



School Improvement Council Handbook



The Basics

Fourth Edition, 2008

South Carolina School Improvement Council Handbook

-The Basics-

Fourth Edition, August 2008

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The South Carolina School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) provides training and services to more than 15,000 parents, teachers, students, and community members serving on School Improvement Councils in each of South Carolina's 1,100-plus K-12 public schools. Located at the University of South Carolina's College of Education, it is the mission of SC-SIC "to promote and support civic engagement for quality public education in South Carolina." To this end, SC-SIC sponsors local, regional and state training events on a variety of topics pertinent to SIC members and their leadership roles in local schools. SC-SIC produces and provides a variety of printed, video and other materials to inform and assist SICs, and maintains a toll-free hotline and website for SIC members to receive assistance, request materials and services, and schedule training. SC-SIC also provides legislatively-mandated priority assistance on for those schools receiving an "At Risk" rating (formerly "Unsatisfactory") on their annual state *School Report Card*.

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History of South Carolina School Improvement Councils

The State of South Carolina initiated School Improvement Councils (SICs) through legislation as a means of assuring the influential voice of parents and community members in the education of their children. Over a period of more than 30 years, the South Carolina General Assembly has passed several significant pieces of legislation that established School Improvement Councils, and subsequently expanded and extended their role and responsibilities for planning, monitoring, and evaluating improvement at the school level. Four key pieces of legislation have affected the composition of SICs, their role and responsibilities, and the growing importance and influence of councils in South Carolina's education improvement and accountability efforts.

1977 – The Education Finance Act (EFA) was passed to create a structure and formula for state financed education in South Carolina. To ensure community awareness and review of how the state funds were spent, local school boards were directed to establish a School Advisory Council at each school composed of elected parents, teachers and students (in schools with grades 9-12), and appointed community members, with the primary assigned responsibility of advising the school's principal.

1984 – The Education Improvement Act (EIA) amended the EFA to outline a series of specific programs or actions to be achieved by the S.C. Department of Education, local districts and schools. To pay for these new programs, funding came from a penny sales tax dedicated to funding innovation and improvements in the state's public education system. The EIA changed the name of the School Advisory Councils to School Improvement Councils. Additional responsibilities were specified and the roles of SICs in the improvement process were based on effective schools research. These responsibilities included assisting in a newly created three-year planning process, assisting in the monitoring and evaluation of annual improvements, and advising on the spending of incentive award funds.

1993 – The Early Childhood Development and Academic Assistance Act (Act 135) amended the EFA by altering the state's school funding formula to account for the effects of poverty on children, and directed that funding be spent on timely academic assistance, family literacy programs, parent involvement initiatives, and innovative teaching methods and organization. A five-year strategic planning process (increased from three years) was required for schools and districts to achieve the goal of improved student achievement. School Improvement Council responsibilities were expanded, with SICs being directed to be active participants in the five-year strategic planning process and in writing annual updates of the plan, and required to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of innovations and improvements. In addition, SICs assumed the responsibility of writing the annual *Report to the Parents* about progress made to achieve the goals and objectives of the school and district. SICs were also further authorized to advise on the spending of any state incentive funds should the school receive an award for academic achievement and improvement. (Incentive awards are subject to the availability of funding from the General Assembly.)

1998 – The Education Accountability Act (EAA) established a system of curriculum standards - measured by a state test - and reported by an annual *School Report Card* rating individual schools and districts. Each district was required to create an accountability system that would be included in the district's strategic plan. A system of awards and consequences were also outlined. The Education Oversight Committee (EOC), composed of business, education, and legislative representatives, was established to review the accountability process. School Improvement Council responsibilities were expanded to include collaborating with the school's principal to write a descriptive narrative for inclusion in the annual state-issued *School Report Card*. If a school were to be rated as "unsatisfactory," the SIC was empowered to participate in writing a revision of the school's improvement plan outlining how the school would better improve student achievement. (In 2008 the EAA was updated. The more significant changes included the revision the state's end-of-year student assessment test for grades 3-8, clarifying and streamlining certain aspects of the *School Report Card*, and aligning South Carolina's school achievement ratings with those established at the federal level in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.)



School Improvement Council Roles and Responsibilities

Each School Improvement Council (SIC) member needs to have an understanding of the role of the SIC and the specific responsibilities the SIC is required to fulfill by state law. New members need a period of orientation to learn this information and should expect the principal and/or the district to provide appropriate training to help them. Through its web site (<http://sic.sc.gov>) and toll-free hotline (1-800-868-2232), and through state-wide, regional and local training sessions, the S.C. School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) provides information, materials and services to all SIC members. This publication is but one example of the materials and services provided by SC-SIC.

PARTICIPATE in the development of the five-year school improvement plan. (Act 135)

Each school is required to have a school improvement plan (also known as the school renewal plan) that contains strategies or goals to improve student achievement over a five-year period. This plan is reviewed and revised every year. The local school district may establish the planning process to be used by its schools, create the timetable for plans to be completed and provide resources to schools to aid the planning process and the writing of the plan. Act 135 requires SICs to be "active participants" in this planning process.

