are getting the job done. "Thank you letters" to speakers and presenters and people who contributed refreshments or the like should be sent as soon as possible.

## **Planning SAC Meetings**

### **The Agenda**

An agenda is a list or an outline of topics to be covered in a meeting. A successful SAC chairperson always has a prepared agenda.

#### *Who prepares the agenda?*

The chairperson is responsible for preparing the agenda. He/she may be assisted by other officers of the SAC. The chairperson should decide on the agenda at least two (2) weeks prior to a regular meeting to decide what items should appear on the agenda. The SAC's Bylaws should establish a regular meeting date and require that an agenda be sent to each member of the SAC prior to the scheduled meeting.

The SAC meeting agenda should be posted six (6) days prior in a publicly accessible area in the school's administrative building and on the school's website. The agenda should list all items that the SAC intends to consider at the meeting. The purpose of posting the agenda is to inform the public of the matters the SAC intends to consider so that the school community can decide whether to provide input at the meeting on a specific agenda item.

#### *Why is an agenda needed?*

An agenda serves as a guide for the chairperson and the SAC. The chairperson can arrange the meeting to ensure that scheduled items are covered and not overcrowded during the meeting. It also gives SAC members a chance to organize their thoughts and plan for discussions.

The chairperson should permit SAC members enough time to express their ideas and opinions before moving on to the next item of business.

#### *How is an agenda prepared?*

- Check the minutes of the last meeting. Note any unfinished business.
- Include committees or members who are to make reports. Make sure that the individuals who are responsible for making the reports attend the meeting.
- The SAC secretary should go over all correspondence that has been received since the last meeting.
- Include time for new business and general discussion at the end.

## **Conducting Effective Meetings**

Several strategies should be considered for conducting/facilitating SAC meetings:

- Facilitative Leadership
- Interaction Method
- Parliamentary Procedure

Facilitative Leadership and Interactive Method promote group facilitation, dialogue, problem-

solving, and consensus building. Parliamentary Procedure focuses on discussion of an issue and seeks to move towards action on these agenda items. SACs should be sure to identify the context and desired outcomes for the meeting and select the appropriate strategy to be used.

## **Parliamentary Procedure**

### *How is a motion made?*

A motion is a recommendation that the group takes on a specific action. The following steps should be taken to make a motion:

1. Recognition – Receive permission to speak by saying “Mr./Madam Chairperson.”
2. Make the motion – For example: “I move that we survey all parents in the school to determine how many think we should have students wear school uniforms.”
3. Second – Another member must agree that the motion is worth discussing by saying, “I second the motion.”
4. State the motion – The chairperson restates the motion clearly for the whole group. For example: “A motion has been made and seconded that parents should be surveyed on the subject of students being required to wear school uniforms.”
5. Discussion – The group discusses the motion; the person who made the motion speaks first.
6. Voting – The group votes on the motion by written ballot, show of hands, voice, etc.

### **What are the guidelines for voting?**

1. A quorum, as defined in the Bylaws, determines the number of members required to be present for action to be taken.
2. All members including the chairperson are able to vote.
3. In the case of a tie, the chairperson will cast a second vote to break the tie, unless the SAC makes a prior agreement on a different decision making process.

### **How are SAC meetings run and managed?**

1. Begin and end on time.
2. Use written agendas with time schedules.
3. Involve all members of the group.
4. Use meetings for making decisions. Committee work should be done at a different time.
5. Delegate detailed work to sub-committees or work sessions scheduled for the committees.

6. Use motions to focus the group's attention on important issues.
7. Prioritize business items and limit discussion to important issues.
8. Determine interesting ways to have meetings (utilizing media, dividing into small groups for discussion, recording decisions on chart paper for all to see).
9. Restate outcomes of each agenda item in terms of who is expected to complete what task and by what date.
10. Collect feedback about the meeting's effectiveness. Use this information to improve the next meeting.

### **How to evaluate a SAC's effectiveness?**

Conduct an end-of-the-year evaluation using the Effective SAC Assessment. (*See Section 4.*) The results of the assessment should be kept on file with the minutes of the meeting. This assessment process should be used as a means to develop an effective team, to determine the strengths and growth areas of the current SAC, and to identify actions, steps, and resources for improvement.

