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Factors Affecting Site-Based Decision-Making in Elementary Schools

Barbara Kearn

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This field study submitted by Barbara Kearn in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the M. S. degree at St. Cloud State University is
hereby approved by the Graduate Faculty.

**FACTORS AFFECTING SITE-BASED DECISION-MAKING
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

by

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A Field Study

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the

Specialist Degree

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Dean

School of Graduate and Continuing Education

St. Cloud, Minnesota

May, 1998

This field study submitted by Barbara Kearn in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Specialist Degree at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

Barbara Kearn

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of various factors on site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. The opinions of principals in rural, suburban, and urban public school settings, as well as site observations by the researcher and a review of pertinent documents were obtained.

The review of literature presented various forms site-based decision-making may take in public schools today. Expected outcomes and areas of decision-making were explored. A collection of nationwide surveys of elementary principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of site-based decision-making were reviewed to ascertain barriers to its successful implementation.

The sample included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools. The purpose of the grant was to examine practices and organizational structures for the improvement of student achievement through school site-based decision-making.

The conclusions reached were:

1. The level of trust at all three sites either positively or negatively impacted the effectiveness of site-based decision-making.
2. The knowledge of group process skills at all three sites either positively or negatively impacted the effectiveness of site-based decision-making.
3. The results supported findings of previous research on the positive outcomes achieved in the areas of community involvement and student morale through site-based decision-making. Student achievement did not increase.

Donnis Nunn

Dean
School of Graduate and Continuing Studies

The following recommendations were made:

1. Administrators and school boards should assess the existing level of trust between the various stakeholders in their educational

FACTORS AFFECTING SITE-BASED DECISION-MAKING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

2. While implementing site-based decision-making, the decision-making matrix may need to be gradually phased in. Otherwise, issues directly related to the movement may be put "on hold" until the school has developed the necessary group skills.

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The sample included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools that received a restructuring grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. The purpose of the grant was to examine practices and organizational structures for the improvement of student achievement of educational outcomes through school site-based decision-making.

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3. The results supported findings of previous research on the positive outcomes achieved in the areas of community involvement and student morale through site-based decision-making. Student achievement did not increase.

The following recommendations were made:

1. Administrators and school boards should assess the existing level of trust between the various stakeholders in their educational community before initiating site-based decision-making.
2. While implementing site-based decision-making, the decision-making matrix may need to be gradually phased in. Otherwise, issues directly related to student achievement may be put "on hold" until the council has developed the necessary group skills.
3. The council must decide how a high level of expertise will be maintained when council members resign and others are elected.
4. One parent on the site council does not contribute as much to the process as if there are a number of parents.
5. Administrators should consider additional ways to provide compensation for council members so they do not "burn out" and are able to maintain their membership over an extended period of time.
6. When structuring the by-laws, consider scheduling meetings often enough for members to build a working relationship, receive background information, discuss issues, and make informed decisions.
7. All council members should have an equal vote with either the principal or board having the ability to veto decisions that are not in alignment with state rules or mandates.

May 1998
Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

Elaine L. Leach
Elaine Leach Chairperson

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CLARA A. KLAUSEN, Kenyon
Minnesota Skyline

MINNESOTA MOON

*Let me dream, O Minnesota moon,
Beneath your mellow light;
Let me walk where northern pines
Spread beauty through the night.*

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The concept of decentralized decision-making or school site budgeting within public school districts is not new (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). In the 1960s and 1970s, these strategies were widely adopted to increase local authority and overall efficiency. These actions were based on the belief that school improvement is best achieved by giving those people closest to students the authority to make important decisions (David, 1994). At the end of the 1990s, site-based decision-making is one component of a long list of suggested reforms to restructure and revitalize public schools. Research suggests site-based decision-making may improve teacher morale, the quality of instruction, student attitudes, and academic achievement. Site-based decision-making also increases community involvement through membership on a site council. This involvement impacts schools by increasing trust between the school and community and widening the base of support and pool of knowledge on which to draw (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goodlad, 1984).

Site-based decision-making calls for each school to create its own council including the principal, teachers, parents, and students, if appropriate. Members of the community who do not have children in school, e.g., business

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The concept of decentralized decision-making or school site budgeting within public school districts is not new (Wissler & Ortiz, 1986). In the 1960s and 1970s, these strategies were widely adopted to increase local authority and overall efficiency. These actions were based on the belief that school improvement is best achieved by giving those people closest to students the authority to make important decisions (David, 1994). At the end of the 1990s, site-based decision-making is one component of a long list of suggested reforms to restructure and revitalize public schools. Research suggests site-based decision-making may improve teacher morale, the quality of instruction, student attitudes, and academic achievement. Site-based decision-making also increases community involvement through membership on a site council. This involvement impacts schools by increasing trust between the school and community and widening the base of support and pool of knowledge on which to draw (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goodlad, 1984).

Site-based decision-making calls for each school to create its own council including the principal, teachers, parents, and students, if appropriate. Members of the community who do not have children in school, e.g., business

or religious leaders, are included as well. Site-based decision-making places the decision-making authority at the school level so those who implement the decisions have a hand in making them (Goldstein, 1989). New relationships are formed among teachers, administrators, parents, community members and students (White, 1989). The 1990 Minnesota Department of Education's definition stated that site-based decision-making shifts decision-making initiatives from school boards and central administrative offices to those closest to the delivery of services--teachers and principals at individual schools. It is assumed this shift will improve performance by making individual school sites increasingly independent and directly responsible for the results of their school's operation.

The Minnesota State Legislature mandated that all public schools in the state have a plan for site-based decision-making by January of 1995. To assist principals in this endeavor, Jenni, a research associate for the University of Minnesota Strategic Management Research Center, developed A Practitioner's Guide to Site-Based Management (1989) for the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association. In this guide, as well as in other articles (1990, 1993), Jenni concluded that site-based decision-making cannot be successful without a real shift of decision-making power from the school board to the site council. Other factors significantly affecting success include training and planning prior to implementation, leadership style of the principal, balance/diversity of council members, compensation, and size of the school district (Baim & Dimperio, 1994; David, 1989, 1994; Edirisooriya & Gunapala, 1993; Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989; Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991; Johnson & Ledbetter, 1993; Matranga, Horner, Hill, & Peatier, 1993;

Mentell, 1993; Mesenburg, 1987; Robertson & Kwong, 1993; Strusinski, 1991).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of various factors on site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. To identify these factors, the opinions of principals in a rural, suburban, and urban public school setting, as well as site observations by the researcher, and a review of pertinent documents, were obtained. The fundamental goal of the study was to develop a baseline of information upon which further research could be conducted.

Research Question

What factors influence site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools today? Specifically, the following questions were addressed through interviews, observations, and review of pertinent documents:

1. What effect does a site council's increased decision-making autonomy have on teacher and/or student morale?
2. What effect does increased community membership on the site council have on a community's support of the school?
3. What effect does the amount of planning prior to implementation (measured in months and years) have on the site council?
4. What effect does the amount of training site council members receive in problem solving strategies and educational issues have on site-based decision-making schools?

5. What is the relationship between the effectiveness of site councils as perceived by principals and the degree to which the principal exhibits a transformational leadership style?
6. What effect does the size of the district have on site councils?
7. What effect do human relations issues such as personal agendas or lack of compensation have on site councils?
8. What effect do variations in the mechanics of site-based decision-making have on its functioning?

Definitions

Site-based decision-making: Site-based decision-making shifts decision-making initiatives from school boards and central administrative offices to those closest to the delivery of services--teachers and principals at individual schools. Its purpose is to improve student performance by making site staff more independent and responsible for the results of their school's operation. Site councils bring about significant change in educational practice by empowering staff to create conditions in schools to facilitate improvements in teacher and/or student morale, level of learning, quality of instruction, and community involvement and support (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goodlad, 1984).

Site council: The composition and nature of the site council is dependent upon the individual school. In some schools, membership is comprised of representatives of the school's instructional staff. In other schools, paraprofessionals and ancillary staff (i.e., custodial, cafeteria workers) are also included. Parents, students, and community members may also be members of the site council. At least one administrator is included.

However, whether administrative representatives have veto power varies. Some schools limit decisions to those directly affecting students and curriculum. Other schools extend decision-making to the overall budget and hiring of staff (Strusinski, 1991).

Compensation: Intrinsic rewards include status, respect, personal satisfaction, praise, or recognition. Extrinsic rewards include merit pay or stipend, incremental increases on the pay scale, seminar/workshop sponsorship, leadership training, smaller class sizes, and travel allowances (Mentell, 1993).

Diversity: The differences that exist among members of the site council such as gender; ethnic group; amount of council experience; and role, i.e., parent, teacher, administrator, support staff, student, community member (Robertson, 1993).

Elementary school: Any public school with some combination of grade levels kindergarten through sixth grade.

Transformational leadership style: A transformational leadership style is based on collaboration (i.e., efforts that unite and empower individuals and organizations to accomplish collectively what could not be accomplished independently) and the development of a shared vision among various participants. This type of leader is able to facilitate the group process while helping to expand the community of decision-makers. These leaders are skilled in public relations, group process, conflict resolution, and preparing members to make decisions. They allow site council members to take risks (Matranga et al., 1993). They work to enable others, ensuring that members of the school community have many opportunities to engage in deliberations leading to decision-making (Johnson, 1993).

Assumptions

1. The effectiveness of site-based decision-making can be measured.
2. Responses to the interview questions will be valid.
3. The opinions held by the principal regarding the effectiveness of the site council and factors influencing it are an accurate and relatively objective picture of the school's site-based decision-making at the present time.

Delimitations

The population of this study was confined to three practicing elementary principals in Minnesota during the 1994-1995 school year and individuals present on site the day of the visit including teachers, parents, site council members, and district administration.

Limitations

The principals surveyed were limited to those three principals practicing in the State of Minnesota. Therefore, the results of this study may not necessarily apply to other site-based schools.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study were significant, providing baseline data in relation to the current effectiveness of site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. More specifically, the data will provide direction to individuals in leadership roles, allowing them to reflect on their leadership style and strengths; possible barriers to successful implementation; and initiatives that may be taken to enhance future success.

Because of the mandate to implement site-based decision-making statewide, elementary principals are in need of some form of baseline data which may reveal factors affecting its success locally. One step organizations can take to prevent the failure of new organizational systems is to understand the importance of mitigating factors prior to implementation. For site-based decision-making, these factors include an awareness and understanding of the personal and interpersonal barriers involved e.g., the fear of risks, the loss of power, resistance to change, and lack of skills or trust. There are institutional barriers such as lack of definition and clarity e.g., the limited understanding of the concept of site-based management or the vision, beliefs, and roles of the participants; inadequate financial resources; and lack of support from the school board, labor union, or state legislature (Mutchler, 1990). There are also positive steps that must be taken for success to occur, i.e., preplanning and training.

There is some question in current research as to the types of success achieved with site-based decision-making. Although community involvement and student morale have improved, increases in student achievement cannot be attributed to site-based decision-making (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Mauriel & Jenni, 1989). Student achievement is considered the most important by-product of site-based decision-making and one directly attributable to decentralized decision-making since decisions affecting the stakeholders are made at the site where service is provided (Garms, Huthrie, & Pierce, 1978; Marburger, 1985). An analysis of specific goals achieved within these schools through the use of site-based decision-making can provide a basis for further discussion about the value of a system that is both challenging to create and to maintain (Mutchler, 1990).

