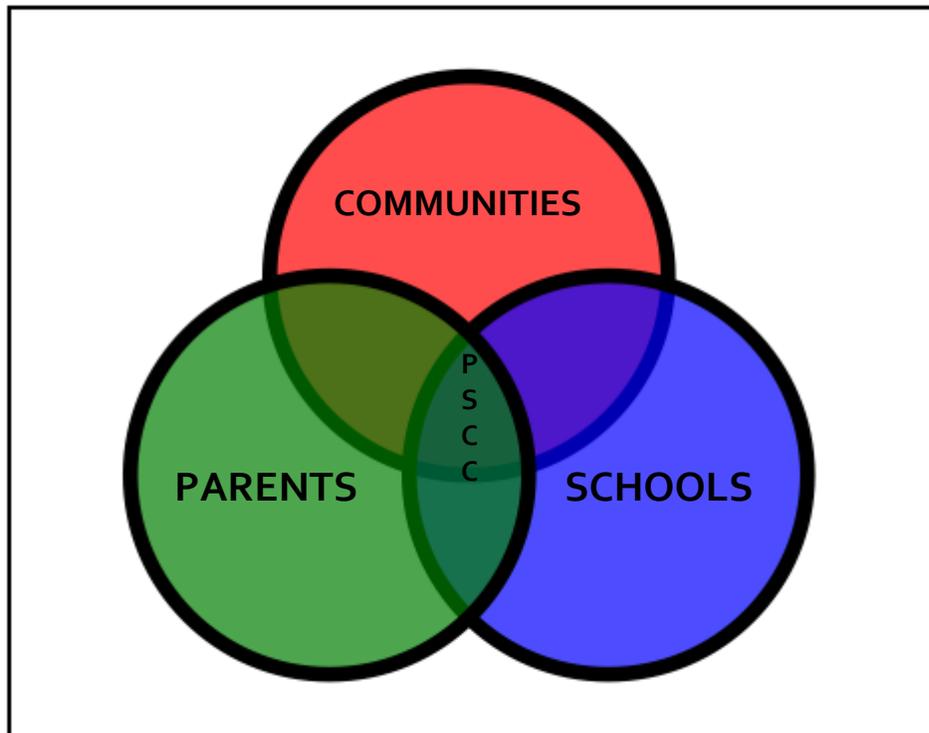


Parent School Community Council (PSCC) Handbook



Together we make a difference in our children's education.

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Overview

The Pittsburgh Public Schools’ philosophy on parent and community engagement is simply this; we want parents, caregivers, and community members to become full partners in their child’s educational experience. We believe this partnership with teachers and principals builds trust within our district. We want the focus to be on what is best for your child, in your school, at an individual level. Therefore, we recognize that it is in the best interest of the District for all schools to start, build, and sustain an active Parent School Community Council (PSCC).

WHAT IS A PSCC?

Why do we have Parent School Community Councils (PSCC)?

The Parent School Community Council model was first adopted by the Board of Directors in 1993. It was designed to have a group of dedicated parents and community members in each school who serve as an advisory body to the principal regarding issues such as school safety, student achievement, curriculum, discipline, and parental and community involvement in the school.

Participating in the Parent School Community Council (PSCC) is one of the most effective ways parents and community members can be engaged. Each month, the PSCC has a meeting as an opportunity for parents, families, the community, school staff, and sometimes students, to discuss important topics related to the school and provide support to the leadership of the school.

When parents and community members participate, it results in increased understanding, commitment, responsibility, and satisfaction with each school's culture. Today, the PSCC continues to serve in this capacity and provides direction and support to the school in the development and revision of its School Improvement Plan. The School Improvement Plan is a plan which focuses on Reading, Math, Safe and Orderly School Environment and Parent/Community Engagement. The School Improvement planning process involves:

- Defining the school's mission, vision, beliefs and shared values
- Analyzing data and identifying strengths and weaknesses
- Setting long-range goals
- Developing a school improvement action plan
- Reviewing and evaluating the plan with the PSCC

At Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), we know that we cannot function in a vacuum, and that with the participation of all parents and community members, we can achieve an educational environment in each school where every student will learn, experience success, and become a responsible citizen. Each of us has a vital role to play and a major contribution to make if we are to achieve excellence for all.