How can the SIC participate in planning?

- The SIC acts as the core of the planning team and others are added to ensure a broad representation of the school community, enlarging the group up to 25 or 30 members. The SIC is involved in all stages of the development of the plan using this method.

- The district may require that a specially organized planning team be named for each school. Selected SIC members serve as representatives on the planning team and act as a liaison for information sharing with the full SIC in all stages of the planning process.
- A broad-based team develops the strategies for improvement as the initial stage of the planning. In this design, the SIC members serve as representatives on action teams for each strategy to plan the specific steps to be accomplished for each year of the five years.
- A combination of the two previous designs might be used. A large broad-based planning team is named, selected SIC members act as representatives on the planning team and all of the SIC members have an opportunity to participate on one of the action teams to develop specific actions to implement the plan.

NOTE: The district may choose to substitute the SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) plan for the Act 135 five-year plan. The SIC participates in the planning process in the same way.

**ASSIST in implementing the plan and evaluating the outcomes.
(Act 135)**

Once every five years, local School Improvement Council members are involved in planning. Most SIC members spend time on the implementation of the plan's strategies. A main function of the SIC is to gather information about the actions taking place and the progress realized in achieving goals. A major portion of monthly SIC meetings should be spent reporting such information.

How can the SIC monitor implementation?

The school improvement plan can be monitored solely by SIC members if the council is large enough (at least 15 members). Plans often have three to seven strategies. For example, a strategy for improving reading, or one for improving parent involvement, or one for Healthy Schools would require a committee for each strategy. The number of SIC members on each committee will vary according to the work of the strategy.

- Each SIC member chairs or co-chairs a committee that monitors implementation of one strategy of the plan. Members for these committees may be recruited from among parents, teachers, students, and community members interested in and committed to working on a particular strategy of the plan, but not serving on the SIC itself. The number of people on a committee will vary according to the amount of actions to be monitored.
- The SIC as a whole reviews information from school administration and faculty committees, forming subcommittees as needed to gather the information about the strategy's implementation.
- The school's faculty may be organized into implementation teams. Each SIC member chooses to become active with one of the faculty teams by attending their meetings, communicating with the chair of the team about progress, and reporting the progress to the whole SIC.

The number of SIC members and the number of improvement plan strategies will affect how the membership is divided up to perform this function of the School Improvement Council. No matter how the SIC organizes itself, it is important to create some structure to focus the SIC's attention on the monitoring function and sharing the workload. When every SIC member has an assigned job and responsibility, the result is an effective SIC.

**ASSIST in the writing of the annual updates.
(Act 135)**

At the end of each year, information about how well each strategy of the school improvement plan was implemented must be compiled, analyzed and evaluated by the school's administration and the SIC. The information is written into a report called an annual update and submitted to the district. Each district sets its own deadline for this update. Each SIC strategy committee will be able to make a contribution to the development of the annual update based on the implementation information collected. During the year, the SIC may have created and distributed surveys to parents, interviewed teachers, and/or observed programs to gather information about progress being made on the plan. All of this information will contribute to the writing of a useful document that will provide the basis for the next year's actions.

**ADVISE on the spending of any state incentive award funds received by the school.
(EIA, Act 135, EAA)**

Incentive awards are given to schools based on the rating each school receives on the annual *School Report Card*, along with other performance and improvement objectives. Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards may also include a cash award if funds have been allocated by the General Assembly for this purpose. As the SIC represents the many groups interested in the school's success, it is well positioned to provide informed input about how incentive funds could be spent to implement the school improvement plan more effectively. The signature of the SIC Chair on the budget submission form is required by law and verifies the participation of the SIC to the S.C. Department of Education.

**WRITE the annual *Report to the Parents* about the progress of the school and district to achieve the goals and objectives of the school's strategic plan.
(Act 135)**

The SIC is charged with the responsibility of preparing an annual *Report to the Parents* about the progress being made to achieve improvements. This report is to be publicly distributed by April 30th of each year, and should include the following:

- A brief summary statement about each strategy.
- The amount of progress made during the previous year.
- The actions planned for the current year.
- Information about programs, activities, awards, and recognitions for students and teachers.
- Pertinent test scores not already reported in the annual *School Report Card*.

The SIC may appoint a committee for writing the whole report or form small teams to write sections of the report. The final product should be designed to attract attention and draw the reader's interest to the information contained within it. Visit the SC-SIC website (<http://sic.sc.gov>) to view some sample reports. Local SICs may consider the following suggestions for the report:

- Include the school's mission statement.
- Write a brief letter or introduction about the report.
- List SIC member names and contact information.
- Use letter size paper and fold it to make a brochure of 4 or 6 pages.
- Print the report on colored paper.
- Use the school mascot as a graphic theme throughout the publication.
- Use various size fonts and graphics for emphasis.
- Distribute copies of the report to other members of the community by placing them in public locations and/or posting the report to the school's website.
- Send a copy of the report to the SC-SIC office in Columbia.