### **Other Issues Related to SAC Meetings**

*How can School Advisory Councils reach and involve parents, including underrepresented groups?*

- Have specific groups of parents meet at different times and send a representative to the larger meeting. This lets parents' voices be heard without having to accommodate everyone at the same meeting.
- Have teachers encourage parents to attend SAC meetings. This strengthens relationships between teachers and parents, and also makes parents feel like someone specific is looking forward to seeing them at meetings.
- Encourage parents to participate in leadership training sessions and encourage them to recruit new parents to become involved.
- Mail notices directly to parents, and implement targeted initiatives to reach parents who are members of underrepresented groups.
- Communicate the activities of the SAC (minutes of past meetings and scheduled times of future meetings) in a monthly newsletter in relevant languages.
- Coordinate SAC meeting nights with other meetings that tap into a community interest, such as a Parent University class.
- Request that the parent organization help in presenting information about each of the candidates running for the SAC for all interested parties. Try to meet with parents of incoming students new to the school, to encourage them to be involved in next year's SAC.

- Have parent facilitators encourage parents in underrepresented groups to become involved in the SAC.
- Share the results of the meetings and planning process to let parents and community know that their voices are being heard and taken seriously. Parents are more likely to come to meetings if they know that what parents say has an impact.
- Have students make invitations for their parents during school or during the afterschool program.
- Avoid using educational jargon in all messages sent out to parents. Also allow time for meaningful discussions that are easy to understand.
- Assume the BEST INTENTIONS!!!

***How can School Advisory Councils hold discussions and make decisions so that everyone feels his/her voice has been heard?***

- Put topics for discussion on the agenda for two or more consecutive meetings so that members have time to talk to others before decisions are made. Make major decisions with the use of surveys to identify priorities. Make further decisions by plotting the priorities and using a process to apply points according to specific criteria.
- The SAC involves much dialogue and collaboration. In situations where there are large SACs or during the School Community meetings, break up into smaller groups so “voices are heard” in a less threatening arena. Feedback is then shared with the larger group.
- Survey parents and ask them to share 3 things they like about the school and 3 things they think could use improvement. Go over school-wide survey results to study the concerns of all parents and try to incorporate that into our planning process and plans.
- Ask each person on the Council to take a minute to comment on the agenda items as they are discussed.
- Require that all data be presented in a written format and be sure that members are asked for input and questions before issues come to a vote.
- In addition to posting meeting times in advance and sending notices home to parents, present SAC reports at staff/faculty meetings.
- Follow a decision-making strategy during meetings and always make sure there is discussion before a vote.
- Check in with each SAC member for feedback. When there are contentious issues or disagreements, take the time to make sure each member fully understands all of the issues at hand.

***How can School Advisory Councils get input from and “get the word out” to your larger school community?***

- Have SAC members get input from other organizations/committees (Parent Organizations, Teacher Committee, and community partners) and report back to the organizations/committees about SAC news, decisions, and events.
- Send monthly updates to the school community. Have many community meetings and activities as well as surveys for parents and staff.
- Give the students special stickers on the days of special meetings or events.
- Get input by talking with parents and teachers to make sure their concerns are on the SAC meeting agendas.
- Publish all meeting dates in the school calendar for parents, business partners, and other members of the community.
- Use parent ambassadors and other classroom parents to spread the word to other parents and community members.
- Publish meeting dates on the web as well as in weekly bulletins.
- Post meeting notices on the administration building’s front door.
- Write articles about school activities for submission to neighborhood newspapers.
- Ask teachers to keep a log during parent/family/teacher conferences of major school issues that parents raise during those meetings to bring to the SAC as family input.
- Get e-mail addresses for members of the school community and develop an e-mail list-serve for the SAC.
- Combine SAC activities with Literacy, Curriculum, Science Fair Nights, and Back to School Nights.

## Case Studies

### 1. Dealing with a Difficult Person on the Council

You are the chairperson of your council, which has been together for about a year now. There is an issue that comes up about the school so you decide to mention this at the next meeting of the charter school board of director. One very active member of your group also attends the meeting. You leave the room to take a phone call and this member decides to speak on the council's behalf without your knowledge. However, she states her own opinions based on a personal circumstance and not that of the council's. After, the meeting you approach the member to let her know that you did not feel that was appropriate. Later that evening, the member emails everyone on the council to let them know that you were not professional or competent. This is not the first time that the council member was rude to you and to the other officers. You have tried to hide this from your membership but now it was getting out of hand. After all, this is a volunteer position. What do you do next?

