DISTRICT PLAN FOR
SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING AND
SHARED DECISION MAKING
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

PURPOSE OF THIS SHARED DECISION MAKING PLAN ............................................. 1

FOCUS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING ................................................................. 2

SCHOOL TEAM OVERVIEW ....................................................................................... 4

  RESPONSIBILITY .................................................................................................. 4
  ACCOUNTABILITY ................................................................................................. 7
  DISTRICT COMMITMENT ...................................................................................... 8

SCHOOL TEAM DECISION MAKING ...................................................................... 9

  PROCESS FOR ARRIVING AT DECISIONS ......................................................... 9
  LIMITATIONS ON DECISION MAKING ............................................................ 11
  CONFLICT RESOLUTION .................................................................................... 11
  PROCESS FOR MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................... 12

SCHOOL TEAM ORGANIZATION .......................................................................... 13

  COMPOSITION .................................................................................................. 14
  COMMUNICATIONS ........................................................................................... 14
  COMMITMENT OF TEAM MEMBERS ............................................................... 15
  REPLACEMENT OR REMOVAL OF TEAM MEMBERS ....................................... 16

SCHOOL TEAM OPERATION .................................................................................. 16

  MEETINGS .......................................................................................................... 16
  FACILITATION AND RECORD KEEPING .......................................................... 17

DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE ..................................................................... 17

  COMPOSITION .................................................................................................. 17
  RESPONSIBILITIES ............................................................................................ 18
INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Commissioner’s Regulation 100.11, the Northport-East Northport Board of Education created a District Planning Team for the purpose of recommending to the Board a District Plan for the implementation of Shared Decision Making (SDM) in each building in the District.

The Commissioner’s Regulation requires that each school district’s board of education develop and adopt by February 1, 1994, a plan for the “participation by parents and teachers with administrators and school board members” in school-based planning and Shared Decision Making. In order to meet the regulation and move forward with this key element of The New Compact for Learning, the District Planning Team hereby presents this plan to the Board for consideration.

PURPOSE OF THIS SHARED DECISION MAKING PLAN

Shared Decision Making is a process by which groups responsible for implementing decisions become involved in making those decisions. Within each school, those who are “closest to the action” in schools are provided with greater control over decisions about educational matters. They are thereby able to contribute to the broad purpose of Shared Decision Making, which is to improve schools for the students by establishing a framework of trust and collaboration.

SDM is an inclusionary process which involves principals, teachers, support staff, parents, students and community members in meaningful decisions about their schools. The process provides an opportunity for collaboration in decision making and for sharing responsibility in achieving improvement at the school level. Representatives of stakeholder groups collaborate in identifying educational issues, defining goals, seeking input, formulating and implementing decisions, and evaluating the success of those decisions as they relate to helping students reach higher standards of excellence.

The Northport-East Northport UFSD has had a long history of involving members of its various stakeholders in decision making. The District Planning Committee created this document for two reasons. First, it was charged with the responsibility of recommending to the Board a comprehensive plan for formally implementing SDM. The plan which follows represents the recommendation of the District Planning Team after weighing alternative design options and considering input from all stakeholder groups. Secondly, the recommended plan calls for a new approach to school improvement – one that is collective in format, collaborative in process, and consensus in decision making.

The District Planning Team also recognizes and affirms the need to conduct periodic evaluations of the implementation of this plan to modify and adjust the design to best meet the goals of the District.
FOCUS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING

Consistent with the Board charge to the District Planning Team, all elements of the proposed plan exist for the purpose of maximizing student performance and self-esteem and shall be consistent with all pertinent federal, state, and local laws, regulations, policies, and collective bargaining agreements, as well as the School District's philosophy, goals, and objectives.

Focus defines the directions which School Teams may take in their decision making. Operationally, the focus of SDM provides School Teams with decision criteria. When considering alternative decisions or actions, with all other factors being equal, the School Teams will select an alternative most likely to attain the stated objectives of the process.

