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ABSTRACT
        This manual is intended as a resource guide for school
councils in Arizona. The state created school site-based councils to bring
together parents, the community, administrators, teachers, and students to
form a decision-making body that can empower all stakeholders. The guide
details the process of school councils as it relates to Arizona legislation,
and serves as a flexible resource to assist school-council members in
identifying and adopting necessary training. The booklet provides tools to
help district/school administrators and board members initiate or implement
school-based teams. It introduces a format for training that includes
essential elements for school-council operation, such as team building,
conflict management, the change process, and needs assessments. The text also
provides examples of functioning school councils and offers ideas for
additional resources/services. It presents the steps for organizing councils
as it focuses on the district's role, the changing roles of education
personnel, school council membership, and council evaluation, showing how
school-council leadership can improve the school. Finally, the text outlines
the steps necessary for achieving consensus: creating a shared vision,
assessing needs, setting goals, developing and implementing action plans, and
making site-based management work. (RJM)

School Councils

An Information Guide

for

Arizona Schools

Arizona Department of Education
Lisa Graham Keegan, Superintendent
February, 1997

School Councils

An Information Guide for Arizona Schools

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Unit III   School Improvement Through School Council Leadership

Resource Tool Kit

An updated Information Guide, with accompanying Resource will be available to
schools in the Fall of 1997.

State of Arizona
Department of Education

Lisa Graham Keegan
Superintendent of
Public Instruction

February 18, 1997

Dear Principal,

School Site-based councils were created as part of a statewide effort to empower all
individuals who are affected be decisions made at the school level. In 1994, the Arizona
legislature passed a law requiring each school to establish a school council, no later than
December 31, 1995. The purpose of the council is to bring together parents, the
community, administrators, teachers and (at some schools) students to form a decision-
making council. This decentralization process was designed to help local school sites
develop school improvement plans that addressed the student achievement goals set by the
local board of education. Since this requirement went into effect, many parents, teachers
and school leaders have asked for assistance in developing the site-based process in their
schools.

In response to these requests, the Arizona Department of Education has compiled this
information guide as an introduction to help school teams understand the process and
principles of Site-Based Council Management. The guide includes some resources and
training opportunities utilizing the expertise from districts currently operating successful site
councils. Such opportunities will be co-sponsored by the Staff Development Council of
Arizona and the ADE.

The key to any school's success is the ability to involve parents and the community in its
program. We invite you to share with us the success your school has in bringing about
student performance and achievement through the development, implementation and
evaluation of site-based goals. Best wishes for success with your school council!

Sincerely,

Lisa Graham Keegan
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Paul N. Street
Associate Superintendent

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California Department of Education

North Carolina Department of Education

Texas Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

This manual is to serve as a resource guide for school councils. This guide is not intended to be comprehensive in all areas, but will provide basic information to schools, districts, businesses and the community. A "suggestion" page is included in the back of this guide for ideas you may want to contribute to future publications.

The goals of this resource guide are as follows:

1. To provide an orientation to the process of school councils as it relates to Arizona legislation.

2. To serve as a flexible resource and guide to assist school council members in identifying and developing necessary training.

3. To provide some tools that will assist district/school administrators and board members in initiating or implementing school based teams.

4. To introduce a format for training that includes elements necessary for school council operation such as team building, conflict management, the change process, decision-making, planning, and conducting needs assessments.

5. To provide examples of operating school councils and ideas for additional resources/services.

Definitions

Site-based Management is the process and structure for shared decision-making by the school site councils with the goal of increased student performance.

As applied to Arizona, School Site Councils ensure that individuals who are affected by the outcome of a decision at the school site have an opportunity to provide input into the decision-making process.

Each state must define site-based management and the structure for site council operation within the context of state government structure, statutes and State Board of Education policies. Within those parameters, each district must further refine site council responsibilities in accordance with their unique district needs.

The common theme throughout all site-based initiatives focus on improved communication and interaction among the publics; including parents, teachers, principals, and others involved in improving education for all children.

Researchers have identified more than 35 different definitions for the phrase "site-based management" and have found that many of the definitions and phrases are used interchangeably. The most commonly used terms are SHARED DECISION MAKING, PARTICIPITORY DECISION-MAKING, SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT, SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING, and SITE-BASED TEAMS. Schools that utilize site councils for shared decision-making are often referred to as SITE-BASED SCHOOLS.

All of the phrases suggest a common arena that brings the decision making as close as possible to the school site. The process also defines how schools can work collaboratively to make these decisions and how schools can create ownership for decisions by involving stakeholders directly in the decision-making process. Decisions involve a variety of participants at the site level: principals, teachers, parents community representatives, support staff and students may all be involved in the decision making process. Given discretion and influence, participatory decision-making teams may use their authority to implement change that improves their school and enhances student achievement and success.

DEVELOPING AND CLARIFYING DISTRICT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Every school district needs to have a plan and policy in place that addresses site councils. Each district governing board plays a crucial role in establishing the district policy. The governing board policy should assure that a collaborative process is in place for developing parameters within which site councils can function. This procedure will take time, but if it reflects widespread involvement, it will be well worth the effort.

For many, the formation of site councils and the implementation of site-based decision making processes represents a major change in organizational philosophy. Normally, board members have not received any training and, therefore, the task for this may rest with the superintendent and administration. <u>Districts which experience the most success are those in which training and extensive involvement of the governing board occurs.</u>

Some important steps in preparing boards for policy implementation and implementation of site-based councils are:
   a) Introduce the concept clearly and demonstrate the elements.
   b) Utilize existing local and state resources.
   c) Present current research and practices for review and study.
   d) Contact, interview, or visit successful site councils for ideas and
      suggestions.
   e) Provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders, including;
      administrators, teachers, staff, parents and community.
   f) Develop district policy and procedures.
   g) Identify local school parameters.

The intent of district policy should be to ensure stakeholder involvement in shared decision-making and foster collaborative efforts of district personnel, parents, and community members through the formation of school site councils.

School Site Councils

SAMPLE POLICY

Community, Staff and Student Involvement in Shared Decision Making

The Governing Board of _____ School District believes that it is the shared responsibility of the district employees, student, home, and community to work as partners in the process of enabling effective school improvement and provide the highest quality educational opportunities for each student. The beliefs of this Board and school district support a system by which decisions are made at levels as close to the issue being addressed as possible, and a process by which individuals who affect and are effected by significant decisions provide input or participate in making those decisions. Final decisions may depart from each input or advice when, in the judgment of the Superintendent or Board, the input or advice is not consistent with goals adopted by the Board, is not consistent with quality educational practice, or is not within reach of the available financial resources.

State of Arizona

Site-Based Council
LEGISLATION

ARS 15-351, 352 & 353
ARS Title 15 - Chapter 3

Article 3.1. DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS

§ 15-351. School councils; duties; membership

A. The purpose of this section is to ensure that individuals who are affected by the outcome of a decision at the school site have an opportunity to provide input into the decision making process.

B. Each school shall establish a school council. A governing board may delegate to a school council the responsibility to develop a curriculum and may delegate any additional powers that are reasonably necessary to accomplish decentralization. The school council shall reflect the ethnic composition of the local community and shall consist of the following members.

1. Parents of pupils enrolled in the school who are not employed by the school district.
2. Teachers.
3. Noncertified employees.
4. Community members.
5. Pupils, if the school is a high school.

C. Each group specified in subsection B shall select its representatives and shall submit the names of its respective representatives to the principal for appointment to the school council. The initial representatives shall be selected at public meetings held at the school site, and, therefore, representatives shall be selected by their groups ion the manner determined by the school council. Schools shall give notice of the public meeting where the initial representative of the groups shall be selected, clearly stating its purpose, time and place. The notice shall be posted in at least three different locations at the school site and in the community and shall be given to pupils for delivery to their parents.

D.   The governing board shall determine the initial number of school council members. Thereafter, the school council shall determine the number. The number of teachers and parents of pupils enrolled at the school shall constitute a majority of the school council members.

E.   The principal shall serve as chairman of the school unless another person is elected by a majority of the school council members.
1996

§ 15 - 352. Exception

A.   The governing board is not obligated to reconstitute previously formed school councils pursuant to this section if the existing school councils include representation by more than one teacher and more than one parent or guardian of a pupil enrolled at the school.

B.   A school district that has only one school or a student population of less than six hundred students may decide by a vote of the governing board to not participate in the decentralization process are required by this article. If the governing board votes to not participate, the district is not subject to this article.
1994

§ 15 - 353. Responsibilities of Principals

The principal of every school offering instruction in preschool programs, kindergarten programs or any combination of grades one through twelve is responsible for:

1. Providing leadership for the school.
2. Implementing the goals and the strategic plan of the school.
3. Serving as the administrator of the school.
4. Distributing a parental satisfaction survey to the parent of every child enrolled at the school. The parental satisfaction survey shall be distributed at least once each year as a part of the regular parent communication correspondence.   1994

Current Research
and
Related Articles

The following articles have been selected because they address most of the

areas related to Site Councils and the training process. Many of these articles

have been used by various schools and districts in Arizona.

It is very important to share information and learn together what has worked

elsewhere and what issues need to be addressed. By reading articles and

discussing them in small groups, members of parents organizations and the

business, community and school staff and administrators can become

acquainted with the process involved in organizing a strong and exemplary

site council.

The District's Role in School Councils

When developing a district structure for a School Council, several issues must be addressed. These include:

- How will this change the roles, responsibilities and relationships of district and school level personnel as well as that of the district governing board?

- How much authority should be delegated from the district office to the school level?

The goals of School Council should be to:

- Share power with and delegate decision-making authority to the school sites

- Maintain professional standards for curriculum and instruction

- Increase services available to and from schools

- Educate all students to high educational standards

At the district level, School Councils require:

- Establishing new roles for the school board

- Establishing new roles for the superintendent and central office

- Working with and building consensus among diverse stakeholders

Current literature identifies some of the following general changes that district governing boards and central office personnel might expect in implementing Site-Based Management.

The Changing Roles of the
District Governing Board

The key to successful implementation is the board's commitment to the concept. They

are the key to carrying out the concept. The local governing board decides how site-based

management will be implemented. School board members will experience new role

expectations.

The district governing board will still provide direction for the district by writing and

enforcing district policies. It is vital that the board be knowledgeable and enthusiastic

about School Councils. The board should establish a climate supportive of Site-Based

Management, perhaps through developing policy and direction statements. The board

must also become aware of the actual implications of power sharing and resist the

temptation to overturn school-based decisions unless the decisions are in direct conflict

with the mission of the district.

The Changing Role of the
District Office Personnel

District Administration

The role of the superintendent and central office staff will change from a decision-making role to a facilitating one, as more and more key decisions are made at the school level. Central office staff and superintendents will develop procedures to devolve budget and personnel decisions to the school site; ensure that schools invest in ongoing professional development and training for faculty and staff, create a fiscal accounting process that makes revenue and expenditure information available to sites; provide data on student demographics and achievement; as will as other tasks.

Superintendent

The superintendent is often the key to initiating a School Council. As the chief administrative officer and general manager of the district, the superintendent will face role changes.

These may be characterized by inviting participation and serving as an executive team member, supporting and encouraging bottom up change.

As with the school board, the superintendent must be willing to delegate authority and power, in both theory and in practice. The superintendent must also develop a relationship of support with principals and school staff members.

Rather that delivering uniform treatment to all campuses, the superintendent will support differences and uniqueness.