WRITE a brief explanatory narrative, in conjunction with the principal, for inclusion in the annual *School Report Card*.

(EAA)

Since 1998, the annual state *School Report Card* has required the SIC and the principal to provide a brief narrative with information about the school, its challenges and the strategies developed to address those challenges. The text of this narrative is submitted by the school to the S.C. Department of Education as part of the summer data collection for the *Report Card*. In 2008, under revisions of the Education Accountability Act (EAA), the *School Report Card* was shortened to an executive summary format of two pages, with a full online version to be posted to the state Department of Education website. Both versions of the *Report Card* include the narrative, which is signed with the name and title of both the school's principal and the SIC Chair.

PARTICIPATE in the revision of the school improvement plan if a school is rated as "At Risk" (formerly "Unsatisfactory") on the *School Report Card*.

(EAA)

The local district will provide direction and procedures for the revision of a school's improvement plan in conjunction with the S.C. Department of Education. The SIC is required to participate in the revision of the current plan and help identify strategies that will better support improved student achievement.



School Improvement Council Membership

Membership requirements for the School Improvement Council (SIC) were first set out in the Education Finance Act (EFA) of 1977. Ex-officio members were required by Act 135 in 1993. Information about membership and elections procedures should be outlined in the local SIC's bylaws. Participation on the SIC is an important contribution to education initiatives at the local level. As a quasi-public elected or appointed position, SIC membership should be considered as a high-status position in a school and district.

Elected Members

In accordance with state statute (EFA, EIA), the elected members of the SIC make up two-thirds of the total membership of an SIC.

Parents

- A minimum of two parents are required by law to be elected by the parents of current students in the school.
- A parent may not serve as an elected representative of parents if his/her child no longer attends the school.
- Most SICs have more than the minimum number of elected parents in order to increase the base of representation.
- In deciding the number of parents serving on the SIC, the number of grades in the school or the various communities being served by the school may be considered.

Teachers

- A minimum of two teachers are required by law to be elected by the teachers in the school.
- Most SICs have more than the minimum number of elected teachers to reflect the representation of the grades, subject area or age groups of the school's students.

Students

- Students in a school with grades 9-12 are required by law to elect a minimum of two students to the SIC.
- Schools with grades other than 9-12 may elect students to the SIC if they desire.
- Most high schools have more than the minimum number of elected students to reflect the number of grades in the school.

Appointed Members

In accordance with state law (EFA, EIA), appointed members represent one-third of the SIC.

Community members

- The principal appoints members of the community to serve on the SIC to represent the non-parent portion of the population, which is usually about 75% of any given community.
- These appointments may include business and industry representatives, civic and social organization leaders, grandparents, retirees, and social service agency or local government representatives.
- By law, these appointments should not include individuals eligible to be elected to the SIC (parents, teachers or students).
- In appointing community members, attention should be given to creating a balanced representation by gender, race, age, and location in the community so that the demographics of the SIC reflect that of the school.
- If an SIC wants to increase its number of community representatives, then the number of elected members must also increase in order to keep the required ratio in balance.

Ex-Officio Members

- These members of the SIC are included *by virtue of the position* they hold in the school or an organization associated with the school.
- By law, the school's principal is automatically considered an ex-officio member of the SIC.
- Act 135 does not set limits on the number of members in this category, but does make suggestions about what positions a school might include: business partner, Teacher of the Year, president of the parent-teacher organization, chair of the Title I parent advisory council, or a previously serving SIC Chair.
- The reason the ex-officio category is included on the SIC is to bring all interested parties into the discussion and planning for improvement at the school.
- The local SIC's bylaws should indicate the voting status for the principal and other ex-officio members.

School administrators and SIC leaders should pay particular note to the legislatively-mandated ratio of elected to appointed members. SICs should always have **twice** as many elected (parents, teachers, students) members as appointed (community) members. These membership ratios ensure that all of a community's constituent groups have a direct voice in their local schools and that school principals receive a broad range of community advice and support in charting their schools' improvement and success. Ex-officio members do not figure into the elected/appointed membership ratio.

Terms of Service

Elected Members

- Elected members are required by law (EFA, EIA) to serve a minimum two-year term.
- Law places no limits to the number of terms a member may serve, but the school or district may choose to set limits through SIC bylaws or district policy.
- Elections occur each year for a minimum of one member in each category of elected membership to maintain a staggered election process.
- Staggered elected terms provide a continuity of membership and knowledge of the SIC's actions from year to year.

Appointed Members

- Appointed members of the community are often willing to commit to one year at a time, but are encouraged to serve for two years just like elected members.
- Recognition of the demands on their time and the importance placed on being a member of the SIC will contribute to their willingness to participate.
- The local SIC's bylaws should indicate the term lengths for appointed members.

