

Hudson City School District
SHARED DECISION MAKING PLAN
Originally drafted January 1994
Recertified 1996, 2002

Biennial Review

Statement of Success - February 2010

The New York State Board of Regents, the governing body for education in our state, established a requirement that every school district in the state develop a plan for involving people in decision making at each school. The Hudson City School District adopted a Shared Decision Making Plan at its January 25, 1994 meeting. On March 25, 1996, the Board of Education recertified the original document with minimal amendments as recommended by the committee. No such review or revisions were completed in 1998 or 2000. In 2002, a Statement of Successes form and narrative was completed and approved by the Board of Education. No such review or revisions were completed in 2004, an attempt was made in 2006 with no evidence of completion, and no review was completed in 2008.

In 2003, some district schools began writing Comprehensive Education Plans (CEP) as a part of being designated as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI). These plans resulted in significant changes in the Hudson City School District organizational structure and focus. The CEP teams reviewed various student performance and developed goals according to the area(s) in need of improvement. The expectation was that through comprehensive planning our students would excel, our communication would improve and we would continue to develop effective use of data. Districts received guidance from the State that school CEP teams and plans could function as the Shared Decision Making team/plan as the structure and goals were the same. It appears that with this new focus coupled with changing leadership, the biennial reviews did not occur as required.

In an effort to bring the district into compliance, each building administrator was given a copy of the Shared Decision Making Plan and asked to share it with their building level committees for review and comments. Each building level committee commented on the overall level of implementation for each of the six component areas of the plan as outlined in Part 2 of the 2010 Biennial Review Form. It was the general consensus of each committee that the district plan has been implemented with minimal to moderate success. Each building leader has agreed to work with the committee to update and revise the plan to closely reflect the current work being done in the district. It was further recommended that the plan be edited to reduce repetition of language and align the key ideas over the next two years.

As a forward plan, it is hereby recommended that the Board of Education recertify the district plan with the understanding that it needs to be revised. Each building's School Leadership Team (SLT) (comprised of administrator, teacher, and parent representation as specified within this document) must meet regularly. Should any school be designated by the State, the SLT would take over the task of developing a Comprehensive Education Plan without losing site of the need for a biennial review of this document. Furthermore, each SLT must meet collectively as a District Leadership Team (DLT) on a quarterly basis to discuss topics of relevance and to work on plan updates by the next submission date of 2012 and on a biennial basis thereafter as required.

PURPOSE OF BIENNIAL REVIEW

The purpose of the biennial review is to allow a school district an opportunity to see if the district plan needs to be "amended" or "recertified". It is an opportunity to review the success of the district plan which was submitted to the Commissioner of Education for approval on February 1, 1994.

The biennial review is a requirement in paragraph (f) of CR 100.11, which necessitates that the Board of Education, in collaboration with a district committee composed of the Superintendent of schools, administrators, teachers and parents, review the district plan for the participation of teachers and parents in school-based planning and shared decision making biennially (every two years).

SHARED DECISION MAKING PLAN

Shared Decision Making (SDM) is a process by which groups responsible for implementing decisions become involved in making those decisions. Within each school, those who are "closest to the action" in schools are provided with greater control over decisions about educational matters. They are thereby able to contribute to the broad purpose of Shared Decision Making, which is to improve schools for the students by establishing a framework of trust and collaboration. Quality through participation will be our major initiative.

SDM is an inclusionary process which involves principals, teachers, support staff, parents, students and community members in meaningful decisions about their schools. The process provides an opportunity for collaboration in decision making and for sharing responsibility in achieving improvement at the school level. Representatives of stakeholder groups collaborate in identifying educational issues, defining goals, seeking input, formulating and implementing decisions, and evaluating the success of those decisions as they relate to helping students reach higher standards of excellence.

The Hudson City School District has had a long history of involving members of its various participants in decision making. The District Committee created this document for two reasons. First, it was charged with the responsibility of recommending to the Board a comprehensive plan for formally implementing SDM. The plan which follows represents the recommendation of the District Team after weighing alternative design options. Secondly, the recommended plan calls for a new approach to school improvement - one that is collective in format, collaborative in process, and consensus in decision making.

The District Team recognizes that the features of the proposed plan are a start; they represent design choices which it believes will work for the District in the initial stages of implementing School Teams. The work of the Effective Schools and Strategic Planning Committees will be embraced and incorporated into the program. Over time, as the Teams mature and demonstrate their capacity to operate effectively, it is anticipated that features of the plan will be modified and broadened (e.g., the areas of Team authority). The District Team also recognizes and affirms the need to conduct periodic evaluations of the implementation of this plan to modify and adjust the design to best meet the goals of the District.

