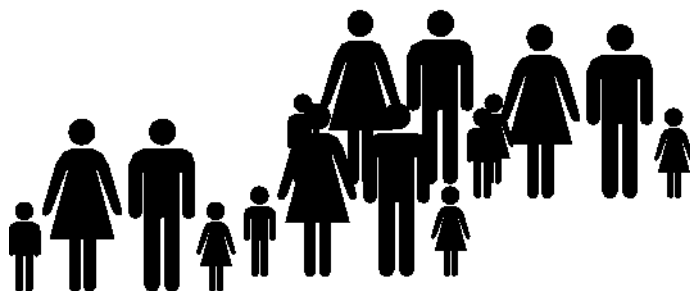


Southern Echo, Inc.

A Manual on

**How to Implement
P-16 Community Engagement
Councils**

**Answering Questions that should be
Frequently Asked**

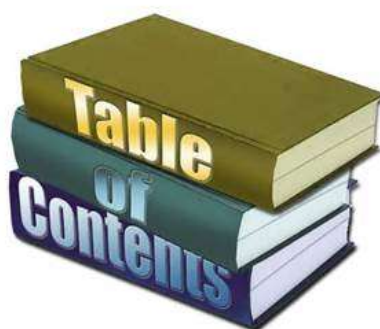


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History of Establishing

Community-based Pre-kindergarten Through Higher Education (P-16) Councils



Southern Echo, Inc. has incorporated several important updates to this revised P-16 Council “How to Implement P-16 Community Engagement Councils” for 2017. These revisions were required after the Mississippi Department of Education changed the Accountability Standard from #18 to #12 for P-16 Council requirement. Also, this revised manual includes elements of the Every Student Succeeds Act-ESSA (2015) around helping to create a positive school climate through the P-16 Council model.

Southern Echo, Inc has been an active participant with the creation, development and implementation of P-16 Community Engagement Councils with the Mississippi Department of Education since the approval of the Children First Act of 2009. Southern Echo, Inc. and William Carey College were certified as the only two (2) P-16 training providers by the Mississippi Department of Education in 2011. Southern Echo, Inc. has been active across the state of Mississippi helping school districts, schools, and communities to effectively establish P-16 Community Engagement Councils since 2011-Present. Southern Echo, Inc. along with members of the *Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable actually wrote the P-16 Guidelines that MDE adopted and used.

Southern Echo, Inc. is an expert in helping to train individuals, organizations, and communities to create organized systems to encourage community involvement, parental communication, and business partnerships in school district decision-making. Southern Echo uses an intergenerational model of community organizing to accomplish the organizational mission

*Members of the Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable (2017): Action Communication and Education Reform, Activist With A Purpose, Citizens for a Better Greenville, Citizens for Educational Awareness, Fannie Lou Hamer Center for Change, Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Rural Families United for Empowerment, Southern Echo, Sunflower County Parents and Students United, Tunica Teens In Action, and Youth Innovation Movement Solutions.



Answers to Questions that should be Frequently Asked

1. What is a P-16 Community Engagement Council?

A P-16 Community Engagement Council {community based Pre-Kindergarten through higher education (P-16) council} is a broad and diverse community-based, community-led assemblage of education stakeholders from within the school district or school zone charged with the responsibility to work together to develop a comprehensive plan for building a healthy community, with a healthy school district or school as a keystone in the foundation of a healthy community.

2. What is the legal relationship between the P-16 Community Engagement Council and the school district or school where it has been created?

The P-16 Community Engagement Council has only an advisory role in its relationship with the school district or school. The Council cannot mandate or impose policy decisions on the school board, nor cannot it mandate or impose administrative decisions in the operation of the school district or school.

At the same time, however, the Council is a legal structure mandated by Accountability Standard 12 for all school districts and schools designated as Failing (F). This means that the school district or school ranked academically as a “D” or “F” shall initiate the Council process, turn over the Council process to the elected members of the Council, participate in good faith in the work of the Council, and cooperate with the Council by making available to the Council all of the data and other information requested that constitute public records and the sharing of which would not violate federal or state privacy regulations.

3. Which school districts and schools are obligated to create a P-16 Community Engagement Council?

Each school district and school which has been ranked in the Accountability system as Failing (F) as defined by the State Board of Education or designated as “D” or “F” *shall* ... that is, *must* ... initiate a P-16 Community Engagement Council. This requirement is mandatory as a result of the adoption of **Accountability Standard 12 (2016)**.

4. May school districts and schools create a P-16 Community Engagement Council notwithstanding that they are not required to do so?

Every school district or school has the right and the capacity to *voluntarily* create a P-16 Community Engagement Council to encourage and support the active engagement of parents, students and other education stakeholders in building a healthy school and healthy community, and to obtain the benefits of their input and feedback to the school board, administration, faculty and personnel.

5. Where does the authority derive from that mandates school districts and schools to create a P-16 Community Engagement Council?

The mandate to initiate a P-16 Community Engagement Council comes from two sources: the **Children First Act of 2009** enacted by the Mississippi Legislature and the **Accountability Standard 12** adopted by the State Board of Education in 2016. The Children First Act statute mandated that **every failing school district must create a P-16 Council. The law was revised (2016)**. The administrative regulation, **Accountability Standard 12**, expanded the mandate to create a P-16 Community Engagement Council in **every school district that is designated as Failing**



(F) as defined by the State Board of Education and a district and /or a school designated as a “D” or “F”.

