



Consultation and Decision Making

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Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Consultation and Decision Making

Decision making should be inclusive, transparent, informed, democratic, collaborative and in the best interests of the children. All decisions must have a focus on five core elements:

1. Alignment with Site Improvement Plan (SIP)
2. Benefits to the students
3. Impact on staff, students and community
4. Reflection of school values and vision
5. Role in ongoing improvement

Purpose of decisions

Decisions are necessary to

- Provide conformance to legislation, regulations and policy
- Provide consistency and fairness
- Conserve resources
- Target resources
- Make a choice between alternative and conflicting actions or proposals
- Manage risk

Areas and responsibilities for decision making

The levels of involvement or responsibility for tasks that different groups or individuals undertake may vary dependent on the area. Levels of involvement in decision making comes under 3 categories:

1. Informed – given the information that the event/ process is to take place prior to the event
2. Involved – advice will be sought from the group, some discussion or consultation may occur
3. Decide – will be a key participant in the decision or have final responsibility for the decision.

Information affecting decisions

Decisions should be based on sound information and data. Such data and information could arise from:

- An analysis of student learning outcomes
- An analysis of child / student or family participation
- Information arising from consultation with students, staff, parents or the wider community
- An analysis of information from staff performance management activities
- Annual reports
- Research information from literature and other sites
- Comparative eg like school information
- Advice from sections of the department
- Crown Law advice

There are occasions when it is better not to put a proposal through the decision making process. This includes:

- When it is advisable to maintain flexibility of approach and professional autonomy, particularly where the teaching / learning process is concerned and a variety of approaches are being encouraged
- When a proposal may be counter to the agreed values and SIP
- When it can be shown it is unlawful or counter to departmental or local policy

Consultation

Consultation gathers information (eg personal circumstance and how people will be affected and opinion) about the proposal.

Stakeholders affected by the proposal will be given the opportunity to be consulted.

The areas which will involve consultation and the method of consultation will be clear in the decision making process, or at least how and who will decide this.

Information gathered in any survey will be taken into account in the decision making process, without implying that the information itself or the results of the survey will be the decision.

Impact of a decision

In any decision the consequences of implementing the proposal (or not) will be evaluated in terms of

- The duty of care to children / students
- Exposure to short or long term risk
- The short and long term availability of financial, physical or human resources
- The Occupational Health Welfare and Safety consequences on staff work load and patterns of work

The decision making process and time-line for each proposal

In relation to each proposal the Governing Council and/or Principal will establish with consultation and where appropriate:

- The timeline for the decision making
- Who will be consulted and how
- How data and information will be researched, analysed and presented and by whom
- When the decision will be made and in what forum
- The method of decision making – eg by consensus or voting

Consensus or voting

Consensus processes build what is commonly agreed. They are usually group processes that share information and understanding. Consensus processes also lead to agreement about the practices that will be accepted (or not) outside of the common agreement. Consensus processes therefore are best suited to proposals that relate to the teaching and learning environment or developing the site values and mission.

Consensus process are collaborative. They build understanding of the proposal and its impact and, if adopted, assist in its smooth implementation.

Councils can only formally 'decide' by voting. Except in the case of a special resolution to change the constitution, a decision by voting of the majority of the members of a Governing Council is a resolution of the Council. However, a range of consensus building activities may be included in the processes leading to the proposal being formally put to the Council. This may require suspending Council standing orders.

Voting and the processes leading to it are more likely to be adversarial in nature. Voting is most applicable to proposals that make a choice between a range of conflicting alternatives.

Principal emergency decisions

Sometimes a decision needs to be made immediately without the time for consultation or meetings.

This will include:

- Immediate risks to safety that need to be addressed
- Occasions when acts or regulations are being breached
- When an immediate response is required without time for full consultation

Monitoring and reporting on decision making processes

A group of people including representative of governing council, principal, OHSW representative and staff will monitor the decision making policy and plan for the consideration of particular policies (eg who decides, when, what consultation etc). The decision making policy will be reviewed as part of the ongoing cycle.

Related Act's and Regulations

- Education Act 1972
- Education Regulations 2012

This policy needs to be read in conjunction with a range of other site based and Department for Education policies. The Education Act and Department for Education Regulations determine that the final responsibility for decisions rests with the Principal.