

# Hartford Public Schools School Governance Councils

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## Year I Implementation

A key element of the Hartford Public Schools' Strategic Operating Plan is the creation of School Governance Councils (SGCs), guided by a policy adopted by the Board of Education in May 2009. With an independent perspective, Achieve Hartford! has been working with the District and its training partner, Leadership Greater Hartford, in providing an objective evaluation of both the implementation and effectiveness of SGCs in this first year of operation.

This report represents Part I of the evaluation and addresses the implementation of SGCs through January 2010 and the completion of SGC training sessions. In particular, this report largely addresses compliance aspects of implementing SGCs, including the number of SGCs formed, membership levels, parent participation, and training attendance.

Part II of the evaluation, to be released in late spring, will incorporate more member survey data and attempt to measure SGC members' levels of engagement and preparation, as well as further address compliance aspects relative to the Board's policy. This broader evaluation will include, among other things, year one effectiveness, percent of SGC members trained, attendance levels during regular meetings, membership make-up, and membership selection.

## Executive Summary

Pursuant to the Board's SGC Policy approved in May 2009, all autonomous schools as defined by the Board's Accountability Policy and School Performance Matrix were earmarked for formation of SGCs. The policy called for SGCs to be implemented by September 2009. Based on data collected through January 2010, we have noted the following:

- The goal of a full implementation of SGCs in Hartford in year one is ambitious. Other cities operating with similar school-based councils - including Boston, Cincinnati and Chicago - have taken much more time.
- A total of 28 of 40 applicable schools formed or operated SGCs during the 2009-2010 school year.
- Of these 28 schools, 26 sent members to training.
- Training for SGCs was provided by Leadership Greater Hartford and consisted of four sessions focused on teambuilding, communication and content specific items.
- The average rate of attendance for all SGCs over the four training sessions was 72%.
- Of the 26 schools, so far 14 have achieved membership levels made up of at least 50% parents, as per Board policy.
- In Hartford's policy, the principal is the primary driver of creating the membership; whereas in the other cities, members are selected by their respective peer groups.
- Survey results suggest initial training of members improved their understanding of the role of SGCs as well as their responsibilities as a member.

While the District has largely achieved the policy objective of launching SGCs in 2009, the implementation data thus far indicate that work remains to achieve and maintain compliance with Board policy, particularly related to membership levels. Achieve Hartford! is supportive of SGCs and recognizes that effective implementation, like reform, takes time. As regular meetings of SGCs have now begun in earnest and membership levels have continued to grow, Achieve Hartford! looks forward to continuing to monitor progress.

## HPS School Governance Council Policy

The District's Strategic Operating Plan called for the formation of SGCs for all autonomous schools as defined by the Board's Accountability Policy and School Performance Matrix. Subsequently, in May 2009, the Hartford Board of Education approved a School Governance Council policy. The policy was adopted after nearly a year of design that included substantial community discussions. Aligned with the District's *empowered performance* theory of action, which cedes school-based decision-making authority largely to principals based on the academic performance of their school, the SGCs were formed with the vision that the success of a school is the shared responsibility of school staff, parents and community members.

The policy defines SGCs and their responsibilities as:

- "The School Governance Council (SGC) is the primary, local school decision-making body of a school devoted to achieve its mission and vision. Toward this end, the SGC will focus on the analysis of student achievement, development of improvement plans, allocation of resources and programmatic and operational changes which enhance the quality of the school and the achievement of its students."

To guide the formation of SGCs, the policy stipulates, among other items, the following provisions:

- SGC's shall be comprised of no more than 12 members;
- Parents or legal guardians shall comprise 50% of the membership of each council;
- Remaining members may be selected among school teachers, staff, students or community organizations;
- All members are required to participate in initial and annual training; and
- Members are selected by the Principal in collaboration with the school's PTO, school partner organization and student council (in the case of secondary schools);

## Perspective from Other Cities

The concept of SGCs is not unique to Hartford. They have been adopted in various forms in other cities under reform theory that emphasizes localized school decision-making as an effective driver of improving student performance. To assist in our evaluation, we looked at three other cities which have created SGCs - Boston, Cincinnati and Chicago. Interestingly, while these other cities mostly rely on peer selection for each council member, Hartford's policy calls for principal selection of council members *in collaboration* with other groups. Hartford is also unique in that the policy specifies the amount of parent membership, with guidance to the principal as to the make-up of the rest of the council. Our research also noted that, in comparison to these cities, Hartford's efforts to implement high functioning councils in a short amount of time is very ambitious. In Chicago, for example, it took over five years for councils to get effectively implemented and operate with consistent authority.

## Interim Implementation Data

### Number of SGCs Implemented

The District operates 50 schools (including Adult Education and 2550 Main Street Academy). Ten of these schools are not in autonomous status, so, as per policy, SGCs are not being formed. As detailed on page three, 28 of the remaining 40 schools formed or operated SGCs during the 2009-2010 school year. Despite policy requirements, 12 schools did not initiate SGCs this year due to various reasons, including the transition status of certain schools or particular school model need.

While deviation from the policy regarding these 12 schools may be grounded with sound judgment, we recommend that the policy be amended to include the use of Superintendent discretion to defer formation of SGCs based on unique circumstances. The District has indicated their intent to have SGCs in the 12 remaining schools launched September 2010.

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### Level of Membership, Parent Participation and Attendance through January 2010

The following table provides initial data on the 28 schools that have initiated or currently operate SGCs. The table summarizes the number of SGC members that attended training<sup>1</sup> (not including the principals), the number and ratio of parent members on each SGC, and the average attendance throughout the initial four training sessions for each SGC through January of 2010.