6. What does a school district or school have to do if the district or school has already created a P-16 Council?

If a school district or school has already created a P-16 Council pursuant to the Children First Act of 2009, then the school district must *start over* or *begin again* and initiate a P-16 Community Engagement Council in the manner prescribed in, and consistent with, the P-16 Community Engagement Council Guidelines adopted by the State Board of Education in 2011 & 2016.

This might seem counter-intuitive, but it is not. The 2011 Guidelines specify an initiation and election process designed to ensure that the P-16 Community Engagement Council members are selected by the community and that the Council becomes *independent* of the school district or school as soon as the initiating process is completed. Since existing P-16 Councils could not have followed the Guidelines before they were created, the school district or school is obligated to initiate a new process that follows the Guidelines.

7. What is the purpose or goals of a P-16 Community Engagement Council?

The purpose of a P-16 Community Engagement Council is to create a legally-mandated, structured mechanism for the engagement of parents, students and other education stakeholders in the community to work with educators to create a quality, first rate health school district and healthy community. See the mission discussion below.

8. What is the mission of the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

As stated in the **Guidelines** adopted by the State Board of Education in 2011:

School Districts and schools have the duty and responsibility to build quality first-rate schools accessible to all children regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability or status. This requires meaningful participation of parents, students and other parts of the community in the formation and implementation of policy at the school district and school levels.

Community Engagement Councils, also known as P-16 Councils, are an essential opportunity to build this process. The Community Engagement Councils are intended to be community-based and independent. The Councils are charged with the duty and responsibility to build strong, healthy communities. In order to build strong, healthy communities it is necessary, among other things, to create a quality public education delivered to students in healthy schools which are accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, status, gender or disability. Since these goals cannot be achieved within a year or two the Councils will need to develop a “comprehensive plan” that attempts to answer these two questions:

1. “What will a strong, healthy community, rooted in a quality public education system, need to look like 10, 15 or 20 years from now?”



2. “What do we have to do this year, next year and the years that follow in order to build this process in the right direction?”

Toward these ends, the P-16 Community Engagement Council provides a legally-mandated, structured process through which a broad and diverse congregation of education stakeholders can:

- a. Use existing data, other information available as public records, and discussions with parents, students, educators and other stakeholders, to develop an analysis and profile of existing education outcomes, conditions and circumstances within the school district or school;
- b. Use the analysis, profile and discussions to develop recommendations to the school district or school regarding policies designed to improve the health of the schools and the health of the community;
- c. Use the P-16 Council process to encourage and broaden the participation of parents, students and other education stakeholders in every aspect of the life of the school district and schools because stronger schools make for a stronger community.

9. What is the role of the local school district or local school administration with regard to the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

Under the Guidelines the school district or school administration has the duty to work with community education stakeholders to initiate the P-16 Community Engagement Council process. Also under the Guidelines, the school district or school administration is responsible for selecting some of its personnel to serve on the P-16 Community Engagement Council to ensure that there is effective input, feedback and flow of data and information from the school district or school into the work of the Council and an effective line of communication from the Council to the school district or school administration.

10. What do the statute and Guidelines mean when it requires that the P-16 Community Engagement Council be independent, community-based and community-driven?

The P-16 Community Engagement Council is intended to provide a legally-mandated structure through which the community of education stakeholders can create a voice and a process to develop a comprehensive plan for building a healthy community, with healthy schools as the foundation. It is imperative that this process not be owned, controlled or dominated by the school district or school administration. Within the community there is a great deal of knowledge, understanding, expertise and capacity that needs an independent process to find expression. This is least likely to happen if the school district or school administration has a tight hold on the reins of the Council. The Council has to be able to chart its own course and walk the walk it deems necessary to achieve the goals which it sets for itself on behalf of the community.



11. What do parents, students and other education stakeholders need to accomplish through the work of the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

The values underlying the process of the Community P-16 Councils

The Community P-16 Councils should be guided in its work by certain values that reflect the mission of the Councils and their commitment to being community-driven and independent. Therefore, the Councils should include, but not be limited, to the following values:

- a. Encourage the participation and the voices of the younger and older members of the community in the work of the Council and create a process which ensures that they can be heard in meetings and in the work of any committees established by the Council;
- b. Be respectful and supportive of and open to students, whether attending school or not, regardless of age, grade or status;
- c. Meetings shall be held as public, open meetings in places readily accessible to community on dates and at times that will enable working families and students to attend;
- d. Membership on the Council shall include community-based organizations within the school district that are working to improve public education;
- e. A core underlying value promoted by the Council process is the building of a *joint and shared partnership* between the school district and the communities it serves. See **37-1-2(a)** which states:

The legislature finds and determines that the ***quality of public education*** and its effect upon the social, cultural and economic enhancement of the people of Mississippi is a matter of public policy, the object of which is the education and performance of its children and youth. The legislature hereby declares the following to be ***the policy*** of the State of Mississippi:

(a) That the ***students, parents, general citizenry, local schoolteachers and administrators, local governments, local school boards, and state government have a joint and shared responsibility for the quality of education*** delivered through the public education system in the State of Mississippi;

- f. The Council shall have a governance structure that is democratic, seeks to build consensus when feasible, and uses a voting process when needed to carry out the work of the Council;
- g. The Council shall have the capacity to create working committees that may include members of the community to assist Council members in the formation and implementation of the policies and work of the Council; and
- h. A key focus of the Council shall be to build strong communities within the school district, with a special emphasis on creating **“healthy schools”** as essential to strong communities.