There are numerous types of decisions that a site council may be called upon to make. Analyzing the types of decisions made may clarify the level of autonomy elementary schools have achieved in Minnesota to date (David, 1989).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History and Purpose

The term site-based decision-making may be new, but the concept first became popular in the 1960s when it was termed decentralization or school-site budgeting. The purpose then was to give political power to local communities while decreasing state authority as well as increasing administrative efficiency (Wassler & Ortiz, 1986).

In the 1980s, the purpose began to change. It was hoped that site-based decision-making would bring about significant change in educational practice, empowering school staffs to create conditions in schools that would facilitate improvement, innovation, and continuous professional growth (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goodlad, 1984). It was hypothesized that staff empowerment would result in increased staff morale (Mantell, 1993).

Site-based decision-making is not the same thing as a school improvement plan. Although site-based decision-making hopes to bring about improvement, it is also much more. Authority is delegated to all schools within a district (David & Peterson, 1984). The size and roles of central office staff change and their goal changes to one of helping implement decisions made at the site level (Elmore, 1988). Control over the school budget and access to knowledge are given to the council.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History and Purpose

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Current literature suggests three forms of site-based decision-making are most common in public schools today. They are: community control where power is shifted from teachers and the school board to parents and community members currently not involved in school governance; administrative decentralization where building level teachers make up the majority on the site council and are empowered to make decisions formerly made by the central administration; and principal control which may or may not have a site council to assist in decision-making (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992).

Regardless of what form it takes, site-based decision-making should theoretically increase staff authority and responsibility resulting in a higher level of staff productivity and accountability (David, 1989). Members of the local community feel more ownership for the concerns and decisions made at the school site with the final result being a higher level of student learning (Garms et al., 1978; Marburger, 1985). Fullan (1982) found that systemic change requires this type of ownership. Local stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in defining change with the flexibility to adapt it to individual circumstances. Change does not result from externally imposed procedures.

Expected Outcomes

Purkey and Smith (1983), in their review of effective schools literature, suggested that school-site decision-making is one of the most important organizational variables connected with effective schools. The entire system of district and school organization is restructured with most roles in the district changing (David, Purkey, & White, 1988). For students, this change would be

reflected through their active engagement in meaningful learning with a focus on the ability to acquire and use knowledge effectively. Teachers would accept the role of collaborator, mentor, and coach, creating environments that promote meaningful learning. Administrators would create opportunities for site councils to make informed decisions so community members and parents become true partners in promoting meaningful learning. Restructured learning-centered schools reflect new patterns of active, engaged, and participatory interaction among administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members (Fennimore, 1990).

Areas of Decision-Making

In its purest form, site-based decision-making provides site councils with the opportunity to make decisions in the areas of budget, staffing, and curriculum (Clune & White, 1988; Garms et al., 1978). Second order changes go even further with decisions on school calendar, scheduling, criteria for pupil assignment and promotion, allocation and use of space, and the roles of staff (Cuban, 1988). These types of changes often involve obtaining a waiver from either the teachers' union, school district, and/or the state.

Site-based decision-making has been tested in Kentucky due to the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. This act was the result of the Kentucky Supreme Court's 1989 decision which found the State's public school system unconstitutional. The state of Kentucky had to create an entirely new system of public education. One component of that system was site-based decision-making. All schools within the state were given the authority to set policy on curriculum, staff time, student assignment, schedule, school space, instructional issues, discipline, and extracurricular activities

(David, 1994). The Kentucky Court of Appeals ruled that site councils have the "real authority" to run the schools, while school boards are limited to "oversight." School boards do not have the authority to approve council goals and plans (David, 1994).

Results of the third annual survey of U.S. school executives in 1989 showed that, of those schools having site-based decision-making, 91% made decisions about scheduling, 85% made purchasing decisions, 74% made budgeting decisions, and 62% made staffing decisions. Maintenance, curriculum, and textbooks were decided by slightly more than 50%, 37% decided hiring, 22% decided teacher evaluation, and fewer than 10% determined the school calendar, length of day, or starting salaries and raises (Heller, 1989). A comprehensive level of decision-making cannot exist if superintendents and school board members are unwilling to delegate important decisions to site councils, trusting them to make informed, quality decisions that will improve student learning. Because of differences in trust and willingness to share the power, there are wide variations in the number and type of decisions made by individual site councils.

Site Councils

Site councils are made up of persons representing community (parent and nonparent), staff (certified and non-certified), and administrators of each school. The principal and members of the initial site council establish by-laws and procedures for the operation of the site council. Site council representatives are elected by citizens, parents, staff, and administration (Jenni, 1989). The third annual survey of U.S. school executives conducted in 1989 showed that, of those schools using site-based decision-making, 99%

of the principals and 85% of the teachers were involved in the decision-making process. The superintendent was involved in 75% of the schools, and more than half included a school board member. Parents were involved in key decisions 40% of the time. Students and members of the community were involved in only one out of four schools (Heller, 1989).

Barriers to Success

For any program to be successful, it is important to be aware of barriers that may be experienced prior to implementation. Survey results in recent literature point clearly to a wide range of possible pitfalls that can lead to the demise of site-based decision-making efforts.

In 1986, 33 of the 116 public schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico, began a pilot school-based budgeting program. Before planning began for the second year of the program, participating schools were asked to share their experiences from the first 6 months of implementation. Sixteen of the schools were elementary. The main problem in implementing site-based budgeting was the time required to complete the process. Other concerns included an extremely limited amount of money and limited flexibility and acceptance of change. Other elementary respondents were concerned over a lack of training for principals and secretaries as well as their view that teachers were having to do the administrative duties as well as their own which cut into their valuable teaching time. There was also concern over the lack of pay for involvement. The limited benefits did not seem to justify the time required (Robinson, 1987).

The third annual survey of U.S. school executives conducted by The Executive Educator (Heller, Woodwarth, Jacobson, & Conway, 1989)

suggested additional barriers to site-based decision-making. The questionnaire was mailed to a stratified random sample of 4,800 school executives drawn from an administrator population of more than 110,000. The largest number of responses were received from administrators in school systems with enrollments of 1,000 to 4,999. Every state, with the exception of Hawaii, was represented in the final sample. The response rate to the survey was approximately 31%, or 1,509 responses. Elementary principals accounted for 27.4% of the responses. Elementary principals saw superintendents as the major barrier to site-based decision-making because superintendents believed they should retain authority over budgets, hiring, staffing, and maintenance. Superintendents were willing to turn over authority to schools on curriculum and textbooks.

Other factors mentioned in the 1989 survey were lack of teacher interest, tradition, apathy, lethargy, central office foot-dragging, fear of the unknown, and weak leadership at the building level. Labor contracts, including issues of seniority and tenure, can make the process even more difficult. The lack of time and resources were other common concerns. Respondents cited a lack of sufficient funds to implement change and too few individuals to do all the work in too short an amount of time. Finally, the needs of parents and community members for uniformity and standardization were additional obstacles to success (Heller et al., 1989). Many administrators suggested that the technical complexities of implementing school-based decision-making were monumental. All parties have to develop a level of understanding and achieve a measure of knowledge and skills to implement it effectively which has yet to be achieved. Staff members are also

barriers to implementing site-based decision-making; whereas the principals

hesitant to make decisions and then be held accountable for them. They simply do not want the responsibility (Woodwarth, 1989).

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory conducted a survey of educational practitioners in 1989 to identify the difficulties that confront schools and districts when initiating site-based decision-making. The eight major barriers derived from an analysis of the data were:

- Fear of taking risks
- Fear of losing power
- Resistance to changing roles and responsibilities
- Lack of trust
- Lack of definition and clarity
- Inadequate or inappropriate resources
- Lack of skills
- Lack of hierarchical support.

The fear of losing power was reported by staff and parents who had built a base of informal influence in the school or district. Teachers resisting change seemed to lack confidence in their ability to participate. Fearing personal accountability, they preferred to have administrators make the difficult decisions (Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1989). Boschee, Uhl, and Bonaiuto (1993) conducted a study to determine and compare what school board presidents, school district superintendents, and K-12 principals perceived as obstacles to site-based decision-making using the barriers identified by Mutchler and Duttweiler. Fifty-four South Dakota school districts with student enrollments of 500 or more participated in the survey. None of the districts had yet implemented site-based decision-making. School board presidents saw no barriers to implementing site-based decision-making, whereas the principals

perceived all of the barriers identified by Mutchler and Duttweiler to be of concern. Boschee et al. pointed out that state statutes place the responsibility for operation of local school systems in the hands of the local school board and its designee, the superintendent as chief executive officer. "The school superintendent is the key to initiating site-based management and shared decision-making. The superintendent moves from the role of controller to facilitator, delegator, supporter, allocator of resources, and thinker" (DiSalva, 1989, p. 3).

Arizona's State Legislature initiated the Arizona School Restructuring Pilot Project in 1990. The project included 11 elementary schools and 4 high schools. The project was to continue over a period of 4 years, ending in June, 1994. A formal written survey was completed by participants during September, 1993. Respondents included teachers, principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and governing board members. State level barriers were identified as the lack of state funding to support decentralization activities as well as restrictive state laws (certification, teacher dismissal, and mandates without funding). Local board and district office level barriers included excessive paperwork, cumbersome teacher dismissal procedures, and a reluctance to terminate ineffective teachers. There was also a lack of knowledge/education among school board members regarding educational issues and problem solving strategies. The requirement that all schools within a given district be uniform due to items in the district's negotiated teacher agreement was an additional obstacle. School level barriers included lack of time, lack of financial incentives for teachers, lack of knowledge/education among parents, lack of adequate discretionary funds, limited decision-making authority over budgetary items, and a limited

knowledge of federal/state laws and educational reform activities (Bierlein & Sheane, 1993).

Differences in the Level of Success

Site councils often appear to have varying levels of success in meeting the suggested outcomes of site-based decision-making. These differences may be attributed to a variety of factors. One of these is the size of the district. The Schools and Staffing Survey of 1987-88 gathered information regarding the level of decisions made in three areas: (a) establishing curriculum, (b) hiring new full-time teachers, and (c) setting discipline policy. Principals from 8,580 public schools across the country participated in the survey (Anderson, 1993).

Results of the survey indicated that in high population districts with a large centralized bureaucracy, 62% of the time central office staff had the most influence over establishing curriculum and hiring new full-time teachers. Their level of influence over discipline was lower at 40%. Only 5% of large city principals believed that control over these issues rested at their site with the principal and teachers. Central office staff have a much lower level of control in small cities and towns. Only 27% of the principals reported that their district had the most influence over establishing curriculum, 22% on hiring new full-time teachers, and 22% on setting discipline policy.

Nearly half felt that they and their teachers had the most influence over establishing curriculum and setting the discipline policy. More than half (53%) reported having the most influence over hiring new full-time teachers. The larger the city in which the school was located, the less control was reported by the school's principal (Anderson, 1993).