FOCUS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING

Consistent with the Board charge to the District Team, all elements of the proposed plan exist for the purpose of maximizing student performance and self-esteem, and shall be consistent with all pertinent federal, state, and local laws, regulations, policies, and collective bargaining agreements, as well as with the School District's philosophy, goals, and objectives.

Focus defines the directions which School Teams may take in their decision making. Operationally, the focus of SDM provides School Teams with decision criteria. When considering alternative decisions or actions, with all other factors being equal, the School Teams will select an alternative most likely to attain the stated objectives of the process.

Teams will assess existing programs and practices in terms of the extent to which they support the attainment of quality. In addition, teams will work to create improvements in our existing programs.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Hudson City School District is to enable all children to meet high and challenging educational standards through quality programs and support services which promote the intellectual, physical and cultural well-being of all students and families in our community. This would provide a foundation for lifelong learning and productive citizenship.
“TOGETHER WE CAN”

The Mission Statement provides the broadest context for School Team activity. By creating improvements which help students, the School Teams are also helping the District move toward the attainment of the goals outlined by our Mission.

To provide School Teams with the desired focus, a District Steering Committee shall be created after adoption of this plan, and prior to the formation of School Teams, to recommend to the Board a set of broad District goals.

The SDM goals will be future-oriented. Rather than focusing on day-to-day operational problems which might exist, it will be the responsibility of the School Teams to consider the needs of students into the future. At the outset, the Teams will conduct a needs assessment using the indicators to develop objectives designed to address those issues which Team members deem to be significant.

SCHOOL TEAM OVERVIEW

RESPONSIBILITY

Each school will have a Team whose purpose is to foster a new and distinct sense of responsible decision making at the building level. It reflects the belief that the school is best served by gathering the input of those most responsible for its success (e.g., faculty, staff, parents, and students). One goal, then, is to foster mutual respect and trust among the school partners.

Beyond establishing the dynamics of a collective process, the School Team is intended to shape or guide school improvement activities in order to increase or enhance student performance.

The School Teams will be involved in creating improvements in existing programs and practices. The School Teams are not intended to be administrators, and should not be directly involved in day-to-day administrative matters. The Teams operate within the existing administrative structure of the District; they do not replace it.

On a regular basis, the School Teams will engage in the following activities:

- Analyze student achievement, and school community needs, to determine what programs might most benefit from a review.
- Establish priorities based on this analysis.
- Develop plans as possible response actions to selected priorities.
- Select an action plan for working toward goal(s) and determining measurable outcomes sought/desired.
- Develop a reasonable time frame for the chosen plan and support its implementation with appropriate resources.
- Submit a report on the chosen plan to the District Committee.
- Evaluate the success of the plan according to predetermined assessment design.
- Submit a report on this evaluation to the District Committee.

MEANS AND STANDARDS FOR EVALUATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Quantifiable standards will be available to the public so that student achievement progress can be monitored. The annually published Comprehensive Assessment Report will supply data by school buildings over a span of years, so trends and changes may be identified. In addition, to gauge changes in achievement, student portfolios, collections of best work, displays of students' products, student exhibitions and performance will be utilized. Measures will be developed to show how students deal with authentic, real-life challenges demanding complex thinking, problem-solving and group cooperation.

The following are examples of the issues which might be a part of a regular needs assessment:

Student Performance Needs

- Mastering goals set by the district, which may include:¹
 - Pupil and Program Evaluation Tests
 - NYS Regents exams
 - SAT/ACT results
 - Individual Education Plan (IEP)
 - Building student self-esteem
 - Going beyond individual limitations

School Community Needs

- Integrating special education students
- PTA/PTO/HOPE
- Back-to-school nights
- Moving-up day
- School and community projects (environmental/safety, etc.)
- Parent volunteers
- Parent workshops on homework strategies and learning reinforcement

Issues That May Be Delegated

- Selection of textbooks
- Instructional strategies to attain district wide performance outcomes
- Grade-level coordination
- Combining or integrating subject areas
- Determining curriculum objectives by grade level
- Team planning
- Keeping students with the same teacher for more than one year
- Examining the length of instructional periods and scheduling
- Improvement in student attendance and decreasing tardiness
- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities and sports programs
- Student publications
- Drug and alcohol abuse prevention
- Individual school expenditure plans

¹One important purpose of a collective, responsible decision making process is increased understanding of school and district programs, policies, procedures and practices. We must first know what we are about and where we are, if we are

ACCOUNTABILITY²

School Teams will be accountable for promoting continual improvement. That is, Teams are accountable for making a good faith effort to develop and implement creative methods of improving a school's programs, practices, and services to facilitate progress. The District recognizes that the Shared Decision Making process takes time, and that creating lasting, meaningful change requires both patience and an ongoing commitment to the process.