The Work of the Councils: Fact-finding, Assessments, Analyses, and Recommendations

• ***The impact of public education on creating healthy schools and strong communities***

- a. Is there a common understanding within the community that for a community to be a “strong community” there must be:
 - * effective engagement in the civic affairs by all segments of the community;
 - * that the community must be thriving economically,
 - * safe environmentally,
 - * equitable and fair in the administration of justice,
 - * responsive to the recreation needs of all segments of the community, and
 - * that the resources of the community need to be applied to nurture and develop the capacity of all citizens to develop their full potential to contribute to the building of a strong community, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, status or geographic location?
- b. Does the quality of public education provided to the children of the community impact how strong the community can become? If yes, then in which ways and to what extent?
- c. What are the core elements of “healthy schools”?
- d. Why are healthy schools key to the building of strong communities?
- e. Is there a common understanding that public schools ought to strive to generate among students an effective understanding of how to engage meaningfully in the civic affairs of the community?

• ***Understanding how healthy public schools can deliver the quality of education to which students ought to be entitled***

- f. If healthy schools are key to building strong communities, how do children, youth and their families obtain the support that they need to ensure that they obtain and benefit from the public education to which they ought to be entitled?
- g. An assessment and evaluation needs to be done to determine whether the school district is effectively utilizing Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Conflict Resolution, Response to Intervention, Teacher Support Teams, early diagnostic assessments, and creating a positive school climate as required by federal and state law to rationalize the school discipline process so that it keeps students in school, with a supportive process, rather than pushing the students out of school, on to the streets, and into the schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline.
- h. In order to understand the existing education landscape, identify and evaluate needed improvements, and prepare recommendations for consideration by the school administration, it is essential for the Council to obtain data as to the quality of education being provided and the quality of educators providing the education.
- i. If the data is already available to the school district, then the Council needs to understand whether and how that data is being used, monitored and evaluated by the school administrators and educators to improve the education delivered to the students.
- j. In order to access the data needed by the Council, the Council must have the authority to request and obtain from the school district, without cost to the Council or its members, all



policy, program, testing, financial and other data, so long as that data does not compromise the confidentiality for students and faculty expressly set forth in federal and state law. Inconvenience or embarrassment shall not be valid reasons for the district or its personnel to fail or refuse to provide requested data in a timely fashion. Most or all of this data and information is public record according to Mississippi state law.

- k. In order to facilitate the process for the Council to request and acquire data and other information from the school district, the school district ought to appoint a “liaison” to the Council who is responsible for expediting acquisition of the data and other information for the Council.
- l. The Council ought to explore how the universities and community colleges can assist the Council to gather the data and information it needs to support the on-going work of the Council.
- m. There needs to be a community training process to assist community to understand concepts, jargon and analytical tools often used in the discussion of education issues. The Council should have the authority to initiate such training sessions for its members and to share these training sessions with community. The Council should have the authority to obtain training from organizations, including non-profit organizations, with a successful record of conducting training sessions with community around education issues. The State Dept. of Education ought to maintain a list of such organizations, including community-based organizations, which can effectively provide such training for the Council.
- n. Although our public schools, colleges and universities are the formal institutions of learning, it is important to expand the lenses through which education is seen to include what is going on within the community as “additional classrooms for student learning”, or “place-based learning”, that makes a connection between theory and practice.

- ***The well-being of children as a core element needed to build strong communities***

- a. What contributes to and what detracts from the well-being of children?
- b. In order to build strong communities it is necessary to have healthy children. Therefore, it is important to gather and assess data on the well-being of the children and youth in the community from birth through the period after they finish their formal education. Toward these ends, it may be helpful to segment the data into the following categories: Birth to 5 years old; K – 2nd grade, 3rd to 5th grade; 6th grade to 8th grade; 9th grade to 12th grade; community college/university; and workforce.
- c. The Council ought to explore the building of an early childhood learning and care collaboration with Head Start, area day care providers, relatives and home child care providers, and the school district to support the development of young children in preparation for their entry into the public schools.
- d. The Council ought to explore how best to enhance the capacity of parents and other early child care providers to support the development of very young children.
- e. The Council ought to identify effective early child care models that support the development of children and respect the strengths of their cultures.
- f. Can a “transition planning” process be developed that would result in a reviewable and adjustable Individualized Growth Plans (IGP) for each child that takes into account the



developmental needs of the “whole child” for each of the separate periods set forth above from Birth to workforce.

- g. Among the elements that public schools ought to monitor and evaluate:
 - i. Physical well-being immunization;
 - ii. Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) results;
 - iii. Nutrition;
 - iv. Physical activity;
 - v. Early intervention programs;
 - vi. Dental care;
 - vii. Mental and emotional well-being—including but not limited to incidences of physical abuse and neglect substantiated, other traumatic events that may impact emotional or mental well-being, and appropriate interventions provided ;
 - viii. Healthy School Climate and;
 - ix. Other high risk factors.
- h. An assessment and evaluation needs to be done to determine whether the school district is effectively utilizing Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Conflict Resolution, Response to Intervention, Teacher Support Teams, early diagnostic assessments, and positive school climate as required by federal and state law to rationalize the school discipline process so that it keeps students in school, with a supportive process, rather than pushing the students out of school, on to the streets, and into the schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline.
- i. How can the strengths of families support the well-being of children and youth?
 - i. What data is needed? Is it available? How do we obtain it? How do we assess it?
 - ii. How can “family plans” be developed to support the children and youth? How do we obtain family buy-ins to the planning process? How can such plans be implemented?
 - iii. How can families support each other? Is there a process that can be established to facilitate mutual support?