The focus of the SDM process in the Northport-East Northport School District shall be the District's Exit Outcomes - defined as what a student will be capable of upon exiting a given level of education and Program Outcomes - defined as what a student will be capable of upon exiting a given program or course. District-wide initiatives and common core standards. Teams will assess existing programs and practices in terms of the extent to which they support the attainment of the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes. They should work to create improvements in existing programs and practices, which will better ensure the attainment of those outcomes.

Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes shall be derived in part from an examination of the District's Vision and Mission Statements, which are as follows:

VISION STATEMENT

In the changing global multi-culture of the 21st Century, the Northport-East Northport School District shall endeavor to provide students with those tools which will enable them to develop their abilities and interests as well as to function as literate, resourceful, self-sustaining, and informed participants of a democratic society.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our School District will take full advantage of the sociological, technical, and fiscal opportunities and challenges which will influence our schools tomorrow and in the future by:

- Providing our students with a solid educational foundation which will enable them to achieve personal mastery, and by supporting and encouraging them in their pursuits of excellence in additional academic, career, and civic opportunities

- Assuring that all District personnel fully and effectively lead, teach, guide, and support all students in attaining their maximum educational levels

- Encouraging the community to take an active and enthusiastic role in School District affairs, in order to provide full and positive support to students and staff, and to help
members of the community recognize that fiscal requirements are realistic, necessary and beneficial.

- Involving parents/care-givers as active participants in partnerships with the school for their children’s successful careers in education

These Vision and Mission Statements provide the broadest context for School Team activity. By creating improvements which help students attain Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes, the School Teams are also helping the District move toward the attainment of the goals outlined by these statements.

The SDM goals will be future-oriented. Rather than focusing on day-to-day operational problems which might exist, it will be the responsibility of the School Teams to consider the needs of students into the future. At the outset, the Teams will conduct a needs assessment using the indicators related to the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes, and develop objectives designed to address those issues which Team members deem to be significant.

**SCHOOL TEAM OVERVIEW**

**RESPONSIBILITY**

Each school will have a Team whose purpose is to foster a new and distinct sense of responsible decision making at the building level. It reflects the belief that the school is best served by gathering the input of those most responsible for its success (e.g., faculty, staff, parents, and students). One goal, then, is to foster mutual respect and trust among the school partners.

Beyond establishing the dynamics of a collective process, the school Team is intended to shape or guide school improvement activities in order to increase or enhance student performance.

The School Teams will be involved in creating improvements in existing programs and practices. The School Teams are not intended to be administrators, and should not be directly involved in day-to-day administrative matters. The Teams operate within the existing administrative structure of the District; they do not replace it.

On a regular basis, the School Teams will engage in the following activities:

- Analyze student achievement based on Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes (NYS Assessment), and school/community needs, to determine what programs might most benefit from a review

- Establish priorities based on this analysis

- Develop plans by directly affected stakeholder groups as possible response actions to selected priorities
• Select an action plan for working toward goals(s) and determining measurable outcomes sought/desired

• Develop a reasonable time frame for the chosen plan and support its implementation with appropriate resources

• Submit a report on the chosen plan to the Superintendent of Schools

• Evaluate the success of the plan according to predetermined assessment design

• Submit a report on this evaluation to the Superintendent of Schools

Some examples of the issues which might be part of the regular needs assessment are listed below:

**Student Performance Needs**

• Mastering Program Outcomes set by the District, which may include:
  o NYS Assessment
  o Pupil and program evaluation tests
  o NYS Regents exams
  o SAT/ACT results
  o IEP’s
  o NWEA Data

• Building student self-esteem

• Going beyond individual limitation

**School Community Needs**

• Integrating special education students
• School-home/home-school communications
• School plan/facilities
• PTA meetings/programs
• Back-to-school night
• Moving-up day
• School and community projects (environmental/safety, etc.)
• Parent volunteers
• Parent workshops on student engagement, homework strategies and learning reinforcement
ACCOUNTABILITY

School Teams will be accountable for promoting continual improvement toward attaining the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes. That is, Teams are accountable for making a good faith effort to develop and implement creative methods of improving a school’s programs, practices, and services to facilitate progress on the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes. The District recognizes that the Shared Decision Making process takes time, and that creating lasting, meaningful change requires both patience and an ongoing commitment to the process.