In 1989, The Executive Educator conducted a survey of administrators' opinions regarding site-based decision-making. There were 195 administrators from small rural districts with enrollments of less than 1,000, and 913 administrators from non-rural districts with enrollments greater than 1,000. The data from this survey and the resulting study (Heller et al., 1989) were reanalyzed to ascertain the difference district size makes on the overall success of site-based decision-making as well as the types of decisions made. Administrators in small rural districts with site-based decision-making reported having authority over schedule (91.7%), purchases (84.5%), texts (84.5%), curriculum (78.6%), staffing (72.6%), maintenance (66.7%), budgeting (63.1%), hiring (44%), evaluations (42.9%), school calendar (29.8%), length of day (26.2%), pay raises (22.6%), and starting salary (21.4%) (Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991).

In larger, non-rural districts, the percentage of autonomy for schedule selection and purchases was similar to that in rural districts. Budgeting occurred more often at the site level in larger districts (75.8%), but all other areas were significantly lower: curriculum (44.4%), texts (44.6%), length of day (4.0%), calendar (5.9%), starting salary (0.9%), pay raises (2.1%), maintenance (49.6%), and teacher evaluations (16.7%), (Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991).

Principals in rural settings see a closer alignment between their vision and the reality of site-based decision-making. Their satisfaction rating is higher since they place less value on parent participation and more value on the participation of the superintendent and school board in the site-based decision-making process. Since community members have greater access to the superintendent and school board, principals may believe that parents

already participate indirectly in decision-making (Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991).

The success of site-based decision-making is also linked to the amount of preplanning and training (both in process skills and educational issues) site council members receive. This training may include team building, developing problem solving strategies, and background knowledge regarding a wide range of educational issues.

School District 12 in Adams County, Colorado understood the need for preplanning. In 1985 they used the Institute for the Development of Educational Ideas School Improvement Process to complete a needs assessment, vision, implementation plan, and evaluation. In reviewing their mistakes following implementation, the lack of training for school personnel and on-site support for the principals were pinpointed as glaring omissions.

Suddenly teachers used to working in isolation were being asked to work collaboratively as members of teams to make essential management, curriculum, and staffing decisions. Suddenly, principals accustomed to making decisions alone were being required to share decisions. We had neglected training in the necessary underlying skills for shared decision-making. (Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989, p. 57)

The district now conducts workshops for teachers and administrators in facilitation, conflict resolution, communication skills, and participatory decision-making.

The Baltimore City Public Schools began a pilot restructuring project in 10 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high schools during 1992. After the first year, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, community members, and students were surveyed to ascertain their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Respondents were concerned about the lack of

training in the essential aspects of restructuring (Edirisooriya & Gunapala, 1993).

During the 1987-88 school year, public schools in Dade County, Florida, implemented school-based decision-making. A survey of principals provided insight as to the continued need for training. One third of the principals were satisfied with the level of training provided. The rest of the them felt training was needed in the areas of problem solving, budgeting, time management, and team building. Strusinski (1991) pointed out that these categories are not surprising since teacher education usually does not cover management or group skills. "By the very nature of the teacher's work setting these two areas of skills are not learned on the job. Traditionally, teachers do not take on management roles or work in groups to any great extent" (p. 2).

Kentucky's Educational Reform Act is the result of that State's 1989 Supreme Court ruling. The ruling found Kentucky's public school systems unconstitutional. Site-based decision-making has been a part of their effort to decentralize. It has been closely monitored in the hopes of providing guidance to other states considering the adoption of such a plan (David, 1994).

Survey results in Kentucky indicate that training has been provided to introduce council members to the concept of site-based decision-making and training in consensus building and setting agendas. Workshops are readily available on the technical aspects, but little is available on understanding the purpose of site-based decision-making and its role in achieving the ultimate goal of increased student achievement. David (1994) suggested that group process skills such as setting agendas, soliciting input from larger

constituencies, holding efficient meetings, delegating authority, and feeding back information to others are essential to ensure productive meetings that create decisions based on adequate input.

If councils do not have the skills to operate on behalf of an entire school community, their decisions will either go unheeded, raise tensions, or both. All teachers, principals, central office personnel, superintendents, and school board members as well as parents need to understand the purpose of councils and what it takes to support them. If there is not a shared understanding of the role of councils, they are unlikely to be a positive force in school transformation. (p. 709)

Membership diversity on site councils may also account for differences in overall success. Robertson and Kwong (1993) mailed surveys to all leadership council members of the 156 Los Angeles, California, United School District schools. Fifty-seven schools, with a total of 682 surveys, qualified for inclusion in the study. While gender and ethnic diversity had a minimal impact on council functioning, the amount of individual council experience had a negative impact on group process. Robertson and Kwong suggested that either experienced council members discount the value of those individuals with less experience or, in fact, relative inexperience does actually have a negative impact on council functioning. Councils with longer membership tenure may be utilizing more effective group process. Results also indicated that as the number of parents on the council increased, their level and quality of participation also increased. With increased representation, parents may feel less threatened and more willing to volunteer their opinions and services. Respondents also felt that as the composition of the council became more diverse, the decisions and process used to reach them improved. An additional weaker finding suggested that as the number of men or individuals of color increased, decision-making

effectiveness was somewhat reduced. Overall, however, council members tended to believe that council functioning was independent of either gender or ethnic composition while dependent on level of experience.

The leadership style of the principal is also an important factor in the effectiveness of site-based decision-making. Johnson and Ledbetter (1993) examined the role principals play as schools implement site-based decision-making. Over a 2 1/2 year period of time, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis at six unspecified schools, two of which were elementary sites. The researchers found that the role of the principal was crucial to the level of progress made toward implementing site-based decision-making. Site councils were most effective when principals worked actively to support them and the participation of all community members in the life of the school. They ensured that members of the school community had numerous opportunities to engage in deliberations leading to decision-making. Those principals who worked to provide many opportunities for people to share their knowledge and expertise acquired funds, bought meeting time, and arranged for training, were most successful in implementing site-based decision-making. Trust between site council members and the principal increased with these types of efforts.

Matranga, Horner, Hill, and Peltier (1993) surveyed the total population of principals (365) in Nevada to determine the current level of site-based decision-making implemented in the state along with the level of support from superintendents and school boards. The response rate was 43%. More than half of those responding were implementing site-based decision-making. The most common types of decisions made by site councils included discipline procedures, school objectives, staff development, and school budget

priorities. Fifty-six percent of the principals felt that school boards were in favor of site-based decision-making, and 70.8% of superintendents supported the concept. The researchers suggested that if a similar level of support exists in other regions of the country, it would seem then that administrator training programs need to understand that one of the most important skills of today's administrators is the ability to facilitate the group process while helping to expand the community of decision-makers.

The role of site administrator is clearly changing as are the expectations of staff, parents, and community relative to their involvement in substantive decisions. Courses in public relations, group process, conflict resolution, and communications are becoming more and more critical to the success of education administration graduates. (Matranga, 1993, p. 61-62)

One example of the radical change necessary in leadership style is provided by Holcomb (1993). A principal who had arranged for training, set regular meetings, and developed the site council agendas jointly with the co-chair (a teacher) still had difficulty persuading the site council to make decisions rather than looking to him when discussion was concluded. After discussing this dilemma with a consultant, it was decided that when a decision was imminent, the principal would be silent and look out the door. The team members spotted the change immediately. The principal responded, "I've told you that the days when I made all the decisions are out the door, so I thought I'd try to demonstrate that I really meant it." This example gently pushed the site council members toward accepting their responsibility for making decisions. Another strategy used by transformational leaders is internally asking the question, "Who else?" This strategy serves as a constant reminder to consider who else should be

involved, who else may be affected, who else has expertise, and the support of who else will be needed to ensure success.

The power of visual reminders of the changing role of the principal cannot be overstated. A wipe-off board titled "Decisions Pending--Input Requested" provides staff a forum for input on decisions. This modeling of new behaviors demonstrates sincerity and faith in the leadership ability of those who have always seen themselves as followers or receivers (Holcomb, 1993).

Additional factors that influence the effectiveness of site-based decision-making include superintendents who show their support for it by providing training, hiring and evaluation criteria, and incentives to develop strong site managers (David, 1989). They send clear signals to principals that they value and reward those who involve teachers in decision-making. They incorporate plans for reducing teachers' workloads, provide extra time for professional development, and reorganize schedules to free teachers to participate in decision-making. Financial incentives are provided to reflect the value attached to the new roles and responsibilities (Guthrie, 1986).

When schools are given only marginal authority and are asked to form site councils, develop annual plans, and prepare annual reports, teachers perceive these requests as yet another set of top-down demands (Corcoran, Walker, & White, 1988).

Effectiveness may vary due to human relations issues such as council members who bring personal agendas to council meetings. Site councils may also be frustrated when decisions they make are not implemented by the principal or teachers. This may occur when councils have not paid attention to gathering pertinent facts or communicating their reason for a particular

decision, which would have ensured that those expected to carry out the decision share a sense of ownership for it (David, 1994).

Site councils are also more effective when the entire staff is involved in the process (Mentell, 1993). If the majority of staff members do not participate, a vocal few often step in and push their personal agendas. Increased participation comes through the distribution of rewards for effort (Mentell, 1993; Strusinski, 1991). Intrinsic rewards include status, respect, personal satisfaction, and praise/recognition. Extrinsic rewards include merit pay or stipend, increases on the pay scale, seminar sponsorship, leadership training, smaller class sizes, and travel allowances. Increased participation also occurs when information flows freely to the site council and from the site council to all staff members. Information must also flow horizontally to promote discussion of current issues (Mentell, 1993).

Sample Selection

The sample for this study included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools selected from a list of schools that received a restructuring grant from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). The grant stipulated that each school would develop a formal site council which included parents. In order to receive the MDE grant, the school board was directed to allow total control by the site council over nine specific decision-making areas (Appendix B).

Chapter 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of various factors on site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. To study these factors, the opinions of elementary principals in a rural, suburban, and urban public school setting as well as site observations by the researcher and a review of pertinent documents were obtained. The fundamental goal of the study was to develop a baseline of information upon which further research might be conducted. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to conduct the study. The population and sample used in the study, pilot testing, instrumentation, procedures, and proposed analysis of the data are discussed.

Sample Selection

The sample for this study included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools selected from a list of schools that received a restructuring grant from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). The grant stipulated that each school would develop a formal site council which included parents. In order to receive the MDE grant, the school board was directed to allow total control by the site council over nine specific decision-making areas (Appendix B).

The purpose of the grant was to examine practices and organizational structures for the improvement of student achievement of educational outcomes through school site-based decision-making. Approved sites received levy authority for \$50.00 per pupil unit. Each approved site received a matching grant from the state of \$50.00 per pupil unit. Revenue from the levy and matching state aid were to be under the control of the school site-based decision-making team and could be used for any purpose determined by the team.

Principals of the three elementary schools that received the restructuring grant were sent a cover letter explaining the field study (Appendix A). These principals were contacted by phone the following week to discuss their willingness to participate in this study.

All districts in which the researcher had been employed were eliminated from the pool of possible sites. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) pointed out that it is unwise to conduct research in one's own backyard. Often the research role and a person's other roles collide. Researchers must remain emotionally detached from the subjects, and studying former colleagues makes this difficult to achieve. It also can present ethical and political dilemmas.

