Advise and Consent:
*A Study of Collaborative Decision-Making in Denver*
ABOUT CTAC: The Community Training & Assistance Center is a national not-for-profit organization with a twenty-year track record of success in urban communities. It focuses on developing leadership, planning and managerial expertise within community-based organizations, school systems, collaborative partnerships, state and municipal governments, and health and human service agencies. The Center has provided assistance to hundreds of community-based organizations, coalitions and public institutions in the United States and several other countries.

The Center’s staff is comprised of nationally recognized executives, policy makers and organizers who have extensive experience working with city, county and state agencies, educational institutions, federal legislative bodies, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic institutions and the private sector.

Community Training & Assistance Center
Boston, Massachusetts
February, 1999
Advise and Consent:

A Study of Collaborative Decision-Making in Denver

February 1999

COMMUNITY TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE CENTER
Acknowledgements

The Center would like to begin by thanking the 218 members of the Denver community who took time out of their busy schedules, sometimes as significant inconvenience to them, to spend an hour with CTAC staff members discussing CDM issues. Next, we would like to thank the 806 individuals who took the time to fill out and return our survey. Naturally, without the willingness of these individuals to share their views, there would be little data to analyze and few findings to report.

In addition, the Center was assisted in its work by many individuals throughout the central administrative offices of the Denver Public Schools, including particularly Superintendent Irv Moskowitz and Assistant Superintendents Sharon Johnson and Wayne Eckerling. The reception to our questions and requests was uniformly friendly and helpful. While there were far too many people who helped in one way or another to mention all of them, a few key individuals stand out. Hulus Dennis, CDM/SIAC Public Resource Officer, was helpful and supportive throughout the process, at considerable disruption to him and his office. Similarly, the study would have bogged down considerably without the willing and cheerful assistance of Sherry Eastland in the CDM/SIAC Office and Cara Cantarella in the Community Resource Office. On the data analysis front, Ethan Hemming was invaluable in providing assistance in obtaining and interpreting DPS data, without which the review of impact would have been much limited.

Finally, we would like to thank and commend the Denver Public Schools Board of Education, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, and all the members of the Study Steering Committee. Few school districts undertake comprehensive analyses of school improvement activities. The Study Steering Committee and district and union leadership, are to be commended for their interest in the effectiveness of their improvement strategy and their willingness to look openly and publicly at the results.

Credits

This study was conducted and prepared by the Community Training & Assistance Center of Boston, Massachusetts.

Denver Study Project Team

Peggie L. Brown
William M. Eglinton
Donald B. Gratz, Ph.D. *
William E. Gutowski, Ph.D.
Barbara J. Helms, Ph.D.
Mimi Howard
Nelson Mercel
William J. Slotnik *
Van Lan Truong

* Principal study authors
Contents

4
Executive Summary

7
SECTION 1
Overview of Study

12
SECTION 2
Responsibilities and Understandings

20
SECTION 3
Involvement and Operations

29
SECTION 4
Supports and Linkages

36
SECTION 5
Impact and Perceptions

42
SECTION 6
Major Issues and Recommendations
Executive Summary

In May, 1998, the Study Steering Committee of the Denver Public Schools contracted with the Community Training & Assistance Center of Boston, Massachusetts to study the effectiveness of and stakeholder satisfaction with Collaborative Decision-Making (CDM). This is a landmark strategy for school and district management that is embedded in the teachers contract. CDM began in 1991.

In the conduct of this study, the Center interviewed more than 200 people and analyzed more than 800 survey responses from teachers, parents, principals, students, central administrators, classified staff, business and community representatives and other interested parties. Interviewees and survey respondents represented a cross-section of the Denver Public Schools community both racially and in terms of native language. In addition, the Center analyzed school level data provided by the Denver Public Schools. The Center tested the correlation between this data and the perceptions of the school communities as to the impact of CDM in its major priority areas. The Center's main findings and recommendations are summarized below.

Primary Findings and Recommendations

Collaborative Decision-Making is at a pivotal juncture in Denver. It is perceived positively by school, community and policy level participants. Yet significant and legitimate concerns are repeatedly expressed regarding how CDM is being implemented. The purpose and scope of CDM are defined differently at different sites, empowering some communities and not others. The breadth of representation and involvement are inconsistent from school to school. Although many of the goals of CDM are being advanced, overall accountability could be significantly enhanced.

The vast majority of survey and interview respondents want CDM to continue and be improved. To this end, the study presents recommendations in five areas of CDM involvement and school activity. Together, these propose a comprehensive rethinking of CDM purposes and processes. They will not dramatically change the structures of CDM at the school site. However, they will increase the clarity of CDM operations, enhance the support of CDM from the district, increase the effectiveness of CDM at the school sites, and provide the basis for improvements in student achievement through concerted CDM/school efforts. The recommendations will also increase the satisfaction of participants in the CDM process by clarifying and aligning expectations, roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority.

A. Charter, Charge and Decision-Making

The purposes and decision-making responsibilities of the CDM committees, generally called CDM's, all need to be clarified. This includes defining the division of duties and responsibilities at the sites. For example, although the teachers contract delineates a range of responsibilities, confusion still exists as to whether CDM's are truly decision-making or advisory committees.

The Center's recommendations identify ways to clarify the purpose and vision of CDM, from the sites to the overall structure. They include approaches for redefining the scope and priority of CDM responsibility and establishing parameters for decision-making. While two thirds of respondents are satisfied with their CDM's, one third are not. This is reason for the district to be pleased, but not satisfied. Much of the stakeholder dissatisfaction that exists stems from conflicting understandings of the purpose of CDM, the roles of the respective participants, and uncertain lines of decision-making authority. Clarifying these areas will dramatically increase both satisfaction with and the effectiveness of Collaborative Decision-Making in Denver.
Recommended actions include:

- Convening a citywide summit to clarify the purpose, expectations and priorities of CDM
- Redefining and focusing the scope of CDM responsibility
- Establishing the CDM as a policy-making body at the school level, with decision-making roles in the significant areas of school functioning, but retaining the principal as the instructional and operational leader
- Elevating school improvement planning to become a primary function for CDM's
- Developing parameters for decision-making, thereby delineating specific decision-making responsibilities for principals, CDM committees, central administrators, and the board of education

B. Student Achievement

Improving student achievement is described as the primary goal of CDM. It is also the first priority of the district. Yet operationally, improving student achievement is often not the primary focus of the CDM's. CDM activities in support of student achievement are often indirect. Impact is unclear.