Teams are expected to address roughly two to three meaningful objectives annually, and to create and implement action plans designed to attain these objectives. However, it is recognized that the Teams are first of all accountable for making progress in promoting the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes, and above all else, the evaluation will examine how successful the Teams have been in promoting lasting change, not merely how many action plans they have implemented.

There is recognition that Teams, like individual decision-makers, sometimes fail. Some action plans will not achieve the expected results. The District recognizes that there is value in this, and embraces the concept of “productive failure.” When a Team’s action plan fails short, the Team is to analyze why and develop alternatives designed to correct the problem. If Shared Decision Making is to succeed, Teams must turn “failures” into successes and members of the school community must learn from these experiences. In this sense, Teams are accountable for their efforts to correct action plans and ultimately achieve their objectives.

The District Steering Committee shall conduct bi-annual evaluations of School Team progress, which shall include examination of Team action plans and an evaluation of Team process. While there is value in failure on an action plan, continual failure to attain objectives is a likely indicator of a more serious problem with the SDM process. If a Team continually fails on its action plans, or if a Team does not make a good-faith effort to correct action plans which fail to reach their objectives, the District Steering Committee is instructed to take action which may include:

- Providing a Team with additional training if necessary
- Providing technical assistance to a Team on issues which they are considering
- Disbanding the Team and forming it again with new members

The District Steering Committee, in determining a course of action, will consider first what support the District might provide a Team to help it get back on course, and only as a last resort disband the Team.
DISTRICT COMMITMENT

The District agrees to support the activity of the School Teams and makes a commitment to make the SDM process work. The District demonstrates this commitment in part by providing training, if necessary, to the School Teams and agrees to cover the costs associated with the training activities.

Team training may include:

- Training in Team management/meeting management
- Training in the use of data and in conducting a needs assessment
- Training in decision processes, including the use of the structured decision process and consensus decision making

Each year, the Superintendent of Schools shall report to the Board of Education significant of the SDM effort.

SCHOOL TEAM DECISION MAKING

PROCESS FOR ARRIVING AT DECISIONS

School Teams will use a structured decision making process which assures that all members have an equal voice in decisions and that all members have equal decision making power. Decisions shall be made by consensus of members present at Team meetings. Consensus means that each member can state:

- I can live with the decision
- I understand the decision; it is clean, concrete and specific
- I had an opportunity to be involved in the decision
- I will support the decision and do what I can to make it work

Because consensus is a whole new concept for many individuals, it must be understood that this process involves arriving at decisions through shared input and then reaching mutual agreement on the best course of action. Unlike deliberative processes which involve voting, consensus does not pit a majority against a minority, but rather it allows all participants to have an equal voice in making decisions. For this reason, decisions arrived at by consensus will be those which all stakeholders can comfortably support and agree to promote.

The goal of this process is to enable School Teams to help students make continual progress toward realizing the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes by developing creative methods of improving a school’s programs, practices, and services. The judgments of the individual School Teams in selecting which areas to concentrate on, and in creating, implementing, and evaluating thorough action plans to address their objectives, will be respected.
School Team decisions and actions which fall beyond the normal responsibility will be presented in the form of a recommendation to the Superintendent. (For example, the Team might seek approval for a decision which requires the expenditure of funds not otherwise budgeted to the building.) The Team may expect timely consideration of its recommendations, as well as feedback concerning the disposition of the recommendation. A process for approval of recommendations appears at the end of this Plan.

**LIMITATIONS ON DECISION MAKING**

The decisions and recommendations of School Teams may have far-reaching effects, but Teams also have the same limitations as individual decision makers in the District. In order to coordinate Team activities and ensure consistency with existing structures:

- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot supersede provisions of an existing collective bargaining agreement or bypass the grievance process available under and existing agreement.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot violate federal, state, or District mandates.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams should be consistent with current research and understanding of best practice.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams cannot commit another department, unit, or school to some action without their prior knowledge and involvement.
- Decisions and actions of the School Teams should demonstrate respect for academic freedom of individuals in the school community.