How do I join a Parent School Community Council?

Interested individuals should contact their schools to find out when meetings are scheduled. All schools shall have an established PSCC and will convene monthly meetings to discuss educational issues relevant to each school. Council meetings are open to the public.

Schools must ensure that all PSCC meeting dates and times are posted on the school website no later than 1 week before each meeting, and that PSCC agendas and minutes are posted on the school website no later than 1 week after the monthly meeting.

If your school does not have an active PSCC, call your assistant superintendent and request a PSCC meeting be held.

What are the benefits of PSCC meetings?

Some of the benefits include:

- Increasing knowledge about Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Gaining knowledge on how to improve education for all children
- Opportunity to learn from others who have a wide array of skills and experiences
- Opportunity to interact with the Principal, other parents and the community at large

What are the Roles and Responsibilities of a Council Member?

Council Members are expected to:

- Attend as many meetings as possible
- Create notes from PSCC meetings to distribute to those who could not attend
- Establish an effective communication plan
- Advise on agenda topics and critical issues as determined by the PSCC
- Find 1 to 4 parents or family members to serve as Excellence for All (EFA) Parent Committee representatives (EFA representatives must have a designated time on each monthly PSCC agenda to report meeting minutes and gather feedback)

What initial activities should Councils undertake?

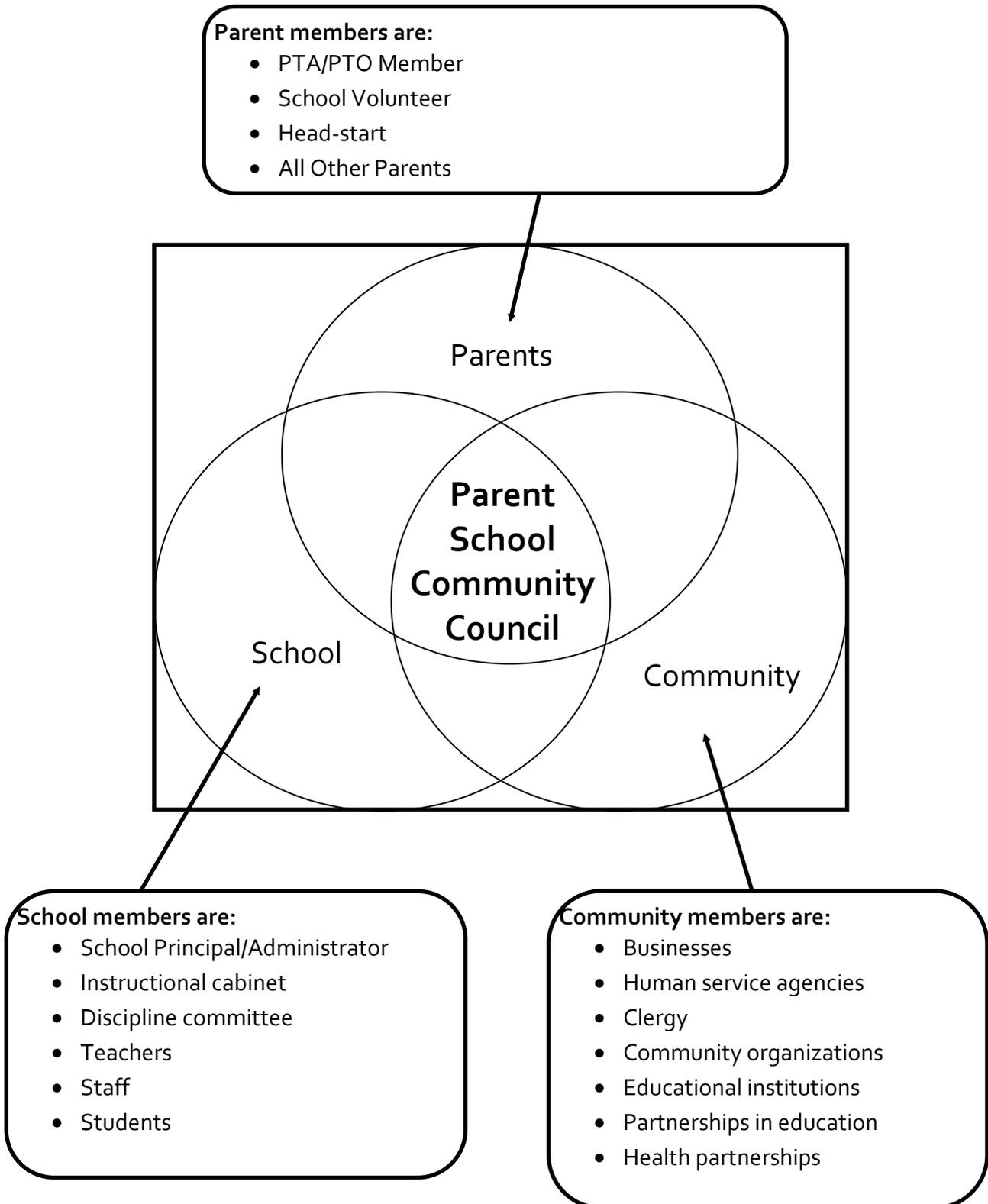
The first few steps of your Council are important. If you start off on the right foot, you have a better chance of reaching your goal. The following are some suggestions for your Council.