Recommended actions include:

- Reinforcing the primary goal of CDM—to increase student achievement
- Giving CDM's the primary responsibility for school improvement planning
- Strengthening the efforts of the CDM's and school sites to become more data driven
- Establishing the baseline data against which improvement will be measured
- Disaggregating student achievement data by a variety of student and school factors, and providing this data to school sites for the purposes of planning and accountability

C. Composition and Communication

The levels of involvement on CDM's differ significantly from school site to school site. In particular, parents and community members tend to be under-represented, especially in school communities that have large Hispanic, African-American and Asian populations. At some schools, teachers are also hard to recruit and involve. This undercuts the effectiveness of CDM. It also results in many parents, and often many teachers, who are poorly informed and unengaged in CDM. Lack of visibility is an obstacle to greater involvement.

Recommended actions include:

- Designing and implementing a district-wide campaign to increase the visibility of CDM
- Targeting a significant portion of the campaign to under-represented populations
- Targeting a segment of the campaign to area businesses and corporations
- Including a meaningful involvement component in each school improvement plan

D. Accountability

There is very little accountability associated with CDM. True accountability results from several inter-related components. These include the alignment of responsibilities and authority, the priority placed on evaluation and the organizational emphasis placed on measuring effectiveness. Greater accountability would markedly strengthen CDM.

Recommended actions include:

- Establishing performance measures for the cabinet in relation to CDM, thereby demonstrating the board's commitment to the effective use of CDM as a management process
• Linking CDM effectiveness to the evaluation of the principals and the supervisors of the schools
• Establishing indicators of quality and effectiveness for CDM

E. Leadership, Support and Linkages

Leadership and support on behalf of CDM is diffuse. There is a critical need for structured means of communication and coordination around issues related to CDM's. Support mechanisms need to be clarified and strengthened. Training services must be expanded to address existing and emerging needs. Further, there needs to be greater interaction between the Board of Education and the CDM's.

Recommended actions include:
• Determining the locus of the following roles relative to CDM’s: support, compliance, accountability and leadership
• Linking the reporting structures for the CDM's and those for principals
• Realigning the CDM/SIAC Office to focus on capacity building
• Increasing the coordination between the district’s structures for community involvement

Summary

Denver is one of the only districts in the country to undertake a comprehensive study of district-wide reform. This indicates a level of seriousness in collaborative decision-making at the school sites that few districts can match.

Despite the structural and organizational issues that impede the effective functioning of CDM, it continues to be a significant vehicle for the involvement of parents and teachers at many school sites. Given the limited publicity and lack of knowledge in the community regarding CDM, it still enjoys broad support.

While not all parties are enthusiastic about all aspects of CDM as currently constituted, it is valued and can be made considerably more effective. For example, while principals are often the key to CDM success, a well-functioning CDM along the lines described above both empowers teachers and parents and furthers the effectiveness of the principal. The whole, in such a configuration, is considerably greater than the sum of its parts. Further, there is widespread support for the principles of CDM. Despite some suspicions, there is no credible evidence that any party seeks to eliminate CDM—not the board or the central administration, not the DCTA or teachers, not the principals, not the classified staff, certainly not the parents. Given how CDM began, this is a considerable testament to the many people who have labored for years to put it in place and help it grow.

Certainly there is much work to be done. But the expectation has been created within the community that DPS is a district where significant responsibility is invested in site-based CDM's. This expectation significantly enhances the likelihood that CDM can be strengthened and used as a vehicle for improving the educational opportunities for all of Denver's children.
Overview of Study

Background and Charge

The Denver Public Schools began implementing a comprehensive new strategy for school and district management in 1991. This strategy, Collaborative Decision-Making (CDM), was embodied in the contract between the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) and the Denver Public Schools (DPS).

As described in the contract, CDM was established with specific goals and structures for involving the community. The contract lists a broad range of responsibilities for CDM Committees at the school sites. These include improving student achievement, increasing the involvement of parents and the community, and enhancing the climate of each school. Moreover, the charge also defines significant involvement in personnel issues, school budgeting, school operations, and the creation of an environment conducive to learning and teaching.

After seven years of operation, and in preparation for the renewal of the contract, diverse parties came together to sponsor a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of and stakeholder satisfaction with Collaborative Decision-Making. They created the CDM Study Steering Committee to ensure the broadest possible representation of constituents affected by the CDM process in the development of study purpose and objectives. Further, the Study Steering Committee serves as the review body for the study methodology, data gathering measures and report results.

The composition of the Study Steering Committee includes: two members of the Board of Education appointed by the president, two DPS central administrators appointed by the superintendent, two DCTA representatives appointed by the DCTA president, four parents appointed by the District Council PTSA and the Educational Advisory Councils, three
principals appointed by their respective level associations, two students appointed by the Student Board of Education, two DPS Employees Coalition members appointed by the Employees Coalition, one member of the Denver Association of Educational Office Professionals appointed by that organization, one representative of the Center for Quality Schools, one CDM business representative appointed by the CDM Business Network, one CDM community member appointed by the CDM Improvement Council, and one taxpayer citizen appointed by the Interneighborhood Cooperation.

**B. Community Training & Assistance Center**

In late April, 1998, the Study Steering Committee selected the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC) to conduct the study. CTAC has been a leading provider of technical assistance to school systems throughout the United States since 1980. In particular, the Center provides multiyear, comprehensive technical assistance to major urban school districts attempting to improve student achievement, parent and community involvement, and overall school performance and accountability. At the community level, the Center also assists more than 90 non-profit organizations and community agencies each year.

**C. Objectives and Research Questions**

The study addresses three primary and overlapping areas of inquiry, as delineated in the Study Steering Committee’s initial request for proposals. In each of these areas, the study examines the **perceived effectiveness** of Collaborative Decision-Making, the level of **stakeholder satisfaction** with the CDM process and committees, and the relationship, if any, between CDM activity and measurable results at the schools. This includes:

- The impact of CDM on school culture and operations.
- The impact of CDM in the areas of responsibility defined in DCTA/DPS contract.
- The identification of barriers that inhibit CDM effectiveness and supports that enhance CDM effectiveness.

Based on these objectives, the study was constructed around the following questions:

1. To what extent has CDM achieved its primary goals?
   - Improvements in school climate and learning environment
   - Improvements in parent and community involvement
   - Improvements in student achievement
2. To what extent do perceptions of the success of CDM match available school improvement data?
3. What factors—school, community, district and CDM specific—correlate most closely with CDM effectiveness?
4. What barriers inhibit, and what supports enhance, the effectiveness of CDM?
5. What steps may be taken to improve the effectiveness of CDM Committees and the CDM process?

**D. Methodology**

**Overview**

To complete this study, the Center used three sets of data: individual and group interviews, a comprehensive survey, and school and CDM operational data provided by DPS. These data were subjected to multiple levels of analysis. Statistical tests were conducted on quantitative data to provide statistically valid comparisons between the responses of different groups of people on survey questions and to establish relationships between survey responses and groupings of schools. A brief description of data sources is contained below.