#### Recommended Actions

- Incorporate a code of conduct for your council developed by all members that includes a respect all members and define what that means to your council.
- Develop Ground Rules for how you will operate as SAC members (i.e. We will address conflict on a one-on-one basis, we will respect each other's point of view etc.)
- Meet with all members prior to any formal meeting to discuss the purpose and message you want to give as a unified front.
- Talk to the person one-on-one to resolve conflict without drawing in the other members.
- Know that sometimes personalities don't click. Here are some tips to deal with difficult people. Remember also that from the other person's perspective you may be the difficult person!

### 2. The Bake Sale

The school is having a bake sale fundraiser and the home and school association has asked the SAC to co-sponsor the event. Several parents are on both organizations and they see that the partnership would be effective. One parent passes around the sign-up sheet because the SAC has been asked to sign-up to bake or buy goods to donate. They also pass around the sign-in sheet for manning the table. One SAC member protests because they feel that the role of the SAC does not include bake sales. They feel like the SAC should not participate at all. Who's right in this scenario? What would you suggest the SAC do in this situation?

#### Recommended Actions

- Active parents are typically active in many ways at the school. Remember what hat you're wearing when you're on the SAC.
- Many schools don't have an active Home and School Association and it is natural to want to combine the two organizations. However, the primary goal as an SAC member is to monitor the

progress of the Turnaround Team and to collaborate by giving suggestions and being a liaison between the school and community.

- If your school does not have a Home and School Association recommend this as an action item for the Turnaround Team. The SAC is not responsible to set this up.
- Give any new request the “smell” test. Does it fit into our primary goal? If not, evaluate whether or not it should be done by the council or by the Home and School.
- Here are some “Don’ts” and “Dos” as a guide.

DON’T: Organize and plan events for the school.

DON’T: Take on other responsibilities such as Safety Council or Mentoring Groups etc. other than monitoring the Turnaround Team

DO: Collaborate with the Home and School Association by sharing information. Inviting them to your meetings and where possible attending theirs.

DO: Bake the cookies as a parent.

DO: Attend events when possible.

DO: Set up a table for SAC recruitment

DO: Gather feedback regarding the school from parents who attend.

DO: Track the number of events that the Turnaround Team does.



# Section 4: Effective Decision-Making

## Research Based Decision-Making Guidelines

School Advisory Council members should consider the following guidelines for decision-making:

- Focus decisions based upon the school’s vision, especially what is best for ALL students.
- Seek involvement by the wider community rather than limiting discussions to the SAC. School community meetings are designed to involve the larger community in discussing educational priorities.
- Take risks and learn from mistakes. Seek solutions outside of tradition.
- Create a critical study process to support decisions with data and research. Become a “learning community.” Network, learn from each other, seek information, allow for reflection, and do not feel decisions must be made to show progress. What is most important is a climate where everyone is allowed to learn.
- Create “issue task forces” to study and/or make recommendations.
- Guard against “group think” (a human phenomenon whereby members of a group go along with a group decision because of their desire to “please one another” or to be “team players.” This hampers a group’s ability to choose alternative courses of action.)

## Ways of Reaching a Decision

### 1. Majority Vote

In case of a majority vote, support from a simple majority of those eligible to vote is sufficient to turn a proposal into a decision. While this model may be less time-consuming than others and provide a fast and reliable way of gauging members’ support for various initiatives, it may also fail to adequately address all the nuances inherent in resolving complex problems and should thus be used sparingly.

### 2. Compromise

Compromise can produce a decision that actually does not represent any member’s view. A collection of viewpoints are put together in a manner where most preferences are included in the decision, but where some may have to give up a part of their ideas if others will also give up a part of theirs.

### 3. Consensus

Consensus decisions are made “for the good of the whole” and should be based upon the school’s vision/mission. Aiming for consensus teaches the group to explore and pool the knowledge and experience of all its members. People learn to modify viewpoints based on logic, reasoning, and new information. The group reaches a conclusion, which has blended the best ideas into a decision that

everyone in the group supports.

Each one of these methods will not work in every situation. In many cases, the nature of the issue being worked on and the dynamics of the group will determine the decision-making method that ends up being used. Awareness of the basic ways by which decisions can be made will help the group develop a mixed-method strategy that works best for it.

### **Planning for Decision-Making**

In order to ensure that stakeholders understand how they will participate, the SAC chairperson should:

1. Clarify the issue so that people will know what they are discussing and/or deciding upon.
2. Recommend a method for making the decision. If the goal is decision by consensus, there should be a “fallback” decision-making option defined by the Bylaws.

Not all decisions are best made by consensus. Consideration must include the level of involvement desired by participants.