Lancy (1993) stated that a purposive sample when conducting qualitative research is extremely important--more so than creating one that is random. A purposive sample is one that will yield the maximum amount of information regarding the specific topic/issue one is investigating. With this in mind, those schools that have had a site council for the longest period of time would be given first priority to be included in the sample. Other factors in deciding which schools to select for the sample included: the school and

community's acceptance of the researcher, and the researcher's comfort working there. The final consideration would be distance. All things being equal, those schools closest to the metropolitan Minneapolis/St. Paul area which fulfill the requirements of proper size, length of time using site-based decision-making, acceptance of the researcher by the school community, and comfort for the researcher would be chosen first.

Interviewing Strategies

In qualitative studies such as this, information gathered through in-depth interviews is of great importance. The interviewer can influence the quality of data collected in this manner. Fowler (1993) suggested two characteristics interviewers who are good at gaining cooperation seem to have. First, they exhibit a kind of confident assertiveness, presenting the study as if there were no question that the respondent would want to cooperate. Second, they have the ability to engage people personally so that the interaction is focused on and tailored very individually to the respondent.

The length, quality, and thoughtfulness of respondent answers can also be affected by the behavior of the interviewer. Interviewers who rush through interviews encourage respondents to answer questions quickly. Interviewers who read questions slowly indicate to respondents their willingness to take the time to obtain thoughtful, accurate answers. When interviewers provide encouragement to respondents, the quality of their answers is also positively affected (Cannell, Oksenberg, & Converse, 1977; Marquis, Cannell, & Laurent, 1972).

There are six aspects of interviewer behavior that should be as standardized as possible to maximize the quality and depth of subject responses.

1. All respondents should have a common understanding of the purposes of the study.
2. Questions should be asked exactly the way they are written with no variation or wording changes.
3. When questions are not answered fully, follow-up questions (probes) should be done in non-directive ways; ways that do not push the respondent and increase the likelihood of any one answer over another (e.g., anything else, tell me more, how do you mean that).
4. Responses should be recorded in a standardized manner so that no interviewer-induced variation occurs.
5. Responses to open-ended questions are to be recorded verbatim.
6. The interviewer should behave in a professional rather than friendly way to help standardize the relationship across respondents. Research indicates that having a friendly interpersonal style may actually have a negative effect on accuracy (Fowler & Mangione, 1990).

Pilot Study

A pilot observation was conducted prior to the site visits at the three selected schools. The pilot test was administered at a suburban middle school northeast of the Twin Cities. It serves students in Grades 4 through 6.

The student population in the building is over 1,000. The student population of the entire district is 5,000. Site-based decision-making has been used at the pilot site since September of 1993.

The pilot was administered to assess the clarity, reasonableness, comfort level, and amount of time the in-depth interview, document collection, and participant observation would take to complete. Instrumentation and procedures were found to be clear and effective in eliciting the desired types of data.

Instrumentation

The cover letter (Appendix A) was constructed to introduce the field study to possible respondents and to explain how each respondent was selected. An interview instrument (Appendix C) was designed by the researcher to be used with the principals during the in-depth interview. Items on the instrument address the barriers and differences in success discussed earlier in the review of literature. A data collection worksheet (Appendix D) was completed by the researcher prior to the site visit using the site council's constitution and meeting minutes.

This worksheet included data relating to the mechanics of site-based decision-making. A decision-making matrix (Appendix E) was completed by the researcher using the site council's constitution and minutes. The accuracy of the matrix was then reviewed with the principal during the site interview. The matrix listed 25 areas in which the council may have decision-making authority and also whether the council had exercised that authority.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested that the use of multiple data collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data when

conducting qualitative research. This triangulation includes participant observation (including a written field log), in-depth interviews, and review of a document collection.

In addition to an in-depth interview with the principal, the researcher gathered the site council's constitution and minutes from site council meetings. These were analyzed to assess the type of decisions members have the authority to make and those they have made. One full day was spent at each site observing the school climate and discussing site-based decision-making with faculty, support staff, parent volunteers, and site council members. These observations were recorded in a field log. The three data gathering instruments allowed the researcher to accumulate information relating to a number of issues which affect site-based decision-making in some way.

Issues considered included the size of a district's student population. Population may affect the types of decisions made and the overall level of autonomy site councils have (Anderson, 1993). Generally, principals in rural settings are more satisfied with site-based decision-making than their non-rural counterparts (Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991). Gender and ethnic diversity seem to have little impact on council functioning (Robertson & Kwong, 1993). However, the amount of experience council members have does affect performance. In addition, as the number of parents on the council increases, their level and quality of participation increases. As the composition of the council becomes more diverse, the decisions and processes used to reach them improves (Robertson & Kwong, 1993).

In looking at the mechanics of site-based decision-making, current literature addresses numerous issues including term length, administrative

override of council decisions, types of decisions made, and compensation for participation on the site council. Limited experience of individual council members negatively impacts group process (Robertson & Kwong, 1993). Site autonomy varies widely. Initially councils made decisions regarding budget, staffing, and curriculum (Clune & White, 1988; Garms et al., 1978). Second order changes moved further with decisions on school calendar, scheduling, criteria for pupil assignment and promotion, allocation and use of space, and the roles of staff (Cuban, 1988). Elementary principals viewed superintendents as the key to the success of site-based decision-making since they tended to limit authority over these second order changes (Heller et al., 1989). David (1989) reported site-based decision-making was viewed as effective by elementary principals when the superintendent provided training, incentives, and additional time for administrators and staff to plan and restructure. Lack of compensation and an increased workload were additional concerns (Bierlein & Sheane, 1993; Heller et al., 1989; Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1989). While some states or individual districts put considerable authority in the hands of site councils (David, 1994), many others do not (Anderson, 1993; Heller et al., 1989; Jacobson & Woodwarth, 1991).

Human resource issues considered include preplanning, training, member agendas, and the principal's leadership style. Preplanning was viewed by the site councils surveyed as indispensable in building a solid base that provides a broad enough foundation to withstand the struggles that occur as councils move through progressive stages of development and growth (David, 1994; Edirisooriya & Gunapala, 1993; Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989). Current literature also suggests that principals who exhibit a transformational leadership style are more successful in implementing site-

based decision-making (David, 1994; Holcomb, 1993; Johnson & Ledbetter, 1993). The personal agendas of council members can negatively affect site councils (David, 1994; Mentell, 1993). These agendas shift the focus away from what is best for all students to an overly narrow one that is often self-centered.

Procedure

A copy of the interview questions was mailed to each principal 2 weeks in advance of the site visit. The site visit was conducted on a day school was in session and was mutually agreed upon by the researcher and principal. The principal was asked to notify the staff of the researcher's visit in advance. The data collection worksheet was completed prior to the site visit using the site council's constitution and minutes obtained from the site council secretary. The interview with the principal was conducted prior to observing the school climate and interviewing staff members. The researcher observed 15 minutes at each of these locations within the school: dining area, media center, playground, gym, three classrooms, hallway, and front office. Observations were recorded in the researcher's field log as they occurred. Any additional time was spent discussing site-based decision-making informally throughout the building with teachers, parents, volunteers, site council members, and any other stakeholders willing to share their opinions on site-based decision-making.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research methods were used to analyze and interpret the data. Eight questions guided the organization and summary of data. Analysis of the data are summarized by question across all three sites.

1. What effect did increased decision-making autonomy for site councils have on teacher and/or student morale?
2. What effect did an increase in community membership on the site council have on the community's support of the school?
3. What effect did the amount of planning prior to implementation have on the site council?
4. What effect did the amount of training for site council members in problem-solving strategies and educational issues have on the schools?
5. What is the relationship between the effectiveness of site councils as perceived by principals and the degree to which the principal exhibits a transformational leadership style?
6. What effect did the size of the district have on site councils?
7. What effect did human relations issues such as personal agendas or lack of compensation have on site councils ?
8. What effect did variations in the mechanics of site-based decision-making have on its functioning?

Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of various factors on site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. To identify these factors, the opinions of principals in a rural, suburban, and urban public school setting as well as site observations by the researcher and a review of pertinent documents were obtained. The fundamental goal of the study was to develop a baseline of information upon which further research could be conducted.

The study was designed to answer the following question: What factors influence site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools today. More specifically, the following questions were addressed through interviews, observations, and review of pertinent documents:

1. What effect does a site council's increased decision-making autonomy have on teacher and/or student morale?
2. What effect does increased community membership on the site council have on a community's support of the school?
3. What effect does the amount of planning prior to implementation have on the site council?

4. What effect does the amount of training site council members receive in problem solving strategies and educational issues have on site-based decision-making schools?
5. What is the relationship between the effectiveness of site councils as perceived by principals and the degree to which the principal exhibits a transformational leadership style?
6. What effect does the size of the school district have on site councils?
7. What effect do human relations issues such as personal agendas or lack of compensation have on site councils?
8. What effect do variations in the mechanics of site-based decision-making have on its functioning?

The sample for this study included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools selected from a list of schools that received a restructuring grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. The grant stipulated that each school would develop a formal site council which included parents. In order to receive the grant, the school board was directed to allow total control by the site council over nine specific decision-making areas. The purpose of the grant was to examine practices and organizational structures for the improvement of student achievement of educational outcomes through school site-based decision-making.

Principals of the three elementary schools that received the restructuring grant were sent a cover letter explaining the field study (Appendix A). These principals were contacted by phone to discuss their willingness to participate in the study. An interview instrument (Appendix C) was designed by the researcher to be used with the principals during the in-

depth interview. Items on the instrument addressed the barriers and differences in success discussed earlier in the review of literature. A site council structure worksheet (Appendix D) was completed by the researcher prior to the site visit using the site council's constitution and minutes. This worksheet included data relating to the mechanics of site-based decision-making. A site council decision-making matrix (Appendix E) was completed by the researcher using the site council's constitution and minutes. The accuracy of the matrix was reviewed with the principal during the site interview. The matrix listed 25 areas in which the council may have decision-making authority and also whether the council had exercised that authority.

In addition to an in-depth interview with the principal and review of the site council's constitution and minutes, one full day was spent at each site observing the school climate and discussing site-based decision-making with faculty, support staff, parent volunteers, and site council members. These observations were recorded in a field log.

These three data collection instruments allowed the researcher to accumulate the following research findings relating to site-based decision-making issues in Minnesota's elementary schools today.

Site A

The student enrollment in grades K-4 at rural Site A is less than 100 with the population of the community totaling 1,210. Site A is located approximately 50 miles southwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The current principal has held that position at the school for more than 6 but less than 10 years. She has a total of 6 to 10 years of experience as an administrator. During our formal interview, the principal shared that she suggested site-

based decision-making for the school. The school board has no policy on site-based decision-making. Based on the outcomes achieved through the implementation of site-based decision-making, if it were her decision alone, she would continue utilizing it.

The site council includes four teachers, one administrator, and one member of the non-certified staff. Members are elected and serve either a 2- or 3-year term. The council meets weekly throughout the fall and then monthly during the spring months. The principal may override a council decision if it is in the best interest of the students. The superintendent and/or school board may also override a council decision.

