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ABSTRACT

Site-based management is designed to bring decision making to the school level and involve all stakeholders in a process that will result ultimately in improved student outcomes. Enacted into law in June 1989, Hawaii's School/Community-Based Management Initiative (SCBM) is part of a national trend toward decentralizing decision making and increasing school autonomy that arose during the 1980s. A voluntary program, SCBM offers schools flexibility, autonomy, and a small amount of resources in exchange for school-community commitment and plans for improving educational outcomes. This document presents findings of an evaluation of the first nine schools that participated in SCBM. Data were derived from individual and focus-group interviews with each of the six role groups and SCBM council members; onsite observation; surveys of teachers, support staff, SCBM council members, administrators, and parents; and document analysis. The evaluation shows that SCBM participation has brought greater voice to many groups, fostered new ways of collaboration, and (in a few cases) led to the development of a school culture that supports significant improvement in the learning environment. In short, SCBM rarely has caused school improvement but has provided the framework and vehicle for improvement. The following recommendations are offered: (1) All levels need to consider ways to continue building group decision making and communication skills; (2) schools need to determine and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the council from the start; (3) participants at all levels, but especially in schools, need to develop better procedures for orienting new SCBM council members--particularly staff and parents--to SCBM and the school's vision; (4) the state needs to streamline and clarify the waiver and exception process; (5) schools and the state should consider adopting accountability systems capable of meeting both school and state needs; (6) all levels should consider streamlining school-improvement goals, designing staff-development plans, and instituting a comprehensive planning process; and (7) greater cooperation, coordination of effort, and creative use of resources are needed to provide SCBM schools with support in this time of diminishing resources. (LMI)

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Voice, Collaboration and School Culture

Creating a Community for School Improvement

Evaluation of the Pioneer SCBM Schools
Hawaii's School/Community-Based Management Initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Overview

Since Hawaii's School/Community-Based Management (SCBM) initiative began in 1989, the first nine schools — pioneers of SCBM — have made considerable progress in accomplishing their goals. In contrast to the state context for educational reform just prior to SCBM's creation — characterized by a lack of risk-taking, particularly at the lower levels, within the system (Berman and Izu, 1988) — we find many schools charting new courses while actively confronting the inevitable tensions that arise in making significant change. Their success and frustrations (and willingness to voice them) are indicators of the growth and change occurring within SCBM schools.

Far West Laboratory's evaluation of SCBM conducted for the Hawaii Department of Education shows that SCBM participants have made particular strides in three areas:

- In all school-communities, SCBM succeeded in bringing greater *voice* to many groups in school decision-making — particularly to those whose voices were absent from previous discussions.

- Some have learned to ***collaborate*** in new ways; by setting the stage for increased communication and mutual respect, by providing schools with limited resources and by allowing for flexibility to plan and learn new ways of "doing business," SCBM has enabled more teachers to work cooperatively with their colleagues and other members of their school-community, including parents.

- A few schools where we have seen significant departures from traditional practice have developed a ***school culture*** — the norms, values and vision — that supports significant improvement in the learning environment for students.

In short, SCBM rarely has *caused* school improvement, but has provided the framework and vehicle for improvement. Whether a specific program such as the Success Compact or a reform of the school's own design, SCBM can help build school capacity, as well as the support and resources necessary for school change. Some adjustments are necessary to provide SCBM schools with support in this time of diminishing resources so they can continue to work with their communities to create new learning opportunities and support for Hawaii's youth. The major findings and conclusions from this study point to specific suggestions on how participants at all levels — school, district, state and community-at-large — can work together to support coherent improvement efforts aimed at creating exciting and challenging learning opportunities for all students.

