

FRAMEWORK FOR INVOLVEMENT IN SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING

Approved for use in Edmonton Public Schools
May 2000



Table of Contents

Purpose.....	1
Background	1
Overview.....	2
Guidelines for Involvement in Decision Making.....	4
Involvement in Decision Making: Misconceptions and Responses.....	6
Recommendations regarding Professional Development for..... Involvement in Decision Making	7
Examples of Successful Experiences with Involvement in Decision Making.....	8
Appendix I – Alberta Learning, Edmonton Public Schools and Alberta Teachers’ Association Support Documents Related to Involvement in Decision Making	9
A. <i>Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual, Alberta Learning, February 1997</i>	9
B. <i>Edmonton Public Schools, Board Policy and Regulations, (2000)</i>	11
C. <i>Collective Agreement between Board of Trustees, Edmonton School District No. 7 and The Alberta Teachers’ Association, September 1, 1998 to August 31, 2000</i>	12
D. <i>The Alberta Teachers’ Association Members’ Handbook, (1999)</i>	12

PURPOSE

This document provides a framework to facilitate improved involvement in decision making within Edmonton Public Schools.

BACKGROUND

This document is the result of a co-operative effort between the Edmonton Public Local of the ATA and Edmonton Public Schools. It came about as a result of a letter of intent between the two parties that was agreed upon during the 1998 round of bargaining. Teachers had expressed concerns that their level of involvement in decision making seemed to be significantly different from school to school, and they were looking for guidelines about what could be expected. The purpose of the document is to provide a framework and suggestions for effective ways of involving stakeholders in decision-making processes within the context of the district's site-based decision-making model.

A committee was formed consisting of four members appointed by the Local and four members appointed by the district. The representatives of the Local were Karen Beaton, Allan Jack, Catherine LeBlanc, and Peter McNab. The representatives of the district were Mary-Ellen Deising, Avi Habinski, Angus McBeath, and Faye Parker. The committee decided to obtain input regarding the important aspects of involvement in decision making from teachers, principals and parents, as well as support, maintenance, custodial and exempt staff groups through a series of focus groups. The focus groups responded to a series of open-ended questions designed to obtain their views regarding the nature of genuine involvement, the things they wanted to be involved in, and the processes and conditions that encourage genuine involvement in decision making. In addition, through the Local's mailing councillors, all school staffs had the opportunity to respond to similar questions.

An analysis of the input from the various stakeholders revealed many common characteristics of what people perceive to be genuine involvement, and the working environment that fosters it.

This document summarizes the input received and provides a framework to facilitate improved involvement in decision making.

OVERVIEW

“Involvement” means having the opportunity to make or influence decisions in a variety of ways. Individuals want to engage in a meaningful and genuine process and receive feedback on the results of the decision-making process. They would like to be kept informed but would also like to be respected if they choose not to be involved.

In general, staff want to be involved in decisions that affect them and their job including direction setting, the use of available resources and the selection of staff.

The value of stakeholder involvement in decision making is reflected in legislation, policy and practice from Alberta Learning, Edmonton Public Schools and the Alberta Teachers’ Association. Appendix I quotes relevant documents from all three.

When asked what involvement meant to them, individuals shared a number of perspectives, including the following:

- expressing ideas without fear of negative consequences
- having the opportunity to debate and share ideas
- feeling that views are solicited and considered
- having opportunities for input to influence decisions
- being invited to share or being asked for an opinion
- having an impact on the results
- having a right to influence decisions
- having a right to be heard

Others focused on circumstances related to the decision maker. They suggested that both the “asker” and “giver” have responsibilities for involvement. A number of the respondents indicated that involvement must be “genuine”, “real”, and “meaningful” and that the opinion of the participants must be respected. They sent a clear message to the decision maker. **“Don’t involve us if the decision has already been made.”** Involvement should be an on-going process and not a single event. They recognized that not all their views or positions could be adopted. They believed, however, that genuine involvement included receiving feedback in exchange for the input provided and knowing the rationale for the decision that was made.