The Center’s findings and recommendations are drawn from the analysis of these data sources, plus literature on school and district management and the Center’s extensive experience in urban
school districts engaged in forms of decentralization, site-based school improvement, and issues surrounding the delegation and distribution of authority.

**Individual and Group Interviews**

The first data set was developed from interviews with 218 individuals. These interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, both singly and in groups. Interviewees included representatives from each of the constituent groups at the local school level, along with a range of individuals from the Board of Education, the administration, the teachers union, classified staff organizations, parent organizations, and from a range of external constituencies.

The pool of interviewees fairly represents the range of opinion regarding CDM in Denver. Because of difficulties encountered by the CDM/SIAC Office (the central unit responsible for supporting CDM) in finding parents willing and able to participate in focus groups, particularly parents whose native language is either Spanish or Vietnamese, the Center identified community organizations in sufficiently close touch with the target populations to generate a pool of interviewees. While the selection of these particular interviewees is not scientifically random, this methodology did allow the Center to reach and speak with all of the target populations.

During the course of this study, individual and/or group interviews were conducted as shown in the figure at left.

**Comprehensive Survey**

**Distribution:** To supplement and broaden data from the interviews, a survey was prepared, in English and Spanish, and distributed to more than 4000 stakeholders at the school level. As with the interviews, the targeted groups included teachers, parents, principals, business/community representatives, classified staff and students—including those who have been involved on CDM’s and those who have not. All principals were sent surveys, along with all current CDM members for whom names and addresses are on file in the CDM/SIAC Office. Additional parents and teachers were selected randomly from the entire population of parents and teachers whose names are available at the DPS administration. Names and/or identifying numbers were provided by the district, while random selection was generated by the Center.

Three survey constraints were encountered. First, Spanish language surveys were printed and made available, but because the selection of surveys was created randomly, and because data were not available to identify parents whose primary language is Spanish, such parents could not be identified in advance. Thus, Spanish language surveys were available by request only. Second, because the names of parents identified to receive
surveys were retained by DPS, it was not possible to eliminate duplication between randomly selected parents and CDM members. It is possible, therefore, that these lists contained some duplicate names. Third, lists of CDM members were available for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years. Consequently, making comparisons between current CDM operations and the early years is not possible. As the study is designed primarily to assess current conditions and perceptions rather than changes in conditions and perceptions over time, this is not a major limitation.

The overall response rate from the survey is an excellent 20%. This is a high rate of return for such a survey. Of the 4,000 surveys distributed, 806 were returned. Figure 2 breaks down respondents by group and race/ethnicity.

**Response:** The largest respondent group was teachers, who provided 53% of the returned surveys. The second largest group was parents who comprised more than 24% of those responding. The vast majority of both groups either are, or have been, members of local CDM committees. This is not surprising, as CDM members are the most likely to be interested in the topic. But this response should be kept in mind when considering the content of the responses. CDM members may be expected both to respond more, and also to have a different opinion of their CDM’s, than the general parent or teacher population. Greater external publicity might have increased the response rate among non-CDM members.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents are white, 15% are Latino/Hispanic, 8% African American, over 1% Asian/Pacific Islander and under 1% American Indian. In addition, 6% of the respondents identified themselves as Other or Mixed, or included no ethnic identification.

One concern emerging from the survey is the response rate of the principals. Only 46 of the 112 principals receiving the survey, or 41%, responded. Since all principals are members of the CDM’s at their schools, this number should be higher. The lack of response could be attributable to many causes, including lack of interest in CDM’s in general, lack of understanding of the purpose of the survey, or lack of trust that the survey

**FIGURE 2**

**Distribution of Survey Respondents by Group & Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Latino/Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Mixed/Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent</strong></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal</strong></td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community/ Business Member</strong></td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Staff Member</strong></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would remain confidential (five principals filled in the survey but did not identify their school). This response rate by principals represents a problem for the district. It is very difficult for CDM to be successful without the active support of principals.

**School and CDM Operational Data**

The third data set consists of data provided by the Denver Public Schools. This is comprised of data on student performance, student behavior, and demographics of the student population aggregated by school and covering a four year period. These data were used to make extensive comparisons between CDM operations and perceived impact as identified in surveys and interviews, and overall school performance, student behavior, and demographics. Also, a comprehensive review was conducted of operating practices and support provided to school sites by the CDM/SIAC Office.

In addition, the response rates from 81 schools were sufficiently high that it was possible to aggregate the individual survey responses by school. Valid comparisons were then made between survey responses and school level data. These comparisons are identified as appropriate in the body of this study.

Limitations on the availability and use of DPS data were anticipated in the design of this study. The constraints related to the available data fall into three areas. First, the data is aggregated by school over a period of time during which changes related to desegregation were implemented. Changes in school composition and structure resulted from the September, 1995 desegregation decision. By the 1996-97 school year, the schools had returned to neighborhood status. These changes affect the applicability of available data for longitudinal comparisons.

A second constraint is with the student achievement data. The data consists of percentages of student scoring in each quartile on the ITBS in reading and mathematics. These percentages are indicated by grade, school and ethnic group. Although such percentages are not appropriate for sophisticated statistical analyses, they were used to examine the possible relationship between student achievement and perceived CDM impact.

Finally, data at the individual student level was not made available due to issues of confidentiality. This precluded comparisons between CDM results and the achievement or behavior of individual students or student subgroups within individual schools.

This study presents correlations between the perceived satisfaction with and effectiveness of CDM, and a range of school-related factors including student achievement and behavior, climate, and parent involvement.
A. Contractually Defined Responsibilities

The contract between the Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers’ Association spells out a range of duties and responsibilities for local school CDM Committees. The stated overall objective, Article 5-1, is:

*Schools that have the vision and flexibility to make operational and instructional decisions based on the changing and diverse needs of their population will provide the best learning environments for all students. Consistent with this belief, collaborative decision-making will allow school communities to focus on student achievement by offering diverse programs and services as they seek to meet the unique needs of their students.*

In addition to the reference to making “instructional decisions,” and maintaining a “focus on student achievement,” Section 5-5-1 states that “the primary goal of CDM...is to improve student achievement.” Section 5-8 lays out a range of areas of decision-making authority delegated specifically to local CDM Committees. These include:

**Student Achievement: Goal Setting, Analysis and Planning**

- Participating in the design of an instructional program
- Reviewing the effectiveness of the content of the courses, programs and curriculum
- Setting school goals
- Conducting a survey of school performance, to include feedback from the community on the effectiveness of the principal, teachers and the CDM Committee in meeting the school’s educational mission and the needs of its students
• Conducting a self-evaluation regarding the extent of improvements in student achievement, the steps taken by the CDM Committee to monitor and improve students achievement, the steps taken by the CDM to ensure full inclusion of all groups within the CDM process, attendance records of CDM members, and the extent of cooperation between the CDM and the School Improvement and Accountability Committee (SIAC).