Teams are expected to address roughly two to three meaningful objectives annually, and to create and implement action plans designed to attain these objectives. However, it is recognized that the Teams are first of all accountable for making progress, and above all else, the evaluation will examine how successful the Teams have been in promoting lasting change, not merely how many action plans they have implemented.

There is recognition that Teams, like individual decision-makers, sometimes fail. Some action plans will not achieve the expected results. The District recognizes that there is value in this, and embraces the concept of "productive failure." When a Team's action plan falls short, the Team is to analyze why and develop alternatives designed to correct the problem. If Shared Decision Making is to succeed, Teams must turn "failures" into successes and members of the school community must learn from these experiences. In this sense, Teams are accountable for their efforts to correct action plans and ultimately achieve their objectives.

The District Steering Committee shall conduct annual evaluations of School Team progress, which shall include examination of Team action plans and an evaluation of Team process. While there is value in failure on an action plan, continual failure to attain objectives is a likely indicator of a more serious problem with the SDM process. If a Team continually fails on its action plans, or if a Team does not make a good-faith effort to correct action plans which fail to reach their objectives, the District Steering Committee is instructed to take action which may include:

- Providing a Team with additional training
- Providing technical assistance to a Team on issues which they are considering
- Disbanding the Team and forming it again with new members

The District Steering Committee, in determining a course of action, will consider first what support the District might provide a Team to help it get back on course, and only as a last resort disband the Team.

²Accountability can mean many different things. Unfortunately, it is often equated with blame. To be accountable, by this definition, means to accept blame. Nothing

DISTRICT COMMITMENT

The District agrees to support the activity of the School Teams and makes a commitment to make the SDM process work. The District demonstrates this commitment in part by providing training to the School Teams and agrees to cover the costs associated with the training activities.

Team training should include:

- Training in Team management/meeting management
- Training in the use of data and in conducting a needs assessment
- Training in decision processes, including the use of a structured decision process and consensus decision making

Each year, the District Committee shall report to the Board of Education any significant costs of the SDM effort.

SCHOOL TEAM DECISION MAKING

PROCESS FOR ARRIVING AT DECISIONS

School teams will use a structured decision making process which assures that all members have an equal voice in decisions and that all members have equal decision making power. Decisions shall be made by consensus of members present at Team meetings. Consensus means that each member can state:

- I can live with the decision.
- I understand the decision; it is clear, concrete and specific.
- I had an opportunity to be involved in the decision.
- I will support the decision and do what I can to make it work.

Because consensus is a whole new concept for many individuals, it must be understood that this process involves arriving at decisions through shared input and then reaching mutual agreement on the best course of action. Unlike deliberative processes which involve voting, consensus does not pit a majority against a minority, but rather it allows all participants to have an equal voice in making decisions. For this reason, decisions arrived at by consensus will be those which all participants can comfortably support and agree to promote.

The goal of this process is to enable School Teams to help students make continual progress by developing creative methods of improving a school's programs, practices, and services. The judgments of the individual School Teams in selecting which areas to concentrate on, and in creating, implementing, and evaluating thorough action plans to address their objectives, will be respected.

School Team decisions and actions which fall beyond the normal responsibility will be presented in the form of a recommendation to the District Committee. (For example, the Team might seek approval for a decision which requires the expenditure of funds not otherwise budgeted to the building.) The Team may expect timely consideration of its recommendations, as well as feedback concerning the disposition of the recommendation. A process for approval of recommendations appears at the end of this Plan.

LIMITATIONS ON DECISION MAKING

The decisions and recommendations of School Teams may have far-reaching effects; but Teams also have the same limitations as individual decision makers in the District. In order to coordinate Team activities and ensure consistency with existing structures:

- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot supersede provisions of an existing collective bargaining agreement or bypass the grievance process available under an existing agreement.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot violate federal, state, or HCSD mandates.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams should be consistent with current research and understanding of best practice.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot commit another department, unit, or school to some action without their prior knowledge and involvement.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams should demonstrate respect for academic freedom of individuals in the school community.

These guidelines are not meant to restrict Teams. Teams are encouraged to be innovative and to consider primarily what they feel will work best for their own school's students.

