

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND SHARED DECISION MAKING:  
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE COLLABORATION

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to deepen understanding of leadership practices that promote shared decision making in school districts. The researcher explored perceptions on shared decision making of 18 participants (six administrators, six teachers, and six parents) from a mid-size school district in New York State. The study was guided by two essential questions: (1) To what extent has the school district implemented the New York State Education Department's regulation (NYCCRR tit. 8, § 100.11, 1992) on shared decision-making? (2) What leadership practices have promoted or would promote shared decision making in this district? Findings revealed that participants valued trust and communication practices in their building leaders and desired greater autonomy in the decision making process from central administration. Results suggest that the district leaders, with the building level participants, need to revisit and revise the district's plan on shared decision making. Participants recommended leadership practices to improve the decision making process on the district level and the two most frequently mentioned practices related to establishing a trusting environment and maintaining open lines of communication. This study sought to identify new and different perspectives on leadership practices that impact the shared decision making process, and thus a better understanding of the complex dynamics of distributed leadership on the school building level and the district level. This study encourages (1) future research in larger school districts on ways to involve leaders in practices to promote shared decision making and (2) future research in the development of shared decision making training programs for school districts by university partnerships.

**Suggested Keywords:** Distributed Leadership, shared decision making, leadership

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

“Leadership must be cultivated deliberately over time at all levels of the organization” (Fullan, 2001, p.vi). School leaders of the 21st century are facing a rapidly changing and demanding work environment where they need to cultivate the structures, practices, relationships and conditions that foster leadership skills within the school community (Bauer & Bogotch, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires school leaders to include staff and parents and community members in decisions that impact student achievement. The challenge for school leaders is to identify and employ the leadership practices that promote a school culture for shared decision making, a culture where both the formal leader, in an administrative position, collaboratively plans and makes decisions with parents and teachers who function in informal leadership roles.

In 1994, the New York State Education Department formalized the practice of shared decision making through the Commissioner of Education Regulation Part 100.11 (CR 100.11): Participation of parents and teachers in school-based planning and shared decision making (NYCCRR tit. 8, § 100.11, 1992). The purpose of the regulation was to improve the educational performance of all students in the state. CR 100.11 required districts to develop and implement a plan that included six key elements. The plan must identify (1) education issues subject to cooperative planning and shared decision making; (2) the manner and extent of the expected involvement of all parties; (3) evaluation measures; (4) accountability guidelines; (5) conflict resolution guidelines; (6) parent involvement guidelines. This plan was subject to a biennial review by the school district’s board of education and required school leaders to include the



participation of parents and teachers in school-based planning and decision making. The regulation stated:

Each public school district board of education and each board of cooperative educational services (BOCES) shall develop and adopt a district plan for the participation by teachers and parents with administrators and school board members in school-based planning and shared decision making. Such district plan shall be developed in collaboration with a committee composed of the superintendent of schools, administrators selected by the district's administrative bargaining organization(s), teachers selected by the teachers' collective bargaining organization(s), and parents (not employed by the district or a collective bargaining organization representing teachers or administrators in the district) selected by school-related parent organizations (NYCCRR tit. 8, § 100.11, 1992).

#### Statement of the Problem

“In spite of all of the reform rhetoric, hierarchy of authority in schools will inevitably continue” (Hoy, 2003, p. 90). The challenge for school district leaders is to develop an enabling hierarchy for distributing power and leadership. NCLB and CR 100.11 require that school leaders distribute power and authority within the educational systems as one means of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of those organizations. However, CR 100.11 provides minimal guidelines on involving teachers and parents within the school district's hierarchical structure. Each school district must submit a plan for shared decision making. The challenge for school leadership is to align the plan with implementation.

## Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore parents', teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of leadership practices that promoted collaboration through shared decision making. "If schools are to embrace a distributed leadership perspective, the practice of leadership has to be the central concern" (Spillane, 2006, p. 84). A secondary purpose of this study was to examine the school district's plan to implement CR 100.11. The district's plan defined the context for identifying the leadership practices. Two research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making?
2. What leadership practices have promoted or would promote shared decision making in this district?

## Description of Study

The setting for this case study was a mid-size urban school district with an enrollment of 12,000 students. The researcher purposefully selected and interviewed 18 participants who were actively involved with the shared decision making process. In addition to the interviews, the researcher observed district level and building level shared decision making meetings, and reviewed related documents posted on the district's website. Two key publications provided a contextual framework for this study: (1) CR 100.11 and (2) the school district's plan for implementing CR 100.11.

## Significance of the Study

Education reform efforts such as CR 100.11 have attempted to institutionalize leadership practices to ensure that both formal and informal leaders have an active role in decision making. It is important for school leaders to be aware of stakeholders' perceptions of practices that either

promote or inhibit full participation in leadership roles and to embrace those practices that promote full participation. In conducting an extensive literature review on distributed leadership and shared decision making, this researcher found that further research is recommended on ways to involve individuals who are not formally designated leaders, especially parents. Research in this area is less developed and most work has involved small samples of schools. Future studies about distributed leadership might focus on the perspectives of all organizational members, especially those in follower roles, and the training needed to support them in informal leadership positions (Spillane, Camburn, Pustejovsky, Pareja, & Lewis, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007).

#### Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the study included the following: (1) The participants were purposefully selected by the researcher with the help of an assistant superintendent; (2) the sample size was small; (3) the researcher was part of the observations and at times included in discussions. Generalization of the study is limited due to geographic location and size of sample.

#### Summary

Distributing leadership through site based planning and shared decision making is a mandate for all schools in New York State. In today's education environment, school district leaders need to rely on multiple leaders, both formal and informal, to complete the many tasks related to student achievement. By exploring the participants' perceptions of the shared decision making process at the building and central level, the researcher was able to identify leadership practices that promoted shared decision making on both levels.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Related Literature

#### *Distributed Leadership*

Distributed leadership is an aspect of leadership that recognizes leading and managing schools as involving multiple individuals including those who are not formally designated leaders (Spillane et al., 2008). The efforts of the multiple individuals create an organizational culture where hierarchical control gives way to shared collaboration (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). Spillane (2006) described distributed leadership as a practice that is “a product of the joint interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situations such as tools and routines” (p. 3). Distributed leadership as leadership practice is located in the webs of relationships or networked interactions between leaders and followers that define the organization’s culture (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

Distributed leadership does not mean that everyone in the organization leads, but that decision making is governed by the interaction of individuals rather than individual directions (Harris, 2008). Leadership practice is “distributed in an emergent and benevolent way so the community engages in robust dialogue, in an evidence-informed and experience-grounded manner, about the best means to promote the goals of deep and broad student learning for all” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008, p. 232). Writing about the future of distributed leadership, Gronn (2008) considered a revision of the definition of distributed leadership. Gronn wondered if the concept of distributed leadership would be better described as hybrid leadership, a mix of solo work, dyad and team membership. One key issue in Gronn’s recent work was the issue of voice. In his discussion of voice, he presented a major distinction between voice in distributed

leadership and voice in democratic leadership. Distributed leadership provided voice to participants; democratic leadership implied that participants also have the added power of veto.

Distributed leadership in education, according to Gronn, appeared to be a hybrid form of leadership, a combination of hierarchical and heterarchical elements. Hoy (2003) stated that organizational structure is inevitable in schools:

Regardless of all the talk about flat structures, empowerment, teacher participation, and reform, schools like all formal organizations have hierarchical structures. In spite of all of the reform rhetoric, hierarchy of authority in schools will inevitably continue. In fact, the accountability movement itself demands more not less hierarchy. The key, however, is to avoid the dysfunctions of centralization by changing the kind of hierarchy rather than eliminating it (p. 90).

This literature review examined distributed leadership in schools with a particular focus on shared decision making, a form of distributed leadership. Four major categories were used to identify distributed leadership factors that promoted and/or inhibited shared decision making. The categories were: (1) developing trust, (2) communicating in webs of relationships, (3) training and capacity building, and (4) leadership styles (motivating leaders).

### *Trust*

Trust is “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 17). Tschannen-Moran (2001) stated that trust is the most potent of the collaboration variables. All others are a subset to trust. Since many states required collaboration with all key stakeholders in school reform initiatives, school communities needed to carefully engage in trust building

practices. Developing trust between administrators, teachers and parents was a key leadership factor in supporting networks of shared decision making in a culture of empowerment.

In a four-year case study, Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels (2008) explored the process through which one district engaged in the development of trust in a K-8 school district. Participants included central office administrators, school principals who were in a semi-autonomous relationship, and a university partnership designed to build trust between both groups. In three rounds of interviews over four years, the researchers focused on the perspectives of 33 district stakeholders (mostly administrators and teachers). Trust emerged as a significant theme in the interviews. One minority administrator wondered if he had enough trust in his district to truly voice what he was thinking. Stakeholders expressed that they wanted a voice where they could express opinions without reprisal or recrimination. Findings from this study indicated that having an external partner such as a university partnership can facilitate trust building by putting trust building structures in place and by surfacing undiscussable barriers to trust.

Organizations that promoted risk-taking and allowed for honest mistakes promoted a culture of trust and collaboration (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Leech and Fulton (2008) conducted a correlational study to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals in a large urban school district and their perceptions of the level of shared decision making practiced in their schools. The participants consisted of 646 stakeholders selected from all secondary schools in a large public school system. Participants were asked to complete two survey instruments measuring leadership behaviors. Survey 1 measured five leadership behaviors: (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart. Survey 2 measured

the level of shared decision making in the areas of (a) planning, (b) policy development, (c) curriculum and instruction, (d) student achievement, (e) pupil personnel services, (f) staff development, and (g) budget management.

Leech and Fulton found that the strongest relationship existed between the leadership practice of risk-taking and shared decision-making. The more risk-taking behavior exhibited by the principal, the greater the teachers perceived their input into decisions. In the web of relational trust, there existed a greater perception of collaboration. This finding was significant because a trusting relationship appeared to be is a strong predictor of successful teacher participation in shared decision making (Leech & Fulton, 2008).

Tschannen-Moran (2001) conducted a correlational study to build upon the evidence linking collaboration and trust in schools. Tschannen-Moran predicted that the level of trust in a school would be related to the level of collaboration. The researcher surveyed and interviewed principals, teachers, and parents in a large urban district on their perceptions of collaboration among all three groups. “Collaboration was defined as the extent to which teachers perceived themselves and parents to be not only involved but to exercise influence over school and classroom-level decisions” (Tschannen-Moran, 2001, p. 317). Collaboration was explored on three levels: between principals and teachers on school-level decisions, principals and parents on school level decisions, and principals and teachers on classroom-level decisions.

Findings indicated that schools with high levels of trust had high levels of collaboration and those with low levels of trust had low levels of collaboration. Both teachers and parents felt that participation was not genuine when they were not exercising control over decisions that were relevant and important to them, and when the decisions that they were asked to make had little influence on policymaking decisions. This study was significant for school personnel

(administrators and teachers) who seek to be responsive to reform initiatives that call for greater collaboration. They will need to attend to the dynamics of trust and do more to build trusting relationships within the schools and with parents. When administrators viewed teachers and parents as having valuable knowledge and insights to contribute, the results were better decisions and greater motivation.

Tschannen-Moran (2001) identified a number of trust inhibiting factors related to school personnel and parents. The most significant inhibiting factor for school leaders was their reluctance to give up power based on perceptions that others do not have the expertise to make valuable contributions or that the decisions will not be in the best interest of the school.

In a case study on African American parents' involvement in their children's education, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) discussed issues of trust and leadership policies and practices that impact parents whose cultural backgrounds and socio economic status are unlike those of the mainstream. The researchers interviewed nine African American parents of middle school students using open ended questions such as (a) "Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?"; (b) What are the benefits of being involved in your child's middle school experiences?; and (c) What motivates you to become involved/uninvolved in your child's middle school experiences?" (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008, p. 145). Findings in this study reported the perceptions of the nine parents and the central themes that emerged from the interviews. One of the five themes identified was the impact of middle school practices and policies on African American parental involvement. Positive practices were: (1) school personnel designed new ways of encouraging parents to become involved; (2) school personnel recognized students' academic accomplishments; (3) school personnel designed progress report distribution through parent teacher conferences.



Negative practices were: (1) teachers' over-identification of African American students for suspensions and detentions for minor reasons; (2) teachers' low expectations for African American students' academic achievement; (3) teachers' inability to meet the needs of African American students thus leading to over-identification of students as troublemakers or slow learners. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein concluded that school leaders needed to establish not only a welcoming culture, but establish an atmosphere of trust, addressing racial biases and social class issues that surfaced as barriers to full participation in shared decision making. Parents were more likely to become actively involved when they had a sense of personal or shared responsibility for their child's education and a sense of efficacy for helping them to succeed (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

#### *Communication*

“Developing communication skills, leadership, and cultures of collaboration are all interconnected and can't be done effectively without treating them as one comprehensive whole” (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 11). Communication was a key leadership factor in supporting networks of shared decision making because sharing knowledge was critical to empowering stakeholders in a collaborative process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). Effective communication fostered a network of exchanges that provided a clear understanding of mission, roles, and relevant issues. Since school leaders were perceived as the gatekeepers to important information, they empowered stakeholders through open lines of communication. Lacking clear communication of mission, roles and adequate information on relevant issues, decision making teams found themselves in a frustrating state of disabling autonomy (Leech & Fulton, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007).