Central Office Administration

Central office administrative staff will shift from supervisory roles to take on new roles as supporters and facilitators to the schools. Rather than delivering policies and monitoring their implementation in schools, they will respond to and serve as resources to schools in assisting their efforts. New responsibilities will include providing technical support and access to information for the schools in addition to assisting the school board and superintendent with developing broad long-range plans for the district.

In site-based decision making, central office staff will become integrated into various campus activities. They provide training, coordinate district level human and material resources for the campus, support the schools' improvement efforts, and model shared decision making.

Curriculum Innovation

With the implementation of site-based management, district curriculum innovation responds to and provides local schools the flexibility to customize their educational programs to meet the unique needs of their students. Curriculum innovation promotes quality and equality for all students through curriculum, instruction, and assessment initiatives.

In some districts, curriculum innovation is linked to schools as part of a district-wide plan. In other districts it may be linked to a plan wherein schools are encouraged to develop a specialized focus.

School Council Budgeting

School Council budgeting practices redesigns school and district financing to support school restructuring and high-performance management. Decision-making authority over the school budget is a key prerequisite to effective restructuring. Under this approach, districts allocate dollars in a lump sum directly to schools.

Site-based budgeting strategies should:

- Allocate Monies directly to the schools, with minimal district oversight

- Provide an adequate base level of funding to all schools

- Adjust for individual school differences

- Ensure extra funding for children who need additional services

- Reward teacher performance and student improvement

- Improve efficiency

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The Changing Roles of School Personnel

School Councils increase school autonomy and shared decision making with teachers, parents, and community members. The range of responsibilities delegated to the school varies with each district. For site-based management to be effective, it is important to expand school site authority to issues that include aspects of the budget, curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and other areas as determined by district policy. Within these areas, the structure and degree of authority varies from district to district.

As it does on a district level, implementation of site-based management also involves a change in the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of individuals at the school level. A brief description of some possible role changes is provided below.

Principal

The role of the principal is likely to be more affected by school councils than those of other school personnel. Their authority and responsibilities are expanded in all areas. They will find their relationships with the superintendent, central office administration, teachers, parents, and community members changing.

The principal will need to continue to be a strong instructional leader while learning to operate in a participatory structure. He/she will develop collegial relationships with faculty and staff to ensure that the needs of the school are met. A framework for decision making will need to be implemented at the school level by the school site council.

Principals will enhance their current role through:

- Taking the lead in creating a shared vision for the school

- Create an environment which supports shared decision making and collegial involvement in school actions

- Act as a liaison between the school, parents, community members, and the district

- Manage the process for school change and improvement

- Involve teachers and staff in determining professional development inservice activities and opportunities

- Identify additional resources of support within the community

- Develop increased expertise in school finance and budgeting

Teachers

Teachers will also find their roles as professionals to be significantly enhanced. They will become involved in issues and decision making which extend throughout the school campus. This new role means participating as active members on one or more decision-making teams, taking part in and playing leadership roles in many professional development activities, working together to change the curriculum, forming professional networks to discuss new aspects of teaching and work in general, participating with colleagues in discovering and implementing new teaching strategies, and taking the responsibility for student achievement.

Teachers will develop new relationships and form new connections with staff and parents across the school . These relationships will provide the foundation for a schoolwide shared decision-making process.

Parents and Community Members

There is much literature which supports the participation by parents as partners in the school decision making process. Participation should be preceded by training in the understandings and skills related to the unique aspects of education. Parents and community members usually become involved in developing policy by serving on the school site council. Here they communicate their perception of the community needs and expectations for students. They provide resources and other support for the school as it develops new goals and plans.

School Councils

Site councils are formed to enlist participation by a large number of those affected by the school's actions. The formation and structure of the councils differs from one site to another according to their specific needs. Membership on school councils usually consists of the principal, teachers, parents, and community members. Some councils also include students, however, this generally occurs at the secondary level. Effective site councils establish operational procedures and regulations. Councils develop a process for shared decision making as well as clear definitions of roles, responsibilities and authority of its members.

Some benefits of forming school councils include:

- The school and community share a common vision for the school based upon their unique needs and goals

- They are able to identify and make use of community resources in a more efficient manner

- School councils encourage the development and implementation of new educational practices

- Councils have the ability to provide staff development specific to the needs and goals of the school

- There is a broader sharing of professional knowledge and expertise

- There is an enhanced development of collegial team and interpersonal relations

- Each individual school has authority and responsibility for growth and improvement

School Council Membership

Selection and Appointment

The selection process for school council membership is critical to the success of the council and, perhaps ultimately, the school in its improvements efforts. Because site-based management relies upon group process to guide the school, the choice to serve on the site council can make or break a school plan. Proper selection of council members preparation and training of members is necessary in order to create a positive experience for all.

For specific requirements see ARS 15-345 (page 4 in this book)

In most schools the selection process is led by the principal. In selecting members, the principal should take into account the qualities of each individual separately, as well as how they will contribute to the chemistry of the group as a whole. The make-up of the council should allow for equal contributions from all and be a representative source of good ideas and inspiration.

Membership should include representation from all "stakeholders." While the major goal is to involve everyone in the process and earn wide range support, selection of negative, ego-centered individuals can be unhealthy and unpleasant. It is important, initially, to select people who are willing to listen, work cooperatively, and seek common goals in reaching decisions. Members should have strong feelings about schools and education, but their feelings should not be so staunch that they prevent the group from reaching consensus.

Members selected should represent a variety of opinions within the community and be selected based on their leadership abilities and not because they always agree with the administrator.

Roles of Council Members

As a council team, the question of who is going to do what during meetings is one which is frequently asked. If not clarified in advance it can create a multitude of barriers to a team's success. School councils should establish designated roles for members during meetings. These various roles should be rotated through all members on a regular basis. Some suggested roles are:

- *Facilitator... in charge of the process.*
  The facilitator remains neutral, clarifies group roles, maintains team energy, keeps them on task, directs the processes, enlists total participation, prevents attacks on ideas or persons, assists in agenda planning and leads the meeting follow-up process.

- *The Chairperson... responsible for logistics.*
  The chairperson assists in setting the agenda, convenes the meeting, provides appropriate information for participants, seeks input of others, supports ideas, actively participates, develops leadership among members, coordinates sub-committees, provides for evaluation, assist in meetings and assure that meetings are followed through.

- *Recorder... documents the groups discussion and ideas.*
  The recorder remains neutral, records basic ideas in participant's language, seeks clarification, writes legibly, and practices using variety of color and symbols.

- *Coach... provides on group performance.*
  The coach decides if the feedback will be on individual or group performance and the method for collecting the data, selects the strategy for feedback, keeps the members to the established group norms, and assists with formulating non-judgmental, objective feedback.

- *Group Reinforcer... builds a positive climate.*
  The group reinforcer builds confidence and morale in individuals and the team, creates a safe environment which encourages participation, demonstrates appreciation to team members, acknowledges and awards contributions, and seeks opportunities for group celebration.

- *Group Member... the person(s) responsible for what happens.*
  Group members initiate discussions, seek and provide opinions and information, monitor the facilitator and recorder, clarify and elaborate on discussion issues, compromise, encourage other members, set and test group norms, and practice consensus methods.

School Council Team Building Strategies

For school councils to experience success, a strong commitment to teamwork is necessary. Schools are using teams to accomplish many tasks, including site-based decision making, curriculum reform, implementing new programs and restructuring. Successful teams have clear, shared goals, a sense of commitment, the ability to work together, mutual accountability, access to resources and skills, and other elements of effective teams.

School leaders should nurture and develop high performing teams for accomplishing the school's mission. They should be able to inspire, motivate, and support teams which are free to take risks, be innovative, acquire new learning, and are supportive of each other.

The School Council works together to develop the mission, goals and action plans which are focused upon improving performance, increasing morale and cooperation, improving interpersonal relationships and reducing adversarial interactions. While teamwork itself is rewarding, it should focus on meeting academic and social needs of all students. For councils to effectively function, attention must be given to: selecting team members, empowering team members, providing team training, and facilitating team meetings.

Successful school council teams have:

- Developed shared missions and goals and remain focused upon them
- Implemented participatory leadership and delegate responsibility
- Open, honest and trusting communication
- Appreciation for diversity of opinions
- The freedom to be creative in a climate which encourages risk taking
- Members who are interdependent and stretch each others' ability
- Established methods for clear and open communication and strategies for reaching consensus
- The ability to assess, reflect and correct

Some advantages of working in teams are:

- Teams are more successful in implementing plans.
- Those closest to the work know best how to perform and improve.
- Teams develop more creative solutions to issues they face.
- Teams build motivation and commitment to goals through shared ownership.
- Teams offer empowerment to individuals as well as groups.
- Teams become a part of the learning process of professionals in schools.
- Members share a mutual sense of accountability.

Tips for Evaluating Your Council

It's hard to have an effective council if you are not evaluating your progress. Evaluation allows you to identify what is going well and what needs to be refined, revised or improved. Evaluation provides you feedback on how you are responding to council initiated changes.

Some tips for evaluation are as follows:

- Keep it clear and simple. Try to figure out which information you need and how to collect it.
- Short questions yield a higher response rate than long ones.
- Evaluate at regular intervals. There should be some form of evaluation at the end of each meeting.
- View evaluations as a means to gather meaningful information for future growth and improvement.
- Ask for feedback from outsiders as well as team members.
- Examine identified goals and determine your progress on each.
- Look at outcomes on goals as well as your processes for accomplishments.

Changes in Your Council

Dealing with change is difficult even in the best of situations. It is best to acknowledge that change will occur and it will have an effect on your council. This can be a useful time for reflection on your mission and goals and the effect they may be having on those involved.

As much as possible, you should clarify in advance, procedures for dealing with changes in team membership and training new members as well as what happens when the mission or processes of the council changes. Although change may cause a temporary feeling of disorganization, it should be viewed as moving forward.

Effective Council Meetings

The effectiveness of team building efforts depends heavily upon the quality, purpose and accomplishments in and outside of scheduled council meetings.
There are many sources of information available on conducting effective meetings. It is recommended that each council establish procedures for their meetings. Council members should have designated roles for every meeting with these roles being rotated on a regular basis. These roles should always include: a facilitator(s), a recorder, process observers, and a time keeper, with many other designated roles to be determined by the council. **Every meeting** should have a designated amount of time devoted to team building activities and a method for evaluation.

Stages of School Council Development

School councils move through different stages of development. Councils progress through the stages at different rates as opposed to some predetermined time frame. Progression is based upon group performance. An important aspect of a team's progress is the members' attitudes and relationships. When a team exhibits positive attitudes and has developed strong relationships within, they move through the initial stages more rapidly.

All councils move through each of these predictable stages on their journey to becoming effective. In times of change, be it in council membership or creating new school goals, councils may revert back to some of the more basic levels. For this reason, it is helpful to be aware of and keep these stages in mind. Through maintaining an awareness of the stages, councils will be able to recognize where they are in the process and then decide what they need and how to move ahead.

The stages are:

> *Forming* (start-up): A council in the forming stage may not be sure of its responsibilities. The members may not know one another, and they may not know the operating style of their leader. They are excited, yet skeptical. Discussions may include complaining about the organization or be non relevant.
> At this stage, members need orientation and to be involved in developing the operational guidelines and procedures. They need clarification as to the expectations and the parameters. Members need to participate in teambuilding activities which build rapport within the group.