Participants emphasized that involvement should be optional. It should be recognized and accepted that some might want to limit their involvement to simply being kept informed.

The desire for involvement ranged from those who reserved the right not to take part in the process at all to those who wanted to be involved in every decision, even those not directly related to their work.

All staff want to be involved in decisions that affect them and their job.

Participants were asked what kinds of decisions they did and didn't want to be involved in.

Classroom teachers most often cited a desire to be involved in the distribution of budget resources, the school's discipline policy, classroom organization and the selection of staff. Smaller numbers of teachers identified the learning conditions, the professional development for the school and the overall policy and goal setting for the school. Principals also want to be involved in decisions that affect them and their job.

Support staff want to be involved in decisions that affect their working environment, their work load and their work deadlines. Custodial staff expressed the need to be involved in decisions about custodial staffing ratios in schools' budget plans. Maintenance staff indicated that they want to be involved in decisions related to the maintenance and repair of district buildings. Exempt staff expressed interest in areas such as the budget and the selection of staff.

Parents most frequently mentioned the budget, the financial state of the school and the discipline policy as the areas of involvement that most interested them. They also want to be involved in decisions directly affecting their child. They expressed interest in having some input into the selection of staff, including the principal, and the establishment of the over-all direction for the school.

With respect to areas in which staff do **not** desire involvement, teachers made it clear that they are not interested in being involved in the maintenance of the physical plant or in fundraising activities. A smaller number of teachers mentioned the budget details, staffing and other areas where they lack expertise. Principals recognized that they do not have to be involved in everything and used the example of day-to-day classroom discipline to illustrate this point.

In general, the other staff groups said they did **not** want to be involved in minutiae that are not part of their responsibilities.

The most frequent response from parents suggested they did **not** want to be involved in the evaluation of staff. The day-to-day operation of the school and the discipline of students were also of less interest to parents.

GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

It should be self-evident that when you involve people in the decision-making process they are more likely to support the decisions once they have been made.

The following guidelines recognize the inherent value to be gained when stakeholders are involved in decisions that affect their work environment, their ability to do their job, and the learning environment provided for students. Equally important, stakeholders need to have input into significant school expenditures and strategies for school improvement plans.

- Principals must strive to create a school environment for staff, students, parents and the community that openly welcomes involvement in the decision-making process.
- Principals and decision unit managers need to acquire the skills to implement appropriate involvement in their schools and units respectively.
- Input of staff, students, parents and the community into the decision-making process should be received in a respectful manner and should demonstrate to stakeholders that they may have input without fear of repercussion.
- Input may take many forms including discussions with individuals affected by a decision or those who have expertise in the area, small group staff meetings, full staff meetings, e-mail, committees, questionnaires and surveys, newsletters, parent and school council meetings.
- Involvement in decision making may sometimes include the delegation of authority to stakeholders such as a committee of staff, a department, or a school council to make specific decisions.
- When determining who should be involved in a decision-making process, consider involving both those who will be affected by the decision and those who have expertise in the area. These may be quite different groups or individuals. Also consider any available information on those processes or approaches that have worked well for others.
- It is important that feedback and a rationale be provided for the decision that has been made.
- The process for involving people in decision making needs to demonstrate that their involvement is genuine and that it is expected to have an impact on the outcome of the decision. The process to be used in seeking input should be chosen with care to reflect the magnitude and nature of the decision and the characteristics of those being involved.
- Individuals and groups who are involved in the decision-making process need to be in possession of necessary background information regarding the decision to be made and the necessary time to provide meaningful input into that decision.

- Parents, staff, community and students should be encouraged to attend those meetings where input into decisions takes place. Stakeholders should demonstrate commitment to becoming involved in making decisions by attending meetings and participating fully.
- Decision makers should recognize those areas of importance to stakeholders where involvement in the decision-making process is highly desirable. Not all stakeholders wish to be involved in decisions they perceive are unimportant to them. This position needs to be respected by decision makers. Those who forego involvement in a decision should be respectful of the outcome of the decision-making process.
- The decision maker needs to monitor the involvement process and make adjustments as necessary.
- Stakeholders affected by decisions should provide open and honest input into the decision-making process and support decisions once they have been made.

INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING: MISCONCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES

Misconception	Response
If you are responsible/accountable for the results of a decision, you must make it yourself.	Better decisions usually result from having a variety of perspectives and all the available information. You can delegate the authority to make a particular decision even though you are accountable for the results.
If you already know what should be done, there is no point involving anyone.	If you involve others, you may get information or different perspectives that will suggest other possible – perhaps better – solutions. Involvement also engenders support for a decision.
You diminish your power by sharing it.	Collaboration and consultation are powerful tools for effective decision making and do not diminish power. Leadership is not synonymous with making decisions by oneself.
Involving others is too time-consuming.	It is critical to involve people in decisions that affect them. Time saved by not involving others is often lost in fighting the resistance to an imposed decision.
You can retain control of a situation by making the decision yourself and then involving others in the implementation.	People recognize immediately whether their involvement is genuine – that is, whether it has the potential to make a difference. There is often significant resistance to helping implement a decision in which people have had no involvement.
As a leader/manager, you should involve others in every decision you make.	There are times when it is not appropriate to involve others in a decision. An example would be in an emergency situation where immediate action is required. Another example would be a situation where, in fact, your decision is already made and you are not prepared to be influenced by what others say.
The school has no real ability to make decisions because everything is decided centrally. Therefore, there is no point in getting involved.	One of the advantages of site-based decision making is that it allows schools to address the unique needs of their community and staff. Schools in EPS have a great deal of autonomy. Getting involved in decision making at the school level can have a significant impact.
The principal or decision unit manager doesn't really want or value my input.	One of the prime determiners of success is the extent of staff involvement in decision-making processes.
The budget is so tight that there is really no point in getting involved – there are no real decisions to be made.	Because the budget is so tight, it is crucial that staff be involved in setting priorities to achieve the greatest possible benefit for students within the limited resources.
Only teachers have the expertise to be involved in decisions related to education.	All members of a school staff as well as parents have a commitment to and vested interest in education. All may bring valuable insights and perspectives to a decision-making process.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

The basis for many difficulties in making decisions results from problems with communications and relationships. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- leadership programs, principal training programs and principal institutes incorporate strategies for involving stakeholders in the decision-making process;
- district, school and decision unit professional development and training opportunities include training in communications and relationships skills;
- school councils be assisted in becoming positively involved in the decision-making process;
- Edmonton Public Schools have resources available to assist school staffs in assessing how they make decisions and how they might improve the processes for involvement;
- the Alberta Teachers' Association extend services that currently support members in involving stakeholders in decision making, and in enhancing communications and relationship skills;
- the Edmonton Public Teachers' Local and Edmonton Public Schools work together to compile and disseminate an inventory of effective practices related to involvement in decision making.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES WITH INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

The following examples of successful involvement experiences were provided by focus group participants.

- Staff had effective input into the selection of some staff. Examples included teachers, an assistant principal, and a foreman.
- Maintenance has more equipment and materials in the shops as a result of input.
- A three-member committee wrote a new discipline policy after having input from staff, parents, and students.
- The superintendent's "dumb rules" committee was very effective. Note: this was a district wide committee established several years ago to rid the district of rules and myths that interfered with getting the job done.
- Staff and parents used a collaborative process to agree to early school dismissal.
- Staff were given the flexibility to cross-schedule classes in mathematics and language arts to meet student needs.
- The decision about a school-corporate partnership was made to the satisfaction of everyone.
- The support staff's classification committee took years of work but was highly successful.
- The staff decided to direct professional development resources to a mentorship program for teachers.
- School committees were established to examine early dismissal, academic achievement, and curriculum alignment.
- A new principal made an important decision quickly and respectfully after consulting with staff.
- All staff groups, parents, students, and departments had significant input into the strategic planning committee.
- Staff had significant involvement in the quantum leap concept.