Communication in shared decision making involved defining what it means to have a voice in the shared decision making process. Alsbury and Whitaker (2007) conducted a four year study of school leaders to determine their perceptions and experiences of leadership related to themes of school improvement, democratic community and social justice. The researchers collected data from two focus groups of seven and eight superintendents located in rural districts in a Midwestern state. They asked superintendents one key question: “What does it mean that other people want to have a voice in decision making” (p. 165)? Results revealed similar responses to the question about voice. Superintendents saw themselves in the role of providing voice as long as it did not interfere with the educational programs, individual student needs and moral purpose of the school. When confronted by widely disparate viewpoints or vocal voices from a small number of self-serving stakeholders, administrators assumed the primary decision making role while allowing input from stakeholders in the decision making process.

Commenting on shared decision making, one superintendent said, “It’s going to be really good once we work through the part about how to dialogue about things we don’t agree on” (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007, p. 165). Alsbury and Whitaker suggested that voice may be more carefully managed depending on the context and purposes of the particular community. They concluded that more research is needed comparing the voices of superintendents on these issues in a variety of contexts such as rural, suburban, and urban.

Defining voice within a particular context helped to clarify the stakeholders’ roles in the distributed leadership process. When words like consensus were used to define the context, the stakeholders expected equal voice. Consensus implied a cooperative process where stakeholders assumed responsibility for implementation of decisions and shared accountability for outcomes. Confusion arose when school leaders defined a context as a vehicle for shared decision making

when, in fact, they expected shared input and not shared decision making. Further confusion arose when stakeholders were not clear on decisions open for discussion. Under education law, some decisions belonged solely to the board of trustees. Stakeholders needed to provide communication that clearly defined which issues were open for shared decision making.

Communication with teachers on mission, roles, and responsibilities in shared decision making involved defining purpose, level of autonomy, and sharing knowledge. In a qualitative case study on group discourse and collaboration, Scribner et al. (2007) focused on the dialogues of two teacher professional learning teams in the context of shared decision making. The purpose of the study was to explore both the situational and social aspects of distributed leadership in the two teams. The researchers focused on two principal-selected teams of seven members each with a history of effectively working together. Each team was given a separate task to complete within a 16 week semester. Findings from this study fell into three categories: purpose, autonomy, and patterns of discourse. Understanding their purpose and level of autonomy directly affected the participants' patterns of discourse and social distributions of leadership. Team A saw their purpose as problem-finding, but with little autonomy. Team B saw themselves as problem-solving and autonomous. Team A's lack of autonomy did not match its mission and negatively affected its work, inhibiting creative decision making and subverting the team's potential. In conversations they frequently referred to external authority and deferred to their wishes. Team A lacked adequate information to participate effectively which caused them to ask more questions, thus delaying action. Team B's mission and level of autonomy matched and they were enabled to engage in creative discussions leading to action.

School leaders' communication with parents required direct and meaningful interaction concerning parents' roles and responsibilities. Miretzky (2004) conducted a case a study on the

direct and meaningful communication between parents and teachers in three Chicago elementary schools. Participants included 17 parents and 21 teachers of fourth through eighth graders. Both parents and teachers were asked to explore what they perceived as the issues and themes of their relationships. Miretzky asked key questions about communication with each group and results of this study identified a lack of connection between the two groups. Parents and teachers acknowledged their need to effectively communicate and felt at times that encounters were not positive, leaving them feeling misunderstood and underappreciated. A significant finding was the teachers' request for administration support in communication with parents that was both scheduled and encouraged. Teachers with very busy schedules expressed little enthusiasm for voluntarily meeting with parents on their own time. Miretzky concluded that school leaders needed to create conditions that fostered greater communication and collaboration, empowering all stakeholders to learn from each other. Administrators needed to provide opportunities for key stakeholders to participate in dialogue with each other, to support and challenge one another (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) because "entertaining competing ideologies, while creating something new, consumes much time" (Carr, 1997, p. 165).

### *Training and Capacity Building*

Leaders who distributed power to others and expected creative solutions needed expertise, vision, substantial social skills, the flexibility required to address the needs of different constituencies, the wisdom required to appraise the appropriateness of solutions, and persuasive skills to build support for projects (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). According to Mumford et al. (2002), expertise in problem solving meant that leaders actively acquired and worked with technical knowledge and problem solving skills to creatively generate solutions. Since problems may be highly complex, leaders needed social skills to form collaborative

collations with different groups who contributed to the expertise of the collective group. Leaders who lacked expertise and creative problem solving skills may find it difficult, if not impossible, “to evaluate ideas, and provide feedback to followers or, for that matter, other managers” (Mumford et al., 2002, p. 712). Visionary leaders were those who helped the group formulate a share consensual vision by “framing vision in terms of work goals and articulating this vision through project selection and project evaluation, rather than overt affective appeals” (Mumford et al., 2002, p. 715).

Kotter and Cohen (2002) stated that lasting reform initiatives required that leaders pull together guiding coalitions and empower them to act. In schools where teacher leaders were part of the guiding coalitions they needed a high level of professional knowledge and autonomous decision making when faced with professional challenges. According to Kalin and Zuljan (2007) the teacher leaders’ professional knowledge was supported through the development of “strategies of thinking, most of all critical and creative ones, problem-solving and cognitive skills and strategies of effective learning” (p. 164). Autonomous decision making was supported when school leaders “established a trust in teachers’ professionalism and the decisions accorded by that professionalism” (Kalin & Zuljan, 2007, p. 174).

Distributed leadership practices placed greater demands on formal school leaders. They were expected to coordinate who performs which leadership function, build leadership capacity in others, monitor the leadership of others, and provide constructive feedback (Leithwood et al., 2007). When the power of decision making was extended to stakeholders who were most affected by policy decisions, stakeholders were motivated and more active participants. Motivated workers were mobilized in the service of the organization’s purposes – applying their passion, intelligence, and initiative (Thomas, 2002).

In an exploratory case study, Lam (2005) explored the relationship between teacher learning and student learning under different school structural conditions. The researcher surveyed 1,330 teachers from 29 secondary schools of different community backgrounds and student academic abilities. The researcher collected data through a two part survey. The first survey collected personal and school background information and the second measured various key factors in school structural conditions. Results of the study indicated that two factors had a positive effect on teacher learning and student achievement: (1) a highly flexible working environment and (2) structural conditions that allowed for greater control and more collective learning opportunities.

Teacher leaders needed training in leadership skills. Teacher leaders functioned in a number of formal leadership roles such as department chairs, curriculum coordinators and peer mentors and they needed to be a part of a supportive knowledge network. Colleagues influenced each other in a network of social interactions, and this social influence was regarded as a key component of leadership practice (de Lima, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007). De Lima (2008) conducted a study of twelve departments in a school district assessing how teacher leadership was exercised and distributed. Data from this study reported on teachers' interactions with one another and identified four distinct types of leadership configurations ranging from formal leadership to no leadership. One significant finding from this study was that *planned practice* did not translate into formal patterns of distributed leadership. De Lima identified factors that inhibited distributed leadership and these factors may very well be generalized to other school districts. For example, there was no evidence that teacher leaders were selected based on professional or pedagogical criteria. Colleagues developed more of a congenial rather than a collegial culture limiting the leader's role as evaluator. Some teacher leaders did not want to

disturb the status quo and put pressure on colleagues to change. One main conclusion from this study was that it is not enough for school administrators to formalize distributed leadership as an organizational quality. School leaders need to provide teachers with extensive training in leadership skills.

Teachers who are not formally designated leaders, but perform leadership roles, needed professional development opportunities to enhance their leadership skills (Spillane et al., 2008). Spillane et al., (2008) studied the philosophical problems and methodological challenges involved in the distribution of leadership in a mid-sized urban school district. In this mixed methods research design, two elementary schools were selected for this study based on an experience sampling method (ESM) log. Results of this study suggested that individuals other than those in administration may be more important when it comes to leading instruction and curriculum. In both schools, the data indicated that when principals shared leadership in instruction and curriculum, assistant principals and curriculum coordinators played a minor leadership roles compared to teacher leaders. In comparing the *designed organization* to the *lived organization*, the results identified the importance of focusing not only on the formally designated leaders but also on the multiple *actors* in informal leadership positions. The researchers encouraged future research in larger school districts on ways to involve individuals who are not formally designated leaders. Research in this area was less developed and most work has involved small samples of schools. Future studies about distributed leadership might focus on the perspectives of all organizational members especially those in follower roles and the training needed to support them in informal leadership positions.

Kalin and Zuljan (2007) conducted a study to understand the main goals of school reform and to evaluate the adequacy of teacher qualifications for professional action in the various areas

of their work. The researchers surveyed 468 primary and grammar school teachers to determine their understanding of school reform and the adequacy of their qualification for professional action in their work. A significant finding related to capacity building was that the teachers had a very narrow view of their role in school reform goals. This conclusion led the researchers to recommend in-service training opportunities and the establishment of teacher learning communities. They concluded that since teachers are the “main actors of reform” (p. 165) and many schools depend on teachers as both formal and informal leaders in the daily network of distributed leadership and shared decision making, successful school reform depended on teacher training, cooperation, and collaboration among peers.

Training and capacity building in shared decision had a positive effect on teacher-parent school reform efforts. Schools enhanced the incidence and effectiveness of parent involvement when they provide in-service support for teachers’ development of parental involvement skills. Schools empowered teachers for parental involvement when they (1) helped teachers develop skills to seek parent ideas, perspectives, opinions and questions about the parents’ role in student learning, and (2) allocated regular faculty meeting time to discuss parental involvement and to discuss involvement practices that have been successful (Hoover-Dempsey et. al., 2005). The concept of parent involvement in shared decision making needed to be defined for both parents and school staff to promote mutually agreed-on expectations. Involving parents as shared decision makers required that they were provided the information needed to make informed decisions. There was a need for parent education programs that strengthened parents’ role beliefs and increased their knowledge of the school.

In a qualitative case study of a small southern California school district, Cooper and Christie (2005) explored the outcomes of a parent institute developed by the district, school and



university staff. The intent of the institute was to improve the capacity of schools with large populations of underprivileged students to better prepare their students for college admission. The researcher's goal was to understand how different stakeholders involved with the parent institute perceived its goals and effectiveness. The study included six of the district's 12 traditional K–12 schools that had implemented at least one set of institutes since the program's inception in the 1998–1999 school year. The six schools included four elementary schools, one middle school and the district's only high school. 92% of the participants in the parent institutes were Latina mothers and most of the mothers did not complete high school. The researcher used purposive sampling techniques and semi-structured interviews and observation protocols to conduct a total of 21 interviews with stakeholders: seven parent staff members, seven parent participants (including one group interview with four parents), four district officials, three university staff members, and three school principals. Participants were asked to discuss their involvement in the parent institute and their general impression of the program, including aspects of the program that they most valued, their suggestions for improvement, and their perceptions about the program's efficacy.

Results revealed contradictions between the university's perceptions, district administrators' perceptions and school officials' perceptions about the goals and effectiveness of the parent institute. Data showed that the parent institute “influenced parent participants in ways unanticipated by university and district officials, particularly by inspiring them to seek broader influence and greater decision-making abilities” (Cooper & Christie, 2005, p. 2258). An important finding revealed a mismatch between the superintendent's perception and school administrators' perceptions of parent involvement. The superintendent wanted parents to be engaged in numerous decision-making roles while school administrators wanted parents to stay

in more traditional roles such as helping with homework and attending events. Parents expressed their desire to participate in decision making and use their power to influence school reform. Even though this study was tightly focused in a specific geographic area and population, the issues raised can provide insight into parent involvement and shared decision making efforts in other districts. Cooper concluded that “establishing true partnerships with parents entail educators acknowledging and validating parents’ views and ultimately sharing power” (p. 2271).

When trying to understand parents’ involvement in shared decision making, schools needed to build capacity for lower resource families who responded differently than do families with greater resources. Schools needed to be creative in ways to involve parents who were unable to be physically present in a school setting, yet desired to be involved in important education issues affecting their children. In a case study, Anderson and Minke (2007) explored why families chose to be involved in their children’s education. Using a model of parent decision-making based on the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997), the researchers determined family involvement through four variables: role construction, sense of efficacy, resources, and perceptions of teacher invitations. They surveyed parents from three elementary schools in a large school district in the southwest. They collected 351 surveys, but the study focused solely on the English results. Results indicated that parents and teachers had differing expectations for the term involvement. Parents rated themselves higher in home involvement, but this type of involvement was not as visible to school personnel as involvement in school. Two significant conclusions from this study were: (1) schools may be underestimating parents’ involvement if they considered only those activities that occurred at school, and (2) minority parents may be more involved than schools think since their level of involvement may

take place primarily away from school. Schools needed to be creative in providing shared decision making opportunities that extend beyond the school premises.