> *Storming* (conflict): In this stage members become more comfortable in expressing their opinions. There may be resistance to issues and fluctuations in attitudes. This usually results in a higher level of frustration, arguments and counterproposals. Challenges arise over issues, roles and personalities. Power issues arise. Behaviors may also include increased jealousy, tension and disunity.
> This stage is where your council learns to deal with conflict. Teams that never "storm" become passive and fragmented, lacking energy and creativity.
> Members should be guided through activities to create processes for resolving conflict.

> *Norming* (teamwork): This stage results from what is learned in the previous stages. Teams begin to establish procedures for dealing with issues and conflict. They mutually create and adhere to a set of operating procedures (norms) for their meetings. Norms may vary from one council to another. Councils should implement norms which best help them achieve their goals. Norms are frequently revisited and "re-formed" as necessary.

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Councils attempt to work harmoniously and cohesively. They share a common set of goals. There is a high level of friendliness and support among team members. Activities in this stage should focus on building trust and creating a sense of empowerment.

Performing (achieving): This is the stage where councils reap the benefits of going through the first stages. They now are able to function as a team. They have defined tasks, have created positive relationships, and are focused upon producing results. Members have new insights into both personal and group processes. They understand the strengths of each member. If they have group problems, they are able to work through them constructively. Members are pleased with their progress. There is a close attachment to "the team."

Councils should continue their diligent efforts in teambuilding skills and strive for further improvement. The leader must be aware of how the team might react to influences from inside and the outside. Changes in tasks, memberships or environment may have critical impact. "Fine tuning" needs to be an ongoing process.

Transforming (renewing): It is a fact that councils experience frequent change. They do not remain the same. They need constant nourishment and renewing experiences. Members need to be reinvigorated. To avoid complacency, councils should continue to acquire new learning. They may need to renew their commitment to the mission and goals or change in them. Changes can be dealt with positively if members see them as opportunities for making a greater impact on the school.

Council teambuilding activities continue, along with activities centered around understanding change processes.
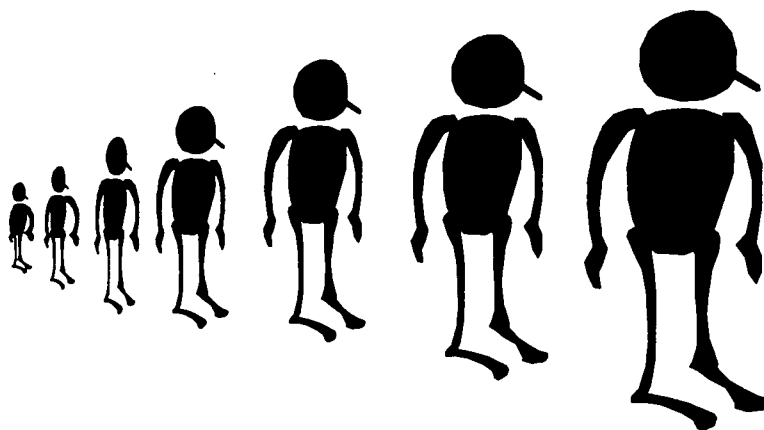
The Role of School Councils
in
Organizational Change and Development

In order for organizational change and development to occur, school councils must come to grips with the time and processes that will be required. The significant factors that face all site councils can be outlined as follows:

- The process takes time and a long-term commitment.

- Planning must be comprehensive and the use of data and research is crucial.

- Agreement must be made on essential goals.

- Problems must be solved and conflicts must be resolved in order to make progress.

- Decisions by consensus will provide the strength and direction for actions.

- Small steps that are implemented well, can pave the way for larger or more complicated actions.

- All activity must support the mission and goals of the school.

- Involvement of stakeholders and representative groups is imperative.

The Change Process

Change is a process, not an event. Even in the most successful, collegial environments change is difficult. When districts transform from a more traditional, top-down decision making model, to a participatory one, the amount of change that will occur is significant. In striving to implement participatory decision making, schools will face major change in all areas, including personal roles and operational styles. Successful councils understand the processes and elements they will experience when going through change as well as the pressure and resistance they will feel during the process.

There is much research available on the process of change and how change can be successfully implemented. There are organizations and consultants who provide effective training on the topic of change. Learning and acting on this information provides significant benefits in moving your school in the desired direction.

Understanding Change

When examining the process of change we need to constantly remember that change starts at the individual level. Many articles list providing for individual differences as the top factor for success. Just as we learn at different rates, we adjust to change at different rates. Taking into account how change will affect the individual is of critical importance. Some of the other factors listed included: providing a safe environment, accepting the influence of the past, introducing new practices carefully and clearly, and building desire for accomplishment. Change is not easy, be prepared for resistance and conflict. A key factor in the change process is discontent with the way things are.

Initiating and Implementing Successful Change

When initiating and implementing change, people realize they are moving to something different, something unknown. With this comes anxiety and discomfort. Frequently, individuals move through a range of emotions when change occurs.

These emotions include:
- Denial or Disbelief: "If I ignore this, it will go away."
- Anger: "How could this happen?" " Why are they doing this to me?"
- Bargaining: "I'll do this much , if I can still _____."
- Depression: "I guess I have to." "Am I capable of doing this?" and
- Acceptance: "I believe I can do this." " I will."

Successful change can be initiated when:
- It is relevant to a highly acknowledged need within the organization
- The model or strategies are clearly developed and presented
- There is strong support for the concept
- People are actively involved in researching and developing the proposed change

Factors for successful <u>implementation</u> of change include:
- Meetings are held and resources are provided in a timely manner
- Stakeholders are involved in and share in decision making and control
- Time is allowed for sharing concerns and frustrations
- Technical assistance is made available as a resource
- Knowledge, desire and motivation to achieve is at a high level

Implementing change may not be successful if these factors are present:
- There is an absence of motivation
- People feel vulnerable and threatened
- Adequate resources are not available
- There is a lack of direction or clarity
- Skepticism and issues exist and are ignored

Implementation Dip

It is important to note and everyone should be made aware of the implementation dip phenomena. In some instances, depending upon the nature of the change, there may be a drop in efficiency, attitudes, scores, etc., during the initial stages of the implementation process. By staying together with your plans and convictions, the results will be successful, taking you and your council to new heights of achievement.

Attitudes which result from change can generally be identified in five areas:

Enthusiasts: These are eager to be innovators, motivated, seeking new challenges. These may also be considered too eager by some of the staff and thought to jump on any "bandwagon" without prior knowledge.

Supporters: These are analytical and want to see how they will fit into the concept. They are generally the most trusted by the staff and are key people in the implementation process. They are your most influential leaders.

Acquiesers: These believe they have to do it. These offer support after the supporters and rely heavily on their opinion. They are cautious and deliberate in their actions and need to understand the benefits clearly.

Laggards: Late supporters. They want to know specifically how they will be affected. They may be resistant to change, but will eventually join in if allowed time and provided information.

Antagonists: The resistors. They may be vocal, critical and negative. They generally have little influence on the rest of the staff. They will join in when they choose to do so.

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Remember, if done properly, with care and sensitivity to individual needs, change can stimulate a ground swell of support and a high level of trust, enthusiasm and achievement. If done improperly without involvement or caring for individual needs, or without confronting issues and concerns directly and openly, the public's responses will be highly emotional and the outcome will result in conflict and mistrust.

Group Facilitation Processes

In a participatory environment, leadership roles for decision-making are shared through all council members. Members have meaningful input and decisions are made as a team.

Group facilitation is a process, not a product. These processes guide a group in reaching consensus on group issues and decisions. Group facilitation is a team effort with all members playing vital rules. Learning specific methods of group facilitation can enhance our group's performance in the following ways.

- They produce a greater sense of shared responsibility throughout the team.
- They promote continuous learning across the organization.
- They provide site councils with consistent, effective methods for developing their mission and goals.
- They provide processes by which councils can identify issues and create solutions.
- They allow for all points of view to come to the table for discussion.

Group facilitation is both a science and an art. It represents a blend between learned and practiced skills and pays sensitive attention to people's needs. When group facilitation strategies are practiced, the difficult task of developing a strategic plan, which is shared and supported by all, is much easier.

In a site-based decision making organization, administrators are viewed as team leaders who consider the best interests of everyone and the organization as their primary focus. This has created a shift from viewing the administrator in the more traditional sense to one of "group facilitator."

The leader who provides all of the solutions is being replaced by leaders who skillfully encourage the group to research the solution together. Today, administrators should know the questions and should involve others in finding answers. There are many descriptions of participation and multitudes of books and articles available which describe the qualities of the administrator in the participatory environment.

A facilitator is someone skilled in eliciting participation from others. The group facilitator need not always be the principal, administrator, or someone in a supervisory role. The role of the facilitator is to lead the group in drawing out answers, building a shared vision, setting goals and developing plans for achieving their vision and goals. The facilitator brings out the talents and contributions of others. Facilitators are communicators and coordinators of group processes.

Decision Making Processes

Establishing parameters and processes for decision making is one of the most crucial elements in site-based management. The question of what areas a site council has the authority to make decisions needs to be collaboratively agreed upon at a district level.

Once the district has reached agreement as to what areas a school site has authority, the district and individual schools will need to clarify the processes and parameters to be used at the school level. Appropriate guidelines clarifying at what level preliminary and final decision making authority rests should be established. Many decision making options exist, including:

- an individual or a group
- an entire site council
- the administrator
- the administrator with input
- administrator and staff
- the staff
- the staff with administrator input
- a sub-group

When the clarification process has been resolved, it is important that all stakeholders receive information with regard to these. In addition to this school site councils should receive formal training in various processes for identifying and discussion issues and making decisions with regard to action. There are several organizations or agencies which offer specific training in group decision making processes. In developing a process for how shared decision making will occur at the site level, the following steps should be considered.

Step 1: *Develop an understanding with the staff and community on the concept of shared decision making.*
Provide articles or information on: characteristics of shared decision making, how it affects school improvement, new roles created through the process, and how it impacts students, staff and community.

Step 2: *Assess your current practices.*
Involve everyone in an activity which generates awareness of areas where shared decision making exists within the school.

Step 3: *Determine, based upon district prescribed parameters, potential new areas for shared decision making.*

Utilizing Decision Making

Once the staff and community are prepared for the process of shared decision making, a specific pattern for dealing with issues should be followed.

These steps should include:

- Clearly identify issues, areas or concerns.

- Establish parameters for the decision making process.

- Determine the methods to be used in the process and how it will be facilitated.

- Select a facilitator who understands and can keep the group focused on the desired outcome.

- Reaches a group consensus and develop an implementation plan.

- Monitor and evaluate the plan and process regularly.

Reaching Consensus

Consensus is when two or more individuals cooperatively arrive at a decision which they can support as a group. Consensus is based upon cooperation not a vote. It allows for the opinions of everyone to be considered. An effective consensus process develops group unity, more creative ideas, and a stronger sense of commitment .

The process for reaching consensus requires site council members to be able to accommodate a variety of differing opinions. If a council can accomplish this, in an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration, the resulting proposed solution will generate a feeling of ownership and commitment within the council. Agreements are reached through a process of open discussion. Individuals must be willing to reassess their positions to find common grounds on different points of view. Consensus is only possible when there is strong, focused, commitment to the process on the part of the stakeholders.

Consensus is not a process for voting on issues. Where voting need only take into account two points of view, consensus considers many. Consensus creates unity and solidarity where voting tends to polarize the majority and minority. Consensus takes more time than the voting process, but the implementation time is much faster and the results are usually more successful.

Some organizations have implemented a process for "sufficient consensus." This is a process whereby, following real and in-depth discussions on an issue with everyone having opportunity for input, if a small number were not in agreement, such a disagreement would not prevent the vast majority from taking action. Most councils identify "sufficient consensus" as representing agreement on the part of 75 - 80% of those involved.