A disagreement regarding what decision-making option to use should be decided in favor of the option requiring greater involvement.

**Consensus Defined:** A consensus decision is an agreement that each member can live with and actively support. A group “arrives” at consensus through a series of small agreements. It is reached when each member can honestly say:

- a. “I believe that you understand my point of view and that I understand yours.”
- b. “Whether or not I prefer this decision, I can support it because it was reached fairly and openly and it is probably the best solution for us at this time.”

### **Options for Moving a Group toward Consensus**

- Polling can be used to get a sense of how far along the group is toward reaching consensus.
- Consensus can sometimes be reached by asking both sides: “What would it take or what conditions might you add/change to make it okay for us to reach consensus?” Or the facilitator could ask the minority: “Do you feel you understand what the majority is saying?” (Have the person[s] paraphrase what they think the majority is saying. Ask the majority to validate what was said.) If the minority fully understands the majority point of view, the facilitator should then ask the majority the same question and paraphrase the minority point of view.
- If that is satisfactory, the facilitator then could say to the minority: “It appears that the various points of view are clearly understood by both sides. I know you may not prefer this decision, but could you support the decision because we have all had a fair and open discussion on the issue? Could we agree that it is probably the best solution for us at this time?” If the answer is no, go back to the strategy of asking: “Then what would it take...?” etc. (The majority could also be asked to suggest ways to help the minority “win.”)
- They could say: “What if we...? Could you live with that?” If the two conditions of consensus have

been achieved, ask once again if all sides can “live” with the decision. Emphasize that the discussion has been open and honest and that each side understands the other’s point of view.

- When a decision appears to have at least 80% support, no one person or small group of persons should block the decision without coming up with an alternative or pointing the group in another direction. For example, the chairperson might say: “We have at least 80% of members supporting this decision. Can those who cannot support this decision suggest other alternatives or at least point the group in another direction?” Once a decision is made, everyone must be committed to its implementation. One hundred percent support is expected. No one can undermine or sabotage the decision.
- When consensus cannot be reached, it may be appropriate for the facilitator to determine which persons are directly involved in the implementation or impacted by the decision. The facilitator might say: “This issue doesn’t appear to involve you in its implementation nor does it appear to impact you directly. Do you agree with that?” If the person agrees, then the objection is no longer a roadblock to reaching consensus. The facilitator need only obtain consensus from those impacted.
- A key to consensus is to “help the other side win.” When consensus appears to have been reached, it is important for the facilitator to declare: “It appears we have reached consensus. For the last time, is there anyone who cannot live with the decision?” (Record the decision in the minutes.)

## Section 5: SAC Self-Assessment

The Effective SAC Assessment provides a tool for members to conduct an honest and open evaluation of the strengths, challenges, and areas of opportunities for the SAC, and to determine next action steps, imperatives, and resources for improvement.

Once the Council members are identified, schools may find it helpful to review the Self-Assessment Survey with SAC members. Reviewing the Survey with SAC members early in the year will:

- Facilitate understanding of their responsibilities
- Address questions early in the implementation process

The purpose of doing a SAC Self-Assessment Survey is to obtain data on the quality of the SAC implementation in order to improve the effectiveness of the Council. The Survey should be administered annually at the end of the school year. The Self-Assessment Survey can be used to:

- Provide data
- Identify major patterns among the data
- Reach conclusions on the data
- Share and discuss the results for the purpose of Council effectiveness and improvement

### **Self-Assessment: Measurements for Success**

Directions: Please complete this assessment with part or all of your current School Advisory Council.

1. SAC members should complete the assessment individually and bring it to the SAC meeting.
2. SAC members should read through the practices and circle the numeric rating they think represents how the SAC operates.
3. At the beginning of the meeting, take a few minutes for team members to log their ratings for each criterion on posted chart paper.
4. Take time to discuss items where team members have significantly different ratings.
5. Build a general agreement among the team about what overall score best reflects the current practice of the SAC for each item and/or category.