ALBERTA LEARNING, EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION SUPPORT DOCUMENTS RELATED TO INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

A. Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual, Alberta Learning, February 1997

Policy 1.8.2 – School-Based Decision Making

Background

Alberta Education believes that major decisions about policies, instructional programs and services and the allocation of funds to support them must be made collaboratively. School-based decision making should involve collaboration between the principal, superintendent, teachers, instructional support staff, parents, and the community in keeping with the policies of the Board of Trustees. School-based decision making enables schools to be responsive to local needs.

Under section 15 of the School Act, and the direction set by the Three-Year Business Plan, the principal is the key educational leader at the school level, who will provide leadership in successful school-based decision making. Principals must work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision-making process to develop school policies and budgets as well as to establish the scope of the school program and extra-curricular activities. Establishing an integral relationship among teaching, learning and the decision-making process should result in higher levels of student performance.

Alberta Education supports excellence in teaching and learning and the involvement of parents and the community in the education of students.

Policy

A school and its community shall have the authority and the support to make decisions which directly impact on the education of students and shall be accountable for the results.

Statute

School Council

7 (4) A school council may, at its discretion,

- (a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,
- (d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent,

Additional Definitions

In this policy,

1. "School-based decision making" involves the whole school community in teaching and learning in order to ensure high levels of student achievement. School-based decision making is a process through which major decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them; and
2. "Community" means a school's students, their parents and other community-based support elements available to the school.

Procedures

2. School board policy and procedures for school-based decision making shall:
 - (3) encourage input from all staff, parents and the community into school-based decisions on programs, instructional services, extra-curricular activities and the allocation of funds to support them;
 - (7) define the roles, responsibilities and relationships with a focus on broad distribution of power and authority for decision making among all participants: principal, teachers, instructional support staff, parents, school councils, the community, central office and the board of trustees;
 - (9) define procedures for widespread communication and information sharing among stakeholders, including: appropriate involvement in school-based planning, evaluating and reporting processes;

1.8.3 Education Programs and Services – School Councils

Background

Parents should have meaningful involvement in their children's education. Such involvement includes ensuring that their children are ready to learn as well as being able to choose education programs that best meet their children's learning needs.

Other members of society also have a responsibility to contribute to the education of young people and an important role to play in education. Everyone has a role and everyone's role is important. In an education system, few decisions can be made by one person or group alone. Parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business and other community members are all participants in the educational endeavour and have a responsibility to work together, cooperate and communicate with one another.

Section 17 of the School Act recognizes and reaffirms the right of parents and the school community to have meaningful involvement in the education of their children through School Councils. School Councils are responsible to the parents and the community they serve.

Policy

In each school operated by a board or a charter school board, parents and the school community have an opportunity through the School Council, as one means, to advise and consult with the principal and to advise the board or the charter board on any matter relating to the school.

B. Edmonton Public Schools, Board Policy and Regulations, (2000)

AE.BP – District Mission

The mission of Edmonton Public Schools, as an advocate of choice, is to ensure that all students achieve success in their individual programs of study.

It is the belief of Edmonton Public Schools that parents, students and community members are committed as partners and accept their respective responsibilities in education.

The mission is being accomplished through exemplary staff performance, program diversity, measured student achievement of outcomes and decentralized decision making.