These guidelines are not meant to restrict Teams. Teams are encouraged to be innovative and to consider primarily what they feel will work best for their own school’s students.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Generally, conflicts on School Teams deal with the inability of the Team to reach consensus. If a Team determines that it cannot achieve a consensus on a decision, they will use the following process to resolve the decision:

- They will table the decision and schedule a time to return to it. In the intervening period, members may collect any information which might assist the Team in resolving the conflict, including that information gained by discussing the matter with stakeholder
groups. A subcommittee may be formed to consider alternative ways to resolve the conflict.

- If the Team controls the timelines on the decision and consensus still cannot be reached, the Team will go on to another issue

- If a decision must be made by a certain date and the Team cannot achieve a consensus on the matter, the person or persons who would otherwise have made the decision if the Team did not exist will make the decision, with the understanding that the decision maker(s) will receive and consider input from anyone on the Team who chooses to provide such input.

**PROCESS FOR MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

Decisions or expenditures which exceed the School Team’s authority or which affect other schools or other areas of District activity can only be formulated into recommendations to be presented to the Superintendent. The following guidelines apply to the development and submission of recommendations by the School Teams:

- The School Team should prepare materials and documentation to support the recommendation. The materials should clearly state:
  - The issue
  - The recommendation
  - How the recommendation addresses the issue
  - How and why the recommendation was selected
  - Who will be affected by the recommendation

- Where appropriate, the materials should include an action plan for implementing the recommendation which provides a schedule, a list of resources required to implement the recommendation, and a plan for evaluating the impact of the recommendation.

Recommendations are to be submitted to the Superintendent. The School Teams should understand that approval may or may not be granted. The School Teams should understand that the Superintendent may have questions about the recommendations any proposed amendments to them. The School Teams should be prepared to answer the Superintendent’s questions, provide additional information if requested, and confer with the Superintendent about proposed amendments to the recommendations.

The following guidelines apply to the Superintendent’s consideration of the School Team’s recommendations:

- The Superintendent will carefully review and give full and open consideration to any recommendations
• The Superintendent will respond to the School Team’s recommendations within 15 school days

• In situations where the Superintendent does not approve the recommendation, the Superintendent will respond to the School Team’s recommendation in writing, and upon request, in person, providing a clear explanation for the refusal and including the criteria used in the making the decision

• The Superintendent agrees not to modify recommendations without involving the School Team

The recommendation process is meant to establish a dialogue. In situations where the Superintendent cannot approve a recommendation, the School Team will have the right to develop a response which addresses the concerns raised by the Superintendent, and have that response treated as a new recommendation.

SCHOOL TEAM ORGANIZATION

COMPOSITION

The challenge involved in coming up with the appropriate Team composition involves balancing competing demands: the Teams need to be inclusive enough to be representative of the school community, while being small enough to be productive decision makers. These competing demands require consideration of the focus or purpose of the Teams, the mix of the various stakeholder groups, and the size of the Teams.

Because School Teams may tackle a wide variety of issues, and because a goal of the Shared Decision Making process is to involve as many members of the school community as possible, the most practical way to organize the School Teams is to create relatively small core teams who have the capacity to involve others on an as-needed basis. This design provides a high degree of flexibility, depending on the issue.

Thus, the School Teams will be relatively small and shall include:

• The building principal
• 2 teachers selected in a manner determined by the union
• 2 representatives of support staff elected by each building’s support staff
• 2 parents selected in a manner determined by the building PTA membership
• In the high school, 2 students selected in a manner determined by the student government
• In each middle school, 2 students shall be participating, non-decision making members of the Team for the first year. The decision making role, but not the participation, of the student representatives will be reviewed at the beginning of the second year by the School Team.
It is recognized that individual schools differ; therefore, they may desire to have a different configuration at their discretion. The decision making authority shall be vested in the School Team, and the Team may, on an annual basis, review its membership structure. The School Team is encouraged to create ad hoc groups for the purpose of benefiting from the expertise which may exist outside the Team.