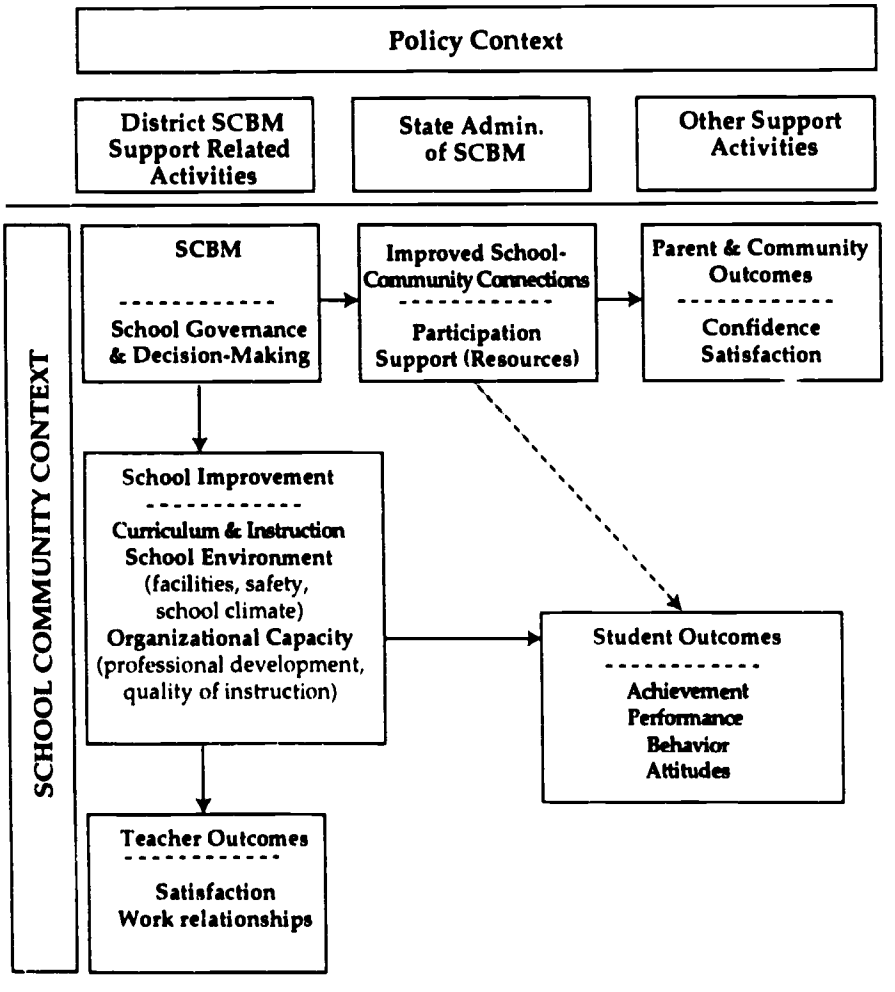
Evaluation Framework and Methods

Evaluation Framework

To evaluate SCBM, we developed a framework built on the theory and assumptions underlying school-based management initiatives, generally, and SCBM, specifically. Stated simply, site-based management is designed to bring decision-making to the school level and involve all stakeholders in a process that will result ultimately in improved student outcomes.

The framework anticipates certain outcomes and impacts. It also illustrates two key points. First, a number of changes need to occur before we can expect heightened student outcomes. For example, improvements in curriculum and instruction are a necessary (but not sufficient) pre-condition. Second, differing conditions in the school-community context can offset not only how SCBM is implemented, but its results as well. Variation in student and community demo-

Figure 1
SCBM Evaluation Conceptual Framework



SCBM: An Experiment in Decision-Making and Autonomy

Enacted into law in June 1989, Hawaii's SCBM initiative is part of a national trend toward decentralizing decision-making and increasing school autonomy that arose during the 1980s. Like most site- or school-based management initiatives and models, SCBM is designed to delegate decision-making authority among all segments of the school's community — principals, teachers, support staff, parents, students and other community members — to stimulate school improvement. SCBM also increases school autonomy and flexibility by offering schools greater budgetary control and the opportunity to relax or waive constraining policies, rules and regulations. By situating decision-making closer to schools and involving the broader school-community, it is believed individuals will feel empowered to introduce innovations, schools will gain broader commitment and support from their communities and staff, and changes will be tailored to unique and diverse communities.

A voluntary program, SCBM offers schools flexibility, autonomy and a small amount of resources in exchange for school-community commitment and plans for improving educational outcomes. Interested schools submit a letter of intent that expresses support from all segments of the school community. Schools also develop a proposal to implement. In return, schools receive $11,000 and opportunities to participate in several state and district support activities, such as an annual SCBM conference and facilitative leadership training.

Ten schools participated in the first year. Moving into the sixth year, 198 schools — about 81 percent of the schools in the state — have now embraced SCBM, 125 of which are ready or have already begun to implement SCBM proposals.

graphics and the stability of leadership are factors known to affect school improvement and restructuring.

Design and Methods

To capture the unique experiences and context of each school, while still assessing the overall success of SCBM, our design had four key features described below.

A qualitative, ethnographically-oriented approach. We employed a *case study approach* to carefully examine how SCBM was viewed and implemented at each school. We gathered rich, in-depth information during two-day visits to each school in February and March 1995, conducting individual and focus group interviews with each of six role groups and SCBM council members. In addition, we observed classrooms and, when feasible, SCBM council meetings and special school events.

