

P16 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCILS

In the 2009 Children First Act the legislature mandated the creation of P16 Councils. When the MS Dept. of Education did not create regulations to implement the councils, in the fall of 2010 Southern Echo and the MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable opened negotiations with MDE leadership to create the regulations.

After 6 months of negotiations MDE leadership and the Echo/Roundtable negotiators agreed on a proposed set of regulations that were adopted by the State Board of Education in the summer of 2011. The councils were re-named P16 Community Engagement Councils to highlight the underlying goal of bringing community into the policy formation process.

In addition, the State Board of Education made compliance with the Guidelines an Accountability Standard, Standard #18.3, which means that compliance is mandatory.

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?”

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.



SOUTHERN ECHO, INC.

1350 Livingston Lane

Jackson, MS 39213

Website: www.southernecho.org

Email: info@southernecho.org

Phone: 601-982-6400

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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.

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.

Core values of the P16 Community Engagement Councils include:

- 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 18. 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.

A number of school districts and schools across the state have initiated P16 Councils and many more are obligated to do so. Some of the Councils have completed the set up process and are moving into the second phase of developing a comprehensive plan to create a healthy community rooted in the development of healthy schools.

The MS Dept. of Education has designated Southern Echo as an official trainer for schools and school departments that seek technical assistance in the creation of their P16 Community Engagement Councils.



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