- ***How can we use the community experience as a “learning lab”?***

- a. How can students be engaged in the work of governing bodies at the municipal, county, school district and state levels?
- b. How can students be engaged in apprenticeships with different kinds of businesses and industry within the community?
- c. How can students be engaged in service learning projects?
- d. How can students be engaged in studies that involve the quality of land, air and water within the community?
- e. How can the schools build community-wide literacy programs for both those who are in and out of school, involving people of all ages?



12. What do we mean by “education stakeholder”?

An education stakeholder is anyone who has any sort of connection to, is associated with, or is impacted by the public education system. In short, every person is an education stakeholder because everyone is impacted by public education, whether through participation directly in the school system, or through family members, or through the impact of education on the economy and the workforce, or through the understanding that citizens bring to the political process, or through the engagement of community in the formation and implementation of education and other public policy.

13. How is a P-16 Community Engagement Council created? How does the process get started? Who initiates the Initial meeting?

As set forth in the **Guidelines**, page 3:

Stage One: Representatives of the School District or School, *working with members of the community*, should serve as the **Initiators** to create the P-16 Council.

Items A through D of Stage One set forth below apply *only* to the initial meeting of the P-16 Council.

- A. The **Initiators** shall agree upon a **Mission Statement** for the P-16 Council that focuses on the need to create healthy schools and healthy communities, noting that healthy schools are a pre-condition to sustaining healthy communities.
- B. The **Initiators** shall determine the **initial number of persons** to sit on the P-16 Council and the equitable distribution of the membership among the categories. Once the Council is formed the Council shall have the right to increase the membership in the Council.
- C. The **Initiators shall call a public meeting** at a time and place which is convenient for a substantial cross-section of the community to attend. This public meeting shall NOT be held during or at the same time as a regularly scheduled school district board meeting or school meeting at the school level. This restriction shall apply only to the initial meeting of the Council.
- D. **Prior to the initial meeting, the Initiators** shall provide copies of the **Mission Statement** to the public so that the public will know why it is important to come to the Council and to participate in the Council.

14. Who can take the initiative to create a P-16 Community Engagement Council?

Any member of the community or the school district or school can take initiative. Under the Guidelines the players in the initiation process are representatives of the School District or School AND members of the community. So members of the community can reach out to the school district or school to get the process underway, or the school district or school can reach out to community. The community does *not* have to wait for the school district or school to make the first move. But both do have to be involved. If the school district or school fail or refuse to participate to initiate the process then that would be a violation of the Guideline, and consequently, the **Accountability Standard 12**.



15. What is the purpose of the initial meeting of the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

As stated in the **Guidelines**, page 3-4, the purpose of the initial meeting is to elect the members of the Council, to end the role of Initiators, and to launch an independent community-based, community-driven Council:

Stage Two: The selection of the P-16 Council members

- A. At the first meeting participants should divide themselves into groups based on the categories as set forth in the Membership section of this document.
- B. In these groups the participants shall select from among themselves the number of members as previously determined by the Initiators. Initiators may participate in the groups based on the six (6) categories and are eligible to be selected as individuals on the same basis as any other person. The selection process within each group preferably shall be by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved then a vote shall be taken by written secret ballot.
- C. When all of the members have been selected, the role of the Initiators ends and the new members take responsibility for the conduct of the P-16 Council.

Stage Three: The P-16 Council becomes an independent organization

- A. At this point the Council becomes independent of the local school district or school.
- B. The Initiators shall let the P-16 Council know that training and technical assistance is available.
- C. The Mississippi Department of Education may be contacted for a list of possible providers. The Council is strongly encouraged to participate in training.

16. Who are eligible to be members of the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

As stated in the **Guidelines**,

Membership in the Councils

The Councils shall have participation from a broad-section of the community, with a special emphasis on the inclusion of parents and students who are the primary constituents of any school district and school. Participation should be shared among these six (6) constituent categories, which are broad enough to encompass and represent the widest range of interests:

1. Members of local community-based organizations working on public education issues within the local school district;
2. Members of local public school district Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations;
3. Members of local public school-based student councils and local public school student government associations;



4. Community leaders, public officials and members of the business community, all within the local school district;
5. Community members *at large* interested in public education issues who may or may not be part of the other four (4) categories. In a school district wide Council there should be one *at large* member to represent each school board election district or ward; and
6.
 - a. For *School District-based Councils*: members of the School District, which should be selected from the School District Board of Trustees, the School District Administration, the School District Faculty, and School District staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.
 - b. For *Individual School-based Councils*: members of the Individual School, which should be selected from the School Administration, the School Faculty, and School staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

Persons who are **employed** by the local school district at the time of these proceedings are expressly **excluded** from the definition of membership in each of the first five (5) constituent categories, 1 – 5, as set forth above, but are included in category 6.

Student members of the Councils must be at least 12 years of age.