Evidence-driven analysis. To develop a complete picture of the role and impact of SCBM, our analysis is built on an array of quantitative and qualitative data from schools. In addition to interviews and observations, we administered short surveys to teachers, support staff, SCBM council members, administrators and parents. We analyzed a variety of materials that might provide evidence of SCBM impacts ranging from SCBM proposals and council minutes to school-designed surveys, evaluations and Parent-Community Networking Center volunteer logs. Finally, we also examined myriad data from state department sources for all schools, such as the School Status and

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Improvement Reports, Effective Schools Survey, standardized test score data for students and SCBM office records on school requests for waivers and exceptions.

Common themes. To assess the overall success of SCBM, our analysis consisted of two phases. First, we examined the implementation of SCBM and its impact on each school to take a look at how well these schools were able to meet their original SCBM goals. We developed individual school reports using a common outline. Second, we analyzed the data summarized in these individual school reports (and other data available for all schools) for similar themes within each area of impact suggested by the evaluation framework: a) school-decision-making and management, b) school-community connections, c) school improvement and d) individual outcomes for parent, teachers and students. We also examined common challenges and issues across these first nine schools. Although some richness is lost by aggregating findings, this analysis provides an overview of how well these common outcomes fit with SCBM's theory as well as the common issues school-communities faced in creating new learning opportunities and support for Hawaii's youth.

Congruency with SCBM philosophy and approach. Finally, we employed a collaborative approach, working closely with schools and the department. Brief orientation visits to each school in October 1994 were designed to obtain input for the evaluation. In designing parent surveys, we obtained schools' ideas on what to include and how best to conduct them; where feasible, we tailored the survey to school needs.

Major Findings and Conclusions

- ***SCBM had a significant impact on school decision-making practices, while its impact on school management practices and autonomy is more mixed. In the current context and at this stage of development, continuing and sustaining the considerable progress made in schoolwide planning and decision-making is critical.***

Not only have all these early SCBM schools established schoolwide decision-making structures and processes but, for the most part, all role groups feel they now have a voice — greater input and influence in school decision-making — accompanied by a sense of empowerment within their school context. SCBM's effect on school management practices has been smaller and more gradual, though it shows promise of affecting planning and evaluation in schools.

SCBM's impact on school autonomy and authority is more mixed. Satisfaction with the extent of SCBM council authority and autonomy is related to different experiences and expectations for participation in school decision-making. More widespread perceptions of limits on school authority and autonomy are often related to experiences with the waiver and exception process — a process intended to provide flexibility. Although it appears to be improving, the process was slow, cumbersome and often frustrating for these early schools.

"Every time we get new people on board, we spend a lot of time showing people how to make facilitative leadership work. It's really hard to explain to new people and keep meetings to the time allotted without sacrificing relationships."

—A school administrator on the issue of revisiting shared decision-making principles

Sustaining the decision-making processes begun under SCBM is a major issue for many schools. This is a crucial time because, in addition to the normal turnover in SCBM council membership as a result of SCBM by-laws, there is high turnover in school administrators and expected turnover in staff due to retirement incentives offered last year. Further, there are fewer opportunities for training in skills like facilitative leadership than before.

Continuing comprehensive planning and evaluation processes is also a challenge for schools. Many began their SCBM efforts with comprehensive planning processes involving a range of school and community participants, but have yet to establish permanent structures or processes to facilitate planning and research. Likewise, few schools have developed the structures and routines to monitor their progress or the indicators to know when their goals have been met.

- ***SCBM decision-making and enhanced school-community connections are strongly linked. In addition to the increased parent and community involvement and support that these nine schools expected, other outcomes were achieved as a result of SCBM — often in combination with the Parent-Community Networking Center.***

We found a strong relationship between the level of community and parent involvement in school decision-making and the extent to which community and parents support and participate in other aspects of public education. Involvement in SCBM helped develop effective collaborations in other areas, such as providing resources to the schools and actively supporting schools efforts. It also helped establish more effective communication networks within the school-community, generally, and between parents and teachers, specifically. Greater awareness and understanding of the schools' vision and goals by parents and community members and improved community outreach are some examples of heightened school-community connections. Several communities benefited from the enhanced reputations of their neighborhood schools — both the growing

interest in the schools' programs plus the willingness of community businesses and organizations to invest in the schools appear due to their enhanced reputations.

