

REGULATION **MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Related Entries: ABA, ABA-EA, ABB, KBA, KLA

Responsible Office: Deputy Superintendent of Schools

Community Participation in Decision-Making at the Local School

I. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

The PTA or PTSA at each school is – or should be – the primary voice of the local community concerning educational matters. The PTA, or some other group in those schools where there is no PTA or PTSA, should be widely and fairly representative of the socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and philosophical viewpoints in the community. This organization should be the focus of community participation with the school and is the organization with which the principal and other school personnel must work closely in making decisions that affect the school.

In addition to the PTA or other representative group, the principal should involve trustees, school advisory councils, staff, students, business persons, or other groups in decision-making, as he/she deems it appropriate, or as requested.

II. CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

A school and/or PTA newsletter, letters to parents, or flyers are the most common channels of written communication between the school and parents. Many other kinds of interaction are possible within the community to effectively communicate and establish interaction, including meetings, study groups, periodic or special publications, surveys, telephone or person-to-person meetings, and committees. Within a community specific people and procedures are needed to orchestrate these various mechanisms that help ensure communication and community participation.

There are many alternatives available to a community to provide these people and procedures. Examples include: the principal and the PTA; the principal and trustees; a committee including the principal, PTA president, teachers, community representatives, other school staff, and students. The best approach will vary from one community to another because many communities have already developed workable and satisfactory approaches to community participation and a community generally will best use those tools it has helped to fashion. To effectively implement this policy, the

principal and community should review their current mechanisms for community participation and propose any additional mechanisms which seem called for.

III. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

The principal has the authority and responsibility to make decisions that affect the school. Whenever feasible, the principal should seek the advice and counsel of those who will be affected by the decision. Since it is usually not possible to consult with each affected person individually, some mechanism should exist at each school for communicating information, receiving feedback, discussing proposals and alternatives, and distilling consensus. These mechanisms should operate on a regular and continuous basis. The important thing is recognition of citizen, staff, and student interest in many school-related matters, and the desire of affected persons to have meaningful input prior to decision-making by the principal.

The community leadership and principal should make every effort to ensure that all communication and involvement is as efficient as possible. Meetings should be held when needed, should be well-organized, and should deal with substantive issues. This will maintain continuing community interest and enable the principal to devote as much of his/her time as possible to the supervision and operation of school programs. Effective coordination of involvement by the PTA or other group, planned and regular consultation, knowledgeable and vigorous community leadership, and familiarity with school operations all will be helpful in this effort. Where possible, some persons representative of the community leadership should be available to work with the principal during the school day.

IV. EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE INVOLVEMENT

Questions of general school policy are appropriate matters for community involvement: i.e., organizational patterns, new programs, extra-curricular activities, safety, rules and regulations, etc. In most cases, the principal and other staff will initiate planning on these matters, then seek citizen input and involvement, and on the basis of this, the principal will make final decisions.

Some decisions will be made based upon the principal's perception of problems that involve particular needs of student and/or staff. It would be impermissible for the principal to reveal specific, personal information about individual students or staff involved – as individuals – but it may be possible to sufficiently generalize problems so that interested citizens will be able to understand the frame of reference within which a decision must be made.

Decisions about the assignment of staff and pupils, methods of instruction, scope and sequence of curriculum, etc., are professional judgments. The principal and staff must take responsibility for these decisions and make them based upon their best professional judgment. The principal should, however, make explanations to, discuss with, and seek input from the community.

The principal will be held accountable by the superintendent – and should be held accountable by parents – for educational decision-making at the school level. It is essential, therefore, that the principal, staff, parents, and students understand this responsibility and that, as a result, the principal must make or approve any final decisions on matters affecting the operation of the school.

Regulation History: Formerly Regulation No. 270-10, June 21, 1974