**Personnel**

• Establishing a personnel subcommittee with a substantial range of duties that include making decisions about the transfer of instructional staff and filling vacancies, subject to principal veto

• Determining the use of the staff allocation provided by the Board of Education

• Establishing and annually reviewing plans and procedures for teacher assignments, allocating certain duties, granting professional leave days to teachers, and handling building access and emergencies

• Providing annual input to the superintendent in connection with the appraisal of the principal

• Organizing and assigning staff time, including instructional time, preparation time, planning night meetings, student contact time, the length and number of classes, a plan for class coverage, the term and duties of department chairs, and the availability of teachers for parent consultation

**School Operations**

• Establishing budget priorities and allocating the school budget

• Developing school procedures and policies

• Reviewing discipline and safety issues

• Scheduling and funding co-curricular activities

**Parent and Community Relations**

• Establishing relationships with parents and the community

• Ensuring the full inclusion of all groups within the school community in the CDM process

These duties are repeated in the CDM Handbook, last revised in 1996.

**B. Perceptions of CDM Purpose and Function**

**Introduction**

There are significant differences of opinion across all respondents as to what CDMs are supposed to do and what they actually do. These differences exist between CDMs across the city, and within individual CDMs. They affect both the levels of satisfaction with CDM, and the related perceptions of impact. Satisfaction relates closely to expectations; expectations often relate to an understanding of responsibilities. As an example, respondents who see the major responsibility of the CDM as involving parents and the community, but do not think it can or should play a major role in budget decisions or student achievement, will not be unhappy when budget or instructional involvement is limited. By contrast, those who believe the CDM should take on a broader array of duties are more likely to identify frustrations if their CDM assumes a narrow set of responsibilities or is ineffective in addressing a broader scope of responsibilities. The following summarizes the range of perceptions of CDM purpose and functions.

**Overall trends**

In the aggregate, approximately two-thirds of the survey respondents speak positively of CDMs. Particularly among those who have a working familiarity with CDM, there are generally favorable trend lines. While positive, however, these trend lines do not reflect uniform satisfaction with or understanding of CDM.

The response among those people involved in CDM activities at the site level indicates that 60–75% are satisfied, depending on the issue. This is reason for the district to be pleased, but not reason to be satisfied. The results also indicate that the remaining respondents are often significantly displeased. “When it’s good, it’s very good,” says one principal summing up a common theme, “when it’s bad, it’s a nightmare.”

The levels of satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of a committee are directly related to its purpose. If the committee’s purpose is unclear, roles and functions related to that purpose will also be unclear. In the case of the CDM’s, moreover,
understandings of purpose vary considerably within and between committees. Accordingly, the Center’s analysis begins by considering how respondents understand the purpose and functions of CDM site committees, and the overall purpose of CDM.

**Understandings**

The responsibilities of CDM’s at the site level, as defined in the contract, are neither widely nor uniformly understood. There is an enormously wide range of understanding about what CDM’s are authorized to do and what they should do based on the contract. Even some long time CDM members, for example, were not familiar with the scope of duties outlined in the contract when they were interviewed. As indicated in Section 3, there are also significant differences of opinion about what CDM’s are being asked to do, what principals are expected and required to do, and the expectations of individual CDM members.

These differences of understanding are apparent in both the interview and survey responses. During the interviews, more than one-half of the current CDM members could not identify the responsibilities of the CDM in the area of student achievement. Many did not feel this was part of the charge of the CDM.

Differing perceptions are also revealed in the survey. For example, 45% of the survey respondents feel that some decisions currently made by the CDM should instead be made by the principal or central administration. In contrast, 70% of the respondents indicate that some decisions currently made by the principal or central administration should instead be made by the CDM. Moreover, 35% of the respondents agree with both statements. Since there is little consistency in levels of understanding from one CDM to another, such responses are noteworthy yet also to be expected.

These differences become more pronounced when the responses are disaggregated. The belief that some decisions made by the CDM should be made by the principal or central administration is shared by 75% of the principals and 50% of the teachers, yet only 31% of the parents. Conversely, the belief that some decisions currently made by the principal or central administration should instead be made by the CDM is shared by 75% of the parents and 74% of the teachers, yet only 21% of the principals. Thus, it would appear, that there is a need for a redefinition of the scope of CDM responsibility, but consensus on the nature of that redefinition will not be easy to achieve.

These opinions are much influenced by confusion over the role of the principal in the CDM process. Further evidence of confusion over purposes is found in discussions of CDM responsibility in the areas of personnel, budget, and student achievement. These are discussed below.

Levels of understanding are affected by participants’ personal beliefs. For example, some respondents believe that CDM’s should focus primarily on parent and community involvement. They feel that CDM’s should only address budgetary and personnel issues in select instances or in response to specific problems. While respondents who express these opinions cite achievements in all kinds of areas—from the selection of textbooks to instructional scheduling changes—they still do not believe that CDM’s can possibly be responsible or accountable for student achievement.

Though there is much disagreement as to the specific duties of site CDM’s, a substantial majority of respondents believes that much more clarity is needed. All groups agree on the need for parameters which clarify the purpose, scope and decision-making responsibilities of CDM. “Tell us our charge,” pleads one principal. The confusion about and disagreement around the charge leads to a significant amount of the dissatisfaction that exists. “CDM is like a headless horseman,” says one PTSA parent. “There is no direction from above. There are no guidelines. You make it up as you go along.” This is not a formula for long term success.

A further distinction, closely related to the issue of purpose, clouds the functioning of CDM committees at the schools. That distinction is between advisory involvement and decision-making authority. The contract language specifies authority in some areas, involvement in others, and is murky on still others. Thus, the question becomes
not only what decisions are to be made at the site level, but also by whom.

C. Scope and Locus of Decision-Making

Overview

Decision-making responsibility under CDM is closely related to the understanding of purpose. In the aggregate, nearly 70% of survey respondents indicate that the decision-making responsibilities are clearly defined. However, interviews indicate that these definitions differ dramatically from one CDM to another, and from one individual to another. Some interview respondents identify the purpose of the CDM as student achievement. One principal notes, “Our CDM focuses primarily on increasing student achievement. We take a hard look at teaching and learning.” This differs from other interviewees at the sites and from most respondents from the central administration. These individuals take the view that the purpose of CDM is to increase parent involvement but not to directly address student achievement. The interviews and survey responses further indicate that some, but not all, CDM’s are involved in budgetary decisions. Some, but not all, take an active role on personnel issues. Simply put, the scope of decision-making varies considerably from site to site.