The terms of office of all members of the core teams will be two years. To create staggered terms, initially one person from each stakeholder group (with the exception of the building principal) will serve a one year term. Thereafter, all terms will be two years. There will be no limit on the number of terms on individual may serve.

COMMUNICATIONS

Teams cannot succeed if they isolate themselves. There needs to be open communication among Team members, and the Team needs to communicate openly with members of the various stakeholder groups that are affected by their decisions. The idea of small, core teams promote flexibility and help ensure that the School Teams can be productive in their decision making, but this smaller group also needs to draw others into the Shared Decision Making process if it is to perform its work effectively.

Team members also have the responsibility of keeping members of their stakeholder groups informed concerning Team decisions and activities. Teams are encouraged to develop regular mechanisms to communicate with members of the school community. These may include, but are not limited to, distributing minutes or summaries from Team meetings, sending periodic memos or newsletters to stakeholder groups and making short oral presentations at the regular meetings of stakeholder groups.

COMMITMENT OF TEAM MEMBERS

Members of the School Teams enjoy certain rights and agree to certain responsibilities. Team members participate in charting a course for the school to enter into the future by developing practices and procedures and defining how the members of the school community may wish to pursue the Exit Outcomes and Program Outcomes. In short, they are change agents whose goal is to help make certain that students have the greatest likelihood to succeed and prosper in the future.

For Shared Decision Making to succeed in creating meaningful, lasting changes in programs and practices, each Team member must agree to make a good faith effort to commit to the following:

- Attendance at all Team meetings

- Responsible participation in Team decision making, including:
Expressing concerns clearly and early in the decision process
- REALLY listening to others
- Being willing to say “no” as a part of consensus decision making and then explaining your concerns about the decision
- Being willing to compromise and agree to a decision you can “live with”
- Communication with members of the various stakeholder groups outside of Team meetings to ensure that the entire school community is aware of and involved in the improvement process.

Being a member of a School Team involves risk-taking; Teams must take chances to create and sustain improvements. The Shared Decision Making process is designed to allow members to participate in setting a direction, creating, and implementing change. Each Team member shared responsibility and accountability for Team decisions.

REPLACEMENT OR REMOVAL OF TEAM MEMBERS

If a member of the Team retires prior to the end of his/her term, that member’s stakeholder group shall replace him/her and the replacement shall serve to the end of the term. (The replacement is eligible to volunteer for additional terms thereafter.)

If a member is not present for three consecutive Team meetings, the chairperson shall contact the person individually, requesting an explanation of the absences and the member’s intentions about remaining on the Team. If the member expresses a desire to remain on the Team but continues to be absent, the chairperson shall contact the appropriate stakeholder group and ask that a replacement be selected to fill this position.

SCHOOL TEAM OPERATION

MEETINGS

The final schedule for Team meetings shall be determined by the members of the School Teams. It is highly recommended that meetings be held at least monthly, with additional meetings to be held as determined by the Team. Meetings shall be held outside of the normal school day. The Team shall designate a meeting room within the school, or make other arrangements for meeting space, and notify Team members of the location of each meeting in a timely fashion.

FACILITATION AND RECORD KEEPING

The teams will select a Chairperson or Team Leader whose role shall include facilitation of agendas as prepared by the Team for each meeting, and facilitation of Team meetings. The Chairperson has neither greater decision making power nor greater accountability than other
Team members. Minutes will be prepared for each meeting and distributed to members prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting. Responsibility for record keeping shall be shared by Team members on a rotating basis, unless any Team member chooses to volunteer to fulfill this function on a permanent basis.

DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEE

COMPOSITION

A District Steering Committee may include administrator(s), parent(s), teacher(s) and a Board of Education liaison. The District Steering Committee composition will change as required.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The District Steering Committee will meet bi-annually to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of this plan and the progress of the School Teams, and to monitor Team accountability. The District Steering Committee will also be available on an as-needed basis to provide support to the School Teams.