- Determine convenient meeting times and dates and post them on the school's website
- Encourage community participation
- Get acquainted with each other
- Know the goals of your school
- Determine your role in the School Improvement Planning Process
- Identify the areas in which Council members should and should not have input
- Determine training needs and request information/training when needed
- Meetings must be open to the public and adhere to the Guidelines for Involvement

What support will the Council receive from Central Administration?

- Title I funds under Parent Involvement can be used for postage, printing, supplies, refreshments, and childcare
- Council funds may not be used for compensation to individuals or agencies in the form of salary or contract
- Training on conflict resolution, effective communication, and other skills will be provided as required
- If problems occur within your Council, please talk with your principal, and if necessary, contact your Assistant Superintendent

HOW IS IT ORGANIZED?



Meetings

PSCC meetings should occur monthly, and the frequency, length, time of day and location will be determined by each individual school council, based on the needs of all constituents. Notification of meetings should be sent in advance from the Principal to the Assistant Superintendent. There should be no school in the district that does not convene monthly meetings, even if there is just one other attendee. To find out when/where meetings are held, call the school or check the school's website.

Schools must ensure that all PSCC meeting dates and times are posted on the school website no later than 1 week before each meeting, and that PSCC agendas and minutes are posted on the school website no later than 1 week after the monthly meeting.

A monthly list of who attended the meeting must be completed and stored at the school.

Agendas for the meetings must be developed through a shared decision making process. Parents must be involved in the decision making process of the topics discussed at meetings. All members can contribute to the agenda, and it should be built at the council meetings through consensus. Priority items and allocation of time will be decided at the end of a council meeting for the next meeting. Time should be dedicated on each agenda for the EFA Representative to report out and gather feedback.

Any member of the school, its parents or community may attend meetings.

Any member of the school, its parents or community may address the council by seeking a place on the meeting agenda.

Responsibility for organizing the meetings, including notification, record keeping, agenda building, and reports of work in progress, is held by the principal or principal's designee with assistance from the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Coordinator.

The council is an advisory group, so no formal voting is required at these meetings and no formal membership is needed.

Time must be set aside during each meeting to let parents discuss topics that are deemed important to them, even though this may not always be in line with that meeting's topics.

Parent School Community Council meetings are **not** subject to the Sunshine Law.

PSCC Relationship to Other School Organizations

Each of the following established groups will maintain its separate identity and function:

- Instructional Cabinet
- Discipline Committee/School Culture
- PTA/PTO/PTSA
- Excellence for All (EFA) Parent Committee (1 to 4 parents or family members from the school community)
- Headstart Parent Policy Council

Many schools decide that it is most convenient to hold PSCC and meetings of other school organizations back-to-back, and this is fine, but ***these meetings should not overlap***. Also, there should be direct communication established between the PSCC and each of these groups. The groups should decide the proper communication between each of these groups. The PSCC might serve as a central meeting for all information about the other groups. Another link for all groups is the shared mission of focusing on students and how their experiences are best served.

Training

Copies of the Parent School Community Council Handbook should be available at each meeting so that new members can be welcomed and understand the basics of the meeting. If further training or technical assistance is needed, a request should be sent to the district through the principal.