Conducting SIC Elections

Elections for each of the categories of SIC membership are conducted to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in the election. When and how elections take place will vary from school to school based on what each has found achieves the most participation.

When?

- Elections for SIC members are required by law to take place *no later than October 15th* of each year.
- Fall elections take place early in the school year to provide time for the SIC to organize and begin its work before too much of the school year has passed.
- Schools are encouraged to hold elections in the spring (May) so the SIC can organize over the summer and is ready to work when the school year begins. If this option is chosen, an effective process for including the parents of rising students from feeder schools needs to be in place to give those parents the opportunity to participate.
- Spring elections also provide principals with the summer months to make community appointments to the SIC, ensuring a demographic balance for the SIC reflecting that of their schools.

How?

For **teachers**, conduct the election when the whole faculty can be present.

- Teachers should be nominated in advance and the faculty made aware of the names of the teacher(s) willing to serve on the SIC.
- Sequence these events during the days prior to the opening or closing of school.
- Conduct the election during a faculty meeting with ballots.
- Teachers completing their term on the SIC supervise the counting of the ballots and announce the faculty's selection.

For **parents**, be sure to be inclusive and find ways to offer all parents the opportunity to run for the SIC.

- Nominations are solicited through the school newsletter or other communication, at student registration activities prior to the start of school, at end-of-year events and/or on the school's website.
- Conduct elections in conjunction with an event or activity that has a high level of parent participation.
- Students can deliver and return ballots if that is an established method of school-home communication.

Practices that help parents make informed choices about their representatives include:

- Each candidate for election writes a brief statement of two or three lines about why he/she wishes to serve, with these statements published in the school's newsletter.
- Publish the picture of each candidate in the newsletter, on the ballot sheet, or on a flyer announcing the election date, time, and place.
- Introduce the candidates at the chosen event and provide ballots for parents present, with voting conducted by the outgoing members of the SIC.
- To ensure that as many parents vote as possible, a ballot box should be made available to parents in the days before and/or after the event in the school's office or some other place convenient for parents.
- When balloting is completed and the votes counted, the principal should contact the newly-elected members to notify and immediately congratulate them on being selected for SIC membership.

Parents need to know who has been elected as their representative on the SIC. Ways for communicating who the new SIC members are include:

- Listing the new members' names in the school newsletter, website and marquee.
- Place their pictures on a school lobby bulletin board.
- Announce the new members in the local newspaper.

For **students**, elections are held when other class and student body officers are chosen. Nominations by grade level or at large are made according to the local SIC's bylaws. *Practices that help students* make informed choices about their representative include:

- Students nominated should write a brief statement indicating why they wish to serve on the SIC, with these statements and the candidates' pictures published in the school newspaper, on an information flyer, and/or on the ballot.
- Introduce candidates at an assembly or other event so those students voting get to know the students who are running (especially if the school is large and the class votes on its own grade representative or the whole school votes for several SIC members).
- Conduct voting when elections for other student offices occur, or conduct voting through homerooms, with outgoing students and teachers on the SIC counting the ballots.
- Announce the new student SIC members at school, in the school newsletter, on the marquee, on the school web site, and in the local newspaper.

Elections for New or Reorganized SICs

- A new school and newly organized SIC will conduct elections for the total number of members on the SIC.
- State law indicates that members will “draw lots” (drawing straws or slips of paper numbered “1” and “2”) to determine which member(s) will serve only one year in the first year in order to get the staggered system started.
- For example, if an SIC has four parents elected in its first year, two parents will serve a one-year term and two parents will serve two-year terms. In subsequent years, all elected members will serve two-year terms.
- This procedure is also appropriate when the SIC is found to be inactive or nonfunctioning and the need to reorganize is recognized by a new principal or district staff.



SC-SIC Member Network Database

State law (Act 135) requires membership information on each local SIC be reported to SC-SIC office *no later than November 15th* of each school year. The SC-SIC Member Network, the online membership database and information reporting system, provides a variety of membership services to the general public and the education community.

SIC District Contacts and school administrators can obtain user accounts and log onto the system to enter or obtain membership data for their own SICs. Member contact information and compliance reports for School Improvement Councils are available to school and district account holders. Security regulations require that district and school user accounts be reactivated each year.

A “read-only” function enables the general public to view SIC membership and compliance reports for individual schools anywhere in South Carolina. No password is necessary to access read-only information and the information is not downloadable.

Membership data is vital to the SC-SIC office in order to distribute newsletters and other important information and correspondence. The names and contact information of those serving on SICs are public information and the database may be shared with other agencies and organizations that have information to share with SIC members. This data, along with individual SIC membership compliance, will also be made available to school district administrators, local school boards and other elected officials.