Parents as shared decision makers needed the requisite foundational knowledge about school operations to make informed decisions (O'Connor, 2001) and school leaders needed to provide professional development opportunities for parents to learn about key school operations. O'Connor conducted a study involving parents and teachers in an elementary school serving a low-income, primarily white, urban neighborhood. The purpose of the study was to learn about the school staff's and the parents' perceptions of school programs, their interactions with school personnel, and parents' hopes and expectations concerning the school's role in their own and their children's lives. Through interviews of 32 participants (17 staff and 15 parents), and observations at a state-mandated, school-based decision body, O'Connor found that "parents were generally silent during discussions and nominally included in the decision making body because they did not possess the requisite foundational knowledge about school curriculum, scheduling, or funding to make informed decisions" (p. 195). O'Connor provided school leaders with a number of recommendations to overcome the socio-economic barriers to parental involvement in school-based decision making. Many of the recommendations involved capacity building through parental training in child development, the organization of the school, school jargon, curriculum instruction, and at least minimally in civil and school law.

In a study on budget allocations by decision making bodies in a large Florida school district, Greenlee (2007) examined spending choices and budgetary allocations that reflected deliberate decisions and therefore reveal the priorities of the councils. Findings revealed that budget choices varied, with high performing schools choosing to spend money on curriculum materials and staff development. Low performing schools were more likely to spend their money

on incentives. These findings suggested a need for a more systemic understanding of what works in school improvement spending. It was recommended that before committees were given a task, administrators provide the necessary prerequisite training to all stakeholders so that they can make decisions to promote student achievement. When given the knowledge and background information needed to make an informed decision, parents sought broader influence and greater decision making abilities (Cooper & Christie, 2005). Parent empowerment meant that school leaders needed to investigate ways to change current systems to include parents with varying socio-economic backgrounds, educational needs, and experiences.

### *Leadership Styles*

Distributed leadership was not restricted to any particular leadership style and could not be prescribed in advance, but emerged within the organization in different forms to solve problems or take actions (Harris, 2008). However, some leadership styles possessed a greater tendency to promote shared decision making. In a four-year case study, Brunner (1998) interviewed 47 superintendents, and those who knew them, to explore the superintendents' definitions and uses of power. A network of educators selected superintendents based on their reputations as excellent administrators. Superintendents in this study included 22 women and 25 men from various parts of the United States. Results indicated that definitions of power fell into three categories: power over (authoritarian top-down leaders), power with/to (participatory leaders) and power using a mixture of both definitions. It is significant to note that all of the superintendents used both types of power but their tendency to use one more than the other placed them in a specific group. The researcher concludes that the superintendents who were able to define power as power with/to were more likely to engage in collaborative shared decision.

Local school management, a form of distributed leadership, was a key motivating factor in shared decision making. Mulford, Kendall, and Kendall (2004) used a research approach referred to as causal-comparative to examine the relationship between teacher's perceptions of administrative practice and shared decision making. In this quantitative study, teachers, principals, school council members and parents were surveyed to see how they perceived the implementation and effectiveness of local school management. A total of 124 teachers and 1,181 students responded to their respective questionnaires and since there were 15 high schools where both the teachers and students responded, it was possible to compare teachers' perceptions with students' perceptions of school. Mulford et al. (2004) found that:

...where decision making is perceived by teachers as collegial, collaborative, co-operative and consultative and providing adequate opportunities for participation, it will be more likely to lead to positive student perceptions about their school and teachers as well as perceptions about relationships and their own performance than where decision making is more top-down, executive or does not foster widespread involvement (p. 94).

When teachers were involved in shared decision making and site based management, they were motivated and the quality of their work improved. This level of involvement promoted a positive school climate which in turn had a positive impact on student outcomes.

Cooper, Ponder, Merritt and Matthews (2005) studied eleven diverse North Carolina high schools to explore why they were successful in a high-stakes test accountability environment. The researchers used a combination of document review and interviews to collect data. The guiding question for all stakeholders was, "How has your school achieved its success?" (p. 7). Five major themes emerged in the study: (1) caring relationships among faculty members and

students, (2) the development of support systems for teachers and students, (3) the use of student data to direct decisions, (4) academic departments considered the major vehicles for instructional improvement, and (5) collaborative leadership. A significant finding was that collaborative leadership emerged as one pattern of success in all eleven schools. All eleven schools were identified as high-performing and had shown consistently high performance across time, represented the three major regions of the state, varied in socio-economic status and demographics, and varied in size and in location.

Two of the five findings above related directly to leadership style, distributed leadership and shared decision making. The participants in academic departments were given the freedom and responsibility to make decisions about student learning, but the freedom and responsibility were within a highly structured school system. Faculty members felt the structured system supported shared goals among faculty and administrators. The second significant finding is that principals in all eleven schools demonstrated strong collaborative leadership through teamwork and through managing systems rather than micromanaging details. However, all eleven principals differed in their leadership styles.

Mascall, Leithwood, Straus and Sacks (2008) examined the relationship between four patterns of distributed leadership and teachers' academic optimism. The participants for this study included all licensed, part-time and full-time teachers in one Ontario school district (about 8,800). A total of 1,640 teachers responded to one of two forms of an on-line survey. Results indicated that teachers favored a more planned (planful) approach to leadership distribution as opposed to unplanned, spontaneous, unaligned approaches. Planful forms of leadership distribution made leaders' decisions more transparent, less open to suspicion, and increased teacher satisfaction. Planful leadership meant that "agreements have been worked out among

sources of leadership about which leadership practices or functions are best carried out by which source” (Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 40). This form of distributed leadership contributed significantly to long term organizational productivity (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Leithwood et al. (2007) conducted research on distributed leadership seeking to explore the relative contribution of different patterns of distributed leadership to the achievement of school organizational goals. The case study was conducted in a large urban/suburban district in southern Ontario serving more than 100,000 diverse students in approximately 25 secondary and 140 elementary schools. Eight schools (one rural, seven suburban), were selected with help from district staff. Four were elementary schools and four were secondary schools. All of the teachers in the eight schools were surveyed and they were asked to nominate non-administrative colleagues whom they believed were providing leadership. Nine district administrators were included in the study and were selected because of the central role they played in promoting distributed approaches to leadership in schools and their close knowledge of each of the district’s primary initiatives for change. This study was based on interview data from a total of 67 district staff, school administrators, non administrative school leaders and teachers.

Results indicated that distributed patterns of leadership were nurtured when (1) collaborative structures were established, (2) numbers of people collaborating on an initiative was kept manageable, (3) influence was exercised through expert rather than positional power, (4) organizational culture was open, encouraging strong staff commitment to students and was free of favoritism and internal dissent, (5) leaders provided full explanations (exemplifying an open culture) for their decisions and when they went out of their way to ensure staff were aware of new directions and activities, and (6) there were opportunities for staff to acquire the

capacities they needed to participate effectively, along with the autonomy and time to act in accord with their professional beliefs.

Camburn, Rowan and Taylor (2003) hypothesized that leadership styles within the context of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models would show an increase in distributed school leadership. In this quantitative study, they predicted that leadership would be more distributed in schools embracing reform models such as Accelerated schools Project, America's Choice, and Success for All. From all CSR schools, 352 were selected based on their affiliation with CSR models, geographic region, length of time in the programs and socioeconomic factors. Comparison schools were chosen from the same geographic regions and were matched with the disadvantaged criteria. 503 elementary school leaders were surveyed through a school leader questionnaire. The questionnaire measured perceived accountability pressures and clear standards for teaching and learning. 114 principals were given a school characteristics inventory. Results indicated that CSR schools have a greater number of formally-designated leadership positions than schools that are not participating in CSR programs and that CSR programs promote increased distributed leadership resulting in successful programmatic change and instructional improvement. This study was one of the first to provide evidence of distributed school leadership across a fairly large sample of elementary schools participating in CSR programs. It was important to note that leadership in CSR schools was provided primarily by teams of individuals rather than by a single leader.

Leadership styles either empowered or limited participation in shared decision making. School leaders empowered action by removing barriers that limited participation and by providing the resources necessary to promote full participation (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). In cases where school leaders maintained tight control, participants remained relatively passive, probably



due to their lack of influence or power (Carr, 1997). In a case study, Carr (1997) reviewed relevant literature on systemic change and community participation and explored leadership styles of principals in four middle schools seeking to increase parental and community participation. Schools located in a major Midwestern city were selected based on their demographics and diversity and the perceived leadership style of their principals. The study investigated principals' leadership styles by means of observation notes, principal interviews and stakeholder interviews. The study used a naturalistic inquiry orientation and a case study methodology. Parent interviews were conducted at the midpoint and at the end of the school year to identify parent perceptions of team membership issues and power. At one school, minority parents and community members were rarely involved in the schools until the superintendent began an advisory council. Parents appointed to advisory teams were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of leadership styles relating to membership issues and power. Although participation in advisory groups was initiated by the superintendent who sought to empower parents at individual schools, findings in this study indicated that teams were not empowered by building level school leaders. Teams were invited to participate, but not lead. Leadership practices impacted council composition, scheduling and level of participation. In some cases, the school leaders, in an effort to limit conflict, limited the power and influence of the advisory groups.

Leech and Fulton (2008) recommended that principal preparation institutions be charged with the task of developing programs to provide experiences which enhance leadership skills to create learning organizations. Leadership preparations programs could develop skills sets needed for leaders to sustain reforms in schools. They have the ideal opportunity to address issues of power, from traditional *top-down* styles of leadership to transformational *power with* styles of leadership.

### *Conclusion*

All too often, distributed leadership exists in organizational design, but not in practice. The ‘designed organization’ may not be an accurate representation of what happens in the day-to-day *lived organization* (Spillane et al., 2008). Shared decision making as an organizational design is enhanced when (1) trust-building structures are in place, (2) participants are provided a voice in deciding issues that are important to them, (3) communication is clear and information shared, (4) participants are motivated through their sense of influence and power, (5) capacity building means high quality professional development for all stakeholders, and (6) leadership practice is seen as *power-with* and removes obstacles to collaboration.

## CHAPTER III

### Research Design and Methodology

#### *Design*

This descriptive case study explored the individual participant's perceptions of leadership practices that promoted shared decision making in a mid-sized urban school district in New York State. Eighteen participants (six administrators, six teachers, and six parents) participated in the study. To obtain a history of the shared decision making process in the district, the researcher also interviewed three individuals at the district level (two assistant superintendents, and one district consultant who was a former teacher and administrator in the district). The researcher observed shared decision making meetings on both the district and building level, and reviewed the district's related shared decision making publications on their website. Two key documents played a significant role in the data analysis: (1) the school district's plan for shared decision making and (2) the New York State Education Department's regulations governing shared decision making at the school level. Two research questions guided the inquiry:

Question 1: To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making?

Question 2: What leadership practices have promoted, or would promote, shared decision making in this district?

The researcher primarily explored individual participant's understandings of the shared decision making process through data collected in interviews. The design of the study was based on the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the qualitative research tradition (Creswell, 2008) and the researcher used descriptive words rather than numbers to present results. The research was exploratory and "assumes that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an

objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception” (Merriam, 1988, p. 17.)

### *Setting*

The setting for this study was a mid-size urban school district with an enrollment of 12,000 students. The researcher selected this school district based on the district’s level of activity in the shared decision making process as documented on the district’s website. This district constructed a central level committee for shared decision making, a level of shared decision making above the requirement of CR 100.11. The school district’s website posted documents on their shared decision making process dating back to the 2005-2006 school year. Documents included the district’s approved biennial plan for site based management and shared decision making, minutes to building level committee meetings and minutes to central level committee meetings. Initial interviews with three of the district administrators revealed their active involvement in the shared decision making process for over ten years. The interviews provided a historical context and background information on the shared decision making process in the district. Table 1 provides demographic information on the school district.

Table 1

*School District Demographics*

| Factor  | District |
|---|----------|
| Eligible for Free Lunch                         | 48%      |
| Limited English Proficient                      | 13%      |
| American Indian or Alaska Native                | 0%       |
| Black or African American                       | 30%      |
| Hispanic or Latino                              | 39%      |
| Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander | 2%       |
| White   | 29%      |
| Multiracial                                     | 0%       |

*Source:* New York State Education Department 2007-2008 School Report Cards

*Participants*

The researcher purposefully selected 18 participants based on their involvement with the shared decision making process and each participant received a recruitment letter outlining the purpose of the research (Appendix A). The first participants were selected by the assistant superintendent with the researcher and those participants recommended other persons who were actively involved in the shared decision making process. By employing *network sampling*, the researcher was able to identify participants who others knew to be good interview subjects (Patton, 1990). A review of minutes from district level shared decision making meetings beginning in 2005 revealed that 12 of the 18 participants participated in the central committee on shared decision making from 2005 to the present (6 administrators, 3 teachers and 3 parents). In the interview sessions, all but three participants indicated that they had been involved in the

shared decision making process for over five years. Table 2 provides information about the participants.

Table 2

*Participant Profiles*

| Category       | Men | Women |
|----------------|-----|-------|
| Administrators | 4   | 2     |
| Teachers       | 1   | 5     |
| Parents        | 2   | 4     |
| Black          | 1   | 2     |
| Hispanic       | 2   | 4     |
| White          | 4   | 5     |

*Data Collection and Analysis*

The researcher collected data through (1) audiotapes of eighteen individual interviews with administrators, teachers and parents,(2) direct observation of shared decision-making meetings (building level meetings and district level meetings convened by the school district for the purpose of shared decision-making), and (3) review of public documents such as meeting minutes and related documents on the school’s website as well as the NYS Commissioner of Education Regulations Part 100.11 on shared decision making. All sources were purposefully selected to create a comprehensive description of the school district’s involvement in shared decision making. This approach is based on Patton’s (1990) belief that “[q]ualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (p. 10). Furthermore, Yin (2009) suggested using multiple data sources when constructing case studies in order to increase the reliability of the

data. Multiple sources of data allowed the researcher to triangulate the data to build a coherent justification for emerging themes (Creswell, 2008).