Many people agree with the parent who states that CDM’s are “mired in peripheral issues… working around the edges of what schools should be.” A principal adds that the CDM “spends 75% of its time on mandated responsibilities and 25% on school site concerns.” This problem is directly related to the frequently stated perception that CDM decisions often “get whacked” by district regulations, and that the district often changes CDM decisions.

Of those who speak favorably, many see the purpose of the CDM as bridging gaps between the school and community, and addressing issues of school climate. “Where it works, CDM eliminates the we/they,” notes one principal. “I can’t believe the difference in the feeling,” reports another principal after the CDM tackled a school issue. “People are really talking about things.” This is, for many, what the CDM is supposed to accomplish. “The strength of our CDM,” says another principal who looks favorably on CDM’s, “is lots of communication.” Many parents feel similarly. “CDM’s help people understand that administrators face difficult decisions and they are not the bad guy,” says one parent.

FIGURE 3

Comparison of Respondents Beliefs Regarding Locus of Decision-Making

| Some decisions made by the CDM should instead be made by the principal or central administration. | 45% |
| Some decisions made by the principal or central administration should instead be made by the CDM. | 75% |

Percent Agreement

All Respondents  Parents  Principals  Teachers
Locus of Decisions

There are considerable differences of opinion as to where the decision-making responsibilities delineated in the contract are actually lodged within the Denver Public Schools. These opinions fall into three basic groupings.

Some interviewees feel that decision-making is primarily based at the school sites. The CDM is described as addressing these responsibilities effectively “when the principal is on board.”

A second grouping of responses is concerned that the CDM is not truly collaborative. In response to the survey, 32% of the respondents indicate that the CDM is not a decision-making body. In addition, 34% of the respondents feel CDM decisions are controlled by a group or individual and 36% believe that decisions are influenced by special interest groups.

A third grouping suggests that, despite the contract, decisions in the areas that most significantly affect the school sites are made by the central administration. Exponents of this point of view argue that the CDM’s make only minor decisions.

These issues are delineated further in Section 3-C, Leadership and Control.

Parameters

The confusion and disagreement over the purposes and scope of responsibility indicate a need for decision-making parameters for the CDM process. The lack of decision-making parameters affects both satisfaction with and the effectiveness of CDM. For example, regarding the evaluation of the principal, the CDM is to “provide input” to the superintendent or his/her designee. In addition, the CDM is supposed to “participate” in the design of an instructional program, to “review for effectiveness” the content of courses, programs and the curriculum, and to “establish budget priorities and allocate school budgets at the school site based on the allocation from the Board of Education.” The interviews and survey results make clear that many CDM members expect substantial involvement, and often decision-making authority, in these areas. Frequently, they believe that they have less involvement than they are supposed to have, or than they should have, either through the principal’s veto or the dictates of the central administration. In effect, the lack of clear parameters results unnecessarily in increased levels of tension at the sites and between the sites and the central administration.

Organizational Imperative

The need for clearer parameters is paralleled by the need for greater organizational imperative on behalf of CDM. That is, the district must demonstrate support for CDM by building the expectation that it will be supported at every level of district functioning. As delineated in Section 4—Supports and Linkages, there are varying perspectives regarding the extent of institutional support for CDM. The interviews reveal that the understanding of the purpose and charge of CDM diverges widely among all constituent groups. However, particularly among teachers and administrators, the interviews also reveal a remarkably uniform understanding of the purpose and charge of the district’s initiatives on literacy. This is a significant accomplishment in a district as large as Denver. It also suggests that the same organizational imperative could be applied to CDM.

D. Substantive Areas of Responsibility

The primary areas of substantive responsibility for CDM committees are discussed below.

Personnel

The CDM’s are delegated significant authority with regard to personnel issues at the school sites. In the contract, this is detailed in Article 5, Sections 8 and 11, and embedded in various subsections. This authority includes, through a personnel subcommittee, responsibilities related to filling vacancies, transferring instructional personnel, determining staffing allocations, determining teacher assignments, and setting up professional leave procedures. These are significant responsibilities which can affect the ability of the CDM to create change and build success at the school.

CDM responsibilities in personnel run well beyond involvement on the subcommittee. CDM members have various roles in principal evaluation, transfers, interviewing and hiring, plus the
related issues of determining schedules and work assignments. Many school CDM’s do not participate actively in all of these areas.

CDM members frequently indicate that their roles in principal evaluation and selection are less than satisfactory. Principal selection requests are overruled; principal evaluations are ignored. “If they are going to override, why are we doing it?” asked several CDM respondents.

Central administrators acknowledge that CDM evaluations of principal effectiveness are generally used only with regard to the principal’s effectiveness with the CDM itself, and not concerning the principal’s overall effectiveness. Further, while the contract does specify a role for the CDM in evaluating principal effectiveness, many do not evaluate their principal. There appears to be no formal requirement from central administration regarding CDM input in principal evaluation. These factors have led to the belief among some CDM members that their input is not valued or used.

Unlike many of its other sections, the contract is explicit on how the personnel subcommittee functions. The contract explicitly defines the differing roles of the principal, teachers and parents on the personnel subcommittee (although this requires a careful reading). Parents are ex-officio, and have no vote; they “may be consulted.” Teachers collectively have one vote, and the principal has one vote. However, if an impasse is reached, the principal makes the final decision. Thus, on the personnel subcommittee, the principal has veto authority.

FIGURE 4
Views on the Personnel Subcommittee

Should continue to be a part of the CDM
Makes decisions fairly
Is an important part of the CDM
Parents should be voting members of the personnel subcommittee

Percent Agreement

All Respondents  Parents  Principals  Teachers
The Personnel Subcommittee is seen as important by 85% of the survey respondents, and 80% believe it makes decisions fairly. Teachers, in particular, want substantial input into who will be working alongside them in their school buildings. Overall, 83% of teachers agree that the personnel subcommittee is an important part of the CDM. This view is shared by 84% of the teachers who serve as CDM members and 79% of the non-CDM members. As might be expected, 71% of all teachers disagree with the proposition that parents should be voting members of this committee. Here, although the overall trend is the same, there is more of a difference between responses from CDM members (73%) and non-CDM members (63%).

Principals tend to agree with teachers. For example, 91% consider the personnel subcommittee an important part of the CDM, and 100% of the principals indicate that their personnel subcommittee makes decisions fairly. As for parent involvement, 74% disagree with the view that parents should be voting members of the committee.

On the other hand, parents also have a large stake in the quality and responsiveness of school personnel, and indicate a strong preference for a voting role on the personnel subcommittee. Of the parents responding, most of whom are or have been CDM members, 79% believe that parents should be voting members of the subcommittee. This is one of the few salient areas of disagreement: paid professional staff working in a school believe that they alone should make personnel decisions on the subcommittee, and parents whose children attend that school believe strongly that they should be involved too.