School Improvement Council Officers

Leadership is an important ingredient for all successful organizations and the School Improvement Council is no exception. At a minimum, SIC officers include a Chair and a Recorder/Secretary. Many effective SICs also have elected a Vice Chair, and some have Co-Chairs. However, SICs should not have the elected office of Treasurer as they are quasi-public bodies without non-profit status, and therefore should not hold or maintain funds of any kind.

Both the elected and appointed members elect SIC officers. Some of the ex-officio members are officers in other organizations associated with the school (such as the PTO or PTA) and should not be considered eligible as an officer of the SIC. The local SIC's bylaws will state how the election of officers occurs and who is eligible to vote for the SIC officers. The election of officers should be concluded prior to the November 15th membership reporting deadline so that this information may be entered into the SC-SIC Member Network database.

Other leadership roles are taken by members to chair a subcommittee or study group that the Chair has appointed. Other members will provide leadership coordinating a project, event, or activity for the SIC.

Overall Duties of the SIC Chair

- Direct the monthly SIC meetings.
- Finalize the monthly agenda in collaboration with the principal.
- Act as spokesperson for the SIC when working with the faculty, parent or community groups, district staff, and local school board.
- Sign documents assuring SIC participation, such as the school's annual *Report to the Parents*, the narrative accompanying the annual state *School Report Card*, and the budget submitted to the S.C. Department of Education for any incentive award expenditures.
- Appoint SIC members and others to serve on committees as needed.

Monthly Activities of the Chair

- Prepare the agenda with the principal well in advance of the monthly meeting to allow time for the Recorder/Secretary to send it to all members prior to the meeting and to have it posted publicly at the school and on the school's website.
- Conduct monthly meetings of the SIC, directing the action of the meeting through the agenda, and appointing committees as needed.
- Communicate regularly with the subcommittee, project, and task force leaders to support their activities and prepare them for reporting progress at the meetings.

Overall Duties of the SIC Vice Chair

- Assist the Chair during meetings, assuming the leadership for a discussion period or for the entire meeting if the Chair is unable to attend.
- Assume leadership of a standing committee, task force or project of the SIC.
- Assist with the development of the agenda, committee activity and general support of SIC initiatives.
- Additional duties will vary according to local SIC bylaws.

Monthly Activities of the Vice Chair

- Coordinate with the SIC Chair to identify the actions needed.
- Additional activities will vary according to local SIC bylaws.

Overall Duties of the SIC Secretary/Recorder

- Maintain a set of records at the school for the SIC including current bylaws, current and past copies of SIC meeting agendas and minutes, current and past copies of the school's *Report to the Parents*, latest copy of the state *School Report Card*, and a copy of the current year portion of the school's improvement/renewal plan.
- Work with school staff to ensure that copies of the bylaws, current year's minutes and agendas and other pertinent information is readily available to the public, or by posting it to an SIC section of the school's web site.
- Assure the agenda is distributed to all SIC members at least 10 days prior to the next meeting, and that a copy of the agenda is available for public view prior to the meeting by posting it at the school or on the school's web site.
- Record attendance at each meeting.
- Make a record of the actions taken at each meeting (using the agenda as a guide for reporting actions taken and giving summaries of discussion points where appropriate).
- Coordinate with the committees and school staff about having copies of materials prepared for each meeting.
- Summarize information about meeting actions for publication in the school's newsletter or local news media.

Monthly Activities of the Secretary/Recorder

- File the approved minutes or record of action in an SIC folder at the school and arrange to have them posted to the school's web site.
- Distribute copies of the minutes/record of action of the previous meeting along with the agenda of the upcoming meeting to all SIC members in advance of the meeting.
- Contact the SIC Chair or committee leaders to determine if materials need to be copied for the next meeting.
- Submit to the school newsletter/newspaper the summary of the last SIC meeting and the agenda of the next meeting, and submit similar information to local news media.
- Keep the SIC District Contact informed of local SIC actions.

SIC Committee Leadership Duties

- Direct the actions of a standing committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of a strategy or an ad hoc committee with a specific task and limited time of existence.
- Communicate progress to the SIC Chair and prepare to report to the SIC.
- Report the progress of the committee's work when scheduled on the agenda.
- Recruit committee members from among others not already serving on the SIC.
- Chairs of SIC committees are not required to be elected or appointed SIC members.

SIC Voting

Voting procedures and criteria may vary among SICs. The local SIC's bylaws should indicate under what circumstances voting will be conducted, when consensus is used, what percentage constitutes a majority vote, and the voting status of ex-officio members.



Annual School Improvement Council Calendar

Throughout the year SICs have various responsibilities to perform at specified times, such as conducting elections, reporting membership, and writing and publishing certain public reports. The following calendar can be used as a guideline for SICs to follow in planning and performing their legally-mandated duties.

August / September

- Plan with principal the election procedures, date, and event (unless elections are held in spring).
- New SIC convened; distribute *SIC Handbook*; conduct new member orientation.