Data from individual interviews, observations and document reviews were analyzed through a recursive process of coding, grouping and sorting, and integration (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Emergent themes and concepts were woven into a discussion on the research questions proposed in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Data analysis of the individual interviews was primarily used to define themes and concepts. The researcher used NVIVO8 software to facilitate the coding, sorting and integration of the data.

### *Interviews*

Based on the literature on distributed leadership and shared decision making and a review of the document CR 100.11, the researcher identified pertinent research questions for individual interviews (Appendix B). The questions were reviewed by authorities in the field and pilot tested with three peers in the doctoral program in educational leadership at the Sage Colleges, one curriculum coordinator and two principals. Each interview question was checked to determine its match to the research project's purpose statement.

### *Observations*

From December 2008 to April 2009, the researcher attended five building level meetings in three elementary schools and three district level meetings. The researcher purposefully selected building level meetings based on a review of the school's shared decision making meeting minutes. Schools with rich documentation over three years were selected first. The research cross checked this selection with the assistant superintendent who confirmed that these schools were actively involved in the shared decision making process. The researcher observed (1) participants' interactions during the meetings, (2) their participation in shared decision-

making and (3) leadership practices that promoted shared decision-making. Observations of the building level and district level shared decision making meetings provided the researcher with a number of advantages: (1) a first-hand experience with the participants in their own setting, (2) access to information as it occurs, and (3) observation of information that was not discovered during personal interviews (Creswell, 2008).

#### *Document Review*

The researcher reviewed the district's plan for shared decision making along with building level and district level documents pertaining to shared decision-making. These documents were posted on the school district's website from January through May 2009. In reviewing documents, the researcher was able to (1) obtain the language and words of the participants, and (2) view data that participants have given attention to in compiling for public viewing (Creswell, 2008). The researcher reviewed the NYS Commissioner of Education Regulations Part 100.11 on shared decision making and related documents posted on the NYSED website. NYS Commissioner of Education Regulations Part 100.11, implemented in 1994, is a document mandating each school district to develop a shared decision making plan involving teacher and parents for the purpose of improving the educational performance of all students.

#### *Validity and Confidentiality*

In a qualitative study, using three sources for collecting data increases the validity of the study (Merriam, 1998). In this case study, the researcher controlled internal validity by examining evidence from multiple respondents to identify themes based on converging perspectives of participants (triangulation). Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher and all responses were kept confidential. Transcriptions were verified for accuracy by the researcher and all participant names were coded to further ensure confidentiality.



## CHAPTER IV

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data collection methods and analysis were used to probe for participants' perceptions on leadership practices that promoted collaboration through shared decision making. Analysis primarily involved a review of transcribed individual interviews that were analyzed and coded to situate the participant's perceptions within the context of their home school district and the mandates of NYSED's regulation CR 100.11.

#### *Research Question #1*

Eighteen participants answered six interview questions (Appendix B) that were strategically developed to address two research questions. When possible, email was used to send the questions to participants prior to the interview. The researcher used NVIVO8 software to code responses into tree nodes and the tree nodes helped the researcher identify themes and subthemes for each primary research question. Within each major coding category, a list of subcategories of emerged. Appendix C lists the coding structure used to identify themes in the interview data for research question #1: *To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making?*

In February 2008, the school district recertified its plan for implementing school-based planning and shared decision making. The district's plan states that, at the building level, committee members will have the responsibility and accountability to address issues, problems and policies that increase the academic level of achievement of all students. Aligned with the district's goals and objectives, building committees will have the authority and the accountability to determine their objectives and enact decisions that affect only their own building. Decisions

are to be made by consensus, a systematic process used by the group to make decisions that everyone can support.

### *Building Committee- Purpose and Role*

The researcher asked the participants to explain their understanding of the purpose of the shared decision making committee and their role on the building committee. Most participants identified “setting goals” as one common role for each committee. At the beginning of the school year, the central committee on shared decision making requests that each building committee submit to them a set of yearly goals based on student achievement data. The researcher was able to locate goals for each school through a review of the shared decision making documents posted on the district’s website. Goals related to student achievement and were primarily in response to the standardized state tests. For example, one school listed the following goals for the 2008-09 school year: (1) Increase the percentage of students in levels 3 and 4 on the New York State English Language Arts (NYS ELA) tests by 3%, for all students as well as for all subgroups; (2) Increase the percentage of students in levels 3 and 4 on the NYS Math tests by 3%, for all students as well as all subgroups. (3) Increase the percentage of students in levels 3 and 4 on the NYS Science test by 3% for all students as well as all subgroups. A second school used a more generic approach to their goals in the following: (1) Use assessment data to drive instruction (for example benchmarks, weekly skills test, etc.); (2) Improve parent involvement at building level meetings, parent meetings, and central meetings; (3) Enhance student achievement through differentiated instruction specifically targeting entire student population to reach success in all learners. Beyond that one common decision making task, building committees selected projects or tackled issues that were relevant to their building’s needs and goals.

When asked about individual roles in the building level committee, participants either perceived their role in shared decision making as active leaders, decision makers and providers of information, or passive participants giving input and/or receiving information. Building administrators and teachers generally identified their role as active leaders and decision makers while parents generally identified their role as providing input and/or recipients of information. Five of the six administrators identified their role as chairing or facilitating the monthly meetings. The researcher's observations at building committee meetings confirmed participants' perceptions of their roles. Generally, parents were passive participants with the exception of one building where a parent chaired the meeting.

*Administrators.*

Administrator-1 stated that the purpose of the building committee was to discuss everything that goes on in the building and was meant to be an informative session for the parents. When asked who sets the meeting agenda, the administrator replied, "Generally, the administration does, either myself or [the assistant principal]." Administrator-1 allowed for discussion to happen at the meeting and said that if parents and faculty have questions, they ask them during the meeting and bring up any ideas or anything that they would like to introduce into the school.

The researcher observed at two meetings where the administrators led the group discussion, seeking input from participants. Administrator-2 invited participants to talk about different issues pertaining to student achievement. Administrator-3 considered the building committee as a board of directors, sought their opinion, and invited them to help with problem solving, but saw the final decision as the administrator's responsibility. Administrator-1 stated,

And that's the thing I noticed about public education. I noticed that in the move to share decisions, ultimately I'm the one who gets evaluated on the decisions that were made. So, while I enthusiastically support shared decision making, I make it very clear that the buck stops here and I need to be very careful that I am not succumbing to the whims of stakeholders that create more work for me, and I try to be very careful not to create more work for my teachers.

Administrator-4 is the co-chair of the building committee, takes care of all the meeting notes; makes sure the notes are typed, corrected and sent out. When asked about the purpose of the building committee, Administrator -4 articulated similar statements to Administrator-1. The purpose of the committee is to get information out, let people know of the good things that happen, inform people about projects and ideas, and "a lot of times it is a sounding board so that more and more people know about the activities and the curriculum here at the school." In reference to parent participants, Administrator-4 stated,

It is nice to hear people who come in with a different perspective. I am basically talking about parents, parents who want to come in and ask about 'why does this happen in the room?' and to keep it more in general terms and just to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Administrator-5 is the facilitator of the building level committee. New to the role this year, the Administrator-5 hopes to take a more active part in the decision making process and "would like to see the committee take more part in making the decisions of what the goals would be for the school and some of the programs that take place here." When the researcher asked for further clarification about goal setting, Administrator-5 stated that sometimes the committee sets the school goals but mostly the principal sets the goals and presents them to the building

committee. Administrator-5 stated, “My vision is to see the building committee establish the goals together.”

*Teachers.*

Participants in the teacher group held the longest memory of shared decision making in the district, and three teachers were actively involved as committee members for over ten years. Similar to the administrator responses, teachers articulated “setting goals” as the purpose of the building committee. Teacher-1 stated that the main purpose of the group was student achievement and that last year the school’s main goal was to improve science at the fourth-grade level. Teacher-2 provided a similar response and stated,

At the building level you tend to meet the needs of your student population. You take a look at the student, you take a look at the parents, you take look at the teachers and how they all work together collaboratively and how we go about setting goals just specifically for our building.

When asked who sets the building committee agenda, Teacher-2 explained that “normally the principal sits down with a group and figures out what we are going to talk about.”

Teacher-3 said that the purpose of the building committee was to make decisions for the school and for two years Teacher-3 was involved in a building committee decision that eventually went to central administration for approval. Teacher-4 has been a part of the shared decision making process for many years and described the purpose of the building meetings as a place to present the viewpoints of the stakeholder groups. Teacher-4 stated,

Parents think in terms of their child, whereas we think in terms of 24 children or 600 children at a time. That’s a different perspective. We have to think of the impact. We also have, through our years of teaching, a different measurement of

how things are, how it has been dealt with previously, what has worked and what hasn't. Whereas, a parent might just be coming into the place.

Beyond setting goals, Teacher-5 and Teacher-6 defined the role of the building committee as a place to voice opinions, a good time for parents to come and hear what is going on in the building. Teacher-5 stated, "It is informational, more than it is shared decision-making." Teacher-6 attended the meeting "to get a view of the entire school's happenings and to give input."

*Parents.*

Most parents described their role as passive participants. The purpose of the building level committee was to provide information to them. Parent-1 stated that involvement in the committee provided important information about student activities. "I'm seeing from their day-to-day activities what they are learning, what is important, what they need to succeed from kindergarten all the way up to high school." The researcher further probed with the question, "What does shared decision making look like at the building level committee?" The parent's response was surprising since this parent has been involved with the shared decision making committees for over five years. Parent-1 replied,

Sometimes, I will say from a parent's perspective, it can be a little confusing, because they do talk a lot in what I call 'teacher lingo,' like 'doctor lingo.' They talk about standardized testing, they talk about requirements. We sit and we talk about it together. We explain, if a parent doesn't understand, what they mean by things we have to achieve as a district, with the testing and things like that.

The researcher rephrased the question to, "What do you expect when you hear the words shared decision making?" Parent-1 responded by describing the building committee as a group of

people who are able to make a difference. “Even if I sit there the whole night and not open my mouth once, which I do a lot, I can help make a difference, whether it is in my own building or the entire district.” The parent explained that making a difference involved obtaining information and then sharing it with others.

Parent-2 joined the building committee to offer help and to participate in the school. Parent-3’s role on the building committee was to disseminate information and to give input on developing action plans. Parent-3’s role was to bring information from the central committee meeting to the building committee for further discussion and stated,

Then people around the table, the stakeholders, they would analyze and discuss and then the principal and the assistant principal and the other folks at the building level would talk about a strategy to implement whatever we were looking at.

Parent-4, Parent-5 and Parent-6 participated in the building level committee to gain information. Parent-4 stated, “I like to know what’s going on at my child’s school, because you don’t really find out a lot from a child or some of the stuff that they send home to parents.” Parent-5 provided a similar statement, “I do come because I want to know what's going on, and I don't want to get blindsided, and if I'm going to navigate or find the best for my children, I realize that I have to be involved.”

#### *Building Committee - Issues and Process*

The researcher reviewed the school district’s plan for implementing CR100.11. According to the plan, building committees have the responsibility and accountability to address issues, problem and policies affecting their school that are designed to increase student achievement. The researcher asked participants to identify accomplishments that resulted from

their participation in the shared decision making process at the building level. The purpose of this question was to explore the participants' perceptions of the process leading to shared decision making in their school buildings. During the discussion on accomplishments, participants also articulated their frustrations with the process.

Participants identified both past accomplishments and current projects which included: (1) an after-school sports bus; (2) building level programs and special events; (3) bus loop to alleviate a staggered dismissal schedule; (4) enrichment programs; (5) fundraising; (6) manual for parent volunteers; (7) parent involvement programs; (8) policy on bus safety; (9) policy to address inequity of services and resources; (10) schedule revisions. All of the accomplishments involved significant decisions to improve student achievement in their buildings. Although proud of their achievements, and committed to the process of shared decision making, participants revealed a number of concerns with the decision making process. The common concerns involved (1) the agenda; (2) time; and (3) committee membership.

#### *Agenda.*

A number of concerns surfaced while participants discussed the meeting agendas. The first concern was that most of the agendas were set by the administrators with the exception of one building where the committee chair and the administrator set the agenda. Teacher-4 recalled how their building meeting agendas were developed:

The chairperson, who is a parent, sets the agenda. She meets with the principal; she meets with different people during the month and she emails all of us regularly for input. She sends the minutes out to us through email, so we get a chance to see it and prepare for it before the meeting comes up.



For some buildings, the agenda was set by the administrators just prior to the meetings with little input from the committee members and with a loose connection to prior meetings.

Parent-2 expressed frustration over the lack of action on agenda items. Parent-2 stated, “What happens is, you go to a meeting and something really important comes up and you come to the next meeting and you go over it again, then you come to another meeting and you go over it again.” Parent-2 expressed concern for other committee members who, without a clear understanding of the committee’s tasks, would feel like they were “spinning their wheels” and would not want to commit to the meetings. Parent-3 expressed frustration over an agenda item that was brought to the committee, discussed for six months and then abandoned. Parent-3 stated,

I recommended a program and we started discussing it. This year, for the last six months we have been discussing the implementation and the research of it. But at this point we are not going to go in that direction because we are going to discuss something else today about another program that we want to venture into for next year.