A total of 85% of the respondents think the personnel subcommittee should remain a part of the CDM, including 95% of the parents, 81% of the teachers, and 74% of the principals.

Budget

The contract stipulates that the budgetary authority of the CDM is to: “Establish budget priorities and allocate school budgets at the school site based on the allocation from the Board of

![Figure 5: Budgetary Decisions](image-url)
Education.” (Section 5–8–1–7) This responsibility is delegated subject to “applicable Board established goals, and the outcomes and achievement standards for all students.” The contract further states: “It is the principal’s responsibility to bring decisions related to the matters listed above before the CDM Committee in a timely manner.” (5–8–2)

Regarding actual CDM involvement in school budgets, 59% of the respondents indicate that the CDM makes most of the budgetary decisions at their school, while 53% believe that the central administration makes those decisions. In addition, 17% agree with both statements—that budgetary decisions are made by the CDM and by the central administration.

These differences may be explained by ambivalence over what making budgetary decisions means. Some interviewees indicate that they make budgets decisions that are “left over” after the central administration or principal arranges determines budget items. Further, most interviewees and 36% of the survey respondents said that CDM committees are not given enough time to make decisions, including decisions related to the budget.

The time allocated to budgetary decision-making varies considerably. One CDM spends several full days on budget discussions, with CDM parents taking time off from work to participate. Others report that they don’t address budget issues.

Many CDM members do not feel included in the budgetary process at their schools. “CDM’s don’t do much with the budget,” said one active parent, also a member of the Council of PTSA’s. “It sounds great in the contract. In reality, we have some leeway in how to use the funds but not a lot.” Some CDM’s discuss and largely ratify principals’ decisions, while others believe the budget is largely controlled by the central administration. Certainly, there is little consistency among CDM’s as to how or whether they approach the budget.

**Student Achievement**

Student achievement is addressed directly in the contract in Article 5, Sections 8–1–1, 8–1–2, and 12–1, and is addressed indirectly in numerous other sections. The contract notes “The primary goal of CDM which is to improve student achievement.” (5–5–1) CDM’s are to: “participate in the design of an instructional program that will enhance student achievement,” (5–8–1–1) “review for effectiveness the content of the courses, programs and curriculum,” (5–8–1–2) and “annually conduct a review of school performance... in meeting the school’s educational mission and the needs of its students (school accreditation guidelines).” In addition, CDM’s are given authority to establish instructional time and student contact time, and a range of other issues that are directly related to student achievement.

Although student achievement is described as the primary purpose of the CDM, only two-thirds of the survey respondents believe that their CDM’s are involved, or should be involved, in improving student achievement. As indicated earlier, more than half of the interviewees could not identify the CDM responsibilities related to student achievement.

For some, this discrepancy may be a matter of definition. Numerous parents, teachers and principals feel, or at least hope, that CDM’s have an impact on student achievement indirectly, through the involvement of parents, the creation of a better climate, and the allocation of staff time. When initially asked, they often respond that CDM’s are not involved with student achievement. For these respondents, involvement in student achievement means more formal involvement on issues of curriculum and instruction. This appears to be the predominant viewpoint. Even a parent who describes the victory of his CDM in multi-age grouping labels the purpose of the CDM as “increasing parent involvement.” Similarly, one board member’s assessment is that CDM impact on student achievement is minor, noting “It’s goal is to help parents and teachers manage the building.”

There is not enough data to determine how many CDM’s are involved in issues at the heart of learning. However, many respondents tell stories of “winning battles” which resulted in changes ranging from the implementation of block scheduling to the development of school programs.
To determine the impact of CDM at the school sites, the study examined four significant aspects of committee functioning. These include CDM composition, involvement and representation; meetings, communications and the decision-making process; leadership and control issues; and issues related to accountability.

A. Composition, Involvement and Representation

Composition

The contract specifies the composition of the local CDM committees. At minimum, each CDM should include the principal, four teachers, four parents or guardians, one classified employee, and one business or community representative. In middle and high schools, two student representatives are included; the middle school student representatives serve in an ex-officio capacity. The nomination and election procedures for CDM members are clearly delineated in the contract.

The district’s CDM/SIAC Office collects information regarding the makeup of each CDM. That information is then reported to the Districtwide School Improvement and Accountability Committee (DSIAC). There appears to be no uniform compliance with reporting requirements. The consistency of the data varies widely. A review of the data from those sites reporting to the Office for 1997-98 reveals that the current composition is consistent with past reporting years—relatively static and not at the contractually designated levels.

Figure 6 provides a description of CDM membership. It is based on data reported by the sites to the CDM/SIAC Office, but not confirmed or audited by that office, for the 1997-98 school year. As indicated, only 68% of the CDM’s report full membership. Figures on race/ethnicity are presented as they appear in the files; they are not maintained according to the respective
groupings such as principals, teachers, classified staff, parents and community members.

**Involvement**

The level of involvement on CDM’s is inconsistent. Respondents indicate that it varies by school, neighborhood, and principal. Data on neighborhood demographics were not available to compare with CDM demographics, which themselves are incomplete. The survey results largely reflect the attitudes of those involved or previously involved on CDM’s. The response to both the surveys and the interview requests was generally low for those who did not have direct involvement on or contact with a CDM. This was true for both parents and teachers.

In the interviews, nearly every parent indicates that parent involvement on CDM’s, especially minority parent involvement, is too low. Several traditional reasons for low parent involvement are cited. For example, time is perceived as a major factor. This includes the availability of time to attend meetings, the sense that on some CDM’s time spent is time wasted, and the timing of when meetings take place. “There is a propensity to do meetings during the day, so working parents can’t attend,” according to a parent activist. “This sends a poor message to the community. They must provide incentives to teachers to come after work.”

Intimidation is also identified frequently as a factor. Some parents note the feeling of being intimidated by principals or teachers. “Parents have a difficult time questioning principals,” according to one PTSA president. “In the past, they were ‘yes’ people. This is changing.” Many parents also indicate being fearful that there will be repercussions for their children if they challenge the teachers. There is also a level of intimidation that derives from how topics are discussed at CDM meetings. “There is district speak and school speak,” observed one CDM parent. “This needs to be brought down to parent speak.”

Other parents believe that the overall expectations for CDM’s, as communicated by the district, indicate a lack of interest and respect. This is perceived as turning parents away. “We should be using the same model we use for kids—high expectations,” observes one parent. The message should be that “we expect you to influence how children learn.” This is not the message most parents see as conveyed by the central administration or the CDM training.