The principal rated the performance of the site council members as very good in all five areas including public relations, group process, conflict resolution, communication, and risk taking.

The principal believes that the significant amount of planning prior to implementation "absolutely made a difference" in the overall effectiveness of the site council. The credibility of their decisions was far higher.

The site council received considerable training in team building and dealing with group dynamics. This training has effectively prepared each member to chair a goal committee for the site.

Though council members receive no monetary compensation, they are able to attend a MEEP (Minnesota Effective Education Program) leadership conference each year. The site council functions effectively with this level of compensation, but morale and enthusiasm would increase even more if a wider variety of types of compensation were available.

The site administrator believes that on a five-point scale with five being excellent, very good progress (4) has been made on the following outcomes

due to the implementation of site-based decision-making: increased staff motivation, staff productivity, trust, communication, educational product, level of input from community, level of involvement of parents, student understanding of responsibility, student self-esteem, student performance, and better school discipline.

Table 1 compares the surveyed principals' perceptions of the progress made on outcomes due to the implementation of site-based decision-making.

Table 1

Three Principals' Perceptions of Progress Made Due to the Implementation of Site-based Decision Making

	Site A	Site B	Site C
1--Poor progress			
2--Fair progress			
3--Good progress			
4--Very good progress			
5--Excellent progress			
Increased Staff Motivation	4	4	2
Increased Staff Productivity	4	4	2
Increased Trust	4	5	2
Improved Communication	4	5	3
Improved Educational Product	4	3	2
Increased Level of Input From Community	4	2	4
Increased level of Involvement of Parents	4	4	4
Better School Discipline	4	4	3
Student Understanding of Responsibility	4	2	1
Improved Student Self-Esteem	4	3	1
Increased Student Performance	4	3	1

Increased decision-making autonomy has improved teacher and student morale. It has provided an opportunity for staff to be involved and discuss educational issues on a regular basis. They feel valued and believe their opinions and initiatives make a difference.

Staff members have been unwilling to participate on the site council if evening meetings are involved. Therefore, parents have not participated since they are working during school hours. A member of the site council is a liaison to the PTA and reports on the work of site council to parents on a regular basis. Parent input is gathered at the PTA meetings and used in the decision-making process. Parents have seemed comfortable with this level of input up to this point in time.

The principal believes that the size of the district and/or community has had little effect on the success of the site council. No concerns have surfaced with members of the site council attempting to advance their own agendas. She also suggested that it would be helpful to expand the size of the council to include a specialist, special education teacher, and one teacher from each grade level.

The site council has the authority to make decisions in the following areas: community relations, curriculum implementation, discipline policy, personnel screening and hiring, purchasing, school mission and goals, staff development planning and implementation, staffing, student life, and textbook selection. Recommendations may be made in the hiring of a principal. The site council has used their authority to make decisions in all areas listed. The Board has retained decision-making power in the areas of transportation, budget, curriculum framework and development, food services, maintenance

and construction, negotiations, and school calendar. The school does not have a structured set of bylaws or a decision-making matrix.

Site B

Site B is part of a western inner ring suburban school district. There were no truly urban schools that received the grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. This site does adjoin an urban district. The kindergarten through fifth-grade population of the school ranges between 501 and 700 in size. The principal who has been an administrator for 5 years or less has been at Site B for 1 year. The former principal, prior to her retirement, guided the staff through the initial stages of developing a site-based decision-making leadership model. The current principal believes strongly in this shared decision-making model. She commented that if it were her decision alone, she would choose to continue utilizing site-based decision-making.

The membership of the council consists of 11 elected members including the building principal, assistant principal, three parents, one non-certified staff member, three teachers representing each of the three wings of the building, one teacher representing the specialists, and one teacher at-large elected as chairperson.

Members serve a 2-year term with a maximum of two consecutive terms except for the principal and assistant principal who are standing members. Meetings are held twice a month. The principal may override a council decision, but that is very rare and only when it is necessary to set parameters based on law and/or safety.

The principal rated the performance of the site council members as very good in the areas of group process, conflict resolution, communication, and risk taking. She rated their performance as good in the area of public relations.

The site council was initially created out of the MEEP team. Restructuring of the building was considered a high priority by all staff and was precipitated by a school closing when district funding levels decreased. When one elementary school was closed in the district, its students were placed at Site B. Site B teachers delivered instruction in a more traditional manner than did the staff from the closing school that used an individualized multi-age approach. Parents of the children from the school that closed demanded that the entire program be transferred to Site B. This was done and, in essence, two separate programs ran parallel to each other within one school. Competition for materials and staff ensued. The achievement of students in each program was constantly being compared. The staff today agrees that it was an unhealthy learning environment. The development of a site council helped to finally merge the competing factions into one unified staff. The skills MEEP members had previously learned aided them in the development of council by-laws. In 1994-95, members focused on learning group process skills. In 1995-96, they refined them and became an efficient decision-making body. Members share new knowledge with their teams so when new members join, they are already up to speed. Council members receive no monetary compensation other than their training. A 2-day retreat was held at the beginning of the year at the principal's cabin to develop a plan for the year. This level of compensation does not seem to affect the site council in any way.

According to the principal, the progress made on outcomes due to the implementation of site-based decision-making has been uneven. Excellent progress has been made in the areas of increased trust and communication. Very good progress has been made in the areas of increased staff motivation and productivity, increased involvement of parents, and better school discipline. Good progress has been made in the areas of improved educational product, improved student self-esteem, and student performance. Fair progress has been made in the areas of increased level of input from the community and student understanding of their responsibilities (See Table 1).

When asked what effect the increased decision-making autonomy has had on teacher and student morale, the principal responded by saying, "a very positive one." Teachers now believe they have a say in decisions that are made and that their opinion counts. They see that change is possible. One teacher commented while being interviewed that "The council is getting closer to issues that directly impact students."

Members of the community have not as yet been asked to join the council. It is a goal of the council for next year. The principal does not feel that the district's large size has had any impact on the effectiveness of the council. If anything, the Board tends to micro manage less. The council has not experienced difficulties with members having personal agendas. Input groups or any of the six building committees are welcome to share their point of view with the council as part of the decision-making process. Facts, feelings, and personal realities are shared which often leads to a more balanced decision that meets the needs of all learners.

Decisions can and are made in all areas except food services, length of school day, salary schedule, teacher evaluation, and textbook selection. A detailed decision-making matrix is part of the Site B Bylaws.

Site C

The K-6 student population at Site C is between 701 and 900 in size. The current principal has been the administrator of the school since it opened 4 years ago. He has been an educational administrator between 16 and 20 years. The school is in a suburban area of new growth 30 miles northwest of the Twin Cities. Many families who have been transferred by their employers to the Twin Cities purchase homes in this school's attendance area. Student turnover is relatively high due to parent transfers and promotions. Site-based decision-making was suggested by the principal, teachers, and parents.

Site C's site council has no community members on it outside of the four parent members. In addition, there are four teachers (2 primary, 1 intermediate, and 1 specialist), and two non-voting administrators. Non-licensed staff and students had no representation on the site council at the time of the study. Members are elected to 2-year terms. Meetings are held monthly. The principal cannot override a council decision, but the superintendent and/or school board may do so.

If it were the principal's decision alone, he would encourage a different method of fostering parent input other than site-based decision-making. Prioritizing areas of concern for discussion during the meeting takes a great deal of time. In addition, a good portion of meeting time is used for the principal to provide enough background knowledge so informed decisions may be made. The principal feels the site council has stopped forward

movement. One or two council members can control the agenda. There was more creativity and program development prior to the development of the site council when the school was a MEEP site. That process seemed to be more effective and less time consuming. The principal contends it has eliminated his ability to lead and brought out the pettiness in people. If he had it to do over again, he would not apply for the grant.

The site council's performance has been very good in the area of public relations. Parents comment that they are more informed of decisions that are to be made and the information used during the decision-making process. Performance has been good in the area of communication. The council has performed at an average level in the areas of group process and conflict resolution. None of the members have shown the ability to be risk takers, and the principal rates their performance in this area as poor. The principal perceives the council really believing in their mission and that eventually they will begin to deal with issues directly affecting student achievement. Currently, members are afraid of conflict. Over time, trust must be developed before substantive issues can successfully be tackled.

Planning prior to the implementation of site-based decision-making helped council members develop consensus building strategies. Some of this was already in place since Site C was a MEEP site. Ongoing training has been very important to the council, and they speak highly of their consultant. They believe it is essential to keep group process skills at a conscious level. Council members are not compensated and it does not seem to have affected their attitude regarding their added responsibilities as members of the school's site council.

The principal's perception of the progress made on achieving outcomes through the site-based decision-making process was not overly positive. Student understanding of their responsibilities, improved student self-esteem and performance have not yet been discussed. Performance has been very good in increasing the level of input from community and involvement of parents. Good progress has been made in the areas of communication and better school discipline. Fair progress has been made in the areas of increased staff motivation and productivity, trust, and improved educational product (See Table 1).

The principal believes that both teachers and students had more autonomy before the site council formed. The increased community membership on the site council has greatly increased the community's support of the school though. The principal stated, "They're excited and it's the best outcome so far."

The site council has the authority to make decisions and has used its authority in the areas of budget development and allocation, community relations, curriculum framework, development, and implementation, and discipline policy. Areas the School Board retains control of include food services, hiring of the principal, length of the school day and school year, maintenance/construction, salary and contract negotiations, textbook selection, and transportation.

There have been no personal agendas pushed at council meetings. Fifty to 75% of the schools in the district are MEEP sites. Twenty-five percent have a site council or are in the process of forming one.

Data Analysis

Eight questions guided the organization and summary of data.

Analysis of the data are summarized by question across all three sites.

Question 1: What effect did increased decision-making autonomy for site councils have on teacher and/or student morale?

Based on teacher and administrator responses, it seems that the increase in decision-making autonomy at Site A has improved teacher and student morale. It has provided an opportunity for staff to be involved and discuss educational issues on a regular basis. They feel valued and believe their opinions and educational initiatives make a difference. There are no student representatives, but teacher morale has improved and that has been reflected in the way they relate to their students on a day-to-day basis. Teachers, regardless of their age, are energetic and enthused about doing their best for children. In every classroom observed, students were engaged in inquiry-type activities, working creatively and collaboratively together.

Results of the interview at Site B revealed that the principal believes the increased decision-making autonomy has had a very positive impact on teacher and student morale, "Teachers now believe they have a say in decisions that are made and that their opinions count. They see that change is possible." Teachers who are members of the site council reported that the biggest gain has been the opportunity to impact their own destiny. Non-certified council members stated, "I learned a lot and got more than I've given. It's a neat program, a lot more work, but we can make our own decisions."

The preschool teacher on the site council reported, "I've been on the council for 3 years and taught 9 years in this building. I can see progress now. The

process is really working, changing, improving. We've worked so hard -we're really a team."

While observing classroom instruction, students seemed focused and enthusiastic participants in the learning process. The conflicts and divisions that had existed within the school have been healed through the development of site-based decision-making. The trust level between educators has increased, which is reflected in the classroom with lowered frustration level. Teachers are working collaboratively together to create a highly effective educational program for all children. Overall, the staff and assistant principal see site-based decision-making as a burden where time is concerned, yet the staff empowerment is worth it.