Teacher-3 expressed frustration at the number of times an agenda item was tabled at one meeting, only to be tabled at the next meeting. Teacher-3 voiced concern for other committee members and stated, “There are people who are saying, ‘Why am I giving you forty minutes of my time if it's showing up and we’re not doing anything about it?’” Teacher-3 also expressed a need for more structure to the agenda because “there is a lot of down time, things that we don't necessarily have to talk about every time, time that we spend sitting and gabbing.”

*Time.*

The second area of concern was the issue of time; the time it took for a project to go through the decision making process. Teacher-4 talked about a project that began over two years

ago and is currently at the district level for consideration. Teacher-3 was involved in another project that began over two years ago. The project went through the process beginning at the building level and eventually was approved by central administration. In reflecting on the time it took to gain approval, Teacher-3 stated,

That really didn't need to take two years. It was something that in my opinion took a few months for us. We had committee members who worked on it; we did a lot of research; we had guest speakers. But for me I didn't think it was worth two years in time. And now we have to wait another whole year for budget reasons, and it may not even happen this year. It was supposed to happen this coming summer.

*Membership.*

A third concern involved the need to maintain a stable group of committee members who would commit to participation at every meeting. Teacher-2 expressed the challenge for maintaining the same participants from meeting to meeting because “the parents change all the time.” Teacher-2 stated, “We wanted to maintain some sort of continuity with the same people, so that you don't have to constantly keep on repeating yourself all of the time about what is going on.”

Parent involvement surfaced as a common concern. The researcher observed five building level meetings. For all five meetings, the teachers and administrators outnumbered the parent participants. Building level committees experimented with scheduling to find the optimal time for parents. Whether the meetings were scheduled at dismissal time or at 6:30 p.m., parent involvement continued to be very low. Parent-2 expressed a concern about maintaining a stable parent membership from year to year and its effect on selecting long term projects related to

student achievement. “The struggle is as children move on to different schools, you lose people. Or when individual lives get more complicated, you lose people and it is hard.”

### *Central Committee- Purpose and Role*

According to the school district’s plan for implementing CR100.11, the mission of the central committee is to provide a forum and process for building committees to unite regarding common concerns. It is important to note that the central committee was formed by the district and is not part of the mandated organizational structure outlined in CR100.11. The purpose of the central committee is to (1) promote compliance with CR100.11; (2) gather and share information; (3) reveal, forward and resolve with the Board of Education areas of district concern that are common to more than one building; (4) communicate the district plan for implementing CR100.11; (5) act as a resource and support to buildings; (6) review the district plan; and (7) suggest amendments to the plan to the Board of Education before the next biennial review.

An elected chairperson, who works closely with one of the district’s assistant superintendents, convenes the central committee once a month. Together they construct the agendas for the monthly meetings. Building level committees are invited to send representatives from each stakeholder group to the monthly meetings. Before each central committee meeting, building committees submit answers to survey questions on topics that will be presented by guest speakers. Topics are selected before the beginning of the next school by the chair and assistant superintendent based on feedback received from the building committees.

To obtain a better understanding of the purpose of the central level committee, the researcher observed three district level meetings, reviewed minutes from past meetings, and interviewed three individuals at the district level (two assistant superintendents, and one former

employee who now works as a consultant for the district). The researcher asked each three district level persons about their understanding of the shared decision making process at the central committee level. The results of the interviews indicated that their understanding of the process matched with the district's plan and reflected the practices observed by the researcher at the central meetings. The interviewees defined the central committee as a clearinghouse for information. Assistant Superintendent-1 stated,

I think the origin is [district administration] wanted something as a clearinghouse.

A spearpoint so to speak aimed at central administration and the Board of Education that would take the ideas that were fermenting out there in the different schools and kind of put them in a more cohesive manner so that they could be presented to people who could [act] on them and turn those ideas into reality for the students in the district.

The researcher further probed with the following questions: "So, the central committee was never intended to be a shared decision making body? Shared decision making was supposed to happen at the building level?" To this, Assistant Superintendent-2 responded, "Yes, probably. The shared decision making body would be closer to where the action was taking place." The consultant confirmed that statement with, "There was never an understanding that decisions would come from [central] committee." The central committee would hear common concerns and pass those concerns on the Board of Education. The common understanding of all three individuals interviewed was that decisions affecting multiple schools in the district were the responsibility of the Board of Education. Assistant Superintendent-2 acknowledged that there might be confusion among committee members about shared decision making at the central level and stated,

We felt that shared decision making had to also have responsibility with it. And if you didn't have responsibility then people could make decisions and say, this is a great idea let's do it. We made this decision through consensus, and our [committee] wants you to do this. Some people in the beginning had that as an idea of the way things should work.

Assistant Superintendent-2 felt that shared decision making could not work that way at the central committee because the people who have to eventually make the decisions, the nine elected board members and the superintendent, have a responsibility that goes along with all of the decisions that they have to make. They have to make decisions within the confines of a safe school, a safe school district, and one that adheres to state education rules and regulations.

During individual interviews of the three participant groups, the researcher asked administrators, teachers and parents about their perceptions of the purpose of the central committee. Since participation in the central committee is expected and is a substantial time commitment, it was important to the researcher to understand the participants' perceptions of the committee's purpose and contribution to the implementation of the district's plan. The following data addresses the interview question: What is the purpose and role of the central shared decision making committee?

Administrators, teachers and parents understood that the purpose of the central committee was to share information and was not intended to be a shared decision making committee. Administrators and teachers acknowledged that building level decisions that require central administration approval generally bypass central committee if the issue is not common to more than one building. One major theme emerged from the perceptions on the role and purpose of the central committee. Participants wanted the committee to be more than a place to share

information or hear from guest speakers. Although most participants appreciated hearing about the good programs at other schools, some felt that the monthly investment of time would be more rewarding to the committee members if the committee was involved in action plans.

Administrator-4 stated,

If you have a discussion and you want to discuss something that is district wide, as a group you need to come to some type of a consensus and say 'we are going to move forward with this' or 'we are going to say this.' I don't look at it as a committee that says 'we are going to do this,' but it is more of a recommendation committee, because they don't have to do any of the legwork on it.

Administrator-4 recommended that following a presentation there should be a discussion on how the committee can support the topic and what can be done in the individual buildings.

Administrator-5 suggested that the central committee be a 'stirring pot,' creating opportunities for people to fully discuss what needs to be discussed and to come up with some sort of action item that needs to be taken. "Maybe there needs to be some sort of a motion to vote for something and then have people volunteer to take part in those action items. That's happening at the building level." Parent-5 felt that "people really need to feel empowered. If they feel that things are the 'same old, same old,' eventually people are going to stop coming."

At the February central committee meeting a guest speaker presented on the topic of parent involvement. Commenting on this particular presentation, Administrator-4 stated that the presenter did a wonderful job but wanted central committee members to ask the presenter, "What is our next step within the next 30 days. What can I do for you?" Administrator-4 recommended that the goal of each meeting should be to "step forward on one issue and take a stand." Action plans would result in central committee position papers presented to the Board of Education.

Administrator-4 stated, “As soon as you present your position paper to the Board of Education, the group has value and it has a voice. You want a voice. It is what it is all about.”

#### *Central Committee - Process*

Participants expressed a desire to better understand how common issues from the building committees are identified, selected, and move from the building committee, to the central committee, to central administration, to the board, and back. The researcher asked participants to comment on their understanding of the decision making process. Parent-5 responded that the assistant superintendent brings issues discussed at the central meeting to the superintendent and the superintendent’s cabinet. Parent-5 stated, “How and when it gets to the board, I don’t know.” Administrator-2 responded, “From there (central committee) I can’t tell you, because I’m not a part of those cabinet meetings. I don’t know how it moves from the cabinet meeting.” Parent-6 felt that “in terms of the hierarchy of order of decision-making, it always finally ends up in the superintendent office, but there is no uniformity in the process.”

Parent-3 would like the committee “to take a stronger role, a more defined role in terms of how the central committee is going to utilize information that people bring from the building level. Once we understand our role and our function, then it is easy for us to work within the system.” Administrator-6 expressed frustration over an issue that was brought from the building committee to the central committee and rejected without further discussion. Teacher-5 stated that decisions are being made but “we don’t know how or who is being included in the decision making process.”

Teacher-5 has been an employee in the district for over five years. Commenting on the decision making process at the central committee, Teacher-5 stated,

People are allowed to write in questions and have them read, and concerns. There is an open part of the meeting, at the end, where people are able to ask questions or volunteer some statements. But I don't think there is ever a decision made at a central meeting about anything that would influence what is going on in our district.

Parent-5, also a member of the central committee for over five years, understood that “one of the things in the plan is if there is something that pertains to one or more buildings, you have the right to bring it up to the board.” However, in five years, Parent-5 has “not seen anything happen yet.” Teacher-2 and Teacher-5, each from different schools expressed frustration over a lack of participation in deciding on a district math program. Although this was a common issue to at least two buildings, it did not appear as an issue of the central committee. Teacher-2 stated, “I resent somebody telling me you have to do something because they think it's a good idea without ever asking, particularly, when it comes to curriculum and textbooks. Ask me what you think works.”

Teacher-4 recounted an issue on equity of services in the schools. The issue was brought to both the central committee and to the union. Proponents of the issue thought that a two pronged approach was much better. According to Teacher-4 the central committee stopped it and the union continued to pursue it with the board. The issue is still in the decision making process. Commenting on the process, Teacher-4 stated, “It’s just that the process is slow. The school system is a bureaucracy like any other, and change comes hard to most people. It has taken two years.”

Some participants were unclear on how to place an issue on the central committee agenda. Parent-1, a member of the central committee for over five years, was not sure. “I have



never had the experience, I am sure you could bring it up while you're there or you could contact the assistant superintendent or the chairperson.” Parent-2 would like to see important unresolved issues discussed at one meeting appear on the next month’s agenda to give them more credibility. “For example, there was a good discussion we had the other night, and unless somebody puts it back on the agenda for the next meeting and really raises it as an issue, I think that the likelihood of it getting discussed again is pretty slim.” Parent-3 brought up a concern at a central committee meeting and was advised to write a letter to the committee to have it brought up on a future agenda. This was confusing to Parent-3 who felt that the purpose of coming to the central committee was to present the issue and the committee would take it from there.

### *Research Question #2*

To answer the second research question (What leadership practices have promoted, or would promote, shared decision making in this district?), the researcher analyzed the responses to specific interview questions (Appendix B). The first interview question explored the participants’ perceptions of leadership practices that facilitated the shared decision making process. Responses to the second question explored the participants’ perceptions of practices to improve the shared decision making process.

### *Leadership Practices That Facilitate Shared Decision Making*

Participants provided a number of leadership practices that they perceived to promote shared decision making. For the most part, they identified practices of their colleagues on the building level and responses fell into two major categories: (1) establishing a welcoming and trusting environment, and (2) maintaining open lines of communication. Appendix C lists the coding structure used to identify themes in the interview data for research question #2.

*Establishing a Welcoming and Trusting Environment.*

Participants recalled many welcoming and trust building practices of their colleagues at the building level. One administrator, in an effort to be more inclusive, invited the building custodian to participate on the building committee. Some administrators made a point to welcome children to the meetings and provided food. Administrator-5 “creates a setting, sort of a round table type thing, where everybody seems to have the opportunity to be a part of it.”

Two participants mentioned the importance of leaders being approachable, ‘down to earth’ and humble. Parent-6 spoke with admiration about the superintendent who in the words of Parent-6 “is a person who doesn't have an ego; she is very humble.” Administrator-3 referred to the building committee as the building’s board of directors. Administrator-3 stated,

I am a big believer in building leadership capacity and I believe that, in my case as principal, I am really one of equals. My job is to administer the building and provide leadership.

Administrator-3 recognized other leaders in the group and stated, “Where I may not lead on one occasion, somebody else should and I should have enough good sense to allow somebody else to lead if somebody else brings more to the table.”

Teacher-3 mentioned that when a decision needed to be made, the building principal invited many people to the table. The principal “makes sure that there are x amount of parents, x amount of minorities, x amount of teachers, x amount of teacher assistants.” When the school needed to hire a staff member, the principal chose a committee. According to Teacher-3, the principal chooses committees very carefully and counts on the committees to make the right choice.

Administrator-2 felt that it was important for leaders to express appreciation for the time and effort people contributed to the shared decision making process. Administrator-3 stated that “those who participate in the building committee know very clearly that I hold their opinion in high esteem.” Administrator-2 appreciated committee members’ ideas and input at the meetings and stated, “and that’s what shared decision-making is all about.” Administrator-2 expressed concern over parent involvement and commented on the practices used to involve more parents. Administrator-2 stated, “I try to put the letters out there to get people involved in it here more, because they already have such a full plate. It is hard for people to commit, I don’t care how good of a leader, or lack thereof that I might be, people are just tired.”