### FIGURE 6

**CDM Composition for 1997-98**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Total/Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools reporting</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDM members</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CDM without chair (no chair reported)</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CDM with principal as chair</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CDM without full membership</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>120 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indians</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>200 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CDM/SLAC Office files, April 1998*
Low involvement can signal a range of contrasting trends—from overall satisfaction to the belief that involvement serves no purpose, from a lack of awareness to a feeling of disenfranchisement. The interviews provide some lines for future district inquiry. The majority of the interviewed parents of color are unhappy with their schools. Some of these are parents who responded to the district-sponsored requests for interviews; they are part of a random sample. More were contacted through community agencies or the district's own educational advisory committees. These responses are not random and cannot be considered statistically significant. Collectively, though, the overall response indicates a trend: CDM's are frequently not seen by parents of color as a vehicle for addressing concerns about their schools. To the extent that this is true on a broader scale, the CDM's are not fulfilling one of their clear goals with regard to these segments of the community.

The survey responses deliver mixed messages on how welcome people feel on the CDM, how willing they are to participate, and how easy they are to recruit. For example, 85% of the respondents believe that parents feel welcome and 63% say parents are willing to participate. However, only 23% of the respondents agree that it is easy to recruit new members to serve. Participation on the CDM's by non-parent members of the community is viewed similarly. Several interviewees identify communication with the broader community as a significant weakness point for CDM's overall.

Only half of the respondents say that students feel welcome on the CDM's. As indicated above, only middle and high school students serve on CDM's. Focus groups of randomly selected middle school and high school students suggest that the level of student involvement is low. Slightly less than half of the students had heard of CDM; only one student focus group member had been involved.

The issues of recruitment and the lack of broad-based involvement were raised repeatedly in the interviews and focus groups. Several teachers and parents indicate that a relatively small number of parents are involved in CDM's. While they may attempt to represent the views of parents overall, the breadth of involvement itself is not perceived as extensive. "Parents don't operate by formal networks," notes a central administrator. "With three or four parents as the sole representatives, what are the chances of getting other parents involved?" A parent adds, "Most members of CDM's don't vote as representatives. Most vote their personal feelings."

Teacher involvement is an issue at some schools as well. In several cases, teacher involvement constitutes a teacher "in-group" and is not seen as representative of all the school's teachers. For example, 72% of the teacher survey respondents who are not on CDM's feel that "special interest groups influence the decisions of the CDM." The implications of this are discussed more completely in Section 3-C, Leadership and Control.

Despite these concerns, 83% of the survey respondents believe that their CDM represents the interests and concerns of the school population. This view is shared by 84% of teachers who are on CDM's and 73% of the teachers who are not on CDM's, as well as by 94% of the principals. Among the parent respondents, 88% also share this view. Given the dissatisfaction expressed during the interviews by many of the Hispanic and Vietnamese parents, this percentage might decline were more parents from these ethnic groups actually involved in their CDM's.

The election process for joining a CDM is perceived as fair by 88% of the survey respondents. This response holds true across constituency groups and racial groups, regardless of whether the respondent has been involved with a CDM. Elections represent a very specific dimension of the involvement issue. When there is difficulty recruiting people to serve, elections are rarely considered to be a contentious matter. This pattern holds true in Denver. The more people want to serve, the more the election process could become an issue. At present, recruitment, representation and support, rather
than the process of selection, are the central involvement issues for CDM.

**Representation**

The CDM committees are not representative of the student population of the Denver Public Schools. The CDM composition is closer to, but nonetheless differs from, the teacher population of the Denver Public Schools. As indicated earlier in Figure 6, the reported aggregate CDM membership is 67% white, 20% Hispanic/Latino, 15% African American, 1% American Indian and 1% Asian. The student population is 47% Hispanic/Latino, 27% white, 22% African American, 3% Asian, and 1% American Indian. In contrast, the teachers are 76% white, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 8% African American and 2% Asian.

Addressing the lack of representativeness on the CDM committees is a district priority. Interviews reveal that it is also a high level concern for community leaders. In this context, it is important to note that there were no statistically significant differences in the responses from different racial or ethnic groups to any single question in the survey. While this is important, it is also true that the minority response to the survey, particularly those coming from parents, is lower than the minority percentage of the school population. Several interviewees note that their CDMs are not particularly representative, but indicate that parents had not pushed for greater representation on CDMs. In fact, the reverse often tends to be true. The greater the diversity of the school, the more difficulties seem to arise in recruiting a representative group of parents to serve. As one CIC member noted, “The progress of CDM is directly related to the socio-economic status, ethnicity and location of the school.”

Issues related to race and ethnicity have an impact on CDM. Many parents of color indicate in the interviews that they know little about CDM, but do want to address areas where, in their view, the schools are not meeting the needs of their children. Such responses have implications for CDM. Issues of race and ethnicity do not emerge exclusively nor, in some cases, specifically with regard to CDM. However, it appears from the interviews and survey comments that CDM committees are not successfully helping to address the broader issues of representative parent involvement within the district.

The causes of these perceptions can vary. These may include a lack of trust, on the part of communities of color, of CDM as a sanctioned enterprise. They may represent a view of CDMs as ineffective. They may suggest that the respondent communities have not had the opportunity to learn much about CDM. They may reflect broader concerns about the district as a whole. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that all of these elements come into play.

The interviews illustrate several of these elements. The attempts to find parents to interview in the Vietnamese and Hispanic communities, through the administration, were highly unproductive. Trust was later revealed as a causal factor. As an example, a bilingual parent who has been involved on various school and district committees indicated that her initial response to the district’s interview request was suspicion. At a later point, the Center interviewed 28 mono-lingual Vietnamese parents contacted through agencies and organizations that work with the Vietnamese community. Of these, only 6 knew of CDM’s. None have been provided with sufficient information to describe what the CDM does at a school. Most are skeptical of the usefulness of any involvement. Many cite language as a major barrier.

The reaction from Hispanic parents and leaders is similar. The mono-lingual parents feel excluded on the basis of language. Bilingual parents and leaders are concerned about issues of communication and accountability. One leader even suggest that the title of this study should be “After all these years, why are we still talking about this and when will people take action?”

A stated priority of the district reflects the same concern related to representativeness as articulated by the parents. The superintendent stressed this concern in a June, 1998 memorandum which was sent to all school principals. At the start of the 1998-99 school year, the CDM/SIAC
Office conducted a special mailing of 40,000 brochures to increase the awareness and involvement of parents. This represents a significant effort. However, the brochure was only produced in English and was not targeted to minority or English as a Second Language households. To the extent that the district seeks to involve and respond to the issues identified by parents from communities of color, the CDM remains an under-utilized resource.

Beyond issues of race and ethnicity, some teachers and administrators note a more general problem: the parents involved on the CDMs tend to be the same parents that are already involved at the schools. "A large percentage of parents are not aware of CDM," reports one teacher. "Only the parents who are routinely in the school join the CDM," notes a principal. These observations are shared by the responses of parents who are not already involved with CDMs. Most parents who were interviewed as part of this study, but who are not on CDM's, are largely unaware of the purpose or function of CDM. Many have never heard of CDM.