17. Why is it important to create a broad and diverse membership in the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

The credibility and moral force of the Council is enhanced immeasurably to the extent that it is understood to be inclusive, broad-based, diverse and a vehicle for all voices in the community. Does broad-based and diverse mean there is a higher likelihood that disagreements and even disagreeability may arise? Absolutely. But working out the differences, building a basis for a shared learning among education stakeholders, is key to the development of a meaningful plan for building healthy schools and healthy communities. Furthermore, the development of a great plan will not likely advance us toward the goals of transformational change if the plan does not achieve wide acceptance.

The strategy ought to be to elect the best possible people to the Council, who are thoughtful, incisive, strategic and able to work well with others, and then support them during the work of the Council.

18. How can we ensure that parents, students and grassroots community organizations committed to supporting public education have appropriate representation on the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

It is essential to bring to the **initial meeting** parents, students, grassroots community organization members, members of the business community and other community leaders who are ready, willing and able to serve on the Council. It is equally important, since this will be an election process, to bring as many supporters as possible to vote to elect them. So this will require some organizing work prior to the **initial meeting** to ensure that people come to the meeting already understanding what to expect will happen and to be prepared to nominate and elect a cross-section of the best people in each category of membership.



19. Does participation by school district or school administration personnel compromise the mandate that P-16 Community Engagement Councils be independent, community-based and community-driven?

No! It is important that there be participation of the school district or school personnel to provide a perspective, or set of perspectives, through the lenses of people working inside the school system. This enables the Council to obtain input and feedback from the *inside the system* as the work proceeds and to provide a channel of communication from *outside the system* into the school district or school. So long as the school personnel do not dominate the process,

20. What rights to participate in the work of the Council do education stakeholders have who have not been elected as members of the P-16 Community Engagement Council?

As stated in the Guidelines, as a core value of the P-16 Community Engagement Council:

E. The Council shall have the capacity to create **working committees** that may **include members of the community** to assist Council members;

This means that it is intended that the Council consider the valuable assistance that community can provide to the work of the Council. Council members and community members should both reach out to each other to support this process because they will need each other to succeed. Furthermore, the more involvement there is from a cross-section of the community the more buy-in there will be to the adoption and implementation of plans for healthy schools and a healthy community. For these reasons, the goal of the Council ought to be to include community members on the committees it creates.

Last, but not least, the P-16 Community Engagement Council, as an official body created under law and regulation, is a public body within the meaning of the Mississippi Open Meetings Law. Therefore, the public has the right to attend every meeting, and the Council has a duty to notify the public of every meeting, and meet in a location and a time accessible to the public. The work product of the Council will be a public record, as well.

21. How often are elections held for members of the P-16 Community Engagement Council and who makes that determination?

The Guidelines do not speak to this question. It is up to each Council to make this determination by creating a rule at the outset as to how frequently there will be elections and when and how to replace members of the Council who resign before their term is up.

22. How can community document the process so that community can monitor the process?

Community has the right to attend meetings, take notes, record the proceedings on audio or visual equipment, talk with members of the Council and with school officials, assist in the work of the Council, and inquire of the Council whether timelines for work to be done have been met and the goals achieved. All of this access should lay a foundation for the documentation and monitoring of the process.



23. What are the duties and responsibilities of the MS Dept. of Education to monitor and enforce Accountability Standard 12 regarding P-16 Community Engagement Councils, and the Guidelines adopted to govern the Council process?

The MS Dept. of Education has the power to monitor and enforce the Accountability Standards generally, which would include Standard 12 regarding the P-16 Community Engagement Councils. The procedures for bringing a complaint under the Accountability Standards are defined in the Manual of the MS Department of Education Office of Accreditation entitled, *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016*, which can be downloaded from this web address on the MS Department of Education website:

<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/accreditation-library/ms-public-school-acct-stds-2016-8-11-16.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

This excerpt from the Accountability Manual, pages 11-12, sets forth the procedure:

5.0 ACCREDITATION MONITORING PROCEDURES

The Mississippi Department of Education continuously monitor school districts to verify compliance with applicable accreditation requirements and state and federal laws.

5.1 ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation has the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the superintendent is notified in writing and given thirty (30) days from the receipt of notification to provide a written response. The report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation.

5.2 INVESTIGATIVE EVALUATIONS (COMPLAINTS AGAINST DISTRICTS)

All formal complaints made against schools or districts must be submitted to the Office of Accreditation in writing and bear the signature of the individual(s) filing the complaint. The written complaint shall contain specific details concerning alleged violations.

5.2.1 Areas Over Which the Commission Has No Authority

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission has no authority, the individual filing the complaint is acknowledged and the complaint is filed in the Office of Accreditation.

5.2.2 Areas Over Which the Commission Does Have Authority

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission does have authority, the superintendent may be notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and given thirty (30) days to provide a written response to the allegations and to present documentation of compliance. The superintendent may also be notified that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

5.2.3 Unannounced On-Site Investigative Evaluations

The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation has the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. Procedures for conducting investigative audits are as follows:



5.2.3.1 The auditors may arrive in the district without prior notification.

5.2.3.2 The auditor(s) inform the superintendent of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.

5.2.3.3 The auditor(s) discuss procedures with the principal of the school if appropriate.

5.2.3.4 The auditor(s) may use various methods to collect the data needed to verify or discredit the complaint, including examination of official records, anonymous surveys, and interviews with school personnel, and observations.

5.2.3.5 Upon completion of the audit, the auditor(s) compile a written report that is sent to the superintendent and the chairman of the school board.

