

Systematic Curriculum Decisions

A step-by-step decision-making process keeps everyone informed of what's happening and who's responsible.

For as long as anyone could remember our budget had been developed according to a written plan. From date of initiation through date of final approval, the progress of a request for money was known, or at least knowable. Anyone in the system could trace a request along a predetermined path to learn what had happened to an idea, who had made it happen, and why. Though not everyone agreed with every decision, the "public" nature of the process gave each participant the opportunity to learn the system and to use it to his or her school's or department's advantage.

But for some reason, decisions affecting the instructional program were handled differently. The decision-making path for matters relating to curriculum, for example, were not systematic or well known; and it was sometimes difficult to reconstruct exactly how certain decisions had been made, or by whom.

Then, about four years ago, all that changed.

The superintendent established a written procedure for curriculum change and textbook adoption. It was developed with input from everyone who had a role in planning, implementing, and monitoring the instructional program: teachers, supervisors, principals, central office staff, and school board members.

The procedures call for each department supervisor to prepare an annual assessment of his or her department's program of instruction. The principal objectives of the program, its strengths and weaknesses, and proposed changes for the following academic year are submitted in writing to the director of

Joseph E. Haviland is Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Rose Tree Media School District, Media, Pennsylvania.

curriculum. To the dismay of some, but to the relief of many, these assessments are limited to two typewritten pages.

Copies of assessments are bundled together and distributed to each principal, assistant principal, department supervisor, director of curriculum, superintendent, and school board member. Weeks later, this group (school board excepted) assembles for discussion. Department supervisors summarize their assessments, and field questions and suggestions from the group. The agenda includes opportunities for airing ideas that might improve the district's instructional program.

Following this meeting, the director of curriculum submits to the superintendent a proposal—based on the earlier discussion and assessments—detailing instructional goals for the district for the following academic year. The superintendent considers this proposal when actually establishing the district's goals. Once established, the instructional goals are assigned to appropriate department supervisors and principals for action.

From date of initiation through date of final approval, proposals progress along a predetermined path according to

a predetermined schedule. They are submitted in writing at three critical points—when processed by the department supervisor, by the director of curriculum, and by the superintendent. Anyone in the system can trace an idea to learn what happened to it, who made it happen, and why.

Doubtless, there are some who might say that such a system is neither necessary nor desirable. Doubtless, too, there are other systems for ensuring open access to decision making. I offer this procedure only because it has served us well for several years. Perhaps it will benefit someone else. □

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