DECISION MAKING - LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Shared decision making is the key to a successful PSCC. The goal of shared decision making is to create a culture where participation of parents, students, teachers, principals, and community members results in increased commitment, responsibility, and satisfaction for the total school community.

Shared decision making is a process in which the diverse school community must communicate and collaborate, where appropriate, in determining goals, shaping direction, problem solving and implementation.

Each PSCC in the district determines appropriate levels of participation. Each PSCC works differently, but as a group, each voice should be heard in determining the topics to be discussed, the meeting times, the location and the readiness of the group to discuss the issues in the school. The following is a list of activities and 3 levels of engagement when communicating an issue. Level 1 is the minimum level of information that should be given to parents and community members. This list is not intended to be comprehensive.

Topic	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Budget	PSCC is given the site based budget only when asked.	PSCC is informed of budget and has the ability to discuss spending of discretionary funds.	PSCC is consulted on discretionary funds and has input on where to use appropriate dollars in reaching school needs.
Title 1	PSCC is given the parent school compact only when asked.	PSCC is given the parent-school requirements of Title 1.	PSCC is given time to comment on the parent-school compact.
Discipline	PSCC is given data on discipline in the school only when a parent or community member asks.	PSCC knows how discipline is enforced in the school and understands the goals of the school.	PSCC is updated monthly on discipline data and helps foster a culture of discipline that has learning at its core.
Communication	All PSCC meeting dates and times are posted on the school website no later than 1 week before each meeting, and PSCC agendas and minutes are posted on the school website no later than 1 week after the monthly	PSCC communicates meeting time/location and topic through weekly email, alert now calls, and form letter sent with student.	PSCC communicates meeting time location and topic through weekly email, alert now calls, and form letter sent with student and has minutes distributed to all community council members 1 week before

Topic	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
	meeting.		the next meeting.
Meeting Structure	PSCC is given information when and where meetings are being held. Meeting minutes are recorded and made available on the school website.	PSCC sets time and location of meeting from feedback of the parent survey. Minutes are recorded and made available on the school website.	PSCC meets in several different locations and where necessary at different times of the day. Minutes are recorded and made available on the school website, and distributed to each council member.
Parent Survey	Parents are asked to take the parent survey. Prior year results are shared with the PSCC.	PSCC is active in recruiting parents to take the survey.	PSCC is active and has a participation rate that is above the district average for responses.
Academic Achievements	PSCC is given data on academic achievements in the school when asked.	PSCC is given data on academic achievement in the school and is told what the goals are for improving scores at the school level.	PSCC is given the academic achievement by grade level and given the opportunity to discuss the obstacles that hinder further growth in the school.

GUIDELINES OF INVOLVEMENT

The next 3 sections offer suggestions for involvement of the PSCC in curriculum and instruction, student experience, school management, and staffing. These sections are intended to provide concrete examples of what topics should be discussed at the PSCC. They are not intended to be exhaustive lists.

A. Curriculum and Instruction

- 1) Create a partnership in understanding the “how” and “what” a teacher is presenting in the classroom. Principals and teachers should work collaboratively with parents and community partners on “how” to support and “what” is necessary to further a child’s education.
- 2) Have a workshop to show parents how they can follow their students’ academic progress and attendance records through the eSchools Plus Home Access Center.
- 3) Discuss the effect of class size on the classroom.
- 4) For high schools, discuss the benefits of continuation or termination of each elective.
- 5) Discuss the amount of time spent on each subject including any standardized test preparation.
- 6) Have a list of out-of-school time program offerings, both academic and non-academic, that are offered at your school. Talk about the benefit of each program and it’s alignment to the School Wide Plan.
- 7) Discuss district’s policy of classroom observation. Ensure that the current policy of classroom observation is promoted and understood by parents in your school.
- 8) Help parents identify what an effective teacher looks like to their child.
- 9) When parents struggle with helping their child academically, provide them with resources, community partners, or out-of-school time programs to help them.
- 10) For elementary schools, talk about how much play time is appropriate in the classroom.
- 11) Discuss how “differentiation” works in the classroom.
- 12) Know your rights as a parent to have your child tested for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP).

