



A MODEL CODE on Education and Dignity

CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPATION

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Background

More than a system of “checks and balances,” effective stakeholder participation creates quality public school environments that are student, community and success-oriented, builds the social and political capital of all stakeholders to collectively self-govern, creates high level educational processes and fulfills all human rights standards.

Ensuring that students, parents and other stakeholders have a voice in the vast range of school decisions enhances preparation for citizenship, improves schools and leads to a well-supported educational system.⁶³ It also builds relationships across generations while creating community investment in quality schools for all students. Finally, creating democratic institutions in schools gives teachers and non-administrative school staff a voice in decisions that affect their employment, builds teacher investment and involvement in the school community, and helps establish supportive systems to improve teacher retention.

It is essential that stakeholder participation be re-characterized as both an active, inclusionary practice in and out of the school environment, as well as a means of preventing discrimination in the provision of high-quality education to all children. To invoke a process in the name of stakeholder participation is to invoke the fundamental challenge of our democracy—effective and inclusive self-governance ‘by the people for the people.’ While this challenge has not always been met in practice, our efforts towards democratically based schooling must go unabated—the health of our public education system depends on it. Schools must develop the infrastructure for supporting and sustaining themselves, and the shared commitment, vision and focus required to educate all students.

A Guide to Chapter 2

Chapter 2 focuses on policies and practices for ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in designing, implementing and monitoring all aspects of the educational system. The processes for stakeholder participation described should be used in implementing the other chapters of the code, especially where stakeholder committees and implementation teams are described. The chapter is divided into four sections.

Section 2.1 on Stakeholder Participation identifies students, parents or guardians, community members, teachers, school staff, administrators and all other members of the school community as stakeholders with a right to participate in education at the school, district and state levels. It describes procedures for establishing an advisory committee to design effective processes for stakeholder participation, informing stakeholders of their rights, identifying areas of decision-making requiring stakeholder participation, building the capacity of stakeholders to be informed decision-makers, and monitoring the process of stakeholder participation. The section also specifies how to uphold stakeholder participation in Charter Schools by identifying particular areas of charter school governance where states, districts, charter management organizations and charter schools must support the full participation of all stakeholders.

Section 2.2 on the Rights of Children and Youth to Participation describes the processes schools must create to ensure student participation in decisions affecting their right to education, including student councils and advisory bodies, representation on any decision-making bodies, school-wide forums, peer-led disciplinary processes and grievance procedures. It also requires that students be engaged as active participants in the learning process through participatory instructional methods.

Section 2.3 on the Rights of Parents and Guardians to Participation calls on schools to create welcoming environments for parents and guardians and to ensure their participation in decision-making affecting school policies and practices. It also describes their right to observe, monitor and evaluate school policies and practices, to be informed of and participate in decisions affecting their individual child, and to access grievance procedures. Finally, it includes a provision calling on states to guarantee parents or guardians the right to take reasonable leave from employment to attend meetings or events related to their child’s education.

⁶³ Neville Harris, *Playing Catch-Up in the Schoolyard? Children and Young People’s ‘Voice’ and Education Rights in the U.K.*, 23 INT’L J. L. POLY & FAM. 331, 338 (2009).