

# School Councils Back On State Radar



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State legislators brought local school councils back into the picture this year with the charter systems bill and two other pieces of legislation that seem to be an attempt to produce greater parental involvement at the local level.

If school councils seemed to have fallen off the state's radar screen, that changed this legislative session. They were mentioned extensively in the discussions about charter systems. They were included in two other bills. Based on questions we are receiving, there is some confusion about what changed and what it means.

SB 72 requires that parents be the majority members on the school council. Business persons selected to serve after July 1, 2007, must be parents. If the council is still seven members, it would have four parents, two teachers, and the principal. The bylaws may still expand the membership to others including business members who are not parents, but the parent majority must be maintained. This bill also requires that a parent be the chair of the council.

Another section of this bill allows local boards to hire school administrative managers in lieu of or in addition to assistant principals. If the board decides to do so, "it shall receive and give all due consideration to recommendations by the school council as to whether or not to utilize such position and as to selection of the manager." The bill does not elaborate on that process. Again, this applies only if the board is utilizing the

administrative manager option. It does not apply to selecting an assistant principal.

SB 123 also includes a requirement to provide the school council information if the local board decides to exceed the state board's maximum class size in grades 9-12 math, science, social studies, or language arts classes. If the local board sets a higher class size in those classes, it must annually report the established class sizes to the school councils and the state board.

Since school councils were established, district leaders and school council members have struggled to define their role in practical terms. Specifying responsibilities of a school council seemed to some to be synonymous with granting them some kind of "power" even though they are advisory. Others simply struggled with how to plug them into the existing leadership hierarchy in a useful way.

Legal compliance with the existing law and these changes is the easy part. The harder part is meeting the spirit of the law by establishing a working relationship between the school councils and other leadership entities. It is important that each side put out the welcome mat, so to speak, particularly with the changes in the school council membership and chairmanship. Respect and an understanding of each other's role are vital to working together.

The chair and the principal must establish a communication framework outside of the school council meetings. The principal's school council duties as specified in O.C.G.A. 20-2-86(r) did not change, so the two will need to work together. Members of the General Assembly have made it clear that they believe parents should be actively involved in leadership roles in the schools and districts. School councils are a resource that can be developed to do so. It will be much more effective if this is a choice made at the district level rather than a mandate from the state. One way or another, though, the role of parents is clearly expanding. **GSBA**

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