Teacher-2 and Teacher-6 both mentioned that principals tried to find the most convenient times for parents to join the building committee. If a conflict arose in the schedule, Teacher-1 explained that the leaders “were flexible to meet everyone’s schedule. Like in the month of February or March if somebody’s job description changed, or the time, we were flexible in meeting their time, too.”

Teacher-1 and Parent-5 called parents and reminded them to come to the next meeting. Parent-5 sent email reminders to committee members a week before the meeting and felt that it was important to individually contact each member. Teacher-4 stated that the building principal is very good at reaching out to parents. According to Teacher-4, the principal developed a strong relationship with parents by asking them questions and seeking their opinion.

#### *Maintaining Open Lines of Communication.*

Participants mentioned many leadership practices that involved communication. Administrator-5 “purposely creates conversations for making decisions.” Administrator-4 provided opportunities for staff and parents to voice concerns. “Everyone knows that if there is a

situation, they can come in; it will be discussed. If it is for the betterment of all, we will make that change, from the smallest thing to the biggest.” Parent-5 has children in a number of district schools and commented that “on the building level, each administrator assigned, they’re open to new ideas. They’re receptive and if enough people have concerns, they’ll act on it.” Parent-5 described one building principal as phenomenal because the principal continually asks stakeholders, “How we can make [the idea] bigger, how can we make it better?”

Participants mentioned “listening to stakeholders” as a leadership practice that influences shared decision making. Parent-6 felt that the superintendent was a good listener and created venues to hear people’s voices. “She always seemed to invite input. She wants to hear and she acknowledges that she hears, and she validates your concern. So I respect her for that.”

Administrator-4 stated, “I’m a good listener. During my first year here, I’ve listened to a lot of people. The first year, you really can't make any big decisions. You can't do anything until you know what's going on.” Teacher-6 felt that the school’s atmosphere was very open because the building administrators listen. Teacher-6 stated,

I feel like in this building you do have administrators who are willing to listen, who do have an open door. You can go in and discuss even an idea, it doesn't always have to be a problem. I do feel like they do listen and sometimes they can accommodate what your concern might be and sometimes they can explain to you why they can't.

Parent-4 admired the principal who was candid about communications received from central administration. Parent-4 felt that the open communication addressed frustrations expressed by committee members when they did not understand why something could not be done. Parent-4 stated, “If someone is telling you, oh no, we cannot do that, but they do not give

you the reason why, then you don't know. You just think, oh, she is just blowing me off.”

Teacher-2 felt that leaders influenced shared decision making by “communicating and explaining and saying exactly what it is you want and how it is going to move our school into this 21st-century way of thinking and educating children.”

Teacher-4 described effective practices used by the building committee chairperson. The chair uses email and phone calls. “Most of us, if not all of us have the chair’s home phone number and the chair’s children are used to getting phone calls.” Teacher-3 commented on a building level website created to keep everyone informed. Every night the website is updated and sent to subscribers (administrators, teachers and parents). The website provides information on “what’s coming up, what’s happening in the building tomorrow.”

Parent-2 felt that it was important for leaders to provide continuity from one meeting to the next.

Parent-2 stated,

I think that the leadership factor that helped along the way is when discussions occur at one meeting, it is carried over to the next. Some discussion about what happened, ‘this was an important issue we discussed last month, where is it now, what do we need to do about it?’

#### *Leadership Practices to Improve Shared Decision Making*

The researcher asked participants to respond to the question, “What would you do to improve the shared decision making process? The purpose was to further explore leadership practices that participants felt would promote shared decision making. An analysis of the data from this question revealed that most suggestions to improve leadership practice were directed toward the central committee. One leadership practice emerged to improve the building committee.

For the building level, participants proposed that district leaders give building committees more autonomy in decision making. Administrator-1 suggested that the building committees have the power to make decisions over programs and field trips that do not require budget approval. “I can't do my own field trips. They have to be approved by the board. I can't instill a program without letting them know this is what I want to do.” Administrator-5 felt that with greater autonomy, more people would become involved in the shared decision making process. Administrator-5 stated,

I envision on a yearly basis having an annual type of review or plan of what takes place in the school. What are the programs that come into the school, or presented to the school, or offered to the school, or proposed to the school, and having the building committee be the leaders in making the decision whether or not it would be good for the school.

Administrator-6 recommended greater building committee autonomy so that teachers would feel empowered. “This is a group of teachers who have been in the building for a number of years and have seen the changes come and go, and they are good teachers.” Administrator-6 would like the central administration to “let us go, and watch.” Commenting on the teacher’s commitment to the school, Administrator-6 stated,

How about if we set the standards for elementary? I’ve had so many teachers say, ‘I would really like to do this, this and this. If you could let me do this, or let me go work with this class, I’ll go to these other grades and help them.’ And, I’m like all right, relax; we have to get this approved.

Suggestions to improve leadership practices for the central committee fell into three major themes: (1) establishing a welcoming and trusting environment, (2) maintaining open lines of communication, and (3) defining the central committee's purpose and role.

*Establishing a Welcoming and Trusting Environment.*

Participants considered "establishing a welcoming and trusting environment" as one of the first leadership practices needed to promote shared decision making. Administrator-5 felt that it was important for leadership to "create a setting where everybody feels they have the opportunity to speak candidly." Parent-4, suggested that the leadership introduce themselves to committee members. Parent-4 stated, "It is kind of difficult if you are not the type of person who speaks out at these things. Then you can become very intimidated. It can be kind of loud sometimes; it can be kind of negative." Teacher-1 recommended that district leaders begin the year with a social event where committee members could meet each other. According to Teacher-1, the central committee currently hosts a social event at the conclusion of the year. Teacher-1 felt that beginning the year with a social event would help some committee members to be less timid and more likely to participate if there was a problem. Teacher-1 stated,

I think it is difficult for some people to walk into a situation and feel comfortable.

I find that with parents, too. If they had an unpleasant experience at the school, it is hard for them to come in to sit down and talk to a teacher. We are trying to get everyone involved as much as possible.

Administrator-2 felt that the superintendent's presence at the meetings would show support for the committee and their work. Administrator-2 stated, "I think that people are spending their time, effort and energy, that there needs to be certain value assigned to that, so, helping people to understand that you appreciate their input and that their input is very valuable."

*Maintaining Open Lines of Communication.*

Participants proposed a greater level of communication among building committees, the central committee, central administration, and the Board of Education. Administrator-6 suggested that district leaders facilitate communication by asking the participants what they think. Administrator-6 stated, “I think [communication] needs to be a two-way street. I think often it is a one-way street, more shared out, but not necessarily taken in on the central level.” Parent-5 felt that central committee members have much to offer to the conversation on shared decision making and would like the central office to “listen to what the committee members have to say and take it into true consideration.” Referring to the committee members, Parent-5 stated, “Everyone is very knowledgeable. They’re all there for a purpose, if we would be listened to, but we’re not. The district runs off on different initiatives. They share what they want to share when they want to share it.” Administrator-2 recommended strong communication along with informed decision making and stated, “I think that the communication process is vital, knowing what you want to do as a district from top down, right to the building level... those kinds of things, I think it would make it much stronger.”

Teacher-6 would like to see more communication from the central committee.

Teacher-6 stated,

There are some times when you show up and you feel like, ‘Where did that come from? Because if I was here for the last three meetings, how did I not know that?’

So I think that they need to be a little more careful in their relaying of information back to us.

Administrator-5 recommended establishing clear agenda items, communicating the agenda items well ahead of time, and giving people the opportunity to contribute to agenda items. Parent-1



suggested that the district posts the central committee agenda on the district's website. Parent-1 stated,

Get the word out there. If it is something that is going to interest parents, they are going to come out, and teachers are going to come out. You have parents begging for information. Sit down, have a town meeting at a central meeting and tell them this is what we are going to discuss. I think you would have standing room only.

*Defining the Central Committee's Purpose and Role.*

Defining the Central Committee's Purpose and Role received the most suggestions for leadership practices to promote shared decision making. Participants recommended that the central committee be empowered to make decisions. Since the biennial review of the district plan is due in February 1010, participants suggested that they meet with district representatives before the February date to discuss revisions to the plan. The researcher attended a central committee meeting where the district provided a review of CR100.11. At the meeting the district presenter explained that the primary role of the central committee was to share information. Commenting on the February meeting, Administrator-3 stated,

Well, I think that based on a recent meeting that I went to [committee members] feel that they are making decisions. At that particular meeting it was revealed that you really don't. So there was some healthy discussion about how to make this thing more viable. Is this just a place where we are reporting out what's happening in each others' schools?

Administrator-5 expressed the frustrations of a number of participants and their confusion over the role and purpose of the central committee. Administrator-5 did not see any real discussions taking place at the central meeting. Administrator-5 stated,

I don't see decisions coming about based on any of the conversations that are happening. I think if there's a decision for us to follow this kind of model, then I think it should be modeled at the central level and not just at the building level.

Parent-6 felt that the central committee has not promoted itself and developed itself "as a force to be reckoned with." According to Parent-6, "It was becoming one; there were times when I felt like it was one. You felt accountable to it, but I don't think the district feels accountable to the central committee." Administrator-3 recommended a revision of the district plan to include a non-voting central committee representative on the Board of Education.

Administrator-4 expressed a common response from the participants, "We need to start taking action. [Central committee] is truly a thinking group and that thinking group can have action by speaking out and taking action and they need to step forward and do that." Parent-2 commented, "I think that it is extremely important for people who volunteer their time to see outcomes and really see that what they say can make a difference."

## CHAPTER V

### Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions

#### *Findings*

The overarching purpose of the research was to explore parents', teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of leadership practices that promoted collaboration through shared decision making. The study was supported by two essential questions: To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making? And what leadership practices have promoted or would promote shared decision making in this district?

#### *Implementation of Shared Decision Making*

Data analysis of the interview responses to research question #1 (To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making?) revealed the following results. As members of the building committee, participants perceived their role in shared decision making as either active leaders and decision makers or passive participants giving input and receiving information. Administrators and teachers identified themselves in the first group as active decision makers and for the most part, parents identified themselves as passive recipients of information.

Participants identified both past decision making accomplishments and current projects at the building level. Participants felt that past accomplishments involved significant decisions to improve student achievement in their buildings. Although proud of their achievements, and committed to the process of shared decision making, participants revealed a number of concerns surrounding the decision making process. The common concerns were: (1) meeting agendas were primarily set by the administrators; (2) decisions took too long to go through the decision

making process; and (3) building committees needed greater parent involvement and a stable group of committee members who would commit to participation at every meeting.

All participants perceived their role on the central committee as passive, receiving and sharing information. Although their perception matched the district's plan for the central committee, participants wanted a more active role in decision making. Participants expressed a desire to better understand how common issues from the building committees were identified, selected, and moved from the building committee, to the central committee, to central administration, to the board, and back.

### *Leadership Practices That Promote Shared Decision Making*

Data analysis of the interview responses to research question #2 (What leadership practices have promoted or would promote shared decision making in this district?) revealed the following results. Participants provided a number of leadership practices on the building level that they perceived to promote shared decision making. They identified practices of their colleagues and the responses fell into two major categories (1) establishing a welcoming and trusting environment, and (2) maintaining open lines of communication. Participants recalled many welcoming and trust building practices of their colleagues at the building level. These practices included the following: (1) leaders were approachable, 'down to earth,' and humble; (2) leaders invited a diverse group of people to the decision making table (parents, teachers, administrators, minorities, teacher assistants); (3) leaders expressed appreciation for the time and effort people contributed to the shared decision making process; (4) leaders tried to schedule the most convenient times for parents to join the building committee and called participants to remind them to come to the next meeting; (5) leaders developed a strong relationship with parents by asking them questions and seeking their opinion; (6) leaders purposely created

conversations for making decisions and were candid about the shared decision making process; (7) leaders were good listeners and created venues to hear people's voices; (8) leaders used technology (email and website) to keep committee members informed; (9) leaders provided an agenda that fostered continuity of ideas and issues from one meeting to the next.

In response to the second part of the research question (What leadership practices would promote shared decision making in the district?) participants identified leadership practices that they perceived would strengthen shared decision making. Most suggestions to improve leadership practice were directed toward the central committee and one leadership practice emerged to improve the building committee. On the building level, participants proposed that district leadership grant building committees more autonomy in decision making over programs and projects that do not require budget approval. With greater autonomy, participants felt that more people would be motivated and become involved in the decision making committee.

Suggestions to improve leadership practices for the central committee fell into three major areas: (1) establishing a welcoming and trusting environment, (2) maintaining open lines of communication, and (3) defining the central committee's purpose and role. Participants recommended that: (1) leaders begin the year with a social event where committee members meet each other; (2) leaders create a setting where participants feel they have the opportunity to speak candidly; (3) district leaders visit building committee meetings to show support; (4) leaders facilitate communication by asking the building committees what they think; (5) leaders communicate agenda items well ahead of time, giving building committees the opportunity to contribute to agenda items; (6) leaders, in partnership with building committee members, redefine the central committee's role and purpose for the school district's biennial report on

shared decision making and empower central committee members to “take action,” and make decisions.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Parent Involvement*

Based on the perceptions of the parents, the researcher recommends training in shared decision making specifically for the parent participants. Parent participants generally described themselves as passive participants in the shared decision making process and mentioned that meetings can sometimes be confusing because the leaders used “teacher lingo.” As the only non-employee group, they are less likely to be involved in the day to day operations of the school and more in need of training in curriculum related topics and projects that would foster student achievement. This recommendation is reinforced in a number of the research findings presented in the literature review. O’Connor (2001) recommends that leaders provide professional development opportunities for parents to learn about key school operations and to gain the requisite foundational knowledge about school curriculum, scheduling, or funding to make informed decisions. Hoover-Dempsey et. al. (2005) suggest that the role of the parents be defined for both parents and school staff to promote mutually agreed-on expectations.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) published a document referred to as “Early Guidance” (Appendix D) to help districts evaluate their building level shared decision making process (NYSED, n.d.). The Early Guidance document provides rubrics on participation and communication. The researcher recommends that the building committee use the rubrics to guide professional development training for parent participation. Some areas for the committee to consider include: (1) satisfaction with team functioning; (2) power distribution; and (3) shared leadership. The need for building level professional development on shared decision making

appears to be a common issue to many schools. The researcher recommends that the building committees bring this common concern to the central committee for further action.