It is questionable whether the certified staff at Site C believe they have more autonomy now in making decisions that affect the educational process. Interviews with the non-certified staff and parents lead this researcher to believe that these two groups of stakeholders truly do feel more empowered by the site-based decision-making process. They have learned how the educational system works and have been allowed to make meaningful decisions that affect children. The teachers, on the other hand, who as a group chose to teach at Site C when it opened 4 years ago, have not felt that level of empowerment. As a senior staff, they were more comfortable with the MEEP process where everyone participated on an equal basis. It may be noted that this same attitude was exhibited by the staff of the pilot site for this research. Senior teachers chose to transfer to this new school. When teachers with many years of experience all came together at the same time from numerous other schools within the district, it was extremely difficult for them to build a trust level that would allow them to delegate the decision-

making power to a few colleagues. Teachers at Site C do ask parents for ideas and suggestions now. This type of open discussion and sharing has given parents who are part of the council more confidence. Though staff support for site-based decision-making is less than whole-hearted, the enthusiasm and creative instruction exhibited in all of the classes that this researcher observed speaks of their master teacher status and generally positive outlook. Students were well-behaved and polite to all adults in the building and each other. Students were focused and enthusiastic participants in the learning process.

The principal at Site C believes that both teachers and students had more autonomy before the site council formed. Community membership on the site council has greatly increased their support of the school. He reports that, "They're excited and that's the best outcome so far."

Question 2: What effect did an increase in community membership on the site council have on the community's support of the school?

Members of the site council at Site A report that due to the daytime commitments of potential community members, parents and other members of the community have been unable to attend daytime meetings. The teachers have been unwilling to meet in the evening. The site council has shown no interest in researching parent needs such as daycare or transportation to increase community membership at daytime meetings. The lines of communication are open with information being shared at monthly PTA meetings. Again, parent attendance at these meetings is usually limited to those who have child care, a way of getting to the meetings, and feel comfortable attending meetings at the school. Members of the site council, including the principal, believe that very good progress has been made in

increasing the level of community input. Since information was shared and input sought from parents by the principal at PTA meetings prior to the initiation of site based decision-making, it is difficult for this researcher to perceive what change or improvement has occurred in this area other than the information is now shared by a teacher liaison rather than the principal. It could be that a wider and more substantive number of issues are being addressed.

The membership of Site B's council is certainly more diverse than that of Site A. It includes the principal and assistant principal, one non-certified staff member, three teachers, one specialist, one teacher at large, and three parents. The principal believes that only fair progress has been made in increasing the level of community input. Members of the community (other than parents) have not yet been asked to join the council. It is a goal of the council for next year. Parent members of the council are not interested in having other members of the community join them on the council. Parent participation in the Parent/Teacher/Student Organization (PTSO) activities is very high. PTSO officers report monthly to the site council, but the council does not currently report their progress at PTSO meetings.

Site C is in an area of new growth northwest of the Twin Cities. Many families who have been transferred by their employers to the Twin Cities purchase homes in this school's attendance area. Student turnover is relatively high due to parent transfers and promotions. These parents are drawn together, having experienced a wide variety of public education systems nationwide. Since the school district is so large, it was often difficult for parents new to the area to receive answers to their questions regarding their child's education. In response to this need, the principal believes the

increase in parent and community involvement is the most positive outcome from site-based decision-making since it began 2 years ago. One parent who is a council member was asked if she liked the site council concept. She replied,

Yes, it helps because in a big building parents aren't sure who to take their questions to. The site council provides a very clear process for communicating with the school district. Many families are here because of corporate transfers. They have many questions. I publish my phone number in the school's newsletter.

When asked if she receives many phone calls, the parent replied, "Yes, and often I act almost as the local welcome wagon. Parents want the name and number of a specific department or want to bounce an idea by me before they approach the principal with it." The parent interviewed also spoke highly of the training she received. "The site council has become a very close group-- friends really." Parents are making suggestions which teachers are beginning to accept. This parent believes that the trust level is beginning to improve due to the interactions between parents and teachers at the monthly site council meetings.

Question 3: What effect did the amount of planning prior to implementation have on the site council?

Results from the principal interview at Site A would suggest that the significant amount of planning prior to implementation absolutely made a difference. That planning included the principal's presentation to the school board on the school's proposal and a review of the MDE grant proposal. This presentation was followed by a discussion of what types of decisions could be made by the site council.

Ongoing training has been very important to the council at Site C. Members believe it is essential to keep group process skills at a conscious

The initial members of Site B's site council had previously been members of the school's MEEP team. Their MEEP training helped them to create the bylaws and decision-making matrix. The previous principal guided the staff through the planning phase prior to her retirement.

Planning at Site C prior to the implementation of site-based decision-making helped council members develop consensus building strategies. Some of this was already in place since Site C had previously been a MEEP school.

Question 4: What effect did the amount of training for site council members in problem solving strategies and educational issues have on the schools?

The site council at Site A received considerable training from a paid consultant in team building and dealing with group dynamics. Members of the council, including the principal, believe that the training effectively prepared members to chair a goal committee for the site.

The site council at Site B spent an entire year developing their group process skills. A portion of the Minnesota Department of Education grant was used to provide this training for the council. One of the parent members, a trainer at Honeywell, provided the training on how to organize tasks, people, and resources. The second year council members refined their group process skills and in their words, "became an efficient decision-making body." Members share new knowledge with their team so when new members join, they are already up to speed. This training has increased the level of trust and communication between members of the council.

Ongoing training has been very important to the council at Site C. Members believe it is essential to keep group process skills at a conscious

level. A large portion of the Minnesota Department of Education grant has been used to hire a consultant and receive training in group process skills.

One parent member commented,

We received excellent training that grant funds paid for. The consultant that was hired has been so helpful -really become a friend to all of us. We also visited several other sites to see their site councils in action. We learned how to run an effective meeting and how to communicate.

The principal spends a good deal of time at each council meeting providing background knowledge so council members will be able to make informed decisions. His perception of council effectiveness is less than positive.

Though communication with the community has increased, members are only performing at an average level in the areas of group process and conflict resolution. None of them seem to be risk takers. Those that were have been strongly berated by the rest of the staff and have left the council. The site council has, as yet, been unable to begin working on educational product, student responsibility, student self esteem, or student performance.

Question 5: What is the relationship between the effectiveness of site councils as perceived by principals and the degree to which the principal exhibits a transformational leadership style?

Earlier in this study, a transformational leadership style was defined as a leader's ability to facilitate the group process while helping to expand the community of decision-makers. Such a leader allows council members to take risks and provides members of the school community many opportunities to engage in deliberations leading to decision-making. The principal of Site A exhibits many of these characteristics specifically demonstrated in her weekly council meetings and delegation of committee leadership to members of the council. Teachers shared their belief with this researcher that it is because of

their principal's leadership style that site-based decision-making has been so successful.

Teachers and parents at Site B clearly stated that it was because of the principal's leadership style that site-based decision-making was so successful. Though the principal has the ability to override council decisions, she has done so only when the decision was out of alignment with state guidelines. Her transformational style allowed members to assume leadership roles they had previously not thought possible.

During the council meeting at Site C, the principal displayed a very positive attitude and modeled good listening and group process skills. He provided detailed information as needed. Although he became an administrator during a time when a hierarchical leadership style was more common, it is this researcher's perception that Site C's principal is, by nature, a transformational type of leader. Both the staff and administration seemed more comfortable using the MEEP process where power was equally shared and creativity was fostered. It seems that when new schools are opened today, they are often very large and that the most senior teachers choose to transfer to them. They commonly have the seniority to do that. Such a group of teachers, when brought together, not only have strong instructional skills, but also a firmly held set of beliefs. When 35-40 such teachers form a new organization such as Site C, it often creates a highly energized environment, but one that is short on trust and not easily persuaded to change. In this atmosphere, the leadership style of the principal is of less consequence. The principal voiced his frustrations regarding the lack of forward movement by saying,

There was more creativity and program development prior to the development of the site council when the school was a MEEP site. That process seemed to be more effective and less time consuming. I'm not able to lead and it has brought out the pettiness in people. If I had it to do over again I wouldn't apply for the grant.

Question 6: What effect did the size of the district have on site councils?

The principal believes that even though the town where Site A is located is a relatively small community, its size does not positively or negatively impact the success of site-based decision-making there.

The principal at Site B does not feel that the large size of the district or school has had any impact on the effectiveness of the council. If anything, the board tends to micro manage less because they are focused on district wide issues.

Site C's school district is also a very large one. A new superintendent has just been hired. The principal perceives central office leadership up to this point as being very top down and prescriptive. Fifty to 75% of the schools in the school district are MEEP sites. Twenty-five percent have a site council or are in the process of forming one. The District's leadership style certainly could also affect the ability of Site C's site council to make many meaningful decisions.

Question 7: What effect did human relations issues such as personal agendas or lack of compensation have on site councils?

Both the principal and council members at Site A stated that there have been no personal or single issue agendas presented since the council was formed. Council members receive no monetary compensation. They are able to attend a 3-day educational leadership conference each year. The site council functions effectively with this level of compensation, but both the

principal and teachers agree that morale and enthusiasm would increase even more if more types of compensation were available.

The council at Site B has not experienced difficulties with members having any personal agendas. Input groups or any of the six building level committees are welcome to share their point of view with the council as part of the decision-making process. Facts, feelings, and personal realities are shared which often lead to a more balanced decision that meets the needs of all stakeholders. Council members receive no monetary compensation other than their training. A 2-day retreat is held at the beginning of each year at the principal's cabin to develop a plan for the upcoming year. This level of compensation does not seem to affect the site council because they are able to participate in a highly meaningful decision-making process that affects their lives on a daily basis.

There have been no personal agendas at Site C, but one or two council members can control the agenda of a given meeting. The principal reports that council members are not compensated and it does not seem to have affected their attitude regarding their added responsibilities as members of the school's site council.

Question 8: What effect did variations in the mechanics of site-based decision-making have on its functioning?

At Site A, the length of term of 2 to 3 years seems to be well within the average range with members being elected by their colleagues. There are no student or community members. Both the principal and school board may override council decisions. Curricular decisions and annual goals have already been developed in areas directly affecting student life and achievement with a specific focus on multi-age grouping. The council has no

bylaws or decision-making matrix. This informal agreement with the board and flexible meeting schedule seem to reflect a high trust level between all stakeholders in this small, close-knit community.

At Site B, members are elected for a 2-year term and may serve two consecutive terms. Meetings are held twice a month. The principal or board may override council decisions. There are written bylaws and a decision-making matrix approved by the board. Grant funds have been allocated to develop a more well-rounded technology program for students.

The site council at Site C includes four parents, four teachers (two primary, one intermediate, one specialist), one non-voting secretary, and two non-voting administrators. Members are elected for a 2-year term. The principal cannot override a council decision, but the board or superintendent may do so. There are no community, student, or non-certified voting members at this time. Meetings are jointly facilitated on a rotating basis by one parent and one teacher. Meetings are held once a month. It is notable that Site C, the largest of the three schools in this study, holds the fewest meetings. It is also the only council that does not give veto power to its principal. The council has a board approved constitution and decision-making matrix. This is also the only council with a paid secretarial position.