To allow the Teams the greatest possible latitude in their decision making, they are encouraged to use the existing State Education Department waiver process to seek the authority to institute a practice that departs from State mandates. Likewise, the process for Team recommendations provides a way for School Teams to seek a waiver from District mandates.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Generally, conflicts on School Teams deal with the inability of the Team to reach consensus. If a Team determines that it cannot achieve a consensus on a decision, they will use the following process to resolve the decision:

- They will table the decision and schedule a time to return to it. In the intervening period, members may collect any information which might assist the Team in resolving the conflict, including that information gained by discussing the matter with participant groups. A subcommittee may be formed to consider alternative ways to resolve the conflict.
- If the Team controls the timeline on the decision and consensus still cannot be reached, the Team will go on to another issue.
- If a decision must be made by a certain date and the Team cannot achieve a consensus on the matter, the person or persons who would otherwise have made the decision if the Team did not exist will make the decision, with the understanding that the decision maker(s) will receive and consider input from anyone on the Team who chooses to provide such input.

PROCESS FOR MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

Decisions or expenditures which exceed the School Team's authority or which affect other schools or other areas of District activity can only be formulated into recommendations to be presented to the District Committee.

The following guidelines apply to the development and submission of recommendations by the School Teams:

- The School Team should prepare materials and documentation to support the recommendation. The materials should clearly state:
 - o the issue
 - o the recommendation
 - o how the recommendation addresses the issue
 - o how and why the recommendation was selected
 - o who will be affected by the recommendation
- Where appropriate, the materials should include an action plan for implementing the recommendation which provides a schedule, a list of resources required to implement the recommendation, and a plan for evaluating the impact of the recommendation.

Recommendations are to be submitted to the District Committee. The School Teams should understand that approval may or may not be granted. The School Teams should understand that the District Committee may have questions about the recommendations and may propose amendments to them. The School Teams should be prepared to answer the District Committee's questions, provide additional information if requested, and confer with the District Committee about proposed amendments to the recommendations.

The following guidelines apply to the District Committee's consideration of the School Team's recommendations:

- The District Steering Committee will carefully review and give full and open consideration to any recommendations.
- The District Steering Committee will respond to the School Team's recommendations within 15 school days.
- In situations where the District Committee does not approve the recommendation, the District Committee will respond to the School Team's recommendation in writing, and upon request, in person, providing a clear explanation for the refusal and including the criteria used in making the decision.
- The District Committee agrees not to modify recommendations without involving the School Team
- The resources are the on-going support and commitment through funds appropriated by the Board of Education administrators. Such support may include training, materials, released time, substitutes, facilities, and programs.

The recommendation process is meant to establish a dialogue. In situations where the District Committee cannot approve a recommendation, the School Team will have the right to develop a response which addresses the concerns raised by the District Committee, and have that response treated as a new recommendation.

SCHOOL TEAM ORGANIZATION

COMPOSITION

The challenge involved in coming up with the appropriate Team composition involves balancing competing demands: the Teams need to be inclusive enough to be representative of the school community, while being small enough to be productive decision makers. These competing demands require consideration of the focus or purpose of the Teams, the mix of the various participant groups, and the size of the Teams.

Because School Teams may tackle a wide variety of issues, and because a goal of the Shared Decision Making process is to involve as many members of the school community as possible, the most practical way to organize the School Teams is to create relatively small core teams who have the capacity to involve others on an as-needed basis. This design provides a high degree of flexibility, depending on the issue.

Thus, the School Teams will be relatively small and shall include:

- The building principal
- Two teachers selected for each building by the respective building representatives of the collective bargaining unit
- Two representatives of support staff elected by the building's support staff
- Two parents selected in a manner determined by the building PTA membership
- In the high school, two students selected in a manner determined by the student government
- In the middle school and elementary schools, two students shall be participating, non-decision making members of the Team for the first year. The decision making role, but not the participation, of the student representatives will be reviewed at the beginning of the second year by the School Team.

It is recognized that individual schools differ; therefore, they may desire to have a different configuration at their discretion. The decision making authority shall be vested in the School Team, and the Team may, on an annual basis, review its membership structure. The School Team is encouraged to create ad hoc groups for the purpose of benefiting from the expertise which may exist outside the Team.

The terms of office of all members of the core teams will be two years. To create staggered terms, initially one person from each participant group (with the exception of the building principal) will serve a one year term. Thereafter, all terms will be two years. There will be no limit on the number of terms an individual may serve.

