

# One District Learns About Restructuring

The tenets of outcome-based education have provided the Winona, Minnesota, schools the clear purpose needed to drive their restructuring efforts.

We hear one of education's newest buzzwords, *restructuring*, and questions abound. What exactly is it? Why should we do it? Are we doing it? Maybe we don't even know . . .

Restructuring became tangible for us in Winona, Minnesota, when we began to consider meeting the two cardinal tenets of Outcome-Based Education (OBE): *all students can succeed and schools control the conditions of success* (Spady 1988). Since then, we've come to understand why our innovative efforts in site-based management and state-of-the-art projects and our use of a vision statement—all the right pieces—were not jelling.

## Doing the Right Stuff, But Missing the Point

By most standards, our typical mid-western district of 4,650 students and 278 teachers was doing much of the right stuff. The following descriptions of our previous efforts illustrate our approach to change prior to focusing on the OBE tenets.

*Site-based management.* Winona was an early adopter of site-based management (SBM), having instituted the concept by a faculty vote, with strong super-

intendent support, in the spring of 1984. We also developed a decision-making matrix, which detailed the consultative, advisory, and decision-making roles of various groups (e.g., the school board, principals, site councils) and their decision arenas (e.g., K-12 curriculum, grading policies, hiring).

Over time, SBM has evolved from staff members' considering the day-

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to-day management tasks (i.e., choosing carpeting for the classrooms and controlling noise in the lunchroom) to making decisions about their needs and plans for professional development. Among this year's building themes are: (1) serving at-risk students, (2) writing across the curriculum, (3) grouping by alternative approaches, and (4) developing social skills. (For more details about our efforts, see Lindquist and Mauriel [1989]).

*State-of-the-art projects.* Over the same time frame, Winona was involved in a range of projects and grants. For example, our teachers have participated in Madeline Hunter-type training, and our curriculum efforts have a contemporary focus (i.e., our technology integration plan is recognized throughout the state of Minnesota). In addition, we have received grants to pursue the following concepts: teachers as active learners and action researchers, teaching to overcome students' science misconceptions, improvements in math problem solving, and reducing dependence on Chapter 1 and special education programs by improving primary level reading outcomes. (In the latter regard, Winona met Slavin and Madden's [February 1989] rigorous stan-

dards by producing effect sizes of +1.3 for lower quartile students [Sambas and Schenkat 1987].)

**Vision.** As we were attentive to the literature on excellence and on change (i.e., Peters 1987, Kanter 1984, Fullan 1982), we realized our need for a stated district vision. Consequently, in the summer of 1988, the following vision was shaped by a small group of administrators and teachers and shared with the faculty (for their input) on the opening inservice day and again through our staff newsletter:

ISD 861 is a network of 12 unique learning communities tied together by a commitment to high expectations and success for *all* learners, where administrators, staff, students, and community members are *empowered* to work toward school excellence through planned change and reflective problem solving.

The vision seemed to conceptually unify our efforts, but in reality, it didn't change the status quo because there was little follow-up. In retrospect, we see how our cutting-edge efforts missed the point. Our insight was the result of the following scrutiny.

### Some Significant Rethinking

Our charge from the school board to study the implications of implementing OBE—Minnesota is rapidly moving in this direction (Houston 1989)—has stimulated us to determine how many pieces fit together: belief systems, common practices, the role of the school site and of the district. If we are to make *real* the OBE tenets in our district, we must restructure many dimensions of our operation. In fact, the

process of involving many stakeholders in charting our OBE involvement has made the elusive concept of restructuring concrete for us.

Figure 1 represents our "big picture" analysis of the existing factors influencing our district's educational performance. As we pondered all the buttons to be pushed in bringing about the OBE tenets, we articulated four necessary clusters of activity:

- communicating the vision/beliefs of OBE both internally and externally within the district,
- developing successful pilots of OBE implementation,
- empowering staff to modify traditions and regulations,
- building the capacity of school sites to control the conditions of success.

Fig. 1. Restructuring So That "All Students Can Succeed" and "Schools Control the Conditions of Success"

	Current State	Desired State
<b>Beliefs</b>		
<i>Of educators:</i>		
● about learning	The normal curve is reality. Learning is a passive process for staff and students.	All students can succeed. Staff and students need to be active meaning-makers.
● about change	If you resist change, it usually goes away. Change is something that happens to us.	Change is inevitable. We control conditions and are active problem solvers.
● about publics we serve	"The family" is troubled. We are suspicious of what business is up to.	Parents are doing the best they can. Our interests are linked to business interests, and we're using the best of management principles.
<i>Of business/industry</i>	If you can't, you teach. Why not run the school like a business?	Teaching is a complex, highly skilled job.
<i>Of parents/citizens</i>	The old ways of schools were good enough for us.	Schools need to go beyond the 3 R's.
<b>Practices</b>		
<i>From tradition and regulation</i>	The school calendar is based on the needs of an agricultural society. The curriculum is driven by commercial materials/texts. The use of Carnegie units, seat time, grading, and ranking prepare students for the transition to college.	All traditions are subject to modifications if schools and districts can show better ways of doing things.
<i>District and/or school site</i>	Master contract at district level specifies reward structure/time use. Assessment is poorly aligned with the curriculum. The traditional grading system is just fine. The culture of the district and the schools is unexamined.	Master contract allows for flexibility in rewards, time, and staff organization at the school level. The curriculum is aligned with assessment of contemporary outcomes. Grading and recording fit the OBE model. Careful attention is paid to developing a culture to support desired outcomes.