### *Meeting Structure*

Most participants reported that meeting agendas were set by the principal on the building level and by the assistant superintendent and committee chairs on the central level. Participants wanted more action surrounding agenda items, a clear understanding of the committee's tasks, a focused agenda and continuity from one meeting to the next. Spillane et al. (2008) recommend that leaders recognize the contributions of the multiple "actors" in informal leadership positions. Teachers may be more important when it comes to leading instruction and curriculum and therefore need to be actively involved in constructing the meeting agendas. The researcher recommends that the building committees use the Early Guidance rubrics to guide the structure of meetings. The rubrics rate the following areas: (1) agenda building; (2) assigning responsibilities and choosing facilitators for each meeting; (3) determining desired outcomes; (4) keeping to an agenda and (5) allocating time realistically; (6) attendance.

### *Greater Autonomy for Building Committees*

Administrators and teachers expressed a desire for greater autonomy in decision making at the building level. They would like to make decisions over projects and programs that do not require budget approval. Building administrators felt that committee membership would increase if participants were recognized for their competence in making decisions on the building level. Mulford et al. (2004) found that when teachers were involved in shared decision making and site based management, they were more motivated and the quality of their work improved. This level of involvement promoted a positive school climate which in turn had a positive impact on student outcomes.

The researcher recommends that the building committee review the school district's plan for implementing CR 100.11. The plan includes a belief statement that encourages administrators, teachers, and other staff members, parents and community members to take greater ownership for their school and to develop objectives designed to increase student achievement. The district plan provides examples of objectives for building committees and the following two objectives are relevant to the findings in this study. Participants are encouraged to (1) develop curricular and extracurricular strategies and activities to support the schools; and (2) help select materials, equipment, and supplies, including supplemental textbooks, and library materials.

The researcher recommends that the building committees use a central committee meeting to review the areas delegated to them for shared decision making and to decide on which areas need greater clarification. The researcher further recommends that the building committees use the NYSED rubrics in the Early Guidance publication to guide their level of participation as equals. Since the district plan recommends that the building and central committees use consensus to reach decisions it is recommended that they review the definition of consensus as stated in the district plan on decision making.

#### *Role of the Central Committee*

Participants understood that the central committee was more for sharing than decision making. However, they expressed a desire to change the design of the committee to include action plans. The central committee, a design of the district and not a mandate of the New York State Education Department, was a part of the biennial plan submitted to the State for their review. The researcher recommends that the building committees form a subcommittee to review



the goals of the central committee and make recommendations for revisions before the next submission of the district plan in February, 2010.

Participants were unsure of the process for identifying common concerns to be brought to the central committee. Since each school has identified goals for their respective schools, each school might consider constructing objectives for each of the goals and post them on the district's website. Central committee members along with district administrators could identify common objectives and facilitate collaboration among building committees during the central meeting.

### *Conclusion and Practical Implications*

Participants identified leadership practices that supported shared decision making on the building level. They confirmed the research in the literature review that placed establishing trust and maintaining communication as key practices in distributed leadership and shared decision making and supported Tschannen-Moran (2001) claim that trust is the most potent of the collaboration variables. Developing trust between administrators, teachers and parents is a key leadership factor in supporting networks of shared decision making in a culture of empowerment. All other practices are a subset to trust. Participants in this study recognized and appreciated the leaders who were approachable, down to earth and invited a diverse group of people to gather in the decision making committees. They praised the leaders who trusted them enough to be transparent about the decision making process when the participants did not understand the process. Participants identified leadership practices that they would like to see embraced at the building and central level.

### *Implications for the School District*

Distributing leadership through shared decision making is a mandate in New York State at the school building level. District leaders need to provide participants with professional development in collecting and using multiple sources of data for decision regarding student achievement. Bernhardt (2004) offers a comprehensive process that guides districts through a data collection and analysis process that examines multiple data points. Bernhardt presents a guide for assessing continuous school improvement by analyzing demographic data, perceptual data, process data, and student achievement data.

### *Implications for the New York State Education Department*

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) mandates a biennial review of district plans on shared decision making. Since this mandate requires time and effort at the district level, NYSED needs to develop support services to help districts construct and maintain a viable plan. Support services might include practical suggestions for (1) constructing a shared decision making team, (2) structuring a meeting, (3) developing effective communication, and (4) selection of targeted topics, projects and/or data relevant to shared decision making and student achievement.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study sought to identify new and different perspectives on leadership practices that impact the shared decision making process, and thus a better understanding of the complex dynamics of distributed leadership on the school building level and the district level. This researcher encourages future research in larger school districts on ways to involve leaders in practices to promote distributed leadership through shared decision making. According to Spillane et al. (2008) research in distributed leadership is less developed and most work has

involved small samples of schools. This study took place in a mid-sized urban district and future studies about distributed leadership might focus on the perspectives of a large group of stakeholders in urban, suburban and rural districts.

This study also sought to inform college and university preparation programs in preparing the next generation of school leaders, both formal and informal leaders. Schools leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to embrace practices that distribute power in an atmosphere of trust so that staff are motivated, passionate about their work and energized by self-management (Thomas, 2002). This researcher encourages future research in the development of shared decision making training programs for school districts by university partnerships. Chhuon et al. (2008) explored the benefits of a university partnership and concluded that having an external partner such as a university partnership can facilitate trust building by putting trust building structures in place and by surfacing undiscussable barriers to trust. Since building trust is a foundational practice in shared decision making, future research in practices that build trust will greatly add to the research. Bennis and Nanus (2003) identify the new leader as “one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3).

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Letter

Mary Theresa Streck  
Doctoral Candidate

February, 2009

Dear Participant,

My name is Mary Theresa Streck and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Leadership Program at the Sage Colleges, Troy, NY. I am inquiring if you would participate in a research project on shared decision-making in your district. This project, part of my dissertation study, has been approved by Dr. Annette M. Saturnelli, Superintendent of Schools.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this descriptive case study is to explore parents', teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of the shared decision-making process in the Newburgh Enlarged City School District.

**The nature and duration of participation:** This study will take place from December 2008 to August 2009. Participants will be individually interviewed about their experiences and perceptions of the shared decision making process. Individual interviews will last approximately ½ hour to one hour. Participation is voluntary.

**Procedures to be followed:** Individual interviews of select participants will be audio taped and will be kept confidential. I will be the only individual with access to the raw data. Documents generated during the recruitment stage of the project will be accessible only to me and will be destroyed at the completion of the project. Participants will be addressed by first names or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality during the audio recorded sessions. Participants will not be identified by name or by group in any subsequently published reports, articles, or presentations. Any records or documentation with identifying information about individual participants, including digital recordings, transcripts, and taped interviews will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

If you have any questions about me or the study, please let me know. I can be reached by email at [email@sage.edu](mailto:email@sage.edu). Also, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. James Butterworth, at the Sage Colleges by email at [email@sage.edu](mailto:email@sage.edu) or by telephone at 518 555-1212.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Theresa Streck  
The Sage Colleges  
Email: [email@sage.edu](mailto:email@sage.edu)  
Phone: 518 555-1212

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Research Question #1

To answer the first research question (To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED's regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making?), the researcher analyzed the responses to the following interview questions:

1. What is the purpose and role of the building shared decision making committee?
2. What is the purpose and role of the central shared decision making committee?
3. What is your role in the shared decision making process?
4. What have you accomplished using the shared decision making process?

### Interview Questions for Research Question #2

To answer the second research question (What leadership practices have promoted, or would promote, shared decision making in this district?), the researcher analyzed the responses to the following interview questions:

1. What do leaders do in this district to promote shared decision making?
2. What would you do to improve the shared decision making process?

## Appendix C

### Coding Structure for Research Question #1

Research Question #1: To what extent has the school district implemented NYSED’s regulation CR 100.11 on shared decision-making? The following coding structure in Table A1 was used to organize data for research question #1.

Table A1  
*Coding Structure for Research Question 1*

| Factor                      | Code     | Sub-code                    |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Implementation of CR 100.11 | Purpose  | Make decisions              |
|                             |          | Set goals                   |
|                             |          | Share information           |
|                             |          | Gain information            |
|                             | Role     | Active participant          |
|                             |          | Passive participant         |
|                             | Projects | Projects decided            |
|                             |          | Projects pending            |
|                             | Process  | Agenda                      |
|                             |          | Time                        |
|                             |          | Participants                |
|                             |          | Pathways to decision making |

### Coding Structure for Research Question #2

Research Question #2: What leadership practices have promoted, or would promote, shared decision making in this district? The following coding structure in Table A2 was used to organize data for research question #2.

Table A2  
*Coding Structure for Research Question 2*

| Factor          | Code               | Sub-code   |
|-----------------|--------------------|--|
| Leadership      | Access             |  |
|                 | Communication      | Invites<br>Listens                                     |
|                 | Trust              | Honesty<br>Relationships<br>Value<br>Voice<br>Welcomes |
|                 | Visibility         |  |
| Recommendations | Building Committee |  |
|                 | Central Committee  |  |

Appendix D

CR Section 100.11- School-based planning and shared decision making building team process

review

**CR SECTION 100.11  
SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING AND  
SHARED DECISION MAKING  
BUILDING TEAM PROCESS REVIEW**

**CR Section 100.11 School-Based Planning and Shared Decision Making  
Building Team Process Review For Improved Student Achievement**

Learning to function as a team that makes decisions affecting student achievement is a developmental process. Like individuals, teams pass through **stages** (levels), identified in this protocol as *new, developing, functioning, and accomplished*. Progressing toward working as a truly accomplished team usually takes more than one year and more often closer to two years. Each team is unique and may pass through different **stages** at different rates.

| AREA   | STAGES |            |             |              |
|--|--------|------------|-------------|--------------|
|  | New    | Developing | Functioning | Accomplished |
| Structure of Meeting                             |        |            |             |              |
| Participation and Communication                  |        |            |             |              |
| Focus on Student Achievement                     |        |            |             |              |
| Problem Solving Alternatives                     |        |            |             |              |
| Evaluation Strategies for Continuous Improvement |        |            |             |              |

Usually, developmental growth patterns vary from area to area. Your team can be functioning as a developing team in "structuring a meeting" and as an accomplished team in "focusing on achievement." Do not assume that because your team has been trained and/or meeting for several months that it is functioning as an accomplished team in any or all areas. As a matter of fact, since growth is not linear, your team's pattern will probably reveal some team needs for improvement and some team strengths, but will continue to grow with time and/or assistance. Remember, team functioning will often regress in times of unusual stress such as: members leaving, new members coming in, or the introduction of a complicated or political issue.

You can use the results of this review to:

- ▶ Recognize and enjoy the teams' growth.
- ▶ Periodically assess whether your team is continuing to develop.
- ▶ Identify what kind of help the team thinks it needs and to seek that help.

## TO COMPLETE THIS REVIEW

One way the team can assess its development is to have each team member complete this form anonymously and independently, then to assess its present functioning. To complete this review:

- ▶ check all the individual boxes in each of the five areas of team functioning that describe how your team is currently functioning;
- ▶ decide which level best represents how your team is functioning in each area and indicate the appropriate level on the scale at the end of each area; then
- ▶ for a general or overall perspective of how your team is functioning across all areas, complete the individual *Team Review Process Summary* on the last page.

To complete a collaborative total team assessment:

- ▶ as a group, choose one member to complete the team process review summary;
- ▶ give the individual summaries to that member; and
- ▶ have the member follow the directions under "Team Process Review Summary."

Look at the *Team Process Review Summary* form and decide what your team needs to do to continue to progress in its development as a team. Is it a question of time and letting nature take its course, or does the team need some outside intervention and/or support?

To recognize the need for outside assistance takes both perception and courage, but both may be necessary for team growth. See the *Guidelines for Action*.