**24. What kinds of data and other materials are available to begin to profile the school district or school?
Where are these data and materials available?**

Some of the available data:

- Demographic data for the school district and schools within the district, including statistics on students regarding race, poverty, and disability, critical teacher shortages in each district and school, school tax rates levied, school tax revenues and school district tax bases.
- Performance of students each year on standardized tests (MCT2, SATP, NAEP). This data is not made available for the individual students, except to the educators, parents of the individual students and the students themselves.
- Graduation rates on time, completion rates for students who do not graduate on time, and students who drop out and do not complete high school.
- Students in special education and the services provided.
- Numbers and rates of student out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, in-school suspensions and assignments to alternative schools and duration of stay in alternative school, and the reasons for these disciplinary decisions.
- Number and rates of beating of students by school personnel (corporal punishment) and the reasons for doing so.
- Amount of Title I funds received and for what purposes the Title I funds were allocated, and whether the funds were used as allocated.
- The school district and school budgets, which outlines how much money has been raised, for what purposes it has been allocated and whether it was used for the purposes allocated.

And there is so much more.

25. Why is the initiation of a P-16 Community Engagement Council a good opportunity to organize the community to participate in policy formation and implementation in the school district or school?

For the first time we have an officially mandated structure for building a community voice and community perspective on how to build healthy, quality schools and communities in which the community is mandated to provide leadership to the process. This creates an important opportunity to bring community on to the playing field to participate in a serious framework for the creation of recommendations for the adoption and implementation of policies relating to public education, juvenile justice, health and other issues. In order to make recommendations for change it will be necessary to develop a profile of and monitor the operations of the school district and schools, and the relationship



between the school district and schools with other segments of the community. Done well it can become a structured, powerful voice for parents and students, and other education stakeholders.

26. Why do we need to be knowledgeable and assertive to make this process work?

The P-16 Community Engagement Council will not automatically work. It is going to take hard work, commitment, and an appreciation of its potential. Otherwise, it will diminish into just another advisory board and wither away.

27. How can community people support each other in this effort across school district lines?

It will be very important for community people to come together on a regular basis to share their experiences with the formation and implementation of the P-16 Community Engagement Councils. In this way communities can learn from each other, share what works better and what does not, and share strategic thinking about what improvements in the Guidelines may be needed to improve the process.

I. The state statute mandates the P-16 Councils

The Children First Act of 2009, **37-18-5 (4)**, mandated that the State Board of Education promulgate regulations for the creation by failing school districts of broad-based, diverse Community P-16 Councils designed to work to build strong communities and to report its progress to the entire community. The statutory provision, in its entirety, states:

37-18-5 (4) A school district that has been designated as failing as defined by the State Board of Education shall also establish a community-based prekindergarten through higher education council comprised of a broad spectrum of the community, including economic developers, elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, faith-based leaders, social services, nonprofit organizations, school attendance officers, law enforcement officials, health department officials, day care providers, librarians, parents and others with the knowledge and resources that can be leveraged to build strong communities. The State Board of Education shall develop procedures for appointments to the council, which shall not be appointed solely by the school board. The council will serve as a community-led group that is inclusive, accountable and required to publicly report progress to the community as a whole.



**Mississippi Department of Education
Office of School Performance
Office of Accreditation
Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016
Approved by the State Board of Education 2016**

[Accountability Process Standard 12 Replaced the Old Process Standard 18]

- 12. There is an organized system to encourage community involvement, parental communication, and business partnerships in school district decision-making. {MS Code 37-7-337} (Districts Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance are exempted.)
 - 12.1 A school district that has been designated as Failing (F) as defined by the State Board of Education shall establish a community-based pre-kindergarten through higher education (P-16) council. {MS Code 37-18-5(4)}
 - 12.2 A district and/or a school designated as a D or F shall establish a community-based pre-kindergarten through higher education (P-16) council.



Guidelines for P-16 Community Engagement Councils

Mission

School Districts and schools have the duty and responsibility to build quality first-rate schools accessible to all children regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability or status. This requires meaningful participation of parents, students and other parts of the community in the formation and implementation of policy at the school district and school levels.

Community Engagement Councils, also known as P-16 Councils, are an essential opportunity to build this process. The Community Engagement Councils are intended to be community-based and independent. The Councils are charged with the duty and responsibility to build strong, healthy communities. In order to build strong, healthy communities it is necessary, among other things, to create a quality public education delivered to students in healthy schools which are accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, status, gender or disability. Since these goals cannot be achieved within a year or two the Councils will need to develop a “comprehensive plan” that attempts to answer these two questions:

- a. “What will a strong, healthy community, rooted in a quality public education system, need to look like 10, 15 or 20 years from now?”
- b. “What do we have to do this year, next year and the years that follow in order to build this process in the right direction?”

Membership in the Councils

The Councils shall have participation from a broad-section of the community, with a special emphasis on the inclusion of parents and students who are the primary constituents of any school district and school. Participation should be shared among these six (6) constituent categories, which are broad enough to encompass and represent the widest range of interests:

1. Members of local community-based organizations working on public education issues within the local school district;
2. Members of local public school district Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations;
3. Members of local public school-based student councils and local public school student government associations;
4. Community leaders, public officials and members of the business community, all within the local school district;
5. Community members *at large* interested in public education issues who may or may not be part of the other four (4) categories. In a school district wide Council there should be one *at large* member to represent each school board election district or ward; and
6. *a. For School District-based Councils:* members of the School District, which should be selected from the School District Board of Trustees, the School District Administration, the School District Faculty, and School District staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.



