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Understanding and Improving SHACs

SHAC 101

A. What is a school health advisory council (SHAC)?

A school health advisory council (or committee; hereafter SHAC) is an organization within a public school district that helps formulate policies on a variety of school health issues. The discussions and deliberations that occur within the SHAC help ensure “that local community values are reflected in the district’s health education instruction” (**Texas Education Code §28.004**).

B. What does a SHAC do?

A SHAC is responsible for reviewing district policies, curricula, and programs concerning school health. One of the primary goals of a SHAC is the integration of health education (including human sexuality instruction), physical activity, nutrition, suicide prevention, and other aspects of Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model (WSCC) with district and community practices (see <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsccl/index.htm> for details of Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child previously known as “coordinated school health”). Since there are so many school health issues and programs to consider, not everything makes it onto the SHAC’s agenda for consideration. If one or more SHAC members identify deficiencies in an existing policy and/or program, the SHAC can then draft policy recommendations to present to the district’s Board of Trustees. This is accomplished through the assessment of existing school health programs and policies, deliberations over possible alternatives, and the selection of new programs and policies for implementation.

C. Who are members of a SHAC?

A SHAC is comprised of local residents who can offer some insight and expertise into issues that affect the health of a district’s students and employees. SHACs are open to the public, so anyone can observe the proceedings. However, participation in policy deliberations is restricted to those who are considered members of the SHAC. There are generally three different types of members in a SHAC:

- Parent members are those who currently have at least one child enrolled in the district and are not employees of the district. Parent members must make up a majority of the SHAC.
- District members include those district employees who work on health issues, such as health/science/physical education coordinators, athletic administrators, nurses, health teachers, food service personnel, etc. Some SHACs also include students as members;
- Community members consist of those who live in the area but do not qualify as parents or district members. These may include health care professionals, law enforcement, clergy, and representatives from non-profit organizations. Students who are enrolled in the district also may serve on the SHAC as a community member.



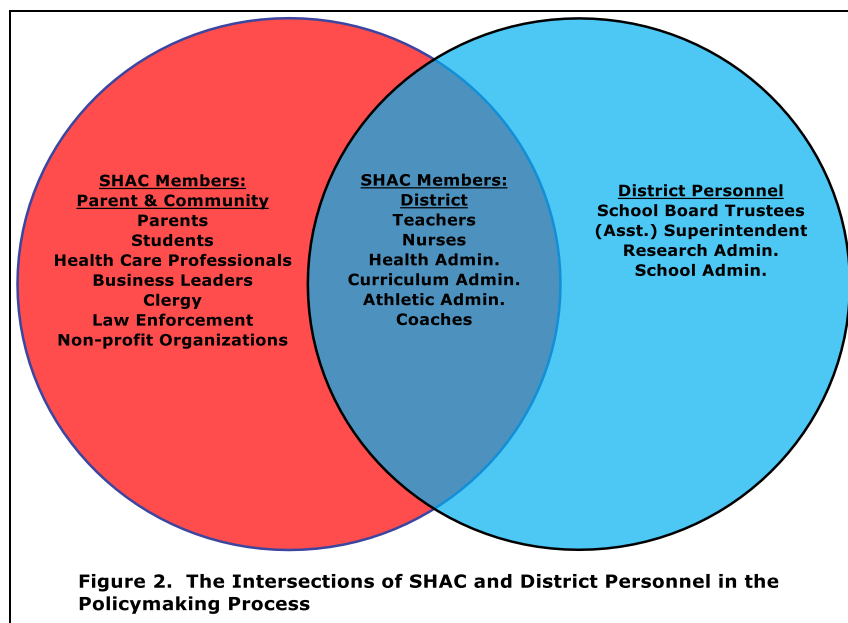
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- According to the Texas Education Code §28.004, a majority of the SHAC’s members must be “persons who are the parents of students enrolled in the district and who are not employed by the district.” One of these parent members must serve as either chair or co-chair. The Texas Education Code § 28.004 states that the district’s board of trustees “shall appoint at least five members” to the SHAC. However, many districts have much larger SHAC memberships.

SHACs are intended to be autonomous, advisory councils that provide guidance and recommendations on health policy based on interests of the broader community. Autonomy is important to SHACs so they can address issues that might be politically contentious in school districts, such as sex education. This is the reason why SHACs are supposed to be comprised of primarily parents who are not employees of the district, with one parent serving as SHAC co-chair. However, District employees perform critical roles in SHACs, providing information about District resources, policies, and politics that affect the CHAMPSS process. SHAC District members also serve as the crucial link between the two groups – SHAC and District – facilitating communication and providing continuity between the adoption and implementation phases of CHAMPSS (Figure 2).

Though not specified in statute, it’s important that a district SHAC represent the diversity of the community. SHAC leaders should consider ways that they can support participation from a variety of community members.





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D. What operating rules must SHACs follow?

SHACs are volunteer community groups, not governmental entities. However, transparency and accountability still are important. Texas Education Code §28.004 lays out several requirements for SHAC meetings. A SHAC must meet at least four times per year. Meeting notices outlining the time, place, and subject of the SHAC meeting must be posted at least 72 hours in advance on each campus's central office bulletin board, and on the district website. The SHAC must maintain meeting minutes that include the subject and content of each deliberation and any action taken by the SHAC in each meeting. Additionally, SHACs must make an audio or video recording of each meeting. The meeting minutes and recording must be submitted to the district within 10 days after the meeting and posted online, if the district has a website.

The district SHAC liaison, or District employees who serve on the SHAC, should help members understand the laws around SHAC meetings and ensure the SHAC complies with legal requirements such as meeting notices and postings.

E. How to become involved in your district's SHAC

Information about a SHAC is often posted on the district's website, and some SHACs have their own web pages. On SHAC web pages, there is usually some basic information about the role of the SHAC, contact information for the district's co-coordinator, and a schedule for meetings. For some districts, however, information about the local SHAC is difficult to find. There are several strategies for finding information about your district's SHAC:

- Type "SHAC" or "school health advisory council" into the district website's search window;
- On the district's website, look for SHAC information under an associated district department such as "health services" or "food services";
- Contact the person in charge of health services for the district: s/he is often involved in SHAC activities;
- Ask the principal, nurse, or the president of a parent-teacher organization (PTO) at one of the schools in the district: these are common avenues for SHACs to recruit new members;
- Ask a trustee on the district's school board; the school board is responsible for approving SHAC membership and they may also recommend members to the organization.

If your district has a SHAC, you should contact the district's co-coordinator to inquire about joining as a parent, district, or community member.