2 What effect does increased community membership on the site council have on a community's support of the school?

3 What effect does the amount of planning prior to implementation have on the site council?

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of various factors on site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools. To identify these factors, the opinions of principals in a rural, suburban, and urban public school setting as well as site observations by the researcher, and a review of pertinent documents were obtained. The fundamental goal of the study was to develop a baseline of information upon which further research could be conducted.

The study was designed to answer the following question: What factors influence site-based decision-making in Minnesota's elementary schools today? More specifically, the following questions were addressed through interviews, observations, and review of pertinent documents:

1. What effect does a site council's increased decision-making autonomy have on teacher and/or student morale?
2. What effect does increased community membership on the site council have on a community's support of the school?
3. What effect does the amount of planning prior to implementation have on the site council?

4. What effect does the amount of training site council members receive in problem solving strategies and educational issues have on site-based decision-making schools?
5. What is the relationship between the effectiveness of site councils as perceived by principals and the degree to which the principal exhibits a transformational leadership style?
6. What effect does the size of the school district have on site councils?
7. What effect do human relations issues such as personal agendas or lack of compensation have on site councils?
8. What effect do variations in the mechanics of site-based decision-making have on its functioning?

The review of the literature presented the various forms site-based decision-making may take in public schools today. The expected outcomes and areas of decision-making were explored. A review of nationwide surveys of elementary principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of site-based decision-making were analyzed to ascertain barriers to its successful implementation.

The sample for this study included three elementary principals from rural, suburban, and urban Minnesota elementary schools selected from a list of schools that received a restructuring grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. The grant stipulated that each school would develop a formal site council which included parents. School boards were directed to allow total control by the site council of nine specific decision-making areas. The purpose of the grant was to examine practices and organizational structures

for the improvement of student achievement of educational outcomes through school site-based decision-making.

Conclusions

On the basis of the data analyzed in Chapter 4, it seems reasonable to draw the following conclusions: Two of the eight barriers discussed in Mutchler's 1989 study are clearly observable at the three sites included in this study. Both the level of trust and knowledge of group process skills either positively or negatively impacted the effectiveness of site-based decision-making at all three sites.

1. The level of trust at the rural school is so high that no formal constitution or decision-making matrix has been established with the board. The teachers, parents, and principal are all members of the same community, together attending church and other civic functions throughout the year. Meetings are informal and parents, rather than being part of the site council, ask only for an update at monthly PTO meetings. Teachers trust each other, allowing a few to represent them on the site council. The atmosphere at the school is positive with children engaged in creative learning activities a high percentage of the time. New strategies are being implemented and council members are supported and applauded by the rest of the staff.

At the urban school, it was the development of the site council that finally united two factions of the staff into one cohesive unit. Two staffs brought together into one building have managed to heal old wounds and develop an entirely new

unified instructional program. In addition, the board has placed its trust in Site B's council making only an annual visit to review the school's progress. The site-based decision-making model helped create an atmosphere that has allowed trust to develop over time.

At the suburban site, the site-based decision-making style of leadership has demoralized the staff and administration, decreasing the level of trust between teachers and also between the teachers and the administration. When the school first opened with a senior staff who asked to be transferred there, decisions were made as a total staff through the MEEP process. The principal facilitated that process along with the members of the MEEP committee. Although interest groups are encouraged to present information on issues directly affecting their programs, this rarely occurs, and though the meetings are open for anyone to attend, members of the staff rarely do. Teachers feel isolated from the process, do not trust the site council, and subsequently have spoken ill of council members, causing those members to ultimately resign. On the other hand, the council structure has increased the level of trust parents and non-certified staff have in the school. Their level of participation has greatly increased and they feel affirmed.

2. The second barrier to successfully implementing site-based decision-making at the three Minnesota elementary schools in this study is a lack of group process skills and understanding of public education. The necessary skills were already in place at

the rural school, especially since council members had previously received extensive MEEP training. The council, made up only of teachers, one administrator, and the school's secretary already had a substantive understanding of public education. Even with their skills and high level of understanding, they received additional training from an outside consultant to get off to a good start.

Both the urban and suburban council members spent two years developing their group process skills. The principals at both sites spent a great deal of time at meetings explaining the process and programs in public education today. The need to develop these skills has slowed down any direct impact council decisions might have on student learning.

3. The results of this study support the findings of previous research on the positive outcomes achieved through site-based decision-making (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Mauriel & Jenni, 1989). Community involvement increased and student morale improved especially at the urban site, but the level of student achievement did not increase. Teacher and student morale improved at the rural site while community involvement improved at the suburban site. This seems in large part due to either a lack of trust or need to initially focus on skill development for the council itself. It seems realistic to suggest that decisions affecting student achievement may not be made until the second or third year following the development of a constitution and a decision-making matrix.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Administrators and school boards should assess the existing level of trust between the various stakeholders in their educational community before initiating site-based decision-making. While site-based decision-making may reinforce a strong bond of trust or help to develop one, it can also increase feelings of mistrust and serve to demoralize a once thriving learning community. There are many successful models for school wide decision-making, including MEEP. It is important that a majority of the stakeholders be willing to make the change, perceiving the benefits that will be derived from doing so.
2. During the first 3 years of implementing site-based decision-making, the decision-making matrix may need to be gradually phased in. Otherwise, many issues and concerns directly relating to student life and academic performance may be put on hold until the council is ready, willing, and able to address them. The question of how issues directly affecting student performance will be addressed during this period of transition is an extremely serious consideration for administrators to take into account.
3. Related to the issue of training is the concern of how to transfer all of the knowledge gained by the initial council members to those who are subsequently elected. It seems some council members will consistently be more knowledgeable than others.

To streamline the decision-making process, the council must decide how a high level of expertise among the members will be maintained. This was an issue at all three sites, and one for which there seemed to be no easy answer.

4. When developing a site-based decision-making model, it would be well to keep in mind that one parent will probably not contribute as much to the process as they would if there were a number of parents. Also, the wider the blend of stakeholders represented, the greater opportunity there will be of reaching decisions that will positively impact student learning.

Robertson and Kwong (1993) reported in their study that as the number of parents on the council increased, their level of participation increased. Also, as the composition of the council became more diverse, their decisions and the process used to reach them improved. Perhaps, though, parents may seem to be comfortable in rural communities with receiving an update at the monthly PTO meeting, for the good of the students, based on best practices, parents and other members of the community should be voting members of the council. Three of Site B's 11 voting council members are parents. Site C has eight voting members, four of them parents. The rural and urban sites included non-certified staff on their councils while the suburban site did not. None of the sites included members from the business community.

5. Administrators considering this model would do well to consider additional ways to provide compensation for council members

so they are able to maintain their membership over an extended period of time. It was apparent at all three sites that being able to have a part in deciding educational policy is a strong motivator and reward in and of itself. The hours spent reading, discussing, and reaching consensus leave many members feeling burned out rather than energized.

6. When structuring the by-laws, it would be wise to consider scheduling meetings often enough for members to build a working relationship in a relatively short period of time. Meetings at the rural school are held weekly while at the urban school they are held biweekly. The suburban school, Site C, has the largest and most diverse population, yet meets only once a month. These meetings will also allow them adequate time to receive background information, discuss an issue, and then make an informed decision. Meetings held once a month leave everyone feeling rushed with precious little time to interact on a more personal level.
7. Every member of the council should have an equal vote with either the principal or board having the ability to veto decisions that are not in alignment with state rules or mandates. At both the rural and urban sites, the schools' principals have an equal vote on the council. They also may veto a decision if it is not in alignment with State statutes. At the suburban site, both administrators are expected to provide extensive background information but are not given a vote or veto power. It is also the only site where the level of trust is low and the administrator no

longer supports the site-based decision-making model. Perhaps it is not the process, but the total lack of empowerment he has that has led to this belief.

The administrators seemed more than willing to share their decision-making responsibilities. Their main frustration was the perceived need to have decisions made more rapidly than the council seemed able to do. As in any system, some of the stakeholders were more than willing to be risk takers, promote change, and share the power while a vocal minority would not.

The school boards in all three districts seemed more than willing to share their decision-making power with the site council, but provided little financial support. The site-based decision-making teams seemed acutely aware that their main objective was to increase student achievement but were universally frustrated by not yet being able to reach that level of decision-making.

8. Future research regarding the impact of site-based decision-making on student achievement should focus on several different issues discussed throughout this study: (a) whether a wider variety of stakeholders participating on a site council can impact student achievement; (b) the affect of the number and length of meetings held each month; (c) revisiting the three sites several years from now would allow a researcher to ascertain whether newly formed site councils simply need 3 to 5 years to reach their optimal effectiveness, or if over time, other factors

such as trust and geographical location have a lasting impact on a council's ability to impact student achievement.

The barriers summarized by Mutchler (1990) definitely do exist, but at least for the three sites in this study, the issues of trust and need for extensive training seemed to be the biggest barriers to the successful implementation of site-based decision-making if measured by increased student achievement.

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APPENDIXES

Cover Letter

Dear Elementary Principal:

My name is Barbara Keen. I am a graduate student at St. Cloud State University working on my specialist degree in elementary educational administration. The purpose of my qualitative field study is to learn what the current attitudes of elementary principals are toward site-based decision-making. Your answers would enable me to view how effectively and successfully site-based decision-making is currently being utilized in Minnesota. All answers are confidential and would be used only in combination with responses from other Minnesota elementary principals. Results would be available for each site prior to final submission to my committee.

You and your school were chosen as a possible research site based on data which indicates your school has had a site council for at least two years. Three schools will be chosen (one urban, one suburban, and one rural). Information gathered from your site would include a one hour in-depth interview with you as principal, document collection (minutes from site council meetings since the passage of its constitution), and participant observation. I would plan to spend one full day observing school climate, visiting with teachers during lunch time, and speaking informally with support staff, parent volunteers, and available site council members.

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter

This field study is meant only to gather information on principals' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of site-based decision-making. There is no intent to judge or evaluate, only understand the barriers and differences that affect the success of site-based decision-making. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and I respect your opinion as an expert in the field of elementary administration. I would appreciate your prompt mailing of the enclosed post card indicating your level of interest in this study. Within the next week I will be contacting sites that have expressed an interest in this study to discuss the possibility of including them in my research.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Keen, M. S.

Elaine L. Leach, Ph. D.
Field Study Supervisor

Dear Elementary Principal:

My name is Barbara Kearn. I am a graduate student at St. Cloud State University working on my specialist degree in elementary educational administration. The purpose of my qualitative field study is to learn what the current attitudes of elementary principals are toward site-based decision-making. Your answers would enable me to view how effectively and successfully site-based decision-making is currently being utilized in Minnesota. All answers are confidential and would be used only in combination with responses from other Minnesota elementary principals. Results would be available for each site prior to final submission to my committee.

You and your school were chosen as a possible research site based on data which indicates your school has had a site council for at least two years. Three schools will be chosen (one urban, one suburban, and one rural). Information gathered from your site would include a one hour in-depth interview with you as principal, document collection (minutes from site council meetings since the passage of its constitution), and participant observation. I would plan to spend one full day at your site observing school climate, visiting with teachers during lunch time, and speaking informally with support staff, parent volunteers, and available site council members.