Guidelines for Reaching Consensus

There are four phases working toward reaching consensus.

The first phase is **Preparing for Consensus.** Each group, prior to developing methods for reaching consensus, must have developed an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. In preparing for consensus, it is vital that the areas open for consensus be clearly identified and that the issue is defined. This makes the process of keeping focused on the task easier. The group must be reminded that their goal is to come to an agreement on a solution which they can unilaterally support.

The second phase is **Creating Team Unity**. When the group has collected sufficient data and they are focused upon the issue, they begin to brainstorm possible solutions. Each solution is discussed openly with the group agreeing to eliminate those which are deemed impractical. The remaining solutions can be pared down through a process of discussion which includes revising some in order to bring the possibilities to one or two. At this point, the facilitator should sense the direction of the group and check for agreement. A straw vote is possible.

The third phase is **Reaching Consensus**. When the facilitator senses the group is near agreement, the discussion moves into the area of identifying each person's feelings. The facilitator guides the team through a process of modifying individual feelings in order to accomplish group consensus. This may incorporate the practice of dividing into smaller discussion groups, taking a break for individual discussions, or other methods.

Upon reaching consensus, the process moves into the fourth phase, **Implementing the Decision**. The final and most important step is determining the plan of action for implementation. When an action plan is developed, it must be communicated to/by all stakeholders. Then the plan can be put into practice. The action plan must also include a process and timelines for evaluation.

Facilitating Consensus

The group facilitator is the key person in guiding a group toward consensus.

Some hints for success in facilitating consensus are:

1. *Keep the group focused* on the issue or problem.

2. *Keep the discussion moving* by moving to a higher level when conflicts evolve. This can be done by refocusing on the general ideas associated with the issue.

3. *Change the subject.* If conflict occurs, change the discussion to deal with why the group is in conflict, then return to the topic of discussion.

4. *Divide the issue into smaller parts.* Focus on individual parts. Reach an agreement on these, and then return to the larger issue.

5. *Terminate the discussion.* Sometimes, it is wise to end the discussion and give members time to consider the issue individually prior to reconvening.

Creating a Shared Vision and Mission Statement

Dictionaries define "vision" as "imaginative foresight" while a visionary is one who "imagines how things should be." Creating a shared vision in a school requires visionary leadership, educational research, staff, student, parent and community support and cooperation, and a desire by all parties to work for the benefit of student learning.

Vision is based on high expectations and ideals associated with educational success. Research indicates that schools with shared visions exhibit a strong sense of purpose, empowering teachers and parents to participate in making decisions affecting instruction, promoting high academic attainment, and developing responsible, self-confident and caring students.

In developing a common vision and mission, school leaders need to do the following:

- Understand the "culture" of the school;
- Focus on student learning that emphasis higher order thinking, problem solving, and student-focused learning;
- Support professional development of teachers;
- Promote collaboration and communication;
- Set parameters but not mandates;
- Connect with the community;
- Utilize research and resources to build and share common understandings;
- Inspire the hopes, dreams, expectations, and values of excellence in education;
- Translate the vision into a written mission statement;
- Develop plans and actions that are feasible and attainable;
- Reinforce the vision by addressing it frequently with belief statements, visible artifacts (written on posters, brochures, bumper stickers, pencils, etc.), and posting the mission in each classroom.

Positive Aspects of Creating a Shared Vision and Mission

A shared vision/mission has great power in that it sets the foundation for all that you do.

- It increases the level of trust.
- People sense that they are a part of a team.
- There is an increased level of commitment.
- It focuses progress in a positive direction.

Assessing Needs
and
Determining Where to Start

Prioritizing goals and selecting areas of focus are crucial to school improvement plans. It is important to find out what areas need attention in terms of the data available and attitudes as to how important an area is. The use of standardized test scores for previous years, state, district and/or school test scores, attendance data (both student and staff), discipline data, parent opinion surveys, parent and student participation information, library resources, and other data sources are important for determining how well your school and students are doing. The plan for improvement will need to be developed around the goals you set from such data.

For excellent examples of Needs Assessments that define quality in dictation and descriptors, you may contact the Arizona Department of Education or the Staff Development Council of Arizona. The following indications are used by Tucson Unified School District as part of their needs assessment. They are used as the criteria for assessing all areas of a school program.

Instruction: Effective instructional practices create a community of learners in which all students achieve their full potential.

Indicators

A. Student learning is monitored and continuously assessed for curricular and instructional planning to improve student achievement.

B. Instruction builds on student strengths, interest, background, experiences, language, and prior knowledge.

C. Students are involved in instructional planning, decision making, and evaluation.

D. Evaluation includes performance-based assessment, norm reference tests, and student self-assessment.

E. Instruction incorporates strategies for developing student responsibility and self-discipline.

F. Teaching strategies accommodate a variety of learning styles and are developmentally appropriate.

G. Grouping practices are varied, flexible, heterogeneous, and address instructional needs.

H. Unit and lesson planning are evident.

I. Instructional time is used effectively.

J. Strategies and resources such as counseling, peer assistance, and social services are accessed for student support and classroom intervention.

K. Technology is used as a tool for content acquisition, skill development and problem solving.

L. The media/library center is the foundation for curriculum planning, development and student learning.

M. Strategies including reflective teaching and action research are employed to increase student achievement.

N. Increased student achievement is the primary responsibility of all staff.

Curriculum: Adopted curriculum is the foundation for teaching and learning.

Indicators

A. Curriculum promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and life skills acquisition.

B. Curriculum builds on student strengths, interest, background, experiences, and prior knowledge

C. Core curriculum is articulate K-12, from school to school, and with post secondary education and business.

D. Curriculum planning includes community resources, business and industry.

E. Curriculum planning is collaborative for integration and active inquiry learning.

F. Curriculum including school-to-work linkages prepares students for employment, post secondary education, and lifelong learning.

G. Community and district resources provide alternate settings and programs to achieve core curriculum competencies.

Environment: The learning and working environment is safe, stimulating, positive and productive.

Indicators

A. All personnel support high expectations for students.

B. Facilities are organized and maintained effectively to provide a clean, healthy, and safe environment.

C. Facilities and resources are accessible to everyone.

D. Risk-taking is encouraged and supported.

E. Learners exhibit confidence and pride.

F. Schools are open, inviting, and used by the community.

G. Organizational culture is inclusive and promotes a positive response to change.

H. Student, staff and community accomplishments, progress, and efforts are recognized.

I. Effective communication is standard practice.

J. Respect, positive self-image, and motivation are evident.

K. Discipline strategies promote responsibility and the development of self-direction.

Diversity Appreciation: **Staff and students protect and respect the rights of all individuals. (Governing Board Policy 6112).**

Indicators

A. Programs and practices ensure equity and inclusion.

B. A variety of cultural practices and perspectives are integrated in all curricular areas and content instruction.

C. Students have opportunities to learn foreign languages.

D. Students have opportunities for instruction in their primary language and in a second language.

E. District and site committees reflect community diversity.

F. Culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and individual abilities are respected.

G. Staff and other role models reflect student and community diversity.

H. Other.

Home and Community: District units, the home, and the community collaborate to meet the educational and social needs of students and their families.

Indicators

A. Two-way communication is frequent and informative.

B. Structures exist at school sites to enable parents and community members to participate in their children's education in a variety of roles such as: learner, teacher, advocate, and committee member.

C. Provisions are made for the establishment of school leadership teams that offer opportunities to include parents and community involvement in result-based decision making.

D. Community resources and partnerships provide support services for school sites.

E. Students and staff engage in school to work opportunities.

F. Mentoring and tutorial relationships are evident.

G. Strategies exist to increase parent/community involvement.

H. Schools create a welcoming atmosphere for families and communities when visiting district facilities.

I. Partnership models exist and include mentoring, job shadowing, internships, service learning, community services, and speaker's bureau.

J. Other.

Leadership: Leadership promotes organizational effectiveness.

Indicators

A. A vision is articulated and supported.

B. High expectations are set for self, teams, and units.

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C. Participative leadership is evident in organizational decision making.

D. Responsible risk-taking is modeled.

E. Trust is established and maintained.

F. Current educational literature is reviewed and used as a catalyst for change.

G. Community members and staff participate on leadership teams and in decision making using a variety of group processes.

H. Organizational focus is on systemic change, development, and results.

I. Problem solving strategies incorporate a variety of techniques to explore solutions

J. Visibility, accessibility, effective communication, and motivational strategies are demonstrated by the leader.

K. Team building and group processes are used in problem solving and decision making.

L. Professional development, consistent with research, is collaboratively designed and implemented.

M. Other.

Human Resources: **Qualified, diverse staff is attracted, supported, retained, supervised, and evaluated using strategies which focus on continuous improvement.**

Indicators

A. Staff is informed regarding policies, procedures, expectations, duties, and responsibilities.

B. Staff is accountable for job responsibilities and expected results.

C. Qualified staff with diverse backgrounds is recruited.

D. Staff demonstrates loyalty and commitment to the vision and goals of the organization.

E. Supervision and evaluation promote professional growth, quality performance, and accountability.

F. Technology applications are used to enhance job performance

G. Professional development activities are focused on individual and organizational development.

H. Organizational development is focused on enhancing the learning environment and increasing student achievement.

I. Other.

Organizational Map: Organizational/unit management, assessment, planning, and development procedures are effectively administered.

Indicators

A. Vision and goals of the organization are aligned and clearly communicated.

B. Planning involves all stakeholders.

C. Policies and procedures are written, communicated, and reviewed.

D. Fiscal needs and allocations are communicated within the organization and throughout the community.

E. Funding criteria and procedures are designed to ensure equity.

F. Budgets are responsibly administered.

G. Resources are pursued and coordinated to enhance optimum results for student outcomes.

H. Data including student and personnel records are accurate, confidential, and managed for effective use.

I. Action plans for improvement including professional development are designed and implemented by all units and individuals.

J. Continuous assessment using multiple data sources is used for planning and development.

K. Annual and midyear assessment of goals serve as a basis for unit decision making.

L. All units provide systematic reporting of results to inform district decision making.

M. Information is effectively managed using technology.

N. Accounting procedures, reporting and appropriate intervention ensure increased student and employee attendance.

O. Other.

School Council Goal Setting

The purpose of goal setting is to clarify direction and provide plans for accomplishing the school's mission. A goal is a clear, realistic statement of what you want your council to accomplish. When groups take time to set goals, they are taking the first step in achieving their mission. Goal setting provides a process for stretching the imagination and performance of your school. Goal setting provides you with feedback on how your improvement efforts are progressing. They are an invaluable source of motivation for your council and school. Goals increase communication by providing every member with the knowledge of where you are going. Without goals, your council efforts will appear unplanned, unorganized and not focused toward improvement.

The process for establishing goals varies from one district to another. In some instances, the district has already identified goal areas and its schools are to develop their own action plans for the achievement of each goal. In other situations the school is empowered to identify their own needs and wants and develop accompanying goals, with governing board approval.

Steps in Goal Setting

- **Goals are most useful and have more importance if they are established early.** They give you direction, energy and purpose. They also provide an excellent tool for assessing your progress.

- **Involve all stakeholders in generating ideas and determining goals.** Establish a process for identifying your needs and wants. When everyone has input into the process, they will also be committed to making the effort to achieve success.