COMMUNICATIONS

Teams cannot succeed if they isolate themselves. There needs to be open communication among Team members, and the Team needs to communicate openly with members of the various participant groups that are affected by their decisions. The idea of small, core teams promotes flexibility and helps ensure that the School Teams can be productive in their decision making, but this smaller group also needs to draw others into the Shared Decision Making process if it is to perform its work effectively.

Team members also have the responsibility of keeping members of their participant groups informed concerning Team decisions and activities. Teams are encouraged to develop regular mechanisms to communicate with members of the school community. These may include, but are not limited to, distributing minutes or summaries from Team meetings, sending periodic memos or newsletters to participant groups and making short oral presentations at the regular meetings of participant groups.

COMMITMENT OF TEAM MEMBERS

Members of the School Teams enjoy certain rights and agree to certain responsibilities. Team members participate in charting a course for the school to enter into the future by developing practices and procedures and defining how the members of the school community may wish to pursue the District goals. In short, they are change agents whose goal is to help make certain that students have the greatest likelihood to succeed and prosper in the future.

For Shared Decision Making to succeed in creating meaningful, lasting changes in programs and practices, each Team member must agree to make a good faith effort to commit to the following:

- Attendance at all Team meetings.
- Responsible participating in Team decision making, including:
 - Expressing concerns clearly and early in the decision process
 - REALLY listening to others
 - Being willing to say "no" as a part of consensus decision making and then explaining your concerns about the decision (see Decision Making, below)
 - Being willing to compromise and agree to a decision you can "live with" (see Decision Making, below)
- Communication with members of the various participant groups outside of Team meetings to ensure that the entire school community is aware of and involved in the improvement process.

Being a member of a School Team involves risk-taking; Teams must take chances to create and sustain improvements. The Shared Decision Making process is designed to allow members to participate in setting a direction, creating, and implementing change. Each Team member shares responsibility and accountability for Team decisions.

REPLACEMENT OR REMOVAL OF TEAM MEMBERS

If a member of the Team retires prior to the end of his/her term, that member's participant group shall replace him/her and the replacement shall serve to the end of the term. (The replacement is eligible to volunteer for additional terms thereafter.)

If a member is not present for three consecutive Team meetings, the chairperson shall contact the person individually, requesting an explanation of the absences and the member's intentions about remaining on the Team. If the member expresses a desire to remain on the Team but continues to be absent, the chairperson shall contact the appropriate participant group and ask that a replacement be selected to fill this position.

SCHOOL TEAM OPERATION

MEETINGS

The final schedule for Team meetings shall be determined by the members of the School Teams. It is highly recommended that meetings be held at least monthly, with additional meetings to be held as determined by the Team. Meetings shall be held outside of the normal school day. The Team shall designate a meeting room within the school, or make other arrangements for meeting space, and notify Team members of the location of each meeting in a timely fashion.

FACILITATION AND RECORD KEEPING

The Teams will select a Chairperson or Team Leader whose role shall include facilitation of agendas as prepared by the Team for each meeting, and facilitation of Team meetings. The Chairperson has neither greater decision making power nor greater accountability than other Team members. Minutes will be prepared for each meeting and distributed to members prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting. Responsibility for record keeping shall be shared by Team members on a rotating basis, unless any Team member chooses to volunteer to fulfill this function on a permanent basis.

DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE

COMPOSITION

A District Steering Committee shall be established and shall include:

- The Superintendent or his designee
- One principal
- Three teachers
- Five parents

For the first two years, these members shall be persons who served on the original District-wide Planning Team and they shall be selected by the group of members who represented each participant group (teachers, parents, students, administrators, community, Board of Education). At the end of that initial two-year period, the District Steering Committee will recommend to the Board of Education a new charge and a new composition for a continuing committee if one is required.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The District Steering Committee will meet annually to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of this plan and the progress of the School Teams, and to monitor Team accountability. The District Steering Committee will also be available on an as-needed basis to provide support to the School Teams. It will gather and record the names of groups, individuals and organizations which will be available as resources to advise the School Teams.

The District Steering Committee shall also select the training programs Teams shall receive, and shall, as a part of its evaluations, recommend modifications of this plan to the Board.

State and Federal regulations will be monitored by the District Steering Committee. PSEN - Chapter I, etc., etc., and all other programs will be directed to submit annual reports outlining recommendations to the DSC. Parents involved with special programs will be provided with an opportunity to submit suggestions. Coordination among building sites will be facilitated by the DSC in order to provide a sound, basic education for every child as required by the State Constitution.