- b. For *Individual School-based Councils*: members of the Individual School, which should be selected from the School Administration, the School Faculty, and School staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

Persons who are **employed** by the local school district at the time of these proceedings are expressly **excluded** from the definition of membership in each of the first five (5) constituent categories, **1 – 5**, as set forth above, but are included in category **6**.

Student members of the Councils must be at least **12 years of age**.

P-16 Council Participation

Smaller school districts may elect to have a single district-wide Council. Larger school districts may elect to have individual school-based Councils.

The number of Council members should be based on the size of the school district or the size of the individual school. The *minimum* number for the smallest districts or schools should be 12 persons, and the *minimum* for the largest districts or schools should be 24.

P-16 Council Membership Selection

There are 3 stages to the process for the selection of sitting members of the P-16 Councils.

Stage One: Representatives of the School District or School, working with members of the community, should serve as the Initiators to create the P-16 Council. **Items A through D of Stage One set forth below apply *only* to the initial meeting of the P-16 Council.**

- A. The Initiators shall agree upon a Mission Statement for the P-16 Council that focuses on the need to create healthy schools and healthy communities, noting that healthy schools are a pre-condition to sustaining healthy communities.
- B. The Initiators shall determine the *initial* number of persons to sit on the P-16 Council and the equitable distribution of the membership among the categories. Once the Council is formed the Council shall have the right to increase the membership in the Council.
- C. The Initiators *shall call a public meeting* at a time and place which is convenient for a substantial cross-section of the community to attend. This public meeting shall NOT be held during or at the same time as a regularly scheduled school district board meeting or school meeting at the school level. This restriction shall apply only to the initial meeting of the Council.
- D. *Prior to the initial meeting* the Initiators shall provide copies of the Mission Statement to the public so that the public will know why it is important to come to the Council and to participate in the Council.



Stage Two: The selection of the P-16 Council members

- A. At the first meeting participants should divide themselves into groups based on the categories as set forth in the Membership section of this document.
- B. In these groups the participants shall select from among themselves the number of members as previously determined by the Initiators. Initiators may participate in the groups based on the six (6) categories and are eligible to be selected as individuals on the same basis as any other person. The selection process within each group preferably shall be by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved then a vote shall be taken by written secret ballot.
- C. When all of the members have been selected, the role of the Initiators ends and the new members take responsibility for the conduct of the P-16 Council.

Stage Three: The P-16 Council becomes an independent organization

- A. At this point, the Council becomes independent of the local school district or school.
- B. The Initiators shall let the P-16 Council know that training and technical assistance is available. The Mississippi Department of Education may be contacted for a list of possible providers.
- C. The Council is strongly encouraged to participate in training.

Core Values of P-16 Community Engagement Councils

- A. The Council shall hold open meetings on dates, times and places accessible to the broad spectrum of education stakeholders and others in the community;
- B. The Council shall have a governance structure that is democratic and seeks, to the extent possible, to build consensus to carry out the work of the Council;
- C. The Council shall be independent of the local school district and each of its schools, and shall have a perspective in working to build strong, healthy communities that is broader than the school system itself.
- D. The authority of the Council to fulfill its mission stems from state statutes and Accreditation Standard 12. The authority of the Council does not extend to the management or operation of the school district or individual schools.
- E. The Council shall have the capacity to create working committees that may include members of the community to assist Council members;
- F. The Council is responsible for making accurate assessments of the strengths and limitations of the school district and its schools as a basis for recommending effective approaches to create quality, healthy schools;
- G. The Council needs to understand how to gather relevant data and how to utilize the data to monitor and evaluate the schools and school district; and,
- H. The Council, upon written request, shall have the authority to request and obtain data from the school district and the individual schools, so long as the content of the data sought does not compromise any existing Federal or State privacy law.



Appendix



Sample Mission Statement For P-16 Community Engagement Council

School Districts and schools have the duty and responsibility to build quality first-rate schools accessible to all children regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability or status. This requires meaningful participation of parents, students and other parts of the community in the formation and implementation of policy at the school district and school levels.

Community Engagement Councils, also known as P-16 Councils, are an essential opportunity to build this process. The Community Engagement Councils are intended to be community-based and independent. The Councils are charged with the duty and responsibility to build strong, healthy communities. In order to build strong, healthy communities it is necessary, among other things, to create a quality public education delivered to students in healthy schools which are accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, status, gender or disability. Since these goals cannot be achieved within a year or two the Councils will need to develop a “comprehensive plan” that attempts to answer these two questions:

- a. “What will a strong, healthy community, rooted in a quality public education system, need to look like 10, 15 or 20 years from now?”
- b. “What do we have to do this year, next year and the years that follow in order to build this process in the right direction?”



**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT (SAMPLE)
FOR THE FIRST MEETING OF THE
P-16 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCILS**

Notice of Public Meeting
Wednesday, August 18, 2017
7:00 pm
XYZ Community Center, Town of Justice

WHO IS INVITED TO THIS MEETING?

EVERYONE within the **XYZ School District** is invited! This invitation is especially directed at:

- Members of local community-based organizations working on public education issues with our school district;
- Members of our public school district Parent Teachers Association or Organization;
- Members of our public school-based student councils and our public school student government associations;
- Community leaders, public officials and members of the business community who come from within our school district;
- Community members, who are not from any of the categories above, and who are interested in public education issues, and
- Members of the school district board of trustees, the school board administration, the school district faculty, and the school district staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

WHO IS MAKING THIS INVITATION?