- **Determine where you want to go.** Ask questions. What do we want? What is important? How will it help us? Who will be affected? How can we establish bold, dynamic goals that will be challenging and exciting to our stakeholders? Allow members to be creative and imaginative without criticism. The more open you are, the better results you will have. The format for brainstorming is one way to accomplish this. People trained in group facilitation can also be of much benefit, and it may lend more openness to your discussion.

- **Evaluate your list and determine your highest needs and priorities.** Discuss the promises, potential and problems associated with each. Identify possible ways to overcome the obstacles.

- **Write the goal.** Your goal statement should be realistic, easy to understand, have a meaningful purpose and be obtainable. In writing your goals, use words that clearly communicate your purpose and your desired results. Use words that are precise and to the point in identifying the action(s) that are necessary for achieving each goal.

- **Written goals should:**
  - ♦ Align directly to your mission and values.
  - ♦ Be challenging as well as realistic and achievable.

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- Be measurable and specific.
- Be written in a positive framework.
- Have clearly written plans for implementation.
- Identify and make available resources necessary for successful achievement.
- Have established timelines.
- Include specific performance expectations for all stakeholders.
- Include clear and specific performance process for evaluation.
- Identify a process for celebrating their accomplishment.
- Be written to reflect short, medium and long range plans.

Setting Goals at the Right Level

Setting goals at the appropriate level requires skill that is often acquired through practice. Accurate input data in necessary in order to set attainable goals. Goals should require effort and stretching in order to grow but should not reach for unattainable heights. If stakeholders see a goal as being unrealistic, they are most likely to make no effort toward its achievement. Likewise, setting goals too low will result in no growth or achievement.

Achieving Goals

When you achieve a goal, have a plan to take time for celebrating your success. Acknowledge those who participated in its achievement and recognize the progress you have made together. Discuss your experience, sharing and reflecting on what you have learned. Look forward to accepting and accomplishing future, more difficult challenges as a team.

Frequent monitoring of your progress, with appropriate revision, should prevent failure. However, if you should not experience success in accomplishing a goal, thoroughly review the processes and procedures used in creating it as well as the specific action plans. Attempt to diagnose why you were not successful. Causes for lack-of success include: unclear purpose, lack of commitment, poor plans or techniques and lack of resources. The most frequent reason is that the goal was unrealistic from the beginning. If the goal remains a high priority, rewrite your plan, and include the aspects necessary to be successful.

Writing clearly defined goals and accompanying action plans gives your team the power to choose your priorities and determine your future. By knowing what you want to achieve, you will know where to concentrate your energies and be able to avoid most distractions. By creating a shared vision and accompanying written goals, schools (councils, teams, communities) will: achieve more, improve performance, increase motivation and pride, and create a positive, satisfying environment where trust is prevalent.

Developing and Implementing Action Plans

Steps to follow in developing an action plan

I.   School Vision, Mission, and/or Philosophy:
    Topic 1: How Students Learn
    Topic 2: School Organization
    Topic 3: Curriculum
    Topic 4: Assessment
    Topic 5: Adult - Student Relations
    Topic 6: Parent Involvement
    Topic 7: Community Involvement

II. Identifying Goals for Improvement
    Student performance on tests and other measures of success and/or achievement
    Effective schools measures
    Survey information from various groups on school issues

III. Understanding and Coordinating Goals
    School Goals
    District Goals
    State Goals

IV. Communicating Goals:
    Teachers and Staff
    Parents
    Community

V.   Writing and Developing the Action Plan:
    Vision/Mission/Philosophy
    Data that Support Goals
    Objectives
    Activities
    Costs
    Timelines
    Persons Responsible
    Assessments and Evaluations of Student Program Success
    Process Evaluation
    Reflection and Planning Based on Outcomes

School Council Improvement Plan

I. **School Vision, Mission, and/or Philosophy:**

Topic 1: How Students Learn
Topic 2: School Organization
Topic 3: Curriculum
Topic 4: Assessment
Topic 5: Adult-Student Relations
Topic 6: Parent Involvement
Topic 7: Community Involvement

II. **Identifying Goals for Improvement:**

Student Performance on Test and Other Measures of Success and/or Achievement
Effective Schools Measures
Survey Information from Various Groups on School Issues

III. **Understanding and Coordinating Goals:**

School Goals
District Goals
State Goals

IV. **Communicating Goals:**

Teachers and Staff
Parents
Community

V. **Writing and Developing the Action Plan:**

Vision/Mission/Philosophy
Data that Supports Goals
Objectives
Activities
Costs
Timelines
Person Responsible
Assessment and Evaluations of Student and Program Success
Process Evaluation
Reflection and Planning based on Outcomes

THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHY OF SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT

JANE L. DAVID

For all its guises, site-based management is basically an attempt to transform schools into communities where the appropriate people participate constructively in major decisions that affect them.

Site-based management may be the most significant reform of the decade—a potential force for empowering educators and communities. Yet no two people agree on what it is, how to do it, or even why to do it.

Kentucky requires virtually every school to have a site-based council with three teachers, two parents, and the principal, and endows councils with considerable fiscal and policy authority. Maryland and Texas require schools to have school-based decision-making teams, but in

contrast to Kentucky, do not specify their composition or legally transfer authority from the district to the school.

In Chicago, state law places significant authority in the hands of local school councils and defines their makeup: six parents, two community representatives, two teachers, and the principal. In Cincinnati, reorganization and downsizing of the central office has shifted considerable responsibility, but no additional legal authority, to school principals.

Colorado governor Roy Romer initiated site-based management in Denver as part of stalled contract negotiations between the school district and the teachers' association and required a business representative on each council. In Memphis, site-based management never got beyond a small pilot phase. In Dade County, Florida, the pilot was expanded but in a much weaker form.

These are only a few examples. According to Ogawa and White (1994), one-third of all school districts had some version of site-based management between 1986 and 1990. Since 1990 at least five states have jumped on the bandwagon. And during the same time, more than 20 states have passed legislation to create charter schools—individual schools that are de facto site-based managed, even though they do not carry that title. All this activity excludes individual schools that have instituted reforms but have not been delegated authority by their district or state, although some of these may be excellent models of democratic decision making (see, for example, Apple and Beane 1995, Wohlstetter and Smyer 1994).

What Is It?

So what is site-based management? It has almost as many variants as there are places claiming to be "site-based." And they differ on every important dimension— who initiates it, who is involved, what they control, and whether they are accountable to an outside authority. Site-based management may be instituted by state law or by administrative action, by a district, or by a school. It may be linked to an accountability system with consequences tied to student performance, or it may not be.

Most variants of site-based management involve some sort of representative decision-making council at the school, which may share authority with the principal or be merely advisory. Some councils have the power to hire principals, some hire and fire, some do neither. Some can hire other personnel when there are vacancies. Some councils specify that the principal be the chair, others specify that the principal not be the chair.

The composition of site councils also varies tremendously. In addition to teachers, parents, and the principal, they may include classified staff, community members, students, and business representatives. Educators may outnumber non-educators, or vice versa. States or districts may list constituencies who must be repre-

sented, or simply leave it to individual schools. Chicago and Kentucky are exceptions in specifying exact membership of the site council—who and how many of each type of constituent.

Why Do It?

Reasons for initiating site-based management run the gamut, yet virtually all are cloaked in the language of increasing student achievement. To some, site-based management is a governance reform designed to shift the balance of authority among schools, districts, and the state. This tends to be the rationale behind state efforts rather than district reforms, and it is often

educational reform is that the way to enhance student learning is to let education professionals make the important professional decisions.

Further complicating the landscape, there are often underlying motives. Stated purposes may obscure far less lofty aims, such as weakening entrenched and distrusted local school boards, creating the illusion of reform without investing additional resources, putting a positive spin on central office downsizing by calling it decentralization, or simply trying to shift the blame for failure to the school itself.

people who have never worked as a group, who may have no experience in collaborative decision making, and who may in fact have a history of being adversaries (parents and teachers, for example). To make matters worse, some members may be subject to evaluation by other members (teachers by the principal, most obviously). Why would such a group be expected to improve student learning?

Indeed, groups like these that do function well tend to spend most of their time on issues of discipline, facilities, and extracurricular activities.

> **Reasons for initiating site-based management run the gamut, yet virtually all are cloaked in the language of increasing student achievement.**

part of a larger reform agenda that claims to trade school autonomy for accountability to the state.

To others, site-based management is a political reform initiated to broaden the decision-making base, either within the school, the larger community, or both. But democratization of decision making as an end in itself leaves open the question of who should be involved in which decisions.

Site-based management may also be an administrative reform to make management more efficient by decentralizing and deregulating it. Here, too, management efficiency presumably serves the ultimate goal of the organization—student learning. Yet another premise of site-based management as

Linking Decentralization and Achievement

Although site-based management appears in many guises, at its core is the idea of participatory decision making at the school site. And despite all the variations in rationale, its main stated objective is to enhance student achievement. Participatory decision making and school improvement are presumed to be related, but that's not always the case.

Consider what happens when any group is formed by bringing together

They limit themselves to these issues for good reason—these are the issues that people are passionate about and have some idea how to tackle. Moreover, these are concerns that parents and teachers share (David 1994).

Curriculum and instruction are much more difficult to deal with, for educators and non-educators alike. And these issues are even more difficult to tackle when states or districts mandate new assessments that require teaching methods that are unfamiliar to many parents and teachers. When there are serious consequences for unsatisfactory student performance—especially teacher or principal dismissal—but a lack of knowledge about how to improve student performance, trust and constructive dialogue are further undermined.

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Who Decides What?

For site-based decisions to be sound, attention must be paid to who decides what. Sound decisions are made by those who are informed about and care about the issues and who know the context in which the decision will be carried out. Otherwise, there is no guarantee that these decisions will be any better than those made by policymakers many steps removed. In fact, school-based decisions could be made by only one person, and that person could be uninformed and insensitive to the context.

Participatory management does not mean that everyone decides everything. Some decisions are best left to the professionals in the school, some to parents, and others to students. Some decisions are appropriately made by representatives of several constituencies, others by a formal schoolwide body. Nor does site-based management mean that all decisions are appropriately made at the school level. Schools belong to larger systems—districts and states—that must provide a strong center if decentralization is to create something other than anarchy (Murphy 1989).

Schools are unlikely to improve unless community members—and particularly parents—participate meaningfully. And in secondary schools, students should be involved as well. Schools are also unlikely to improve unless teachers—the main implementers—shape the direction of change. In general, those who have the strongest personal stake in and the most immediate connection to the school are the ones who should tackle the issues. The challenge is to maximize the likelihood that decisions will be appropriately participatory, informed, and sensitive to the context.

> **Participatory management does not mean that everyone decides everything.**

Internal Elements

Site councils that truly flourish in the school community tend to have a number of characteristics in common, most notably the following.

■ *A well-thought-out committee structure.* In a well-structured system of council committees, there is a good matchup between the types of decisions to be made and the most appropriate people to debate and resolve those issues. Some committees may be standing, others ad hoc. Some may be composed of teachers, and so defined by naturally existing groups like teams, departments, and grade levels. Some may consist only of parents; others may be representative of all constituencies. Whether the relationship between the committees and the site council is formal (approval) or informal (advisory), the committee structure with overlapping memberships provides a communication network that is critical to an effective council.

■ *Enabling leadership.* Strong councils are usually led, though not always chaired, by strong principals (and sometimes teachers) who exercise leadership by mobilizing others. They encourage all parties to participate. And they model inquiry and reflection. Such leaders create schoolwide ownership of the improvement agenda so that principal turnover or a change in council membership does not bring efforts to a halt.