JA.AR – Parent Involvement

1. Principals shall:

- a. create, facilitate, communicate, and encourage opportunities for meaningful parent and community involvement in school matters;
- b. foster staff acceptance, understanding, and co-operation in matters relating to parent and community involvement;
- c. facilitate the formation of and support for school councils in accordance with section 17 of the School Act and as outlined in the district's School Councils Resource manual;
- d. support School Council participation in the School Council Partners program which connects local school councils with each other, trustees, and district staff;
- e. establish guidelines for the involvement of volunteers in the school;
- f. ensure that parents have access to information about the progress of their children, and about budgets and programs in the school and the district; and
- g. provide parents and community members with information regarding appeal procedures

JA.BP – Parent and Community Involvement

The board believes that:

The education of students is best served through the co-operative efforts of students, parents, district staff, elected school trustees, business, union and association staff representatives, and community members;

Parents should be active participants in their child's education and have a role in guiding student decision making;

School Councils should work closely with their school and the district to ensure that students receive the best possible education; and

Parents, business, and community members can assist in the development of responsible citizens through co-operative working relationships with schools and the district.

AFA.AR – Results Review

4. Trustees, staff, students, parents, and community members shall be provided with an opportunity for involvement in the review process.

C. Collective Agreement between Board of Trustees, Edmonton School District No. 7 and The Alberta Teacher's Association, September 1, 1998 to August 31, 2000

13. Teacher Assignment, p. 13

13.1 Teachers have the right to assist in determining the grouping of students for instructional purposes and in determining instructional duties and other duties in accordance with Board policies and the terms of this agreement. It is the responsibility of each teacher to provide such instruction and perform such duties as assigned by the principal.

D. The Alberta Teachers' Association Members' Handbook, (1999)

Code of Professional Conduct, p.1.

17. The teacher as an administrator provides opportunities for staff members to express their opinions and to bring forth suggestions regarding the administration of the school.

Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers, p. 2

3. Teachers have the right to a voice in all decisions of a professional nature, which affect them and have the responsibility to seek the most effective means of consultation and of collaboration with their professional colleagues.

Long-Range Policy, Working Conditions for Professional Service, p. 74 – 75

5.A.1 A voice in the determination of conditions for professional service is a right of the teaching profession.

5.A.5 Teachers have the right to a voice in the determination of educational policy.

5.A.6 Joint teacher/board committees should be established to discuss and recommend policy on educational matters and teacher-board relationships at the local level.

Long-Range Policy, Education Finance, p. 82 – 83

7.A.33 The basic purpose of school-based budgeting should be to meet student needs by involving in decision making those individuals who will be responsible for implementing the decisions.

7.A.35 Basic requirements for the successful operation of a school-based budgeting system are:

2. Policies that ensure that school staffs have timely and authentic participation in decision making including provision for
 - (a) a consensus model for reaching decisions,
 - (b) adequate time and support for participation,
 - (c) staff development to build required skills,
 - (d) access to all relevant information and
 - (e) effective communication with and among all decision-making levels; and
4. Annual review and evaluation of school-based budgeting procedures.

Long-Range Policy, Administration of Schools, p. 90 – 91

9.A.4 School administration should

2. provide structures that
 - (a) ensure that decision making is based on staff involvement as a group,
 - (b) encourage respect for and trust in each member's expertise and professional authority,

9.A.5 Conditions should be established that allow for the inclusion of teachers in decision making and evaluation procedures by considering such activities as part of their teaching load.

9.A.6 The decision-making process in education should provide for the involvement of all certificated personnel in matters that concern them.

9.A.8 Schools should be organized to provide structures that ensure teacher involvement in decision making related to program development, allocation of educational resources, staffing policy, use of technology and policies related to student, staff and program evaluation.

9.A.9 In keeping with the collegial model, budgeting within a school is an open matter among all teachers within that school.

9.A.11 It is essential that each school's professional staff have a major voice in the formulation of a school statement of educational philosophy and objectives in conjunction with provincial goals of education and schooling.

9.A.34 The school administrator's role is to facilitate teaching and learning by acting as

3. a decision maker who is responsible for establishing an appropriate collaborative, shared decision-making model for the school;

Long-Range Policy, Nature of Teaching Profession, p. 92

10.A.7 Teachers have a right to participate in all decisions that affect them or their work and have a corresponding responsibility to provide informed leadership.

Reference to involvement is also found in the ATA Members' Handbook 1999 in the Position Paper on School-Based Budgeting and Decision Making, p. 127