Using the following scale, indicate how typical each statement is of your School Advisory Council:

- NS = Not Sure
- 1 = Never occurs
- 2 = Sometimes occurs
- 3 = Occurs a majority of the time
- 4 = Always occurs in the SAC

1. Recruit and elect the SAC:					
The members of our school community are aware of the role of the School Advisory Council.	NS	1	2	3	4
At our school, everyone is encouraged to consider running for a position on the School Advisory Council.	NS	1	2	3	4
The principal ensures that the election of teachers, paraprofessional staff, parents, and community is conducted in accordance with school guidelines and democratic principles.	NS	1	2	3	4
The principal ensures that there is a clear and fair process for the selection of students to the SAC.	NS	1	2	3	4

2. Establish Council roles and procedures:					
The SAC works hard to arrange meetings at a time that allows for maximum participation by all members.	NS	1	2	3	4
The officers help our SAC follow the guidelines and outlined in the Bylaws.	NS	1	2	3	4
Roles and responsibilities for operating our SAC are clearly understood and supported by all members.	NS	1	2	3	4
3. Develop team guidelines:					
The SAC has a set of guidelines or “ground rules” that clarify how we will work together.	NS	1	2	3	4
Our guidelines reflect an awareness of and respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity of all members.	NS	1	2	3	4
We spend some time at the end of the meeting to share perceptions of how well we worked together to accomplish our goals and identify a few areas we can improve at the next meeting.	NS	1	2	3	4
4. Establish decision guidelines:					
Our SAC Bylaws clearly state how we use consensus or voting as our primary decision-making option.	NS	1	2	3	4
We use student performance data and educational research to make informed decisions.	NS	1	2	3	4

We do a good job of making sure that a variety of ideas and issues are considered and addressed before we reach major decisions.	NS	1	2	3	4
We leave each meeting with a clear understanding of and commitment to our key decisions and next steps.	NS	1	2	3	4
<b>5. Promote community engagement:</b>					
Agendas are developed and circulated through school information systems and on the school website six days before each SAC meeting.	NS	1	2	3	4
Meeting minutes are recorded and distributed to all SAC members and posted in a publicly accessible area in the school's administrative office and on the school website.	NS	1	2	3	4
SAC members gather feedback to ensure that the SAC fairly represents the broader school community's views about how to address student needs in the Action Plan.	NS	1	2	3	4
<b>6. Semi-Annual Reports:</b>					
We understand the role and function of semi-annual reports	NS	1	2	3	4
We know how to brainstorm response to report questions and request information from the school if needed to complete the reports.	NS	1	2	3	4
We have completed the reports in full and on time	NS	1	2	3	4
<b>7. Monitor implementation:</b>					
All SAC members are willing to raise constructive questions or concerns regarding whether the school is successfully implementing its charter	NS	1	2	3	4

### **SAC Self-Assessment Summary**

Once you have finished the self-assessment as a Council, complete the following worksheet for all seven categories to help determine next steps in building the effectiveness of your School Advisory Council.

## SAC Self-Assessment Summary Template

Category	Score and Comments	Possible Next Steps
<b>Recruit and Elect SAC Members</b>		
<b>Establish Council Roles and Procedures</b>		
<b>Develop Team Guidelines</b>		
<b>Establish Decision Guidelines</b>		
<b>Promote Community Engagement</b>		
<b>Complete Semi-Annual Reports</b>		
<b>Monitor Implementation</b>		

## **Appendices: Sample MOU, Bylaws, and Forms**

- **Sample Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between School Advisory Council (SAC) and Charter School**
- **Sample SAC bylaws**
- **Sample meeting sign-in sheet**
- **Sample SAC recruitment flyer**
- **Sample SAC membership nomination/application form**



# High Achieving School

## School Advisory Council Memorandum of Understanding

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### **PREAMBLE**

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (“MOU”) is made and entered into on [month] [day], [year] by and between Turnaround Schools (“Charter School”) and High Achieving School Advisory Council (“SAC”) (collectively, the “Parties”).

WHEREAS, as part of the Renaissance Schools Initiative, the School Reform Commission (“SRC”) of the School District of Philadelphia (“School District”) granted a charter (“Charter”) to the Charter School on [month] [day], [year] to operate a charter school at High Achieving High School (“School”).

WHEREAS, as part of the Renaissance Schools Initiative, the Charter School has entered into partnership with the SAC to enable the SAC to have access to school and grade level data and to monitor the Charter School’s implementation of its Charter requirements, including progress towards its performance targets.

WHEREAS, the Charter School and the SAC desire to set forth the terms and conditions of their partnership as set forth in this MOU.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual covenants and agreements set forth in this MOU, and for good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which are hereby acknowledged, the Parties hereto, intending to be legally bound, agree as follows:

### **A. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SAC**

#### 1. Role

- a. The SAC shall serve in an advisory capacity only in providing input and feedback to the Charter School and the School District. The SAC shall have the following three main functions:
  - i. Monitor performance of Charter School: the SAC shall monitor the Charter School’s ongoing implementation of the program outlined in its Charter and progress toward its performance targets.
  - ii. Solicit feedback from broader School community: the SAC shall solicit feedback from the broader school community to inform the SAC’s ongoing review of the Charter School’s implementation of the Charter.
  - iii. Report to the School District: semi-annually throughout the term of the Charter, the SAC shall report to the School District on the Charter School’s implementation of the Charter and progress towards its performance targets.