■ *Focus on student learning.* Not all issues have a direct influence on student learning, but strong councils consciously connect non-instructional decisions with conditions that maximize learning opportunities. For example, a decision to invest in classroom telephones to facilitate communication between teachers and parents will also affect students. By linking all issues to teaching and learning, council members don't lose sight of the ultimate goal.

■ *Focus on adult learning.* There are two points here. First, council members need new skills, assistance, and practice in asking hard questions and gathering evidence about what is and is not working. Second, councils need to appreciate that their constituencies—parents and educators—require access to new knowledge and skills, both to be active decision makers and to change their teaching and learning practices and beliefs.

■ *Schoolwide perspective.* Functioning councils focus on the collective interests of the parties, devoting their energy to school goals and direction, coordination and communication, and allocation of resources and equity. They do not get caught up in details of management or curriculum, and they do not get waylaid by individual agendas. Naturally most parents will be thinking about their own children's needs, and most teachers will be thinking about their own classrooms, and so they might be defensive. Moreover, everyone may lack confidence in a new process that carries considerable responsibility.

External Elements

Not many schools are able to create on their own the conditions I have described, particularly when strong enabling leadership is absent. To learn

how to do it, most schools require support from their district or state agencies, including the following:

- *Long-term commitment.* Councils cannot evolve into effective decision-making bodies at the school site if the pendulum swings from one extreme to the other every two or three years. Site-based management cannot be the reform *du jour* that changes authority

schools, if real improvement is to occur, individual beliefs and, ultimately, the school culture will need to change.

- *Opportunities for learning and assistance.* Districts can provide resources for the kinds of learning opportunities that adults in schools need to change classroom practices and to function effectively as council

tion can support. Moreover, because the system has its own needs for information, the flow must go in both directions.

Open Questions

Making fundamental changes in systems as complex as state and local school systems raises a number of questions for which there are no pat answers. The solutions simply have to be worked out by those involved. Among these difficult issues are questions of equity, adult learning, decision making, and changing conceptions of teaching and of community. In particular:

- What policies and supports will ensure that site-based management does not exacerbate resource differences among schools? Schools in poorer neighborhoods tend to have fewer resources and less educated populations. They are at risk of being further disadvantaged under a decentralized system.

- How can site-based management create a sense of community in schools that draw from a large geographic area, as do most secondary schools; and in schools in districts with desegregation plans, choice, open enrollment, or magnet schools? Parents and staff at such schools may not have access to transportation or time to participate in school decision making.

- New ideas for teacher professional development are emerging, but where are the opportunities for principals, central office staff, and parents to learn new roles and ways to assist site councils?

- How should teachers' jobs be redefined to allow time for collaborative decision making and ongoing professional development? Both teachers and the public believe that teachers should devote their time to students, and teachers are finding

> In general, those who have the strongest personal stake in and the most immediate connection to the school are the ones who should tackle the issues.

and flexibility when the superintendent changes. Sustained commitment is essential. The process is hard work and takes time.

- *Curricular guidance.* Schools need a substantive framework within which to make appropriate choices. Whether that guidance is best communicated in the form of learning goals and standards, curriculum or content guides, or assessments is an open question—as is the way in which choices about such guidance are made. The goal of site-based management is not to let a thousand flowers bloom nor to force every school to reinvent itself from scratch.

In addition, everyone from classroom teachers to other members of committees who diagnose problems must have opportunities to learn new ways of operating, including mediating techniques. School councils must reflect the existing culture. For most

and committee members. School councils will necessarily reflect the existing culture. Most councils, but especially those with local conflicts and limited experience in collaborative problem solving, will need assistance and access to facilitation and mediation. For most schools, if site-based management is to lead to improvement, individual beliefs and, ultimately, the culture of the school site will need to change.

- *Access to information.* Schools must have easy access to the information needed to make decisions, including everything from budget to performance data. A decentralized system can function well only when each unit knows how it is doing. Although schools can gather certain data from students, teachers, and the community, they cannot be expected to have the data collection and analysis capability that a larger organiza-

classroom demands take increasing time and energy.

■ How can site-based management be structured to balance school autonomy and flexibility with certain centralized operations that require consistency, coordination, and legal constraints? For example, collective bargaining, transportation, and government regulations may all affect class size, schedules, services, and how facilities are used.

■ What is the best public education analogue to private sector work teams, and where do parents and community members fit in? That is, decentralized private organizations delegate authority to work teams that don't involve the public. But in schools, neither site councils nor groups of teachers are really teams that carry out the work of the organization (teachers typically work in isolation).

■ Should schools have mandates that require them to involve parents and the community in decisions? What is the likelihood that without such mandates, parents and community members would continue to have little voice in some local schools?

Risks and Benefits
In theory, the benefits of site-based management overwhelm the costs: the goals of education reform are unlikely to be met in any other way. As public support for public education in general, and reform in particular, dwindles, community members' engagement in their local schools offers the most promise for rebuilding support.

Without a school and community culture that supports ongoing learning, student achievement is unlikely to improve. The challenge is to open avenues for informed conversation and for becoming informed. Ultimate accountability rests on the ability of individuals to influence what is not

working (Wiggins 1993). That is certainly far preferable to a state takeover or school closure.

Although the ultimate goal of participatory site-based management is to improve schools in order to improve student performance, the intermediate goals are desired ends in themselves. Involving teachers in decisions about their work must be valued in its own right, as must giving parents and other community members more involvement in their schools.

One risk is that the public will judge site-based management prematurely on the ultimate goals, derailing sound practices whose success is not yet reflected in test scores. When there is more than one desired end and the means to those ends are not clear, it is difficult to assess progress along the way. Therefore, it is critically important to devise new ways of measuring progress for such an undertaking (Bryk et al. 1994).

Another risk, however, is that participants will not judge site-based management in terms of any of its goals—intermediate or ultimate—but simply allow the process to absorb time and energy to no good purpose. Unfortunately, in practice, the potential of site-based management is rarely realized. It can even have deleterious effects, exhausting limited energy and good will in futile exercises. Only with visible progress and results will folks willingly put in the hard work.

The key is to identify and exploit ways to ensure that decisions will be appropriately participatory, informed, and context-sensitive, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will lead to better school practices and stronger instruction. Ultimately, it will be the people who carry out site-based management who determine what it is—and can become. Their success or

failure will also help others decide whether it is worthwhile in terms of the human costs it exacts.

Finally, the goal of transforming schools into communities where everyone has a voice goes beyond issues of school reform to the heart of our democratic society. The creation of models of collaboration and participatory decision making for students to witness and become involved in—not only in classrooms but also in their community—ultimately benefits not just the school community but our entire society. ■

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Jane L. David is Director, Bay Area Research Group, 3144 David Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94303.

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Shared Decision Making Works!

Robert Kessler

Making the move to collegial decision making hasn't always been a smooth process, says the superintendent of a small district in northern California, ut the positive results have reinforced the commitment of his staff.

've spent many sleepless nights worrying whether the difficulties facing our district's restructuring efforts have been worth the energy needed to move forward. As morning comes. I always reach the same conclusion: yes.

For five years I was head negotiator for the teachers' association in Moraga. California. a small suburban district east of San Francisco. In spite of my public support for our successes through collective bargaining. I always felt personally uncomfortable with its confrontational nature. Often on the same day, I would have to switch from collegial conversations with a teacher, administrator. or parent to uncompromising confrontations about salary increases with the same people.

As a principal. I often felt a similar conflict. I worked hard to develop trust between myself and the staff. Yet the mutual respect that grew out of overcoming problems and developing new programs together would often be tossed aside as teacher and district positions hardened at the bargaining table. I found myself voicing positions that were not necessarily my own feelings, but seemed necessary to protect the district's bargaining strategy. At times the conflicts over salary issues so dominated the school year that efforts to improve the educational program became secondary at best.

I became convinced that there had to be a better way to resolve conflicts. Though the road is difficult, the Reed Union School District is finding a better way.

Starting at the District Level

Two years ago I became superintendent of the district after three years as principal of the middle school. A major factor in my decision to apply for the position was my confidence in the district's three-year budget restructuring project. I was continually amazed by the positive impact shared decision making had on our district. For two-and-a-half years. beginning while I was still at the middle school. for example.-we had no damaging conflict over salary increases.

In Reed. we began our restructuring effort at the district level. Many districts that experiment with involving teachers in leadership start at the school site level. We began with the topic everyone considered the biggest obstacle to educational improvement: conflict over the district budget.

With help from the Stuart Foundations. we launched our Management Team: seven teacher representatives. one classified representative. the district's three principals. the superintendent. and two board members. This group meets regularly— and in public—to develop a recommendation on the district's annual budget. While the Board of Trustees is not legally obligated to accept the team's recommendation. it has done so for the past three years. The proposal has also been the basis for the formal salary settlements between the district and bargaining units.

Forming a Team Agreement

Getting started wasn't easy. Several years ago. as part of a countywide professional development project. the Reed Board of Trustees made an initial commitment to developing teacher involvement in decision making. Once the Management Team was in place. we hired a trainer to help us analyze our personal styles and develop effective group dynamics. Out of the training process came our

Team Agreements: to commit to operate by consensus, respect one another's styles, speak honestly, and advocate the team's decisions to our constituencies. Taking the time to work out these agreements was critical for success.

In the meetings, when a member objects to a particular proposal, everyone listens carefully to his or her reasoning because we cannot reach consensus without everyone's approval. Similarly, when team members raise objections, they also offer suggestions because everyone has the same ultimate goal: consensus. As one member stated in our second-year evaluation, "If this were a collective bargaining session, it would have ended in the first few minutes, because everybody would have stormed out. Everyone here feels responsible for coming up with the product instead of exhibiting the attitude that 'it's not my problem—it's yours!'"

Developing a Recommendation

Beginning with the Team Agreements, we held monthly three- to four-hour meetings to develop a budget recommendation. Though the process was tedious, we went through the budget line by line. The business manager clearly explained state budgeting procedures and regulations, and everyone's questions were answered. As Management Team members gained an understanding of what makes a district budget, we focused on priorities for the upcoming year.

We spent many hours ranking priorities for adjustments to the budget. A typical meeting focused on such questions as: With only a small cost of living increase from the state, what priority do we give to programs, classroom aides, class size, and staff salary increases? The discussion was intense, often heated. Sometimes members broke into smaller groups to try to reach accord.

At times, we doubted we could reach consensus, but everyone persevered, and eventually we drafted a plan that preserved core programs, instructional aides, and small class size. Some specialist positions were dropped and instructional supply allocations reduced. Increased costs, including teacher and staff salary increases, were included in the final budget recommendation. Though no one enjoys deciding whether a half-time elementary physical education teacher or a groundskeeper deserves a higher priority, members knew they must make some hard choices—and that they could make them—because we all share the same fundamental value: quality education for our students.

In June 1991, we completed our third round of budget development. As we have become clearer about our priorities, we have also generated new questions. How should the budget reflect the differences among our schools? Do differing student needs require different student to teacher ratios? Or is equity among schools a better criterion? In the future, we feel able to address these difficult questions because of the creativity inherent in our Management Team process.

After having an adversarial environment for many years, the district now has open communication and an atmosphere of developing trust.

Involve board members from the beginning. Their participation is essential to legitimize the process and to ease communication.

Take the time to build trust. Group training sessions to develop team agreements are an invaluable way to begin shared decision making.

Use neutral facilitators. Facilitators keep the consensus process intact, remind the group when it is straying from its agreements, and focus the group on its tasks.