This invitation is extended to all by the **XYZ School District**.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING?

The purpose of the meeting is to create and organize the P-16 Community Engagement Council, an independent agency that will exist within the geographic boundaries of the XYZ School District, but which will be a community-based and entirely independent organization.

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE P-16 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL?

Mission Statement

School Districts and schools have the duty and responsibility to build quality first-rate schools accessible to all children regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability or status. This requires meaningful participation of parents, students and other parts of the community in the formation and implementation of policy at the school district and school levels.

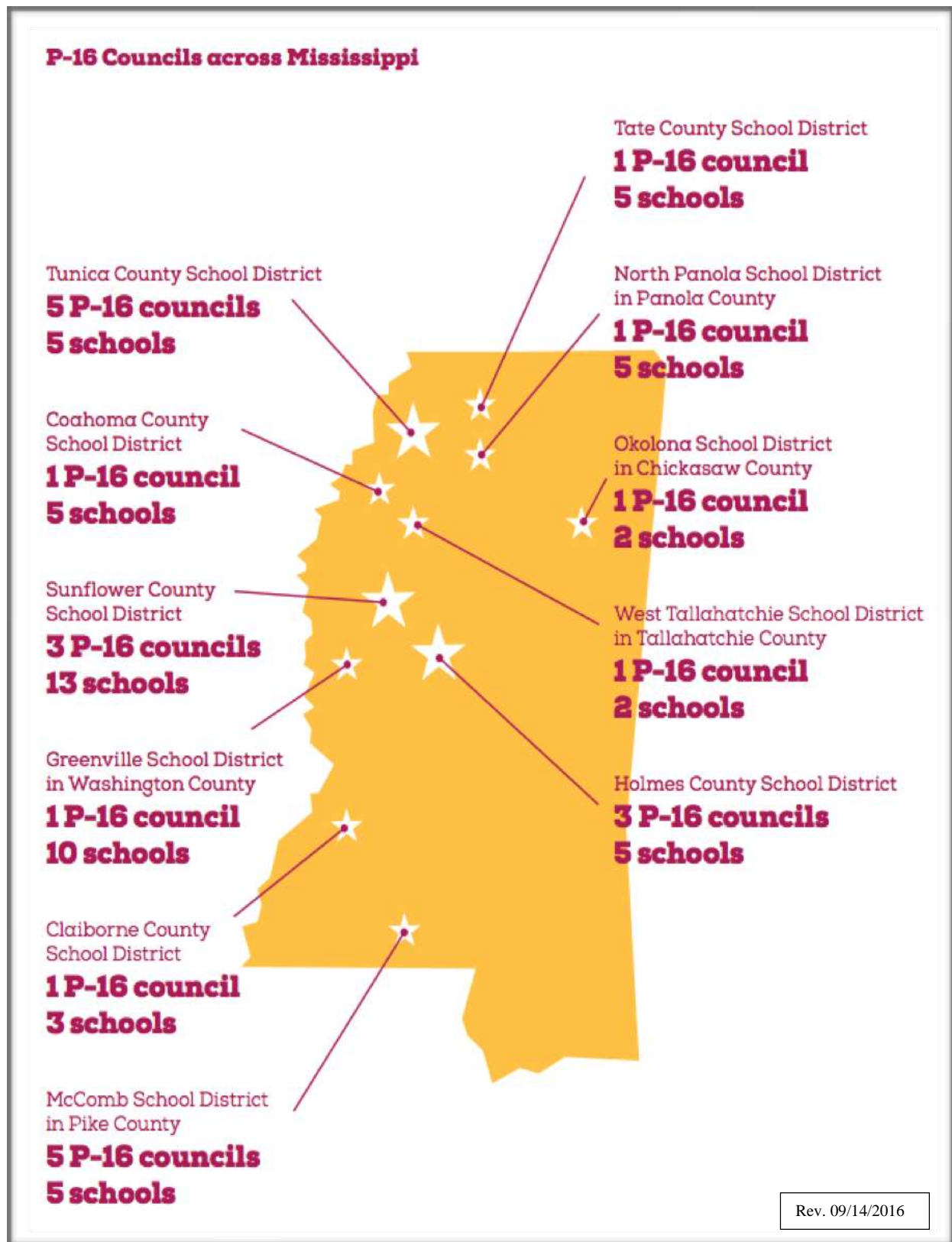
A Community Engagement Council, also known as a P-16 Council, is an essential opportunity to build this process. The Community Engagement Councils are intended to be community-based and independent. The Councils are charged with the duty and responsibility to build strong, healthy communities. In order to build strong, healthy communities it is necessary, among other things, to create a quality public education delivered to students in healthy schools which are accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, status, gender or disability. Since these goals cannot be achieved within a year or two the Councils will need to develop a “comprehensive plan” that attempts to answer these two questions:

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b. “What do we have to do this year, next year and the years that follow in order to build this process in the right direction?”



MS P-16 Councils MAP



References / Sources

Mississippi Department of Education

<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/>

Mississippi Legislature

<http://www.legislature.ms.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

United States Department of Education

<https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rnhttps://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>



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southernecho

Working to empower the African-American community through an inter-generational model of effective community organizing.

The End

