

ODDM:

A Workable Model for Total School Improvement

New York's Johnson City Central School District found a way to coordinate decisions so that new policies could be incorporated without nullifying or conflicting with those already in place.

The result: more thoughtful policies, based on research and consensus rather than the expediencies of the moment.

From birth we are faced with a succession of developmental tasks as we learn to coordinate our different body systems. Hand-eye coordination, focusing our eyes, walking, and riding a bicycle all involve fairly simple physical skills, but learning to integrate those skills into a coordinated whole is a major learning accomplishment.

Similarly, many of the serious problems facing organizations are those of coordination. While individual people may be doing their jobs as they understand them, all too often their efforts, for one reason or another, are not aligned. Designed to coordinate and align all aspects of the life of the school in pursuit of its desired outcomes, the Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model (ODDM),¹ is the creation of Albert Marmar, superintendent of the Johnson City, New York, Central School District. ODDM is the only total school curriculum improvement model validated by

the National Diffusion Network, and its success has been established by a number of research reports and articles on the Johnson City School District.²

Schools in 17 states, ranging from District 1 in New York City to small rural districts in Texas and Vermont,

have received training in ODDM. The Utah State Education Department has produced a videotape about the model and the experiences of districts in that state which are using it.³

Misalignment in Schools

As the following real-life cases demonstrate, lack of coordination or misalignment in schools can be subtle but quite damaging. People can get so caught up in their own roles that they fail to anticipate how their decisions will fall out and whether they will make sense compared to the goals of the school. At one middle school, for example, the faculty and administration's plans for their new facility placed the highest priority on a building that would promote team teaching. Later, the school board decided to make a one-time saving of several thousand dollars by concentrating all the science and home economics classrooms and their necessary plumbing

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in one end of the building, thus making team teaching problematical for as long as the building is used.

In another school system, a high school librarian decided that the only people who could come to the library during homeroom period were students who had overdue books or who had lost books. Consequently, the outstanding students who had classes every period of the day lost their only time to use the library. This policy worked to the convenience of the librarian and those who abused the library, but it worked against the school's efforts to help its highest achieving students.

In each of these cases, decision makers took actions that were reasonable—except that they conflicted with what the school was trying to do.

Misalignment can also occur when educators interpret a call to adopt one program as a requirement that they abandon another in which they have already made an investment. All too often, such decisions are made on the basis of who has the power to impose his or her will on others, rather than by a careful analysis of whether either or both of the programs actually hold promise for contributing to the school's purposes. Without a broad

and inclusive framework for assessing the impact of choices at all decision points, educators have little hope of successfully coordinating the many activities of schooling.

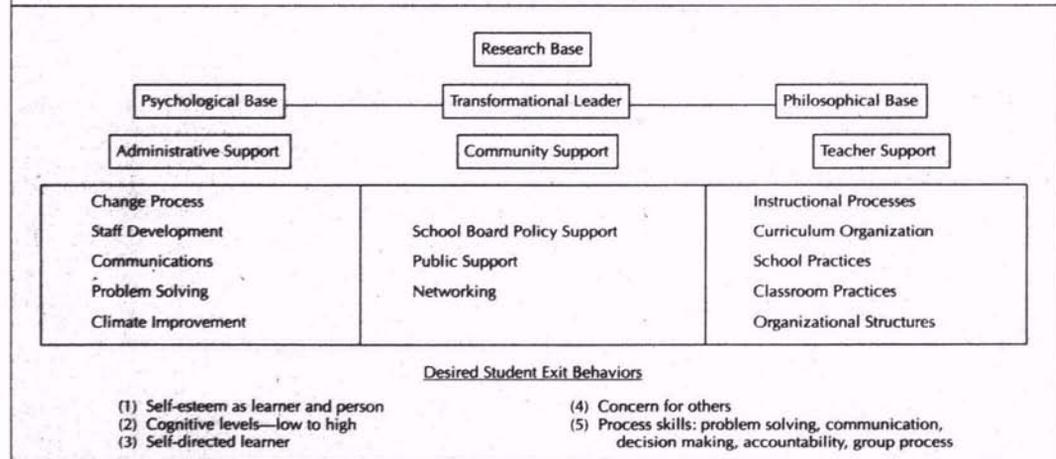
Realignment with ODDM

In contrast, ODDM provides a comprehensive and clear way to evaluate whether policies, practices, and proposals are aligned with the district's goals. It combines what we know about good teaching, learning, and administration into a single model that can be used in the quest for outstanding student achievement. For example, the task of creating a policy on homework illustrates the fundamental difference between decision making under ODDM and more fragmented practices. In a non-ODDM school, when parents complained about too much homework or weekend homework, the principal had to go to individual teachers to get their side of the story. Even then, there were almost no criteria for deciding whether the teacher's assignments were reasonable or not. This situation also created friction among teachers with differing views on the subject. In order to help put the administrator in a more comfortable position when facing an irate

parent and to ease tension between teachers, it became necessary to construct a clear policy that all teachers would abide by. Whether or not the policy was wise became secondary to the need to alleviate friction among the staff and between the principal and parents.