#### 2. Responsibilities

- a. The SAC shall draft and adopt by-laws for SAC governance, which shall include the following School District School Advisory Council requirements:

- i. A minimum of 7 voting members and a maximum of 27 voting members until the Turnaround Team for the School is selected, and no maximum number of members after the Turnaround Team is selected.
  - ii. At least 75% of voting members of the SAC shall be parents (or guardians) of children attending the School.
  - iii. Each voting member shall have one vote.
  - iv. A majority of all voting members of the SAC shall constitute a quorum. The SAC may only take action if a quorum is present, and the SAC only may vote at full SAC meetings.
  - v. Nominations and elections will be held for officers. Officers will hold 2-year staggered terms. Special elections shall be held to fill open seats.
  - vi. Charter School staff and administrators, including the Principal, may not serve on the SAC as voting members or non-voting members.
  - vii. The SAC may include members of the School community or representatives of community organizations. Representatives of community organizations on the SAC may only be those individuals who work for community organizations, not under contract with the Charter School, and which directly serve or work with families of the School.
  - viii. There may be no more than two individuals representing the same program, organization, community group, church, or family.
- b. The SAC shall schedule and host full SAC meetings at least quarterly beginning in [month] [year]. Full SAC meetings shall be open to the school community and the public.
  - c. The SAC shall schedule officer and/or committee meetings to support planning and structure of SAC meetings and events, as necessary.
  - d. The SAC shall participate in citywide School Advisory Council Officer meetings.
  - e. The SAC shall solicit feedback and input from the School community through participation in SAC meetings, in SAC-hosted or School-hosted events and activities, and in both formal and informal surveys.
  - f. The SAC shall participate in periodic monitoring of the Charter School's progress on meeting performance targets set forth in the Charter.
    - i. The SAC shall perform an ongoing review and familiarization of the stated goals and language in the Charter.
    - ii. The SAC shall meet quarterly with the Charter School to monitor and track performance outcomes throughout the year.
    - iii. The SAC shall submit semi-annual written reports to the School District's Office of Charter Schools on January 31st for the first semester and on July 30th for the second

semester.

- iv. The SAC shall provide a copy of its semi-annual report to the Charter School for review and response at least ten (10) days prior to the SAC submitting the report to the School District.
- g. At the end of the fourth-year of the Charter, the SAC may approve a resolution by a majority vote stating that it is not satisfied with the performance of the Charter School or wants the School to return to School District management at the end of the initial five-year term. The resolution would articulate the reasons for such dissatisfaction or readiness to return to the School District. Such a resolution shall be submitted to the Superintendent of the School District.

## **B. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL**

### 1. Role

- a. The Charter School will work in collaboration with the SAC to successfully monitor the implementation of the Charter by:
  - i. Soliciting input: the Charter School will utilize SAC feedback to inform decisions related to the implementation of the Charter.
  - ii. Information sharing: the Charter School will promote transparency with the SAC by providing school updates prior to each SAC meeting. The Charter School will provide access to school and grade-level data to the SAC to inform the SAC's semi-annual review of the implementation of the Charter.
  - iii. Responding to feedback: the Charter Schools should respond to SAC semi-annual reports, as well as requests for information by the SAC.
  - iv. Engaging parents and broader School community: the Charter School shall work in collaboration with the SAC to solicit feedback, resources, and support in the transformation of the School

### 2. Responsibilities

- a. The Charter School shall support the existence of the SAC during the term of the Charter. The Charter School shall have no obligation to financially support the SAC.
- b. A representative of the Charter School shall attend SAC meetings at the SAC's request.
  - i. The Charter School shall ensure that the School principal (or his/her designee) is available to attend SAC meetings, as requested, for updates, to solicit feedback, and for reporting to the SAC.
- c. The Charter School shall provide school updates to the SAC at full SAC meetings on any and all of the following:
  - i. Quarterly expectations around academic gains, benchmarks, assessments, and student growth and initiatives that support academic gains.