- SIC officers elected and committee assignments made related to the school's improvement plan.
- Complete SIC membership information collected at school and entered into state database (SC-SIC Member Network).

October

- SIC elections completed by October 15th; membership information can be uploaded to SC-SIC database at any time during the school year, but MUST be posted by November 15th each year.
- Committees identify areas of school improvement plan to be monitored and organize for action.
- Review school data such as surveys, test scores, demographics, and budget.
- Attend/arrange SIC training if you haven't already done so.
- Apply for annual Riley School Improvement Award.

November / December

- State law requires that all SIC members be entered into SC-SIC Member Network by November 15 each year.
- Review data from annual *School Report Card* and how it relates to school improvement plan.
- Committees continue to monitor implementation of plan strategies.

January / February

- Share analysis of *School Report Card* data with parents and faculty.
- Committees monitor and report implementation progress of plan strategies.
- Identify SIC members to draft the school's annual *Report to the Parents*.

March / April

- Review draft of *Report to the Parents*; revise and finalize for publication.
- Distribute *Report to the Parents* by April 30 to parents, community members, district SIC contact, and SC-SIC office.
- Attend scheduled state SIC conference.
- Identify SIC members to work with principal in drafting narrative for upcoming state *School Report Card*.

May / June

- Summarize the implementation progress made on improvement plan strategies.
- Finalize *School Report Card* narrative with principal.

- Conduct SIC elections or plan elections process for upcoming school year.



Characteristics of Effective SICs

Research has found (Sara Hollingsworth and Jimmy Kijai, “A Study of the Functionality and Effectiveness of School Improvement Councils in Selected Schools in South Carolina,” in *Focus on School Improvement: School Improvement Councils Working for Effective Schools*) that effective School Improvement Councils share the following characteristics:

- Strong principal leadership.
- Members receive training.
- Written bylaws or guidelines are in place.
- The local school district supports SICs.
- SIC members feel a sense of accomplishment.

Principal Leadership

It is widely agreed that the principal sets the tone, expectations and direction for a school. Principal leadership is also a key to the effectiveness of the SIC. If the principal lends his or her support to council activities, the SIC is empowered to make its greatest contributions. The principal promotes the status of the organization in the school by:

- Charging the SIC with its role and responsibilities and stating the expectations for participation.
- Initiating a positive relationship with the elected SIC Chair to coordinate the development of the agenda.
- Providing materials, information and resources when requested.
- Establishing a routine procedure for distributing SIC communications including: disseminating meeting minutes and agenda, posting minutes in teacher work area and on email, placing meeting action summaries and agenda in the school newsletter and on the school website.
- Ensuring a positive working relationship exists between the school staff and the SIC’s officers and members.
- Attending monthly meetings and participating as appropriate.

Training

Every local Board of Education is required by statute to establish an SIC at each school in its district and to provide for training of the membership of these SICs. Opportunities for training

supported by the district might include:

- An annual district-sponsored orientation for new SIC members.
- Regional or state-level trainings about a topic related to school improvement strategies.
- Attendance at training sessions and conferences sponsored by SC-SIC.
- Networking with other SICs within the district or in other parts of the state.
- Access to resources provided by SC-SIC including training videos, newsletters, toll-free hot-line (1-800-868-2232), and website (<http://sic.sc.gov>).

Written Bylaws or Guidelines

Effective SICs also have bylaws to provide the structure which allows the organization to operate effectively to achieve its goals. Copies of the bylaws should be kept in an SIC file at the school, posted to the school's website, and each SIC member and the SIC District Contact should have a copy of the SIC's bylaws. Points to include in the bylaws should be:

- Purpose, responsibilities and duties of the SIC.
- Membership composition.
- Election procedures.
- Voting requirements.
- Officers and their duties.
- Council structure, including committees, tasks, events, and activities.
- Amendment procedures.

Sample bylaws addressing these points and covering all statutory obligations regarding SICs are available for local use and adaptation through the SC-SIC website, <http://sic.sc.gov>.

District Support

Support for SICs from the local school district comes in many ways depending on the need of the individual council. The district is the source of information, funding and other resources to support the efforts of the SIC. Examples of district support are:

- An SIC District Contact appointed by the superintendent coordinates training and acts as a resource to the district's SICs.
- Payment of registration fees for SIC members to attend conferences and training events.
- A district bus or van is supplied to transport SIC members to attend training events, school visits, and/or conferences.
- Mileage reimbursement for SIC-related travel.
- District staff is available to attend SIC meetings and provide resources.
- Public recognition of SIC members serving each school.

Sense of Impact

Members of organizations need to feel they are valued, that their work and family priorities

are honored, and that the goals of the organization match their own values to become committed and active participants in the organization. SIC members need to be involved in the work of the SIC in specific ways to have a sense of accomplishment.