Be honest. There is no room for unspoken agendas or behind-the-scene manipulations. Individual members' priorities or concerns need to be stated and time taken to deal with them as they arise.

Be patient. Reaching a group consensus takes more time and patience than making decisions in a traditional hierarchial system, but recommendations will be accepted with a remarkable spirit of trust.

We began our
restructuring
effort at the
district level
with the topic
everyone
considered
the biggest
obstacle to
educational
improvement:
conflict over
the district
budget.

A Model That Can Work Anywhere

Working in a restructured system has been demanding at times. As emotions become heightened, it's a struggle to maintain a constructive attitude. Adapting to changes in the roles of board members, administrators, and teacher-negotiators has also been a challenge. One of our most persistent problems is finding the time necessary for frequent Management Team meetings. Clarifying the team's role in the district's chain of command remains a thorny issue, as does defining the relationship between legally required collective bargaining and Management Team recommendations.

However, dealing with these challenges is unconditionally preferable to the system I have been used to. After having an adversarial environment for many years, the district now has open communication and an atmosphere of developing trust. Teachers and principals can focus their attention on improvements in curriculum and school programs. Community support has grown, too. Three years ago, district voters turned down a special local tax assessment for schools. In April 1990, they approved a similar

measure by a two-thirds margin.

Recently, the budget situation throughout California has created our greatest challenge yet. The lack of cost-of-living increases in state revenue to local districts means that budgeting for even minimal salary increases is increasingly difficult. District staff began to question whether teacher interests are best served through traditional, adversarial bargaining or through a more collaborative process. It is a mark of commitment to shared decision making that the district and the teachers' association have agreed to broaden the scope of our Management Team to include all contract negotiations.

While the small size of Reed may partially account for our success, our diversity in individual points of view is typical of all school districts. I believe that making a mutual commitment to work by consensus and to base decisions on the best interest of kids is a model that can work anywhere. ∎

Robert Kessler is Superintendent, Reed Union School District, 277-A Karen Way, Tiburon, CA 94920.

A Successful Model For School-Based Planning

Janice I. Solkov-Brecher

With the "whole world in our hands" as the theme, an elementary school community is working enthusiastically to meet its goal of environmental education.

"When I look at all of the schools in Centennial. I see nine different schools. Each community is different. Each staff is different. Each principal is different. What *unifies* us is our mission. . . . The ways we accomplish our mission and our goals and objectives will vary because of our diversity."

At a meeting of our Curriculum Council. Centennial Superintendent Harry Harhigh thus presented his vision of changing from a management-by-objectives system to a program of building goals determined through a needs assessment. As a new elementary principal with a background in research. I immediately sought to discover what a needs assessment model might look like. I examined a program that a committee

of district administrators had designed. I also explored the literature. After a rather lengthy investigation. to my surprise. I had not located one practical plan for assessing a building's areas of strength and difficulty and then addressing the challenges.

A Needs Assessment Model

In the literature. school reform leaders emphasized the importance of a grass-roots movement for successful change in education. Realizing the importance of making the needs assessment process a bottom-up effort. I sent a letter to all parents and staff members soliciting volunteers for a committee that would determine a building goal by the end of the school year. Our Needs Assessment Committee consisted of the principal. four students in grades 4 and 5 selected by their teachers. and all parents and teachers who volunteered—a total of 41 members.

We met once a month. in the afternoon and evening. so that members could choose the time more convenient for them. The average attendance was 30 members. At the evening meeting. I reported on the earlier group's session: the results of both meetings were then published as minutes.

The steps outlined here can be followed regardless of the specifics that apply to a building's staff. student population. or general community.

September: Begin Questioning Process

a. What parts of the total school program need improvement?

b. On what bases have people identified parts of the school program in need of improvement?

c. Why do they think these parts need improvement?

I prepared packets of data and

shared them at the first Needs Assessment Committee meeting. The data included the district mission statement and goals and the results of state assessments and the standardized test results of the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS).

Was it a successful program? After the first year of a two-year action plan. I must respond with an unequivocal "yes!"

Another source of information was a survey of the school's instructional programs and services completed by parents. teachers. and 5th and 6th graders.

Working in small groups. committee members reviewed the data. On a large grid. we marked pluses and minuses to reflect strengths and weaknesses. The chart began to reveal areas in need of improvement and stimulated discussion on the reasons for these needs.

October/November/December: Consider Information Gathered

a. Is there some consensus about which parts of the school program are in need of improvement?

b. Are the areas identified as needing improvement significant? Do they affect the overall quality of

the school's program?

After two months of considering the above two questions. we narrowed our original list of 10 topics to 4:

■ self-esteem/discipline/responsibility.

■ environmental education/community involvement.

■ computer education.

■ reading/critical thinking skills/study skills.

December/January: Identify Concerns and Generate Data

a. Of the concerns identified. which are the most important for improving the educational program of the school?

b. Which are within the scope and ability of the school to address and correct?

c. What information do we need to become fully informed about the nature of the concerns. and where can it be obtained?

d. After gathering the information. how can it be organized so that it is accessible and useful to all?

In reviewing the four topics. committee members searched for the single topic that would be most manageable and make the biggest difference in our educational program. For example. although the committee felt a need to help students with self-esteem/discipline/responsibility. was this area significant enough to be a building goal? Considering all the other related variables. could the school really correct this concern? What type of environmental education program could we actually develop? Did the school have the resources to carry out computer education as a building goal in a meaningful way? Was there already sufficient emphasis on the area of reading?

Over the next two weeks. I met with a mini-team (one parent. one

student. one teacher) for each area of concern to outline an action plan for each proposed topic. At the December meeting. I shared those plans with the committee. and we reviewed them in light of the above questions. The caution here is to resist identifying one topic until this reflective process is completed.

January/February: Prioritize Concerns and Choose One

a. Of the major concerns identified. which are most important for improving the school's educational program. and what priority is given to each concern? Items to be considered include (1) the degree to which addressing the concern will affect the entire school: (2) the availability of time. personnel. and resources to address the concern: and (3) the knowledge of how the concern can be addressed.

b. Which concern is most in need of immediate attention?

During extensive discussions. committee members argued persuasively for their favorite topic. Finally. in January. both the committee and the staff voted for a first. second. and third choice. We examined the results to find areas of agreement.

Environmental education was the first choice of the committee. the second choice of the staff. Both groups were consulted. and they then agreed on environmental education as the building goal. After hearing the mini-teams' presentations and the debates about how environmental education could be addressed as a thematic unit integrating all subject areas. I felt excited about the direction of this topic as a goal program.

March: Write Objectives Needed to Address the Concern

a. What objectives must be set if the concern is to be addressed successfully?

b. What actions must be taken?

April: Develop an Action Plan

a. How can the necessary actions be organized?

b. How will it be determined if the objectives have addressed the concern?

c. How will the program be evaluated?

After drafting the action plan based on the recommendations of the mini-team's plan for environmental education. I shared it informally with individual parents and teachers from the Needs Assessment Committee. Later. at the April meeting. I formally shared the action plan. During this time. in order to reunite the committee. I had informally consulted with those members who felt strongly about one of the other three topics. To give them

ownership in environmental education as the building goal. I had also solicited their input into the action plan.

We submitted the action plan to the administration. and it was accepted in May.

Environmental Education: First Steps

Subsequently. I wrote to various programs recognized as exemplary in ·e field of environmental education. .ter we received an enthusiastic response from Briar Bush Nature

Center in Abington. Pennsylvania. we engaged the center to train teachers and make grade-level presentations. We surveyed the professional development needs of the staff and scheduled workshops for the summer and next school year. In the library. we set up shelves of resource materials for teachers.

Next. to give the building goal a unifying theme to drive the program, we held a schoolwide campaign to nominate slogans. Each homeroom of students submitted a suggestion. and the students voted from a slate of good choices. The winner was "We've got the whole world in our hands."

First-Year Evaluation

So what happened? Was it a successful program? After the first year of a two-year action plan. I must respond with an unequivocal "yes!"

Scores on a schoolwide pre- and post-test survey indicate that the students tripled their knowledge about and their efforts to protect the environment. For example. students responded that they talked to people about pollution. conserved water. turned off unnecessary lights. and picked up trash. On the tests given every month in each classroom. pre-test scores averaged 44 percent. whereas the monthly post-test scores averaged 89 percent. Activities included three-dimensional representations/projects. performances/demonstrations. language-related activities. related assemblies. and field trips.

Students have participated in environmental education activities in their classrooms. within their grade levels. and as a student body. For example. students created a wildlife nature corner on school grounds. constructed birdhouses and feeders in industrial arts for the nature corner. and assembled original research books about endangered species in conjunction with the reading specialist's program. Students also buried trash to predict and observe decomposition. and they observed habitats and adaptations at local parks and nature centers. As a

A community member hands off recyclables to Leary Elementary School students.

culminating activity for the year. the school held an Environmental Parade. As parents observed along the way. teachers and students—dressed as birds. trees. animals. the sun. air. water. and recycling symbols—marched behind flags. banners. and drummers on a half-mile parade route through the neighborhood.

With the "whole world in our hands." students. teachers. and parents rose to the occasion and responded enthusiastically to meet the goal. Apparently. the needs assessment process had accurately identified an area in need of the school's and the community's attention. In fact. the Region III office of the United States Environmental Protection Agency gave the program its 1991 Award for Excellence in Environmental Education for the category of academic institutions. In its letter of congratulations. the EPA commended the program's "action plan which involved the cooperative efforts of students. teachers. parents. and administration." This recognition is more reinforcement that involving everyone is the way to go.

A Shared Effort

By directing the change from an MBO system to a building-based goal program. the superintendent of the Centennial School District enabled each building's staff and community to focus on an individual area of need. as determined by a grassroots effort through needs assessment. Students. parents. teachers. and administrators gathered and analyzed data. ultimately identifying a specific area for implementation as a major goal. The model prompted the committee and staff members to think through the possible programs in order to select the one that best met the needs of the students. In conclusion. this was a needs assessment model that worked! ∎

Janice I. Solkov-Brecher. formerly Principal of Leary Elementary in Warminster. Pennsylvania. is now Principal. School District of Upper Moreland Township. Cold Spring Elementary School. Brooks and Reed Sts.. Willow Grove. PA 19090.

Lessons for Principals
From Site-Based Management

Abby Barry Bergman

An elementary school principal says the advantages of school-based management far outweigh the drawbacks, and he offers eight suggestions to ease the transition.

The decision was made. Our staff had voted to accept the superintendent's offer to try a new approach to school decision making: site-based management. As with any innovation proposed in a school community, I met the prospect with both enthusiasm and concern. Our small elementary school was working well. The Ralph S. Maugham School's reputation for academic excellence, creativity, and a spirited, involved, and dedicated staff was widely acknowledged. Why should we tamper with something that was working well? How would my role as the principal change?

Frankly, I was pleased with the degree of sharing that was already established in the school; I also enjoyed the prerogative to make important decisions on my own, knowing full well that the staff expected everything would fall into place. Somehow, they didn't seem to want to be bothered with the intricacies of the hundreds of decisions made every day. I was a bit worried. Isn't site-based management most often recommended for troubled schools that require major restructuring?

Learning to Let Go

Tenafly, New Jersey, is a well-to-do suburban community of approximately 13,500 residents located within a few miles of New York City. The community has consistently demonstrated an active interest in, and willingness to support, quality educational programs. Our public school district consists of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

My own leadership style can best be characterized as organized and responsive. I had made countless arrange-ments to ensure that the school ran smoothly and stayed on an even keel. To the degree that I could provide assistance to teachers and take care of their concerns. I felt that I was fulfilling the role of an involved, active principal. As my experience with site-based management unfolded, however, I found that I needed to learn to let go and provide the means for people to solve their own problems.