- ii. School climate and culture.
  - iii. Student and family activities.
  - iv. Community partnerships and engagement efforts.
  - v. School facility.
- d. The Charter School shall provide access to school and grade-level data to inform the SAC’s semi-annual review of the implementation of the Charter, including benchmark results, PSSA and PVAAS results, student attendance and retention, suspensions and serious incidents, teacher attendance and retention, special education and ELL demographics and performance.
  - e. The Charter School shall meet quarterly with officers of the SAC to formally review and track progress of implementation of the Charter.
    - i. The Charter School shall provide its written response the SAC’s semi-annul report to the SAC within seven (7) calendar days of receipt of the report.
  - f. The Charter School shall provide reasonable support to the SAC through the distribution of outreach materials and communications to parents.
  - g. The Charter School shall provide meeting space to the SAC for SAC meetings during agreed upon times that accommodate the schedules of the SAC (i.e. mornings, afternoons, evenings, and/or weekends).

### **3. TERMS OF AGREEMENT**

The term of this MOU shall be for a period of five years from **[month day, year1] through [month day, year5]**, unless the Charter School’s Charter is revoked or non-renewed on an earlier date or if the School District determines that the MOU should be terminated pursuant to the Renaissance Schools Initiative.

### **4. NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Each Party agrees that, in the performance of the MOU, activities contemplated hereunder shall be carried out without discrimination toward students, employees, parents, or other persons regardless of their race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, or any other manner prohibited by law.

### **5. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- a. The Charter School and the SAC acknowledge and agree that in connection with the Parties’ roles and responsibilities under this MOU and in connection with the School, both Parties will receive certain information from each other and from the School District (“Information”). The Charter School and the SAC covenant and agree to receive, use, keep, hold and maintain the Information in complete confidence for their own use solely as authorized by this MOU.
- b. “Information” means (i) School and grade-level data, School updates, and other information connected to the Charter School; (ii) reports and other documents, such as agendas and meeting notes, prepared by the SAC; and (iii) certain School District information, including

but not limited, information related to Renaissance Schools and other confidential information of the School District, which the School District, at its option, may provide to assist the Charter School and the SAC in evaluating data and in understanding the Renaissance Schools Initiative.

- c. Without the prior written consent of the School District, the Charter School and the SAC, a Party shall not disclose to any other person, company, entity or party any or all of the Information, nor permit any such other person, company, entity or party to have access to the Information or any part thereof, except for (i) School District personnel participating in the Renaissance Schools Initiative, and (ii) other Persons who have also executed and delivered a confidentiality agreement with the School District in connection with the School. The aforesaid obligations assumed by the Charter School and the members of the SAC under this MOU, however, shall not apply to the Information or any portion thereof which is presently in the public domain or otherwise is generally known, other than as a result of an act or omission of the Charter School or the SAC.
- d. The Parties acknowledge and agree that any disclosure in violation of this MOU would harm the Parties and the School District irreparably. The Charter School and the SAC further agree, therefore, that in the event the Charter School or the SAC breaches or threatens to breach any term, covenant or condition set forth in this MOU, the School District, the Charter School or the SAC shall have the right, without limiting any other remedies available at law or in equity, to immediate preliminary or permanent, or both, injunction or other equitable relief, in order to prevent the continuation of such harm.

### **MODIFICATION OF AGREEMENT**

This MOU shall comprise of the ENTIRE AGREEMENT between the Parties and neither Party shall rely upon any other oral communication or document. This MOU shall be binding upon the Parties hereto and their respective successors and assigns. This MOU may be modified and amended only by mutual agreement of the Parties in writing, and any such modification or amendments shall be attached and become a part of this MOU as if set forth herein.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Charter School and the SAC have executed this MOU as of the day and year first above written.

SIGNED BY:

\_\_\_\_\_, Chairperson, DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name*

\_\_\_\_\_, Principal, DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name*

Signatures of other SAC members:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name Stakeholder Group*

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name Stakeholder Group*

# High Achieving School School Advisory Council Bylaws

## **PREAMBLE**

The High Achieving School's School Advisory Council was created to support school improvement and the academic achievement of students through increased community involvement in the school.

## **ARTICLE I: NAME OF COUNCIL**

The name of this Council is the High Achieving School Advisory Council, hereinafter referred to as the SAC.

## **ARTICLE II: OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the SAC shall be consistent with policies of the School District, and be aligned with the school's mission and vision.

Section 1: To assist in the planning and transition of Renaissance Schools.

