



EDUCATION LAW CENTER

Fact Sheet

RENAISSANCE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS

What are Renaissance Schools?

The School District of Philadelphia has created 14 Renaissance schools which will be completely restructured starting in the 2010-11 school year. The restructuring process may involve changing the school into a charter school, giving an outside company a contract to manage the school, laying off most of the teachers, or making other major reforms.

What is a Renaissance School Advisory Council (RSAC)?

An RSAC is a committee that represents the school community's interest in guiding a Renaissance School towards school improvement. An RSAC is composed of parents, students, teachers, and community members who will provide recommendations to the School District. The [district has indicated](#) that RSACs will have the following responsibilities:

- Meet regularly to discuss and determine the community's educational needs
- Review turnaround team proposals to identify potential turnaround team finalists the larger community would like to interview
- Host community meetings, public forums and community outreach activities to collect community input on potential turnaround teams
- Provide recommendations to the Superintendent on matches between their school and potential turnaround teams
- Assist in incubation and transition of Renaissance Schools
- Participate in periodic monitoring of Renaissance School progress, including an annual report on school progress against performance targets

Was the district required to create the RSACs?

Yes. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates that each school identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring and receiving Title I funds, must notify parents: about what the school is doing to address low achievement; and how the parents can become involved in addressing the schools' academic issues. The school must also provide teachers and parents an opportunity to comment before any action is taken, and to participate in developing any restructuring plan. The Renaissance schools have all been identified for restructuring and, thus, the RSACs, or something similar, are required to conform to NCLB. Visit www.elc-pa.org for more information on parental rights under NCLB or call the ELC hotline if you believe these rights are being violated – 215-238-6970.

Are RSAC meetings supposed to be open to the public?

Yes. RSAC meetings are covered by the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, because they are committees authorized by the District to render advice on matters of School District business. The Sunshine Act requires that the public be given notice, the right to attend, and the right to comment at all meetings of agencies at which any agency business is discussed or acted upon. The Sunshine Act also requires that the RSAC keep minutes that include the time, date, and place of the meeting, a list of the members present, a description of the official action taken, a record of how the members voted on roll call votes, the names of the persons who testified and the subject of their testimony. You can contact the district at 215-400-5995 to request RSAC meeting notices and minutes or to ask for time to make public comments at a meeting. Read ELC's [fact sheet](#) to learn more about the Sunshine Act.

Can I get access to records produced or discussed at RSACs meetings?

Yes. The Pennsylvania Right to Know Law (RTKL) requires governmental "agencies" to make their "public records" available for examination and copying to any legal resident who makes a proper request. All agency records are presumed public unless the agency proves an exception applies. The RSAC is a part of the School District, which is an "agency," thus, RSAC records should be available to the public. Some records may be exempt under the law. You can contact the district's open records officer at (215) 400-4500 to request records. Read ELC's [fact sheet](#) to learn more about the Right to Know Act and find sample forms for requesting records.

How should RSAC meetings be conducted?

Best practices involve a democratic process that allows all participants an opportunity to be heard. Parliamentary procedure is one proven method of accomplishing this goal. An RSAC will make better decisions if members can make motions, ask questions, offer proposals, and take majority votes. See [Robert's Rules of Order](#) for a guide on how to implement proper parliamentary procedure.

What can I do to influence the reforms planned for a Renaissance school?

You can apply for membership on an RSAC on the [district website](#), or by calling 215-400-5995. The official membership deadline has passed, but the district will still appoint new members in some cases.

Attend RSAC meetings. Learn more about the background and rules of the Renaissance Schools initiative and the relevant state and federal laws. Work with other RSAC members, students, parents, and community members to develop your own proposals. Advocate for your ideas and proposals with the RSAC at your school, the superintendent, the School Reform Commission (SRC), the media, and other community-based groups.

I'm a member of an RSAC or an interested community member. How can I learn more about my role and my rights? What can I do if I believe that an RSAC or my school is violating state or federal laws?

Contact the helpline at the Education Law Center at 215-238-6970 for advice or to set up a training session. Also, keep up to date on Renaissance school issues at the website of the [Philadelphia Public School Notebook](#).

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