This process of "letting go" can be likened to a tightly wound watch spring. As we moved toward site-based management, I had to let it unwind incrementally; with each release of the spring, new potential and energy was realized. The rewards for all of us soon became apparent.

Photo by Abby Barry Bergman

Charting New Paths

In the spring of 1990 at staff meetings, we designed the configuration for a school leadership council. After examining various models, we decided on the following arrangement:

- four teachers: one from a primary grade, one from an intermediate grade, one specialist, and one additional

teacher at large (if possible.
a nontenured teacher):

■ three parents: representing both those who are actively involved in our parent organization and those who are not:

■ the school principal:

■ a noncertified staff member (secretary. aide. or custodian):

■ a member of the board of education:

■ a central office administrator.

Then. in a self-directed meeting. the school staff elected representatives to the council. the parent body followed to the council. the parent body followed a similar procedure. the superintendent appointed a central office administrator. and the school board president selected the board member representative.

With a move to site-based management, decisions may be a little slower in coming, but they will be more enduring.

Lesson 1: Learn to Listen

In the fall, we held our first meeting as a school leadership council. Bena Kallick. our district's consultant for site-based management, was the facilitator. Through our involvement with her. we learned many of the skills and techniques associated with site-based

management. More important. we learned them within the context of our own deliberations—not in isolation from real problems.

Our first step was to develop a school philosophy. We worked in cooperative groups. employing and practicing the techniques many of us had learned to use in classrooms. In the process. one of the most important lessons we learned is that in order to really listen. you must move beyond simply hearing the content of what is said. You must hear some of the emotion. concern. and passion with which points are made. I discovered that by paraphrasing what someone is saying and checking whether my understanding matches the intention. communication is clarified for both parties. As a result. I heard some teachers in a new way for the very first time. What an insight!

Lesson 2: Establish Patterns for Communication

Defining a school philosophy became a significant task for our fledgling group. After producing our first draft. council members volunteered to meet. with 7 to 10 members of the community to share our efforts. check whether our beliefs were consistent with their views. and then report results to the council. Some teachers met with other teachers who were not members of the council: other teachers met with parents: some parents met with non-parent citizens: the secretary met with our clerical staff: the board member interviewed other board members: and I chose to work with our growing Hispanic community (see fig. 1).

Through these interchanges. we listened to the ideas of others. refined

our perceptions. became attentive to our audience. and raised our collective consciousness about what a school philosophy means. In order to represent the collective thinking. we synthesized the various viewpoints into statements about our values as a school community.

Lesson 3: Understand Individual Styles

The format of the meetings to gather community input took several forms. from informal conversations to more structured discussions. Two teachers invited small groups of parents to early morning coffees. Another staff member interviewed all the school aides after lunch. One teacher laid out a folder containing our working draft in the faculty room and asked for feedback.

Initially. I wasn't comfortable with this mix of approaches. It wasn't "neat": there seemed to be little consistency in how we were spreading our word. I learned. though. that once others are entrusted to fulfill such functions. a variety of styles will emerge. reflecting the individual personalities within a group. While I cannot diagram the pattern of communication with clearly placed lines and

rrows. I can say that what we did
irked! Information was shared liber-
ally and in an unfettered fashion. After
modifications resulting from the input
we gained, a general consensus arose
within the school and community, and
our philosophy was published. The
three basic precepts are:

1. We strive to provide a nurturing
environment in which all children can
flourish, enhancing their self-worth.

2. We strive for academic quality in
a stimulating school environment.

3. We value close ties among chil-
dren, staff, parents, and the community.

Lesson 4: Promote
Open Communication
As the council met throughout the
year, we learned how to process infor-
mation and feelings in group work by
"freezing" a statement to seek further
clarification and more open communi-
cation. By acknowledging the emotion
behind a member's remarks, we found
that our discussions took on a new
freedom and honesty.

Previously, during such inter-
changes, I had attempted to protect
group members by trying to keep feel-
ings from surfacing that might be
hurtful or impede our progress. What I
learned, though, is that such feelings
must be aired. We found that by
expressing and dealing with divergent
opinions, we made far more progress
than by trying to minimize them.
Teachers began to face one another
without my intervention.

Lesson 5: Work to Build Trust
A new level of trust began to develop
within the group. Before long, we
were taking turns leading the meet-
ings, exercising our skills in setting
agendas, assigning roles (facilitator,
recorder, timer, and process observer),
and evaluating our progress. Divergent
ideas resulted from brainstorming
sessions in an atmosphere
of mutual respect. Reaching
consensus, we discovered, does not
mean total agreement, but rather a
llingness among all members to
accept a decision.

As we refined our decision-making

Figure 1

Patterns of Communication
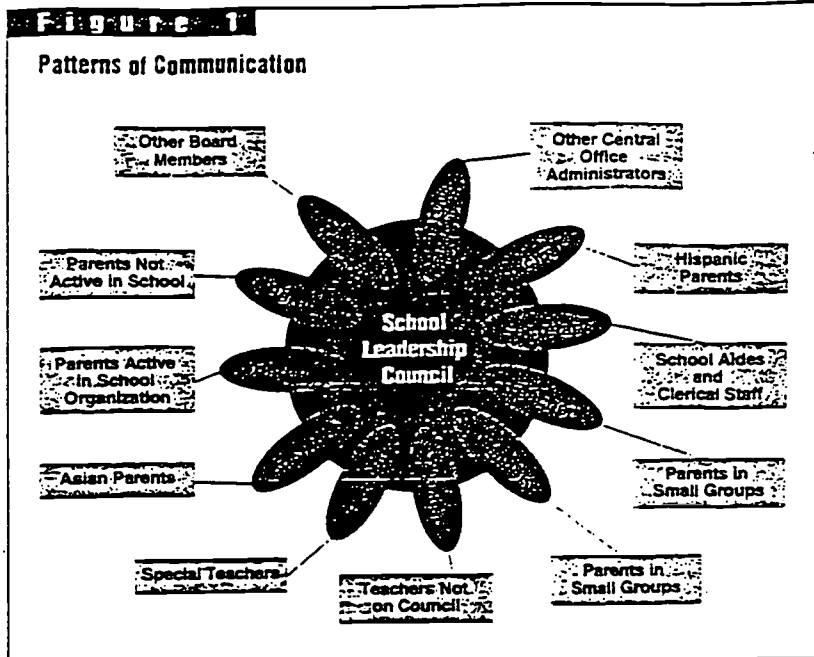
processes, we began to see the connec-
tions among the various tasks we were
tackling: determining our school
philosophy, analyzing sources of frus-
tration, defining priorities, and gener-
ating alternatives. We assumed owner-
ship for our individual assignments,
and reported findings of our own
"research" to the entire group. One of
the more important and broadly felt
realizations was that we looked
forward to our meetings and to the
sense of accomplishment shared. We
truly *enjoyed* our times together.

Lesson 6: Think with
New Perspectives
One of the important issues presented
to our council mid-year was the frus-
tration staff members felt within a
busy, stressful day. The parade of
classroom interruptions, pull-out
programs, and short, unproductive
spurts of planning time—all
contributed to a feeling that staff
members longed for more "quality
time." In light of the daily demands on
student and teacher time, I might have
thrown up my hands, deemed the
problem impossible to solve, and then
felt thwarted by not being able to
provide any relief. But, this time, I
held back for a while.

In our council meetings, we focused
on the tempo of our teachers' day,

contrasting this with what we consid-
ered to be quality time in our own
lives. Council members wrote about
what the concept meant to them in
their personal lives, and students
described their notions of quality time.
Before long, we began to see how we
might build more quality time into our
days. For example, we knew that we
enjoyed our times together as a staff
solving problems, sharing joys and
sorrows, and providing professional
and personal support for one another.
We then looked for time within our
day that could be used to foster what
we valued.

One solution was to schedule our
monthly faculty meetings early on
Monday morning, instead of in the
afternoon. In this way, we would be
able to use the large chunk of time, in
the afternoon, to address faculty
concerns: sharing new book titles for
our literature-based reading program,
talking about individual youngsters
who might pose a particular challenge,
or dealing with other matters brought
directly from the staff. Certainly, some
compromises needed to be made. The
early morning meeting would allow
less time than our traditional after-
school faculty meetings. However, we
found that many teachers are more
attentive and forthcoming with fresh
ideas at this time. While we may not

have actually gained more time for staff deliberations. we found new frames of reference for faculty meeting times. And we might never have arrived at this happy arrangement had we not learned to look beyond the school walls to gain new perspectives about perceived problems.

Lesson 7: To Promote Autonomy, "Let Go"

It had been my usual practice to send memos to remind staff about meetings and commitments as a date or deadline approached. When it came time for us to experiment with having an early morning faculty meeting. I felt certain that several people might be late or even forget about the new time. Since this was a council decision. however. I was advised to leave it to the members to apprise their colleagues of our new format.

When individuals feel that they are a part of a decision. they assume more responsibility for implementing it than if the decision is made for them. This may sound like a simplistic observation. but when you see it for yourself. there is an important lesson to be learned. If you want to promote an autonomous staff. then you must allow things to happen without checking every step of the way. As the members of our council sensed a growing control. their commitment and enthusiasm for their work together grew.

Lesson 8: Take Time for Self-Reflection

Self-analysis and reflection proved to be an invaluable outcome of our one-year experience. Through our deliberations. I learned to examine my own leadership style. For example. I realized that I had become quite comfortable accomplishing many tasks in isolation—from scheduling to budgeting to planning for program implementation. Now there was a new mechanism available for gaining staff and community input into decisions that might have a significant impact upon the school.

Through our deliberations as a council. I developed a better apprecia-

tion of the frustrations and perceptions of our staff members. I became more empathetic about the time pressures they felt. I also examined my own relationships with staff and my own reluctance to delegate tasks. In the past. I had always tried to jump in and solve problems for teachers. rather than empowering them to feel that they might possess the solutions. My own desire to be responsive may have impeded others at school from assuming leadership functions.
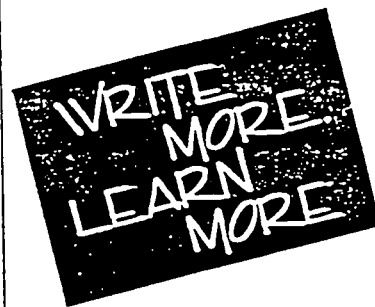
The Added Benefits

With a move to site-based management. decisions may be a little slower in coming. but they will be more enduring. Staff members who may have been reluctant to assume responsibility—feeling "it's the principal's problem. not mine"—will feel a part of the process. With the realization that their input is valued comes a new sense of commitment. The process of site-based management also allows the principal to assume a new level of involvement. seeing situations from the vantage point of others.

The process requires self-examination. role analysis. and meaningful reflection. Working with a school council in a participatory fashion helped to free me from the loneliness that often accompanies leadership. The experience also led to new understandings about human and group dynamics. as well as a compelling legitimacy for solving problems in a collegial fashion.

As principals wend their way through the many passages of site-based management. there will be moments of confusion and frustration. There will be times when you think you're losing control over time-honored prerogatives. But take it from one who has been there. Any perceived drawbacks pale in comparison to the substantial benefits of the approach. ∎

Abby Barry Bergman is Principal, The Ralph S. Maugham School, Tenafly, NJ 07670. Bena Kallick assisted in the preparation of this article.

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