Section 2: Participating in periodic monitoring of Renaissance School progress, including semi-annual reports on school progress compared to performance targets.

Section 3: Meeting periodically with turnaround teams to monitor and track outcomes throughout the year and reporting annually to the Superintendent.

Section 4: To commit to volunteering for up to 10 hours a month during the Renaissance School matching and transition process

## **ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTION**

Section 1. Composition of the School Advisory Council

- High Achieving SAC shall consist of up to 27 members before the match, but shall have no membership size limit after the match. The SAC shall include at least 75% parents, and the remaining members shall be community members and students, where appropriate.
- Membership will be determined through an application process; applicants for SAC membership will be approved by SAC members if they meet the basic membership requirements.
- All new members must review and sign the By-Laws before being confirmed for membership.

- The principal may not be a member of the SAC, but may attend meetings at the request of the SAC.
- The parent representatives must be primary caregiver(s) (legal, custodial, grandparent, foster parent) of students at the school.
- Community representatives must live and/or work in the school community or have an interest in the success of the students and school (such as alumni).

## Section 2. Election and Terms of Officers

- Leadership shall consist of, at a minimum, Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary.
- Additional leadership positions may be created, when deemed necessary, with an affirmative vote by the SAC.
- Leadership shall be elected each year to fill vacancies.
- Elections for Chair and Vice-Chair shall not occur in the same academic year.
- The Chair must serve on the SAC as a member for a minimum of a year before being confirmed.
- Leadership terms are for two years, except that at the end of the first year of the SAC, one-half of officer positions should be open for re-election. This will allow terms of service to be staggered while also permitting continuity of leadership.
- At its initial election, the SAC will determine by majority vote what officer positions will be up for election after the first year.

## Section 3. Termination of Membership

- The SAC, by affirmative vote of two-thirds of all the members of the SAC, may expel a member who is absent from three consecutive meetings without good cause, or fails to uphold the objectives of the SAC and the terms of the MOU between the charter school and SAC

## **ARTICLE IV: DUTIES OF MEMBERS**

The duties of members shall be to:

1. Attend all SAC meetings or inform the secretary of the expected absences.
2. Be responsive to school community members on matters for which the SAC has responsibility.

## **ARTICLE V: MEETINGS**

Section I. Regular Meetings:



- Regular meetings of the SAC will be held at least once every other month, with the day and time determined by the members of the SAC at its first meeting of the year.
- Regular meetings shall be open to the public.
- A quorum is required before any new business can be acted upon

#### Section 2. Order of Meetings:

- The SAC decision-making process shall be conducted with the intention of reaching consensus. In the event the SAC reaches an impasse that prohibits business from being conducted, the SAC will take a vote with a 50% + 1 majority of those present required for the decision to be approved. In the event of a tie vote, the chairperson casts a second vote to break the tie.

#### Section 3. Special Meetings:

- At the discretion of the officers, a special meeting may be called. A quorum is required before any new business can be acted upon

#### Section 4. Voting:

- Every member shall have the right at every SAC members meeting to one (1) vote.
- A member may vote only in person, however, a vote by e-mail shall be acceptable unless explicitly disallowed by the Chairperson. No proxy shall be valid.

#### Section 5. Quorum:

- No business can be acted upon in any meeting without a quorum present. A quorum shall consist of 50% plus one (1) of the membership.

#### Section 6. Confidentiality:

- The Council will adhere to rules of confidentiality when applicable.

#### Section 7. Agenda

- The agenda shall be set prior to the beginning of the meeting
- Any SAC member or member of the general public may request that an item be added to the agenda by contacting Chair twenty-four (24) hours prior to the meeting.
- At the discretion of the officers, the agenda may be revised to include new business, otherwise, any new business shall be conducted after all regular business has been conducted.
- Any SAC member or member of the public may move to introduce new business after all regular business has been conducted.

## **ARTICLE VI: COMMITTEES**

At such time as deemed necessary by a vote of the SAC, committees shall be formed to focus on specific issues, which require additional attention. Each committee shall select a chairperson. A committee shall be responsible to report their findings and activities to the entire SAC membership. No committee shall act without the approval of the SAC.

## **ARTICLE VII: AMENDMENTS**

These bylaws may be amended by the SAC. A Council should present and discuss the proposed amendments at one previous regular meeting for which the necessary notice of meeting and agenda were posted. Passage of amendments to the bylaws requires an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the members.

These bylaws have been reviewed and are consistent with the requirements of Act 51.

These bylaws have been agreed upon by the SAC on [month day, year].