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ABSTRACT

An overview of school-based management (SBM) and the issues involved are provided in this document. Information is offered on the following topics: the advantages and liabilities of SBM; its effect on the roles of the school board, superintendent, and district office; decision-making processes; elements of SBM implementation; examples of three district SBM programs; and contact sources. (Contains 7 references.) (LMI)

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## School-Based Management

**What is it?** School-based management (SBM) is a strategy to improve education by transferring significant decision-making authority from state and district offices to individual schools. SBM provides principals, teachers, students, and parents greater control over the education process by giving them responsibility for decisions about the budget, personnel, and the curriculum. Through the involvement of teachers, parents, and other community members in these key decisions, SBM can create more effective learning environments for children.

**What are the advantages?** According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and other sources, school-based management can:

- Allow competent individuals in the schools to make decisions that will improve learning;
- Give the entire school community a voice in key decisions;
- Focus accountability for decisions;
- Lead to greater creativity in the design of programs;

- Redirect resources to support the goals developed in each school;
- Lead to realistic budgeting as parents and teachers become more aware of the school's financial status, spending limitations, and the cost of its programs; and,
- Improve morale of teachers and nurture new leadership at all levels.

**How does SBM affect the roles of the school board and the superintendent and district office?** The school board continues to establish a clear and unifying vision and to set broad policies for the district and the schools. SBM does not change the legal governance system of schools, and school boards do not give up authority by sharing authority (AASA/NAESP/NASSP, 1988). The board's role changes little in a conversion to SBM.

The superintendent and his or her district office staff facilitate the decisions made at the school level, and provide technical assistance when a school has difficulty translating the district's vision into high-quality programs. Developing student and staff performance standards and evaluating the schools are also the responsibility of the district staff.

The district office will generally continue to recruit potential employees, screen job appli-

cants, and maintain information on qualified applicants from which the schools fill their vacancies. The district office may also specify curricular goals, objectives, and expected outcomes while leaving it up to the schools to determine the methods for producing the desired results. Some districts leave the choice of instructional materials to the schools, whereas others may require schools to use common texts.

**How are budget decisions made?** In most SBM systems, each school is given a "lump sum" that the school can spend as it sees fit. As outlined by JoAnn Spear (1983), the district office determines the total funds needed by the whole district, determines the districtwide costs (such as the cost of central administration and transportation), and allocates the remaining funds to the individual schools. The allocation to each school is determined by a formula that takes into account the number and type of students at that school.

Each school determines how to spend the lump sum allocated by the district in such areas as personnel, equipment, supplies, and maintenance. In some districts, surplus funds can be carried over to the next year or be shifted to a program that needs more funds; in this way, long-range planning and efficiency are encouraged.

**How are decisions made at the school level?** Most districts create school management councils at each school that include the principal, representatives of parents and teachers, and, in some cases, other citizens, support staff, and—at the secondary level—students. The council conducts a needs assessment and develops a plan of action that includes statements of goals and measurable objectives, consistent with school board policies.

In some districts, the management council makes most school-level decisions. In other districts, the council advises the principal, who then makes the decisions. In both cases, the principal has a large role in the decision-making process, either as part of a team or as the final decisionmaker.

**What is necessary when implementing SBM?** From the beginning, the school board and superintendent must be supportive of school-based management. They must trust the principals and councils to determine how to implement the district's goals at the individual schools.

It is important to have a written agreement that specifies the roles and responsibilities of the school board, superintendent and district office, principal, and SBM council. The agreement should explicitly state the standards against which each school will be held accountable. James Guthrie (1986) states that each school should produce an annual performance and planning report covering "how well the school is meeting its goals, how it deploys its resources, and what plans it has for the future."

Training in such areas as decision making, problem solving, and group dynamics is necessary for all participating staff and community members, especially in the early years of implementation. To meet the new challenges of the job, principals may need additional training in leadership skills.

In summary:

- SBM must have the strong support of school staff.
- SBM is more successful if it is implemented gradually. It may take 5 years or more to implement SBM.

- School and district staff must be given administrative training, but also must learn how to adjust to new roles and channels of communication.
- Financial support must be provided to make training and time for regular staff meetings available.
- Central office administrators must transfer authority to principals, and principals in turn must share this authority with teachers and parents.

### **What are the liabilities of SBM?**

Participatory decision making sometimes creates frustration and is often slower than more autocratic methods. The council members must be able to work together on planning and budget matters. This leaves principals and teachers less time to devote to other aspects of their jobs. Teachers and community members who participate in the councils may need training in budget matters; some teachers may not be interested in the budget process or want to devote time to it.

Members of the school community must also beware of expectations that are too high. According to the AASA/NAESP/NASSP task force, districts that have had the most success with SBM have focused their expectations on two benefits—greater involvement in making decisions and making *better* decisions.

**Where has school-based management been implemented?** Hundreds of school districts across the country have experimented with aspects of SBM, including the following:

**Cherry Creek, Colorado**—This district, located near Denver, has refined its school-based management system over a number of years. Individual schools perform many

duties that traditionally fell within the domain of the central office. Commitment, trust, and a sense of ownership are cornerstones of the system at Cherry Creek.

**Portland, Oregon**—A "hybrid" form of site-based management is in operation in this district. Although both budget authority and personnel selection are decentralized, the district has adopted a basal text for each subject but allows individual schools to retain control over teaching methodology and selection of supplementary instructional materials.

**Martin County, Florida**—In this district, individual schools have near-complete autonomy; food service is the only area that is centralized. After soliciting ideas from teachers, staff, and advisory groups, principals make final decisions about budget, curriculum, and personnel.

### **Where can I get more information?**

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by Dorothy Myers and  
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Joseph C. Conaty, Director, Office of Research