- ***Despite substantial progress, adjustments are needed to make SCBM a stronger vehicle for school improvement.***

Though all schools set improvement goals in curriculum and instruction, the connections between SCBM and school improvement have often been loose. Moreover, implementation within a school or even grade level was frequently uneven. SCBM is often tied to school improvement in at least two critical ways: first, it can provide schools with time and money to make changes. Second, it can set the stage for increased communication and mutual respect among role groups.

"SCBM has made us a 'we'; teachers and parents are working together to improve learning opportunities for students. More parents are involved than before. We've provided a lot of opportunities."

— *Teacher*

The few schools that made substantial and coherent *schoolwide* improvements, particularly those that improved curriculum and instruction, were able to integrate SCBM and school improvement with a clear school mission and pedagogical vision shared by all members the school-community — teachers, staff and parents, as well as students. They also gave priority to professional development, including long-range staff development plans.

But for many schools, improvement plans have been documents required by districts, rather than "living" documents that the larger school-community could easily understand. Plans for many schools have been too detailed or fragmented to provide a coherent picture of what schools are trying to accomplish, or they have proven too cumbersome to convey to others.

- ***Though difficult to isolate, SCBM is associated with some positive outcomes for key individuals — parents and teachers, as well as students.***

Parents at all schools appear extremely confident and satisfied with their children's schools, and that confidence is growing. For the most part, measures of teacher work satisfaction also show improvement. At nearly all schools, there is increased collaboration among teachers and other staff since implementing SCBM; however, some teachers are concerned about lack of collaboration or promotion of individual agendas — one reported weaknesses of SCBM. Finally, by and large most teachers are committed to accomplishing SCBM goals and participating in SCBM activities, but sustaining these time-intensive commitments is an issue.

"SCBM means doing things and learning in a creative collaborative way. You learn more through this than if you learn out of a textbook because a textbook is very boring, and you don't pay much attention. They way you learn here isn't boring."

— *Student*

Findings on student outcomes are also positive, but more mixed. With respect to student academic achievement, although there are positive trends in student test scores, for the most part, the results are mixed. But teacher, administrator and parent perceptions of student academic achievement in other areas — writing and critical-thinking skills or participation in class, for example — indicate more positive impacts for students. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that SCBM has promise for affecting changes in student behavior and, particularly, student attitudes. For example, nearly all schools report student attitudes toward school and learning have improved due to SCBM.

- *Experiences and contexts of these first nine schools may differ from other SCBM schools.*

Finally, in reviewing the findings and in considering how they may apply to other schools in Hawaii, it is important to understand that the context for these pioneering SCBM schools is different from schools that may follow. First, as pioneers, these schools eagerly adopted SCBM; their requests and actions have established precedents and eased the way for other schools that may seek a similar course. Second, many of these schools had experience with site-based decision-making or had already embarked on a new direction in curriculum and instruction. Therefore, these schools' experience may be different, and caution is necessary in generalizing about these findings. For instance, it is likely that these schools experienced more frustration with the "state" than others because many had high expectations regarding autonomy and flexibility. But the early SCBM waiver and exception process and support were slow. It may also take schools that entered SCBM in later years longer to achieve similar changes, depending on conditions in place when these later schools began (for example, participatory decision-making, a strong vision and direction for curriculum and instruction).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to participants at different levels for supporting continuous and coherent improvement processes in school-communities.

1. All levels — the school, district, state and community at-large — need to consider ways to continue building group decision-making and communication skills. Though most role groups feel empowered by SCBM, many schools need continued training and support in decision-making skills. For instance, districts and the state should continue to offer training in facilitative leadership and consensus

decision-making. Schools need to consider mechanisms for continued reinforcement and development of these skills. For example, one school began each meeting with a review of the ground rules of participation and decision-making. Another school rotated the role of facilitator of the meeting.

2. ***Schools need to determine and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the council from the start.*** Clarifying expectations and revisiting the issue of areas of jurisdiction are critical, given constant shifts in staff and communities. In many schools, input and influence are sufficient for most role groups; in others, authority and management are important to certain role groups or in certain areas. Schools need to determine and clarify these issues early — and be prepared to regularly review the issue. Roles and responsibilities demand attention with changes in school administrators or significant shifts in staff or community.

3. ***Participants at all levels, but especially in schools, need to develop better procedures for orienting new SCBM council members — particularly staff and parents — to SCBM and the school's vision.*** Developing orientation procedures is one strategy. By-laws that allow for staggered terms instead of complete changes in council membership can be another way of ensuring continuity. For schools that have made significant changes in the way they "do business," orientation procedures are especially critical because new parents and, especially, staff need to be brought up to speed quickly on SCBM and the school's vision for student learning.