- Every member of the SIC has a job responsibility, such as a committee assignment.
- Meetings follow the agenda, start on time and end on time. All members' ideas and positions are encouraged and respected, and communication is open and regular.
- The meeting schedule is convenient, child care is provided and meeting materials are readily available.
- Response to requests for information about policies and budgets for SIC members is timely.



School Improvement Council Self-Assessment Profile

This *Profile* has been designed as a teaching tool, used at the beginning of the year to induct and orient new members, to evaluate the past year, or to be used at both the beginning and end of the school year to examine SIC progress. It is best used in a group to stimulate dialogue and ideas for improving the SIC.

To complete the *Profile*, follow these steps:

1. Give a *Profile* to each council member. Complete responses to statements as a group or mail the *Profile* to SIC members prior to meeting so that they arrive with their responses completed.
2. Select a recorder to make a single record of the group's consensus to all of the *Profile* statements. When completed this copy becomes a record to measure progress toward council effectiveness.
3. Decide as a group whether the answer is "Yes" or "No" for each statement. All SIC members should agree on the answer. If additional information is needed to answer a statement, leave the statement blank for the time being. If discussion suggests actions for the SIC to consider, make sure these actions are recorded.
4. When finished responding to each statement, check any statements left blank for lack of information. Task specific individuals with collecting this information and providing it to the SIC by an agreed upon date.
5. Review responses for the *Profile's* three factors. If there are not many "Yes" responses for a particular factor, review the "No" statements in that section. Determine whether these statements suggest actions the SIC might take to strengthen its effectiveness. Wherever possible, related statements have been grouped together. For example, statements 40-45 refer to the relationship between the SIC and the school's teachers. If there are few "Yes" responses for these statements, the SIC may want to plan actions to increase teachers' involvement with your council. Record all suggested actions.
6. Decide on actions to increase your SIC's effectiveness and a timetable for implementing them.

Profile Statements

Answer “Yes” or “No” to each of the following 64 statements.

Organizational Capacity

1. SIC members include parents, teachers, students (grades 9-12), and community representatives (such as business partners, retired persons, etc.).

YES _____ **NO** _____

2. The SIC includes ex-officio members with leadership positions in the school or school organizations such as parent-teacher groups, booster clubs and federal program advisory groups.

YES _____ **NO** _____

3. The principal is an ex-officio member of the SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

4. The principal appoints additional SIC members from the community to ensure that the council is representative of the school and community.

YES _____ **NO** _____

5. There is at least one SIC teacher representative for every two SIC parent representatives.

YES _____ **NO** _____

6. The SIC has more than the minimum number of members required by law.

YES _____ **NO** _____

7. SIC nomination procedures ensure that all parents, teachers, and students (grades 9-12) have an opportunity to be nominated for election to the SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

8. SIC election procedures ensure that all parents, teachers, and students (grades 9-12) have an opportunity to vote for SIC representatives each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

9. Election of SIC members occurs no later than October 15th of each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

10. The elected members of the SIC comprise at least two-thirds of the total elected and appointed members (excluding ex-officio members).

YES _____ **NO** _____

11. Elected SIC members serve at least a two-year term.

YES _____ **NO** _____

12. An updated SIC membership list is posted to the SC-SIC Member Network within 30 days following council elections every year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

13. SIC terms are staggered so that only half of the council members are new each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

14. The SIC has an established meeting schedule that is publicized in the school and community.

YES _____ **NO** _____

15. The SIC has at least eight meetings per year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

16. At least 80% of SIC members are present at each scheduled council meeting.

YES _____ **NO** _____

17. The SIC replaces members who fail to attend three or more meetings and do not have an excused absence.

YES _____ **NO** _____

18. The SIC elects a chairperson each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

19. The SIC elects a vice chairperson each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

20. The SIC elects a secretary/recorder each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

21. The SIC has written guidelines or bylaws about how the council operates.

YES _____ **NO** _____

22. A written agenda is prepared and distributed to all members prior to each SIC meeting.

YES _____ **NO** _____

23. Minutes or actions of each SIC meeting are recorded.

YES _____ **NO** _____

Council Functioning

24. The SIC agenda is prepared by the SIC chairperson in consultation with the school principal.

YES _____ **NO** _____

25. The SIC chairperson – not the principal – presides over all SIC meetings.

YES _____ **NO** _____

26. The SIC guidelines or bylaws are reviewed every year and amended as necessary.

YES _____ **NO** _____

27. All SIC members receive copies of council minutes.

YES _____ **NO** _____

28. Articles about SIC activities are published regularly in the school newsletter or other publications sent home to parents.

YES _____ **NO** _____

29. Expenses for SIC operations (printing, postage, etc.) are paid by the school.

YES _____ **NO** _____

30. The SIC establishes task forces or committees to address specific issues or needs.

YES _____ **NO** _____

31. Parents, teachers, or school administrators who are not members of the council serve on SIC-sponsored committees.

YES _____ **NO** _____

32. The SIC annually evaluates its activities, discusses accomplishments, and sets priorities for the year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

33. The SIC has spent meeting time discussing the expenditure of state school incentive award funds within the past two years (*leave blank if your school has not won an award or if state funds are not allocated*).