This field study is meant only to gather information on principals' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of site-based decision-making. There is no intent to judge or evaluate, only understand the barriers and differences that affect the success of site-based decision-making. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and I respect your opinion as an expert in the field of elementary administration. I would appreciate your prompt mailing of the enclosed post card indicating your level of interest in this study. Within the next week I will be contacting sites that have expressed an interest in this study to discuss the possibility of including them in my research.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Kearn, M. S.

Elaine L. Leach, Ph. D.
Field Study Supervisor

SCHOOL SITE DECISION-MAKING AGREEMENT

MB 129.951

Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 126B, Section 129.951, is amended to read:

- A. A school board may enter into an agreement with a school site decision-making team concerning the governance, management, or control of any school in the district. Upon a written request from a proposed school site decision-making team, an initial school site decision-making team shall be appointed by the school board and may include the school principal, representatives of teachers in the school, representatives of other employees in the school, representatives of parents of pupils in the school, representatives of pupils in the school, representatives of other members in the community, or others determined appropriate by the board. The school site decision-making team shall include the school principal or other person having general control and supervision of the school.
- B. School site decision-making agreements must delegate powers and duties to the team and involve staff members, students as appropriate, and parents in decision-making.
- C. An agreement may include:
 1. a mechanism to implement faculty support systems for improvement in student achievement or educational outcomes;
 2. a decision-making structure that allows responses to locally instructional problems and control and assess the effectiveness of them;
 3. a mechanism to ensure principals, or other persons having general control and supervision of the school, to make decisions regarding non-financial and personnel matters are consistent with district policies and procedures;
 4. a commitment to implement parental involvement programs under section 126.09 and to provide for effective parental communication and feedback on this involvement at the site level;
 5. a provision that would allow the team to determine who is hired site-based and non-site-based positions;
 6. a provision that would allow teachers to choose the principal or other person having general control;
 7. direct contact with other social service providers;
 8. inservice training for site decision-making team members for financial management of school sites; and
 9. any other powers and duties determined appropriate by the board.

The school board of the district remains the legal employer under clauses (5) and (6).

APPENDIX B

Minnesota Site-Based Decision-Making Grant Criteria

**SCHOOL SITE DECISION-MAKING AGREEMENT
MS 123.951**

Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 1992, Section 123.951, is amended to read:

- A. A school board may enter into an agreement with a school site decision-making team concerning the governance, management, or control of any school in the district. Upon a written request from a proposed school site decision-making team, an initial school site decision-making team shall be appointed by the school board and may include the school principal, representatives of teachers in the school, representatives of other employees in the school, representatives of parents of pupils in the school, representatives of pupils in the school, representatives of other members in the community, or others determined appropriate by the board. The school site decision-making team shall include the school principal or other person having general control and supervision of the school.
- B. School site decision-making agreements must delegate powers and duties to site teams and involve staff members, students as appropriate, and parents in decision-making.
- C. An agreement may include:
 - 1. a mechanism to implement flexible support systems for improvement in student achievement of education outcomes;
 - 2. a decision-making structure that allows teachers to identify instructional problems and control and apply the resources needed to solve them;
 - 3. a mechanism to allow principals, or other persons having general control and supervision of the school, to make decisions regarding how financial and personnel resources are best allocated at the site and from whom goods or services are purchased;
 - 4. a mechanism to implement parental involvement programs under section 126.69 and to provide for effective parental communication and feedback on this involvement at the site level;
 - 5. a provision that would allow the team to determine who is hired into licensed and non licensed positions;
 - 6. a provision that would allow teachers to choose the principal or other person having general control;
 - 7. direct contact with other social service providers;
 - 8. inservice training for site decision-making team members for financial management of school sites; and
 - 9. any other powers and duties determined appropriate by the board.

The school board of the district remains the legal employer under clauses (5) and (6).

- D. Any powers or duties not delegated to the school site management team in the school site management agreement shall remain with the school board.
- E. Approved agreements shall be filed with the commissioner. If a school board denies a request to enter into a school site management agreement, it shall provide a copy of the request and the reasons for its denial to the commissioner.

APPENDIX C

Principal Interview Instrument

Principal Interview Instrument

1. What grades are in this school?
K ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___
2. What is the current child count?
less than 100 ___ 100-300 ___ 301-500 ___ 501-700 ___
701-900 ___ 901-1100 ___ 1101 or more ___
3. How many years have you been an elementary principal?
1-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 11-15 ___ 16-20 ___ 21 or more ___
4. How many years have you been principal at this school?
1-3 ___ 4-6 ___ 7-9 ___ 10-12 ___ 13-15 ___ more ___
5. Who suggested that site-based decision-making be considered at your school?
Teaching staff _____
Superintendent _____
Principal _____
Parents _____
Community _____
Other _____
6. If it were your decision alone, would you continue utilizing site-based decision-making in your school?
Yes ___ No ___
7. How would you rate your performance as a site council member in the following areas?

Public Relations	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Group Process	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Conflict Resolution	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Communication	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Allows site members to take risks	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
8. What effect has the amount of planning prior to implementation made on the overall effectiveness of the site council?

APPENDIX C

Principal Interview Instrument

Principal Interview Instrument

1. What grades are in this school?

K____ 1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6____

2. What is the current child count?

less than 100____ 100-300____ 301-500____ 501-700____

701-900____ 901-1100____ 1101 or more____

3. How many years have you been an elementary principal?

1-5____ 6-10____ 11-15____ 16-20____ 21 or more____

4. How many years have you been principal at this school?

1-3____ 4-6____ 7-9____ 12-12____ 13-15____ more____

5. Who suggested that site-based decision-making be considered at your school?

Teaching staff _____
 Superintendent _____
 Principal _____
 Parents _____
 Community _____
 Other _____

6. If it were your decision alone, would you continue utilizing site-based decision-making in your school?

Yes _____ No _____

7. How would you rate your performance as a site council member in the following areas?

Public Relations	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Group Process	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Conflict Resolution	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Communication	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor
Allows site members to take risks	excellent	very good	good	fair	poor

8. What effect has the amount of planning prior to implementation made on the overall effectiveness of the site council?

9. What effect has the amount of training for site council members in problem solving strategies and educational issues had on its overall effectiveness?

10. What effect has the size of the district had on your school's site council?

10. Are council members compensated in some way for their participation? If so, describe the type of compensation provided.

Yes _____ No _____ Type: _____

11. Does the type and/or amount of compensation affect the site council in any way?

12. In your opinion, has progress been made on the following outcomes due to the implementation of site-based decision-making?

1--Poor Progress

2--Fair Progress

3--Good Progress

4--Very Good Progress

5--Excellent Progress

Increased Staff Motivation	1	2	3	4	5
Increased Staff Productivity	1	2	3	4	5
Increased Trust	1	2	3	4	5
Improved Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Improved Educational Product	1	2	3	4	5
Increased Level of Input From Community	1	2	3	4	5
Increased Level of Involvement of Parents	1	2	3	4	5
Better School Discipline	1	2	3	4	5
Student Understanding of Responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
Improved Student Self-Esteem	1	2	3	4	5
Increased Student Performance	1	2	3	4	5

13. What effect has increased decision-making autonomy had on teacher and student morale?

14. What effect has increased community membership on the site council had on the community's support of the school?
15. What effect has the size of the district had on your school's site council?
16. Has your site council experienced difficulties with members having personal agendas?

Structure of Site Council Data Collection Worksheet

1. How many people from each group are on the site council?

community members (other than parents)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
parents	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
students	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
teachers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
administrators	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
non-certified staff	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. How are members chosen for the council?

_____ election _____ appointment _____ volunteer

3. The length of term for council members is

1 year _____ 2 years _____ more than 2 years _____

4. How often does the council meet?

_____ weekly _____ bi-monthly _____ monthly _____ other

5. Can the principal override a council decision?

Yes _____ No _____

6. Can the superintendent/school board override a council decision?

Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX D

Structure of Site Council Data Collection Worksheet

Structure of Site Council Data Collection Worksheet

1. How many people from each group are on the site council?

community members (other than parents)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
parents	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
students	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
teachers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
administrators	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
non-certified staff	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. How are members chosen for the council?
 _____ election _____ appointment _____ volunteer

3. The length of term for council members is:
 1 year _____ 2 years _____ more than 2 years _____

4. How often does the site council meet?
 _____ weekly _____ bi-monthly _____ monthly _____ other

5. Can the principal override a council decision?
 Yes _____ No _____

6. Can the superintendent/school board override a council decision?
 Yes _____ No _____

Site Council Decision Making Matrix

In what areas does the site council have a decision-making role?
In what areas have they made decisions?

(Mark either column A. or B.)

	A Have Authority To Make Decisions	B Has Authority To Make Decisions
Budget Development/Allocation	_____	OR _____
Budget Implementation	_____	OR _____
Community Relations	_____	OR _____
Curriculum Framework	_____	OR _____
Curriculum Development	_____	OR _____
Curriculum Implementation	_____	OR _____
Discipline Policy	_____	OR _____
Food Services	_____	OR _____
Hiring of Principal	_____	OR _____
Length of School Day	_____	OR _____
Maintenance/Construction	_____	OR _____
Regulating Contracts	_____	OR _____
Parental Screening	_____	OR _____
Personnel Hiring	_____	OR _____
Purchasing	_____	OR _____
Salary Schedule	_____	OR _____
School Calendar	_____	OR _____
School Mission and Goals	_____	OR _____
Staff Development Planning	_____	OR _____
Staff Development Implementation	_____	OR _____
Staffing	_____	OR _____
Teacher Evaluation	_____	OR _____
Technology Selection	_____	OR _____
Transportation	_____	OR _____
Student Life	_____	OR _____

APPENDIX E

Site Council Decision-Making Matrix

Site Council Decision Making Matrix

In what areas does the site council have a decision-making role?
In what areas have they made decisions?

(Mark either column A. or B.)

	A Have Authority To Make <u>Decisions</u>	OR	B Use Authority To Make <u>Decisions</u>
Budget Development/Allocation	_____	OR	_____
Budget Implementation	_____	OR	_____
Community Relations	_____	OR	_____
Curriculum Framework	_____	OR	_____
Curriculum Development	_____	OR	_____
Curriculum Implementation	_____	OR	_____
Discipline Policy	_____	OR	_____
Food Services	_____	OR	_____
Hiring of Principal	_____	OR	_____
Length of School Day	_____	OR	_____
Maintenance/Construction	_____	OR	_____
Negotiating Contracts	_____	OR	_____
Personnel Screening	_____	OR	_____
Personnel Hiring	_____	OR	_____
Purchasing	_____	OR	_____
Salary Schedule	_____	OR	_____
School Calendar	_____	OR	_____
School Mission and Goals	_____	OR	_____
Staff Development Planning	_____	OR	_____
Staff Development Implementation	_____	OR	_____
Staffing	_____	OR	_____
Teacher Evaluation	_____	OR	_____
Textbook Selection	_____	OR	_____
Transportation	_____	OR	_____
Student Life	_____	OR	_____