## STRUCTURE OF MEETING

| NEW   | DEVELOPING  | FUNCTIONING  | ACCOMPLISHED   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No team agreement on how to run the meeting. (1)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Role of leadership vs. facilitation is not understood. (2)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> The meeting is perceived as "too short" or "too long." (3)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Meetings are not usually held on a regular basis. (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> Need for use of a formal agenda is recognized. (5)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Agenda not present or developed by one person. (6)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Agenda topics are not covered to satisfaction of all members. (7)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Need for facilitator function is recognized. (8)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Meeting time is still not well allocated. (9)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Meetings are not held often enough to accomplish ends. (10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Agenda of meeting is realistic in terms of time. (11)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Accomplishments are becoming obvious. (12)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitator and leadership roles emerge. (13)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Agenda covers problems and issues needing work. (14)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Participants recognize the necessity of regular and timely meetings. (15) | <input type="checkbox"/> Team can build an agenda, assign responsibilities, determine desired outcomes, and allocate time realistically. (16)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team members can act as facilitator, timekeeper, or recorder (or leader), and keep within role structure for the whole meeting. (17)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Meetings are long enough and frequent enough to make real progress toward completion of agreed-upon task. (18)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team can use and keep to an agenda. (19)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Meetings are consistently well attended. (20) |

### SUMMARY -- Structure of Meeting

Using the boxes you checked above as a guide, estimate the level at which your team generally functions. Put an "X" on the vertical line on the scale which most appropriately represents your estimate.



### Scale of Function

Write the number(s) of the characteristics above {in parentheses, after each item} that are your team's strengths:

Write the number(s) of the characteristics that are areas where you think your team needs help:

## PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION

| NEW  | DEVELOPING   | FUNCTIONING  | ACCOMPLISHED   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Members explore roles and responsibilities of the team as a whole and as representatives of their constituent groups. (21)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Members get to know each other as people. (22)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Majority of time and energy is invested in personal agendas. (23)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Members speak in terms of themselves rather than constituent group they represent. (24)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team deliberations are characterized by polite and somewhat superficial interactions. (25)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some members argue frequently, fighting to solve differences, while others are hesitant to participate. (26)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is an inability to focus on defining a job to be done. (27)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Power struggles for leadership are evident. (28)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is individual resistance to suggested activities. (29)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team members speak in terms of people they know in their constituent group, not the whole constituent group. (30)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The team senses a need to resolve conflicts in a positive way. (31)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Power is beginning to be shared. (32)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trust of, and respect for, individual members is increasing. (33)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trust is built in informal, as well as formal, venues. (34)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A sense of "group judgement" is emerging. (35)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team recognizes need to draw out some members and develops strategies to do it. (36)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Recognition of other group members' knowledge leads to respect and trust. (37)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Power struggles continue but do not dominate meetings. (38)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Over time, as a result of sincerely respectful interactions, trust is built. (39)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Tasks are accomplished effectively and as efficiently as necessary because the process is collaborative. (40)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Participants are generally personally satisfied with team functioning. (43)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Members' contributions are positively and realistically evaluated in terms of the problem at hand. (44)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> As topics or goals change, leadership and/or power distribution shifts are recognized and accepted. (45)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Individual expertise is recognized and acknowledged. (46)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> "Control" is a group issue -- leadership is shared. (47)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Power struggles do not dominate meetings. (48)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a willingness to contribute time, energy, and ideas to the team's project. (49)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Issues of trust are resolved in the best interest of the whole group in formal and informal meetings. (50)</p> |

**PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION (Continued)**

| New | Developing | Functioning   | Accomplished  |
|-----|------------|---|---|
|     |            | <input type="checkbox"/> Team develops "healthy" ways of resolving conflict. (41)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> A process for communication with constituent groups and the larger community is developing, but is not consistent. (42) | <input type="checkbox"/> Team members communicate regularly with the constituent groups they represent and truly represent them. (51)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Teams recognize the responsibility to communicate with the larger community. (52)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team member participation reflects a compatibility of constituent group goals and improved student achievement. (53)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team members participate as equals. (54)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Participation is fairly well distributed - - people neither monopolize nor are left out when they have a contribution. (55)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> "Turf" areas are represented but not at expense of total team goals. (56)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> There is disagreement and heated discussion without rancor and with respect. (57) |

**SUMMARY -- Participation and Communication**

Using the boxes you checked above as a guide, estimate the level at which your team generally functions. Put an "X" on the vertical line on the scale which most appropriately represents your estimate.



|     |            |             |              |
|-----|------------|-------------|--------------|
| New | Developing | Functioning | Accomplished |
|-----|------------|-------------|--------------|

**Scale of Function**

Write the number(s) of the characteristics above {*in parentheses, after each item*} that are your team's strengths:

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Write the number(s) of the characteristics that are areas where you think your team needs help:

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

## FOCUS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

| NEW  | DEVELOPING   | FUNCTIONING   | ACCOMPLISHED   |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The team has great difficulty in understanding that its "reason for being" is the improvement of student achievement. (58)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Old turf issues and agenda from other venues are raised as legitimate work of this team. (59)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Handling issues of student achievement is not dominant issue of meetings. (60) | <input type="checkbox"/> Many issues related to student achievement are raised but team cannot agree on one area to work. (61)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> There is still resistance to confront issues related to student achievement. (62) | <input type="checkbox"/> Topics chosen for work are more closely related to student achievement. (63)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Areas chosen for group focus are very narrow in scope or are difficult to evaluate in terms of student achievement. (64)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team members are learning to change or build on topics suggested by others in a constructive way. (65) | <input type="checkbox"/> Team can reach consensus on problem(s) to be resolved which are cogent and obviously related to student achievement. (66)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Topics are agreeable to all participants. (67)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation of chosen topic is discussed with relevance to student achievement. (68)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Topic chosen is clearly measurable in terms of student achievement. (69)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Topic chosen is within purview of team and does not conflict with laws, regulations, or district policy. (70) |

### SUMMARY -- Focus on Student Achievement

Using the boxes you checked above as a guide, estimate the level at which your team generally functions. Put an "X" on the vertical line on the scale which most appropriately represents your estimate.

|   |
|---|
|   |
| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>New</span> <span>Developing</span> <span>Functioning</span> <span>Accomplished</span> </div> |

### Scale of Function

Write the number(s) of the characteristics above {in parentheses, after each item} that are your team's strengths:

Write the number(s) of the characteristics that are areas where you think your team needs help:

## PROBLEM-SOLVING ALTERNATIVES

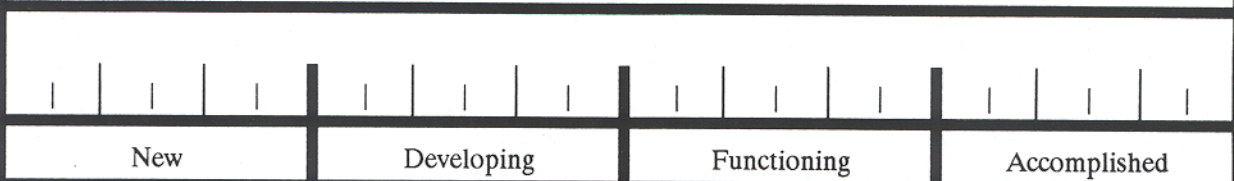
| NEW  | DEVELOPING   | FUNCTIONING   | ACCOMPLISHED   |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> No problem-solving strategies identified are accepted and used by the total team. (71)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Members are "taking sides" rather than looking for strategies to solve problems. (72)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The majority of team members are participating in discussion. (73)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team is using simple, familiar problem-solving strategies. (74)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a beginning recognition that the team needs a larger range of effective ways of solving problems. (75)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team is using a greater variety of problem-solving strategies that they already know. (76)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team recognizes it needs other ways to solve problems. (77)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team seeks additional training or coaching to learn additional problem-solving strategies. (78)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team seeks outside information to inform decisions. (79)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Group can use formal problem-solving strategies to reach alternate solutions. (80)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team integrates new problem-solving strategies into their normal ways of functioning by <i>using what they have learned</i>. (81)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> All ideas / suggestions are valued and considered in team deliberations. (82)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team members feel free to change or build on ideas of others. (83)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Majority decisions, consensus decisions, and/or leadership decisions are used appropriately. (84)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team has learned and can use a variety of data gathering strategies to define and evaluate decisions. (85)</p> |

**PROBLEM-SOLVING ALTERNATIVES (Continued)**

| NEW | DEVELOPING | FUNCTIONING | ACCOMPLISHED  |
|-----|------------|-------------|---|
|     |            |             | <input type="checkbox"/> "Tabling" is used infrequently and is no longer recognized as a viable solution to problem solving. (86)<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Team reaches out to constituent groups and larger community for help and expertise as both consultants and work group members when dealing with particularly complex issues, problems, or solutions. (87) |

**SUMMARY -- Problem-Solving Alternatives**

Using the boxes you checked above as a guide, estimate the level at which your team generally functions. Put an "X" on the vertical line on the scale which most appropriately represents your estimate.



Scale of Function

Write the number(s) of the characteristics above {in parentheses, after each item} that are your team's strengths:

|  |
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Write the number(s) of the characteristics that are areas where you think your team needs help:

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|  |
|--|

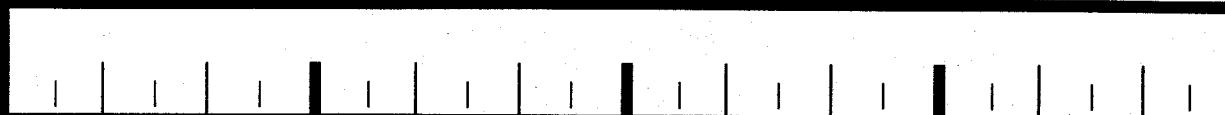
## EVALUATION STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

| NEW   | DEVELOPING  | FUNCTIONING   | ACCOMPLISHED   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team does not think of evaluating in a formal way. (88)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Emotional reaction rather than required reflection characterizes the evaluation of meetings. (89)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team recognizes some meetings are better than others and discussion illuminates reasons why. (90)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation is informal but leads to improved meetings. (91)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team recognizes that a consistent way to evaluate a meeting needs to be learned and used. (92)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Research and training on evaluating meetings are sought. (93)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Outside help for team problems (i.e., training, coaching, and outside facilitating) is less threatening and is seen as an important part of team building. (94)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Seamless rotation of constituents and members is planned. (95)</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation becomes more formalized based on knowledge from research and/or training. (96)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strengths as well as weaknesses are routinely identified. (97)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team can craft and implement solutions to team problems whether related to team process or educational problems and decisions. (98)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is shared satisfaction about meeting outcomes. (99)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A process for new-member orientation is developed and used. (100)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team evaluates progress of project implementation and makes "course corrections" as needed. (101)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Team communicates regularly with groups within the school and community to assess progress in working project(s). (102)</p> |



**SUMMARY -- Evaluation Strategies for Continuous Improvement**

Using the boxes you checked above as a guide, estimate the level at which your team generally functions. Put an "X" on the vertical line on the scale which most appropriately represents your estimate.



New

Developing

Functioning

Accomplished

Scale of Function

Write the number(s) of the characteristics above  
{*in parentheses, after each item*} that are your  
team's strengths:

Write the number(s) of the characteristics that  
are areas where you think your team needs help:

## INDIVIDUAL PROCESS REVIEW SUMMARY

*(To be completed by team member.)*

After you have completed your review of each of the five areas:

- ▶ summarize your assessment by copying the ratings from each of the five areas on the grid below.
- ▶ summarize the strengths, areas needing improvement, and recommendations from each area in the spaces below.

| AREA  | New |  |  | Developing |  |  | Functioning |  |  | Accomplished |  |  |
|---|-----|--|--|------------|--|--|-------------|--|--|--------------|--|--|
| <b>Structure of Meeting</b>                             |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| <b>Participation and Communication</b>                  |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| <b>Focus on Student Achievement</b>                     |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| <b>Problem-Solving Alternatives</b>                     |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| <b>Evaluation Strategies for Continuous Improvement</b> |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |

Strength Areas:

Areas for Improvement:

Recommendations:

IF your team has:

- ▶ met more than 10 times and is assessed/judged to be predominately a "new" team,
- ▶ met more than 20 times and is assessed/judged to be predominately a "developing" team,
- ▶ met more than 40 times and is assessed/judged to be predominately "functioning" team,
- ▶ assessed/judged itself to be predominately an "accomplished" team but recognizes a specific team need,

**THEN** there is probably a need for outside assistance in the form of one or more of the following:

- ▶ an outside facilitator
- ▶ a team coach
- ▶ further training designed to meet your team needs
- ▶ some other change or intervention the team recognizes will help it to improve its functioning.

### TEAM PROCESS REVIEW SUMMARY

*(To be completed by team member chosen to summarize team data.)*

As the person your team has chosen to complete the team summary, number each team member's individual summary as you receive it. Team members names do not need to appear on the Individual Process Review Summary Form.

- ▶ Enter where member #1 has indicated the team is functioning, in each of the five areas, by putting an "1" on that spot on the Team Process Review Summary
- ▶ Do the same for the summaries of team members 2, 3, 4, etc.

The resulting clusters will indicate how the team assesses its functioning.

- ▶ Next, summarize the strengths, the areas needing improvement, and the recommendations.

At a meeting of the team, share this information with the team and plan next steps.

### TEAM PROCESS REVIEW SUMMARY

| AREA   | New |  |  | Developing |  |  | Functioning |  |  | Accomplished |  |  |
|--|-----|--|--|------------|--|--|-------------|--|--|--------------|--|--|
| Structure of Meeting                             |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| Participation and Communication                  |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| Focus on Student Achievement                     |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| Problem-Solving Alternatives                     |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |
| Evaluation Strategies for Continuous Improvement |     |  |  |            |  |  |             |  |  |              |  |  |

Strength Areas:

Areas for Improvement:

Recommendations: