

## A Wise Investment: Becoming a Member of a Site-based Council

Una buena oportunidad: Participando como miembro en el concilio de la administración escolar--local

Besides home, school is the place where children spend the most time. Whatever goes on in school directly affects your child's development. It affects what he or she learns, the lessons about life he or she brings home, and the way your children interact with other family members. Shouldn't you, as a parent, have a say in their school experience? Participating on a site-based council is your chance to learn how schools work and what you can do to make them better.

A site-based council is a team of individuals that make the major decisions affecting the school. At first, the idea of participating on a school management team may not appeal to parents. Teachers and principals may have their own way of doing things. Many issues that impact your child may be beyond your control, such as how much money the school has, or strict state or federal policies. Other school issues, such as labor contracts or school policies and regulations may be hard to understand. Despite these challenges, participation on a site-based council can be a wise investment in your child's future.

Some parents think that being on a school-site council won't make a difference. But consider Chicago where school reformers have established school councils with a majority of parents. In that city parents have a majority of votes on such matters as hiring the school principal, developing school strategies, and reviewing the school budget.

Many schools nationwide have adopted the school-based management approach. A national survey of school executives conducted by researchers at the State University of New York showed that 25 percent of schools have instituted some form of school-based management during the 1980's; another 28 percent say programs are in the planning stages.

As a member of a site-based council, a parent becomes part of the school's decision-making structure. Rather than just complaining about the school bureaucracy, a council member works with teachers, principals and other parents to solve school problems. Being part of a school management team can be a tremendously exciting experience. Knowing that you are improving the quality of school for both your child and other children is tremendously rewarding.

As a member of the local community, you and other parents bring an important perspective to the schools. Many school officials may not know what the local communities think about school policies, teaching materials or programs. As a result, parents on the council must provide guidance to the school officials in shaping the school programs and policy. Working with other parents on the council will give you a good picture of how community members think and how school officials respond to community ideas.

Being on a member of a site-based council doesn't mean you stop being a parent. You can still present and react to ideas as a parent. Indeed, learning about the problems other children face in school means you can help solve them before they affect your child. Most importantly, as a caring parent, participation in a site-based council will help you learn about the important decisions as they affect your child. Since you cannot be there in the classroom, perhaps the next best thing you can do is to know that you are actively working to make his or her learning experience better.

To learn more about participating with your child's school, call the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) toll-free at 1-800/624- 9120. Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) in San Antonio can be reached at (210) 684-8180 for more assistance. To find out more about the ERIC system and its services, call ACCESS ERIC at 1-800/LET- ERIC.