Questions concerning the amount of homework a child should have and when it should be assigned are valid. But with ODDM other questions arise, based on the district's system of shared beliefs and on relevant research: What is the function of homework? Does homework promote student achievement when it requires the independent learning of new material, or is homework more effective when it requires successful practice of what the child has already mastered?⁴ The school using the ODDM model decided, after reviewing the available research, that homework would be more effective if the child practiced the already mastered material. Is the purpose of homework to add more grades to the gradebook or to monitor the child's learning and the extent to which he or she is accepting responsibility for that learning? The ODDM school decided that its purpose should be to monitor the child's learning and

Fig. 1. Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model
Mission: All Students Will Learn Well



Created in 1987 by Albert Mamary, Johnson City Central School District.

his or her sense of responsibility for that learning. The use of the ODDM model helped the school keep sight of these considerations instead of dropping them in the press of events.

As seen in Figure 1, the district's system of shared beliefs is ODDM's philosophical base—arrived at through discussion, deliberation, and participation by all members of the professional staff. This is the base upon which decisions are made. All can contribute to the process of consensus, but every effort is made to see that these opinions rest on the research base built from examination of the professional literature. Together, these lead to a mission statement for the district and desired exit behaviors for the district.

ODDM is participatory in every sense of the term; it cannot be mandated. It is incompatible with top-down management. However, it does require transformational leadership by a person or persons with a compelling vision of what can and ought to be, who can inspire action, secure resources, and remove obstacles. If aligned organizational change is to be achieved, administrative leaders must have a deep commitment to help the staff develop individually and collectively into a cadre of competent professionals who can work successfully to achieve the school's mission, in other words, to transform the professional sphere of influence in their districts.

Under ODDM, policies and actions are evaluated by the district's specifically stated desired student outcomes. Whenever a problem is identified, the first question is "What policy would reinforce our efforts to achieve the school's desired outcomes?" In the case of Johnson City, these are defined by a public mission statement—"All students will learn well"—and by the five desired exit behaviors shown in Figure 1.

While nothing within the ODDM model requires that a district select this mission or desire these exit behaviors, most schools that adopt ODDM wind up with these or similar goal statements. The important thing is that the faculty and administration collectively examine their own beliefs to produce such a set of goal statements, which will then guide decisions in all

other aspects of the life of the school. They must also agree to make professional decisions on the basis of appropriate research literature and relevant theory.

As seen in Figure 1, ODDM decision making falls into three main categories: administrative support, community support, and teacher support. Each area requires careful planning and consideration so that all three groups are aligned and mutually supportive.

Administrative Support

The administrative support aspect of the program includes five elements:

1. A *process for change* is needed which assumes that people *will* change, takes into consideration how people and organizations change, and which supports change. This process should recognize that people change at different rates and that it is not necessary for everyone to change in the same way or at the same rate. For example, some Johnson City teachers work on reading in the content areas while others work on Talents Unlimited or cooperative learning groups. The assumption is that everyone will eventually become proficient in all programs but not necessarily in the same order or at the same time.

2. The *staff development model* should provide for continual renewal, recognizing the stages of development that people and organizations go through in the process of change. Thus a staff member might be a resource person helping others learn one innovation but a neophyte in another aspect of the program.

3. A *communications network* should permit the easy flow of information and ideas in all directions so that everyone knows what is going on and so that people can contribute their expertise regardless of their positions.

4. A *problem-solving procedure* must make sure that problems are quickly identified and resolved in a way that is most helpful to students and teachers.

5. *Climate monitoring policies* should function to improve climate and so help teachers and administrators maximize their efforts to achieve organizational goals. In Johnson City they are given risk-free opportunities

to try out new programs. Training and curriculum development usually take place during the school day, and when that is not possible, staff members are paid for their extra time.

Community Support

The community support aspect of the program delineates the school board's responsibilities for helping the district achieve its goals. This includes establishing clear policies that are consistent with the mission. For instance, the Johnson City board formally adopted a policy that decisions must, whenever possible, be based on the best available research. The board of education should also develop a plan for securing community support for their efforts and endeavor to network with other districts so that it can draw upon the resources of others working in outcomes-based education.

Teacher Support

The third aspect of the program—teacher support—includes five areas that directly affect instruction.

1. The *instructional process* must be one that the entire staff agrees on. The basic instructional process must be consistent with district goals and beliefs, so that teachers and administrators can use it in planning, teaching, and evaluation. It is not enough to adopt effective teaching practices; rather, one must adopt effective teaching practices congruent with district objectives. Johnson City's detailed, group-based mastery learning model is based on research demonstrating that cooperation is superior to competition in promoting student learning and that students learn by different means and at different rates.⁵

2. *Organization of the curriculum* should be consistent with the instructional process and should support district goals. For example, if students are to become self-directed learners who function at both higher and lower cognitive levels, then the curriculum should provide for them to investigate significant topics that are not part of typical classroom instruction. This means, further, that *all* students need to be taught to do such independent investigations.

3. *School practices* should be agreed upon by teachers and administrators.

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