

Local School Council Leadership Guide

**prepared by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE)
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Introduction

This Local School Council Leadership Guide was developed by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) in the fall of 2006 under an agreement with the Chicago Public Schools Office of School and Community Relations.

The Guide is based on Local School Council (LSC) training and informational materials developed collaboratively with dozens of education, civic, and community groups working with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) from the very first days of school reform in 1988, through the changes under the mandated training law beginning in 1995 under the authority of the University of Illinois/Chicago's (UIC) College of Education, and up until today.

PURE has had a prominent role in LSC training from those first days, and contributed a great deal of our own work each time the LSC guidebooks and lessons were revised. PURE's executive director, Julie Woestehoff, was the chair of the UIC project's Curriculum Committee, which oversaw the development of the original six mandated LSC lessons.

Over the years we have created our own extensive LSC training materials, at first when there was no official LSC curriculum, and then as a supplement to the official lessons. Our goal has always been to provide accurate, user-friendly information that's faithful to the law but also reflects our experience as trainers and LSC members and showcases the "LSC best practices" we have observed and advocated for over the past 20 years.

In the end, CPS did not distribute the Guide PURE prepared. Instead, CPS has posted a revision of the 2002-2004 manual on its web site. For more on the 2006 history of the LSC manual, please see the Spring 2007 issue of *PURE Tips and Updates for LSCs*, p. 3, "LSC training material... where is it???" which you can find on our website. (<http://pureparents.org/data/files/Spring07.pdf>)

PURE's Guide is very similar to the CPS manual in terms of content and basic information. Our Guide has more detailed information in many areas. We have included a Resources Guide which provides actual documents or links to a wide variety of useful information LSCs need. Overall, we feel that PURE's Guide is more positive and encouraging of LSCs, and will be of great help to LSCs in their challenging and important work.

In those few areas where we disagree with CPS's interpretation of the law, we have attempted to let the law speak for itself, and to provide references to other agencies such as the Attorney General's Office, where LSC members can go for additional expert opinions.

If you have any questions about this Guide, please feel free to call us at 312-491-9101 or e-mail us at pure@pureparents.org.

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A Timeline of Chicago School Reform

- **1985** Mayor Harold Washington established the Education Summit; citizens were frustrated with the many problems in the school system, and began to come together to develop solutions.
- **1987** 19 day school strike energized parents and others to organize for change.
- **1988** Many groups developed school reform proposals; thousands descended on Springfield to promote major school reform law.
 - ▶ *December:* SB1840 (final version of School Reform Act) passed, Governor James Thompson signed bill into law, LSCs established with power to select principals, approve school improvement plans and budgets, other powers. State Chapter 1 funds redirected to local school to “follow the child”.
- ▶ **1989** *October:* First LSC election – 17,256 candidates ran for 6,000 LSC seats at 546 schools; 312,000 people voted.
- **1990** Original school reform law ruled unconstitutional (weighted voting for parents violated one person, one vote provision).
- **1991** Legislature amended law to fix constitutional problem; gave five votes to parents and community, teachers and high school students appointed by Board after non-binding poll, validated past LSC actions; Mayor Daley re-appointed all sitting LSC members.
- **1994** LSC election moved to spring report card pick up day.
- **1995** More amendments to school reform law: Mayor appoints five-member school board and superintendent; board power to intervene in schools increased; LSCs required to take 18 hours of training.
- **1999** Principal arbitration process established in law giving principals and CPS CEO right to challenge LSC principal retention or non-retention decisions.

You are a Part of History!

Local School Councils – Only in Chicago

Chicago is the only place in the nation - or even the world - where parents, community members, teachers, students and principals have so much say over what happens in their own schools. The timeline of Chicago history on the opposite page shows how much work and how many people were involved in making school reform happen in Chicago.

The intent of the law

The School Reform Act of 1988 begins like this: “The General Assembly has previously established that the primary purpose of schooling is the transmission of knowledge and culture through which children learn in areas necessary to their continuing development... To achieve these priority goals, **the General Assembly intends to make the individual local school the essential unit for educational governance and improvement** and to establish a process for **placing the primary responsibility for school governance and improvement in furtherance of such goals in the hands of parents, community residents, teachers, and the school principal at the school level.** Further, to achieve these priority goals, the General Assembly intends to lodge with the board of education key powers in **limited areas** related to district-wide policy, **so that the board of education supports school-level governance and improvement** and carries out functions that can be performed more efficiently through centralized action.

More work to be done

The General Assembly’s plan is working! The opening pages of Lesson 1 in this LSC Leadership Guide give you some idea of what LSCs have done, and some of the research showing the positive impact of LSCs.

The rest of the LSC Leadership Guide tells you what the law says about your role as an LSC member – **as an elected official** – and how you can do your job most effectively. Every elected body in the nation has rules and guidelines to follow, and LSCs are no different. You can get training throughout your term, and call on the Office of School and Community Relations and local community groups for help and support.

You and your fellow LSC members can make history, too. Working together, you can help your school become the best it can be so that every child succeeds. Nothing could be more important.

We hope that the information in this Guide makes your important job a little easier!