B. Student Experience

- 1) Establish the priority of extracurricular programs in school. Assist in identifying, developing and promoting apprenticeships and work/study experiences.
- 2) Be concerned with achievement issues. Encourage parents to be partners for the educational and social development of their children. Promote family literacy.

- 3) Promote a positive multicultural learning environment that will address the diversity of the school. This can be done by having PSCC meetings in the community, family potluck dinners, etc.
- 4) Be aware of what students are experiencing in school and in their communities. Identify and help establish linkages with community agencies, organizations, and programs to serve as resources to students, both in and outside of the school.
- 5) Establish dress codes that are appropriate for the culture and student experience in the school.
- 6) Talk about the discipline policy in the school and how it aligns with the code of student conduct policy at the district level.

C. *School Management and Staffing*

- 1) Parents should provide input to monthly meeting agenda topics.
- 2) The school should create a repository for all meeting minutes for the year, which should be available on the school website.
- 3) Proper advertising of meeting time and location of all PSCC meetings through the school website, as well as email, flyers, calendars, and postings at locations throughout the community and social media.
- 4) Principals should provide a copy of the School Improvement Plan so that parental and community input can be used to execute it. (Identifying areas of confidentiality)
- 5) Create a process and track progress for identifying and communicating issues in the school.
- 6) Parents must understand the metrics being gathered about their child (i.e., discipline, referrals, academic achievement, and PSSA exams).
- 7) Gain a clear understanding of parental issues through analysis of the parent survey. Review and discuss what the results mean to your school. Discuss strategies on how to get more responses.
- 8) Link the goals of the school wide plan to milestones and metrics for discussion at meetings.
- 9) Ensure that school culture is reflective of the student population through the school improvement plan.
- 10) Communicate clearly the expectations of the discipline policy at the school, what is considered an incident and what are the policies as linked to the student code of conduct.
- 11) School administration keeps a record of all PSCC meetings.
- 12) Central administration should check for compliance of all meetings, and where applicable attend meetings.

Summary: PSCC vs. PTO/PTA/PTSA

The Parent School Community Council (PSCC) and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) / Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) / Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSA) are separate entities and should function as such. Many schools decide that it is most convenient to hold PSCC and parent-led organization meetings back-to-back, and this is fine, but *these meetings should not overlap*.

The PSCC:

The PSCC is a principal-led group and a required model for all PPS schools that serves as the primary way to engage parents and community members at the school level.

Essential Functions:

- Must meet monthly as an opportunity for parents, families, the community, school staff and sometimes students to discuss important topics related to the school. Meetings are open to the public.
- Provides support to the leadership of the school.
- Provides direction and support to the school in the development and revision of the School Improvement Plan.
- Posts meeting dates, times, agendas and minutes on the school website.

Roles of a Council Member:

- Attend as many meetings as possible.
- Create notes from PSCC meetings to distribute to those who could not attend.
- Establish an effective communication plan.
- Advise on agenda topics and critical issues as determined by the PSCC.
- Find 1-4 parents or family members to serve as Excellence For All (EFA) Parent Committee Representatives (*these representatives should have a standing place on each month's agenda*).

The PTO/PTA/PTSA:

These organizations are not the same: PTOs are independent parent-led groups, PTAs are parent-led groups affiliated with the state and national PTA, and PTSA's offer the option of student membership.

Common features:

- Parent-led group
- Promote parent participation
- Fundraise
- Organize school volunteers
- Plan events
- Support teachers and school staff
- Elect executive boards

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

The Pittsburgh Public Schools values your input and wants to assist you in ensuring that you and your child’s experiences with our District are positive. To better serve you, the District created the Parent Hotline in November 2005. Since its creation, we have listened to your suggestions and are working to better assist you. In order for us to keep improving, we request that you use our Parent Hotline when you have questions, a concern or just need help navigating our system. This ensures that you receive a timely response and are referred to the appropriate person. It also helps us to identify where we need to do a better job in communicating and working with you.

Parent Hotline	412-529-HELP (4357)
Board of Directors	412-529-3771
Office of the Superintendent	412-529-3600
Coordinator, Family, Youth & Community Engagement.....	412-529-3851
Project Specialist, Family, Youth & Community Engagement.....	412-529-3664
Title I and Compliance	412-529-3727