### Communicating the Vision

In thinking through how to implement outcome-based education, our planning committee (composed of teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, and university faculty) asserted that the range of innovation in the district seemed piecemeal and nonintegrated: the staff and the community did not see the overall picture. Therefore, we have taken the following actions.

1. We arranged for William Spady, who helped develop the key concepts and frameworks of OBE, to address the faculty on opening inservice day.

2. The superintendent has held follow-up meetings with each secondary academic department and every elementary school faculty to engage in dialogue about the ideas and practice underlying OBE.

3. We have established a continual communications network in which our vision, progress reports, and milestones are shared via internal and external media (district newsletters, local newspapers, and radio) and are studying the possibility of developing a district information specialist position to assist in communications surrounding OBE.

4. The planning committee suggested monthly meetings for all district leaders/committee chairs to focus on the vision and its implementation.

5. The staff development committee is coordinating the linking of interested district staff with their counterparts involved in OBE throughout the upper Midwest.

6. As to externally sharing the vision, this year we will be working with our local chapter of the American Society of Quality Control (ASQC) to clear up conflicting beliefs on our part and that of the business community about each other (see fig. 1, "Current State" of beliefs of educators about publics we serve and beliefs of business/industry about education). We hope these efforts will promote mutual understanding and support in an era of necessary restructuring for both businesses and schools. (We chose ASQC to work with because our study has shown close parallels between their efforts [Viadero 1989] and the type of thinking that underlies our restructuring efforts).

### Developing Successful Pilots

In our district, teachers express a healthy skepticism about the validity of the tenet *all students can succeed*. We hope to erode these doubts by developing pilot efforts carefully documented by action research. By disseminating the findings through our communication network, we expect to create more receptivity to this tenet. Following are examples of our beginning efforts in mathematics and language arts.

During the summer of 1989, teacher volunteers developed a middle school mastery model for teaching mathematics. Through careful use of pretesting, testing, and retesting data, a committed group of faculty is taking a clinical look at the dimensions to attend to in teaching so that *all students can succeed*.

In the reading area, teachers will develop assessments, restructure the school day, and use database decision making. To offset a common fear about OBE that it will reduce learning to easily measured outcomes, our plan supports the trial of outcomes and assessments based on new constructivist definitions of reading (Valencia et al. 1989), which go beyond the current subskill, multiple-choice approach to reading assessment. We are also aware that new forms of assessment will be more labor intensive. Teachers are studying ways to restructure the school day to better understand how our students think and learn. To gain facility in working with a database, three elementary school level site-based councils will be using reading fluency data (measured in words per minute) to guide their instructional decisions for lower quartile students. Pilots such as these clearly involve teachers in *controlling conditions of success*.

### Empowering Staff

The impetus to think so boldly about restructuring has come partly from the encouragement of the Minnesota Department of Education. The department has essentially been saying, "We're more interested in the outcomes of education than in rigidly controlling the inputs" (seat time, certification requirements, etc.). In effect, they suggest, "Make us an offer about how you'll assure student learning and why you need waivers on our regulations." We plan to make some offers.

In addition to studying issues such as the extra time needed for better assessments, we have identified other topics for investigation, including:

- grading, reporting, class rank (including transition to higher education);
- incompatibility of compensatory programs with a prevention model;
- use of the mainframe computer as a tool to aid OBE;
- seat time vs. "testing out" of courses (implications for staffing);
- how to balance face-to-face teaching time requirements with time for teachers to be decision makers.

We have delegated these issues to appropriate study committees with timelines set for policy recommendations. For instance, if we believe our OBE model can significantly reduce the need for children to be placed in classes for the mildly handicapped (Schenkat 1988, 1989), then what planning and assurances do we need to develop to gain more flexible use of our state and federal handicapped education aids? Activities such as these will start to reshape the structure of education as conveyed in the "Desired State" column of Figure 1.

### Building the Capacity of Schools to Control the Conditions of Success

As our analysis in Figure 1 shows, many factors run counter to "schools' controlling the conditions of success." Our activities in the above three areas are all directed at bringing a higher degree of control to the school site. Clearly, school sites need to feel their own power; to have clearly aligned high-quality outcomes and assessment; and to have freedom from many cumbersome and often unexamined traditions, rules, and regulations. If we want restructuring to be understood and to happen, staff members need time to think and some clues as to what is fair game to consider when contemplating change.

Since four of our administrators participated in the Minnesota Administrators' Training Program (based on the work of Snyder 1988), we have come to value a final aspect of *schools' controlling the conditions of success*: principals and staff leaders need the

skills and orientations to work in problem-solving units. This program is designed around training in work group organization, staff performance planning, resource development, quality control, and assessing achievement/productivity.

The program's power comes not from what it does for the individual teacher but rather from the synergy created when a staff as a whole collaborates to change unfavorable conditions in their work setting. Over the next two years, our principals and staff leaders will participate in this training. In retrospect, we needed this training at the onset of SBM.

### A Clear Purpose

We can't underscore enough the importance of *having a clear purpose to drive restructuring*. Doing the right stuff without a well-defined purpose was how we missed the point; now, meeting the tenets of OBE has given us a *purpose* to restructure. As we've begun to deal with a complex puzzle, not just tinker with school improve-

ment, we've come to see restructuring as the purposeful and systematic altering of a range of beliefs, conditions, practices, and traditions to attain a specific end—for us, meeting the OBE tenets: *all students can succeed* and *schools control the conditions of success* □

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