YES _____ **NO** _____

34. The SIC develops the *Report to the Parents* by April 30th each year to provide information on the school's progress in meeting the school and district's goals and objectives.

YES _____ **NO** _____

35. The SIC works with the principal to write the narrative accompanying the annual state *School Report Card*.

YES _____ **NO** _____

36. SIC members design and administer surveys or conduct discussions with parents, teachers, students and community members (when appropriate) to gather information on school improvement needs.

YES _____ **NO** _____

37. Results of school surveys or other forms of gathering information are shared with parents and teachers by the principal or SIC members.

YES _____ **NO** _____

38. The SIC analyzes school level information on attendance, test scores, accreditation, and dropout rates (if applicable) prior to the writing or updating of the school's improvement plan.

YES _____ **NO** _____

39. SIC members, as a group or in committees, participate in the preparation of the school's improvement plan.

YES _____ **NO** _____

40. The SIC assists with monitoring and evaluating strategies described in the school's improvement plan.

YES _____ **NO** _____

41. Every member of the SIC and school faculty receives a copy of the school's improvement plan.

YES _____ **NO** _____

42. SIC members present the school's improvement plan to the district school board or attend the board meeting when the plans are presented.

YES _____ **NO** _____

43. Teachers who are not members of the SIC are able to name two current SIC members (excluding the principal).

YES _____ **NO** _____

44. Teachers who are not members of the SIC can describe at least one activity or accomplishment of the council.

YES _____ **NO** _____

45. Minutes of SIC meetings are distributed to all teachers (including email) or posted in a central location (such as a teachers' lounge or workroom).

YES _____ **NO** _____

46. Minutes of SIC meetings are sent to the SIC District Contact and/or other appropriate district staff.

YES _____ **NO** _____

47. The SIC chairperson or other SIC members have talked with district staff about specific school improvement needs at least once within the past year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

48. SIC members have attended at least one district school board meeting within the past year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

School and District Level Support

49. Each SIC member has received an orientation to SIC roles, responsibilities, and functions from training provided by the principal, SIC Chair, district, or SC-SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

50. Each SIC member has received materials on SIC roles, responsibilities and functions from the principal, SIC Chair, district, or SC-SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

51. The principal attends at least 90% of the SIC meetings each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

52. The principal consults regularly with the SIC Chair and other SIC members by telephone, email or in person (apart from SIC meetings).

YES _____ **NO** _____

53. The principal provides a meeting room for the SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

54. The principal provides secretarial support for the SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

55. The principal solicits input from the SIC during the school's budget development process.

YES _____ **NO** _____

56. The principal shares the completed school budget with the SIC.

YES _____ **NO** _____

57. The principal provides school data such as attendance, test scores, survey responses, accreditation, and dropout rates (if applicable) to council members.

YES _____ **NO** _____

58. The principal has participated in SIC training sessions provided by the district or SC-SIC during the past two years.

YES _____ **NO** _____

59. Both the principal SIC Chair can name their SIC District Contact.

YES _____ **NO** _____

60. The SIC District Contact has corresponded or talked with both the principal and SIC Chair at least once during the past year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

61. At least one district staff person or school board member has attended a SIC meeting within the past year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

62. The district recognizes the contribution of SIC members through letters of appreciation, certificates or other appropriate means.

YES _____ **NO** _____

63. The district provides at least one training session for SICs each year.

YES _____ **NO** _____

64. The district pays some or all expenses of SIC members to attend regional or state SIC training.

YES _____ **NO** _____



About the S.C. School Improvement Council

The South Carolina School Improvement Council (SC-SIC) provides training and services to more than 15,000 parents, teachers, students, and community members serving on local School Improvement Councils in each of South Carolina's 1,100-plus K-12 public schools. Located at the University of South Carolina's College of Education, it is the mission of SC-SIC "to promote and support civic engagement for quality public education in South Carolina." To this end, SC-SIC sponsors local, regional and state training events on a variety of topics pertinent to local SIC members and their leadership roles in local schools. SC-SIC produces and provides a variety of printed, video and other materials to inform and assist local SICs, and maintains a toll-free hotline and website for SIC members to receive assistance, request materials and services, and schedule training. SC-SIC also provides legislatively-mandated priority assistance on SIC issues for those schools receiving an "At Risk" rating (formerly "Unsatisfactory") on their annual state *School Report Card*.

SC-SIC is the publisher of *A Descriptive Study of Eight School Improvement Councils in South Carolina* (1992) which formed the research base for this *Profile*. Additional information about SC-SIC services or the *Profile* is available through the SC School Improvement Council, USC College of Education, Columbia, South Carolina 29208, by calling 1-800-868-2232, and on the web at <http://sic.sc.gov>.

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