School	# Members (Attending Training)	Average Training Attendance	# of Parents	% of Parents
1 Adult Education	10	77%	n/a	n/a
2 Breakthrough Magnet School	7	66%	5	71%
3 Breakthrough II Elementary School	7	94%	3	43%
4 Bulkeley High School (Lower)	9	75%	4	44%
5 Classical Magnet School	6	n/a	2	33%
6 CommPACT at MD Fox	9	n/a	1	11%
7 Culinary Arts Academy (at Weaver)	3	88%	2	67%
8 Global Communications Academy	8	78%	4	50%
9 Hartford Magnet Middle School	9	78%	4	44%
10 HPHS Engineering & Green Tech. Academy	6	79%	3	50%
11 HPHS Law & Government Academy	8	67%	3	38%
12 HPHS Nursing Academy	5	83%	2	40%
13 High School Inc.	12	60%	5	42%
14 Kennelly School	10	66%	7	70%
15 Kinsella Magnet School of Performing Arts	9	68%	6	67%
16 Latino Studies Academy at Burns	8	53%	3	38%
17 Montessori Magnet School	6	79%	3	50%
18 Naylor School	9	50%	4	44%
19 Parkville Community School	8	72%	4	50%
20 Pathways To Technology Magnet School	7	78%	4	57%
21 Rawson School	6	57%	2	33%
22 America's Choice at SAND	9	60%	5	56%
23 Simpson-Waverly School	9	93%	5	56%
24 Sport & Medical Sciences Academy	10	55%	6	60%
25 University High School of Science & Engineering	8	75%	4	50%
26 Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet School	9	73%	3	33%
27 West-Middle Elementary School	11	81%	4	36%
28 Wish School	6	82%	3	50%

#### Key Findings:

- Of the 28 schools operating SGCs, 26 sent members to training.
- Two schools, CommPACT at MD Fox and Classical Magnet, did not send members to training, as they already operate SGCs under pre-existing structures.
- Of the 26 SGCs in training, the average attendance rate at sessions approximated 72%.
- So far, 14 of these new 26 SGCs have achieved membership levels made up of at least 50% parents, as stipulated by Board policy.

1: Attendance based on evidence from training sign-in sheets.

## School Governance Council Training

Leadership Greater Hartford was contracted by the District to conduct all first year SGC training. Training for SGC members took place from October 2009 to January 2010 and consisted of four sessions, each three hours long. The first three sessions emphasized team building and effective communication, while the fourth session was a content specific training, led mostly by members of the Superintendent's cabinet. During this last training, SGC members were introduced to key aspects of the District's Strategic Operating Plan and trained to understand a SGC's year one responsibilities, which include developing a school budget, designing a school Accountability Plan, and developing a school Compact.

Achieve Hartford! created a six question survey to gauge members' commitment to and confidence in the success of SGCs, both before and after the training. The survey results are reflected<sup>2</sup> in the table below:

Questions on a 4-point scale:		Pre-Training	Post-Training	Growth
1	I am engaged and invested in the success of my SGC.	3.7	3.6	<b>(0.1)</b>
2	I believe my colleagues on the SGC are engaged and invested in our success.	3.5	3.7	<b>0.2</b>
3	I believe my SGC will be open to my ideas and inclusive of my participation moving forward.	3.5	3.7	<b>0.2</b>
4	I am confident that my SGC will work together effectively.	3.5	3.6	<b>0.1</b>
Questions on a 5-point scale (with pre and post answers given at the same time):				
5	Level of understanding of the role of my SGC at my school.	2.3	4.4	<b>2.1</b>
6	Level of understanding of my role on my SGC.	2.6	4.5	<b>1.9</b>

This informal data does suggest that participants are supportive and desirous of the success of SGCs, and that the training has been helpful in defining roles and responsibilities.

## Commentary and Recommendations

To be sure, the implementation goals spelled out in the SGC policy were ambitious. The policy effectively stated that all SGCs were to have fully trained members and be operating by September 2009. Such a result was not practical. An expectation that membership of SGCs would be developed, trained and engaged *over the first year* of the policy is certainly more realistic, and the results that are emerging are more consistent with that expectation. We are encouraged that as of January 2010 there are approximately 225 people sitting on SGCs throughout Hartford. However, based on the mixed results in membership levels and attendance, there is room for improvement, as approximately 55% of new SGCs have reached required parent membership levels.

We are also encouraged that understanding of roles and responsibilities is growing. We do believe, however, that effective SGC training will be a cornerstone of success, and we recommend that meaningful efforts continue to educate SGC members in their specific roles and expectations while incorporating outcome specific, hands-on training. To be successful, this need must be fulfilled within budgetary tradeoffs facing every autonomous school.

The Strategic Operating Plan predicates that autonomous and lasting, high-performing schools include effective SGCs. As we have seen in Chicago, Boston and Cincinnati, reaching full efficiency and maximum impact takes several years. Although not fully implemented based on policy expectations, we do not view Hartford's status as behind. Reform is complex and takes time. Achieve Hartford! is supportive of the progress made thus far, but we suggest increased guidance from the District to principals on optimal size of SGCs and on filling membership openings in order to reach policy compliance. This will help ensure that benefits desired from efficiently operating SGCs can be further realized.

<sup>2</sup>: The informal survey results are partially cohort based. A total of 113 people responded to the pre-survey and 68 people responded to the post survey. Approximately half of all respondents were parents.