4. ***The state needs to streamline and clarify the waiver and exception process.*** Several options can be considered; one is blanket or rule-by-rule waiver approval allowing schools to automatically receive approval for requests previously granted to another school by the board. In practice, this could be a simple posting or distribution of an information sheet on waivers and exceptions already approved. Or the department could be given greater authority to approve similar school requests. Additional ways to streamline the process have been suggested (see Berman and Stone, 1991). Any alternative would decrease not only the time schools spend but the time department staff spend on the process — valuable time useful to supporting schools in other ways. Regardless of the means chosen to streamline the process, the outcome is key — providing a quicker turnaround so that momentum and enthusiasm are not lost.

Sharing the criteria used to consider waivers and exceptions — and clearly explaining those criteria — might also streamline the process. At the same time, it would positively alter perceptions on the part of

school-communities of state constraints and limitations. Once schools have demonstrated their requests are consistent with school improvement priorities, providing them maximum flexibility will help them accomplish goals more quickly.

5. Schools and the state should consider adopting accountability systems capable of meeting both school and state needs. While schools may need to design assessments that are better aligned with new curriculum and instruction directions, the state may also need standard measures to gather the comparative data it needs for resource allocation and support decisions. Clearly, state administered performance-based assessment of all students would require a significant investment of time and resources. But other systems that would address needs at both levels should be considered. For example, a system that includes state-required as well as school-community-selected indicators of particular systemwide and school-specific goals would better serve the state and the local schools. The current School Assessment and Accountability Report being piloted in some schools is one existing tool that could be slightly modified and expanded for these purposes.

In exchange for maximum flexibility, schools need to be held accountable for results. Therefore, they should develop methods of monitoring progress toward goals. The state can support schools with appropriate models, including, but not limited to, formative evaluation tools previously developed (and in use in some of these schools) by the department's evaluation section and Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory.

6. For stronger connections between SCBM and school improvement, all levels should consider streamlining school improvement goals, designing staff development plans and instituting a comprehensive planning process.

Streamline school improvement goals. By streamlining school improvement goals and plans, schools can not only target limited resources on a particular area, but better communicate and build support for their goals in the larger school-community. Identifying three to five improvement priorities should facilitate a pedagogical vision of improvement that can be communicated and shared by parents and students as well as staff. Research on systemic reform suggests an in-depth focus on one or two areas over a period of years is often more effective than fragmenting resources to cover breadth (Carlos and Izu, 1995).

Design strategic staff development plans. Staff need time to develop new skills. One-time workshops or even a year-long focus on a significant

reform, such as integrated thematic curriculum and instruction, are insufficient. Schools should develop improvement plans that include strategic and focused staff development plans — plans that include *sufficient time and resources for ongoing professional development activities directly tied to student learning needs.*

Develop a comprehensive planning process that includes all role groups in developing and monitoring school improvement plans. Schools should rely on mechanisms that allow inclusion of a broad range of participants in schoolwide planning. Participation should be routine, not simply at the start of an effort. For example, one school holds an SCBM conference at the start of each year. A few schools hold annual retreats to reflect on the year's activities. Such activities build community support and keep the school's vision alive in the larger school-community.

"SCBM puts decision-making in the hands of the people who really know the school, and the community, and the students. We know best what we need."

— *Parent*

7. ***Greater cooperation, coordination of effort and creative use of resources are needed to provide SCBM schools with support in this time of diminishing resources.*** Different levels of the system need to work together and play different roles to support schools. For example, schools can take the leadership in identifying major improvement priorities and strategies to monitor improvements; districts can lead by simplifying school improvement plan formats and creating ways to better integrate these with SCBM; technical assistance providers can clarify areas of confusion, such as the difference between goals and missions; and the community-at-large can provide the schools with the resources — in time, in-kind contributions and financial resources — necessary to further school efforts.

Schools are resources, too. The state should explore networking possibilities for SCBM school-communities to share valuable lessons, skills and strategies with others who are beginning to implement SCBM or in need of training. For instance, from the grassroots level, some schools are considering or already planning for SCBM at a complex level (i.e., a high school and its feeder schools). Other technical assistance, such as the annual SCBM conference, might be structured to network schools with similar interests or challenges.

In short, SCBM shows promise for furthering school improvement; but the entire system — parents, community organizations and local businesses, as well as the department, board, unions and policymakers — needs to rethink and reinvent its roles and relationships with schools to further SCBM and systemic reform.