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Gainesville school board wants more input from governance councils

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Gainesville City Schools board members are looking to have more input from parents and school leaders in policy development.

At a previous board meeting, members asked to set up a policy development process that increases involvement from school governance councils.

"It's been in place but they want to make sure there's a formal checkoff," Superintendent Merrienne Dyer said. "A policy would be up to be reviewed by the board. If there's no changes, then we would send it to the governance councils and say, 'The board has done first reading and seen no changes to be made. We want your feedback.'"

Now the school board wants a formal policy review by the governance councils, complete with a written report. With the existing policy review process, the only things that require a formal report from the governance councils are school calendars and reduced work schedule days, Dyer said.

"The Georgia School Boards Association says your policy should be reviewed on a rolling basis. Every now and then something changes with legislation or federal policy, or it could be a practice that changes. The board wants to be sure that our policies are kept current," Dyer said. "They seek input from constituents. Our school board wanted to be sure that our governance councils were formally made a part of that."

School governance councils consist of the principal, two teachers, two to six parents and two business partners and community leaders. All but the principal are elected by faculty and other parents, Dyer said.

State law requires all schools to have a school council to review student achievement data, engage parents and advise the principal.

"A school governance council like we have, they are actually a decision-making

body about items that are in the charter," Dyer said.

The governance councils can make decisions about extracurricular activities, which include athletics, after-school programs, tutoring and clubs. They are also in charge of surveying their school community and interviewing and recommending new administrative personnel to the school board.

The only exception to that is when an administrator is transferred between schools. The school board, school governance council and Dyer are involved in that process.

Though it's not explicit in the school system charter, school governance councils also have some say in the school budgets, which are developed by the principal. Dyer said the community leaders in the governance council are good assets with that process, as they have financial planning experience.

"It just increases the decision-making force and the involvement of all the stakeholders. It also, in my opinion, takes some of the pressure off the board and superintendent because it shares the decisions," Dyer said.

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