Beyond parents, some respondents identify the need to increase community/business representation. A principal notes, "Many business and community representatives have a better perspective and are more knowledgeable than parents." A teacher leader adds, "The business community has been supportive of schools, but is losing interest." The survey response indicates that CDM members and school faculties feel supported by their communities, but this general sense of support has not translated into broad community involvement in CDM.

Overall, the issue of representation appears not to be that people are intentionally excluded but that they are not sufficiently recruited, made aware or assisted in becoming involved.

B. Meetings, Communications and the Decision-Making Process

Meetings

In the aggregate, survey respondents express satisfaction with several aspects of how meetings are run. For example, 90% believe that the issues discussed are important, 85% indicate that all members can voice their opinions, and 74% feel that time is used well.

While these are positive indicators, they can mask issues that require attention. For example, 26% of the respondents feel that time is not used well. The district does not have a mechanism for identifying and assisting the CDM's where this is a dominant concern. Also, problem solving or conflict resolution skills are described as weak by 30% of the respondents.

CDM members generally express satisfaction with how meetings are run. A range of reasons are offered for this response. Some CDM's work well and their meetings are run smoothly. Others have low expectations for impact. Still others function without much controversy. In some instances, as where the principal dominates the decision-making process, it may be that this domination takes place not in the context of the meeting itself, but in what is shared before the meeting or acted on after the meeting. Many interviewees note that the principal "controls the knowledge base," and is sometimes slow in providing everyone with needed information (this is described further in Section 3-C, Leadership and Control). Some respondents indicate that parents only have a voice in a limited section of the meeting—such as "comments from the community"—and have no role in setting the rest of the agenda. A few complain that blocks of teachers "get together before the meeting and decide how they are going to vote" in order to control the result.

To the extent that CDM's either are or become significant decision-making bodies, where important and sometimes controversial issues are discussed and addressed, it is to be expected that the conduct of meetings can become a more salient concern.

Communications

While most respondents view CDM's favorably in terms of basic communication, one third — primarily parents, teachers and business members — say that they do not receive an agenda in
advance of meetings. On the other hand, 80% say that minutes of the meetings are made available promptly, although 26% of the teachers and 17% of the parents disagree with this statement. With respect to being able to put an issue on the agenda, 83% feel that this is not a problem. In addition, 92% of the respondents believe that members attend meetings regularly and 90% report that experienced members understand the CDM process. Although 63% of the respondents feel that new CDM members do understand the CDM process, 37% do not agree. Only five principals feel that new CDM members do not understand the process.

While these responses suggest that the CDMs are generally capable in the business of communicating with members, they indicate less about broader communication to the school community. The interviews clearly indicate that communication with the broader community is problematic for most CDMs. Were CDM communications more effective, either at the school or district level, more parents would be aware of their local CDMs and the overall process.

Many interviewees cite an additional concern relating to communication with the broader community. They frequently note that there has not been any significant, recent effort by the district to communicate CDM success stories. Yet, many CDM members have success stories to tell. These include stories related to climate or student issues such as creating a discipline code and saving or introducing programs in music or art. It is not clear how widely known these stories are even at the schools where they occurred. The publicizing of these successes might increase both the understanding and the involvement of parents and teachers.

**Decision-Making Process**

One component of decision-making concerns the mechanics of decisions such as how much time is allocated in meetings and how votes are taken. On this score, while still positive, the overall decision-making process receives lower favorability ratings than other aspects of meeting conduct. For example, only 64% of the survey respondents believe that the CDM has enough time to make decisions. Further, only 68% see the CDM as a decision-making body. As indicated earlier, this means that 32% of those actively involved on CDMs throughout Denver believe that their role is advisory.

There are also conflicting views on how decisions are actually made. Most respondents, a distinct 78%, believe that the decision-making process is clear. In addition, 83% indicate that decisions are made by consensus. Yet 43% indicate that decisions are made by majority vote. This contradiction was evident throughout the interviews, as well.

In Denver, there is no consensus on consensus. Definitions of consensus vary considerably, with some defining it as everybody agreeing on an issue, others as a majority opinion (either a majority vote or “most people agree”), and still others as a generally understood system whereby CDM members do not break from the dominant committee opinion unless they feel very strongly about an issue. This confusion mirrors the contract, which defines consensus as “either unanimous or a majority decision.” (5-7-1) Because the contract places both of these decision-making methods under the heading of consensus, both are accepted means of making decisions. Nevertheless, consensus by any traditional measure differs considerably from majority vote.

**C. Leadership and Control**

**Overall Trends**

There is a direct linear relationship between the quality of CDM leadership and respondents’ perceptions of satisfaction at the school sites. The principal is seen by most parties as the key to a successful CDM. It was repeatedly noted that the principal “makes or breaks” the ability of the CDM to function.

The contract gives principals a significant role in shaping and making decisions at the sites. At the schools where CDM receives moderate or high satisfaction ratings, the principals are often credited
with creating a positive climate. “Our principal knows how to build a constituency around an issue,” indicates a long-time involved parent.

Another parent, who is involved on two different CDM’s, notes that “At one school, the principal makes sure that we all work as a team. At the other, the principal makes little effort to share leadership.” According to the CDM/SIAC office files, only ten current CDM’s report having the principal as the chairperson.

As described earlier, some respondents see the main purpose of the CDM as bridging the gap between faculty, administration, and parents. Around this more modest goal, it is not surprising that satisfaction occurs most often when the principal is open to broad involvement of teachers and parents, and where there is general agreement on roles. All parties are involved on these CDM’s, and each feels it has a substantive role. “Some people have no problem sharing leadership, and that equals a functional CDM,” notes a bilingual parent of a school with a successful CDM. “The CDM is good because it keeps the staff on its toes,” notes another parent.

The contract authorizes the principal to over-rule CDM decisions in many areas. A significant number of respondents are concerned about the principal’s “veto” power. “As long as the principal has total control,” notes one long time activist and member of many district committees, “others aren’t empowered.” Other comments used to describe some CDM’s are “rubber stamp,” “mired in bureaucracy,” and “useless.” “It’s frustrating,” says one parent, “when the CDM makes a decision and the principal won’t carry it out.” Although the principal’s veto is often cited, the formal use of the veto power does appear to be the real issue. The interviews indicate that respondents are often reacting more to the way information can be shared selectively or decisions can be maneuvered to undercut the collaborative decision-making process.

Many principals share these concerns. “The tone of the CDM is set by the principal, and unfortunately we have a lot of autocrats. Many CDM’s operate in name only,” notes one principal who supports CDM. Another principal adds, “Not only do some principals simply override or veto CDM decisions, they control the agenda and access to information.” This alignment of authority does not make sense to some CDM members. “Don’t have the principal voting on the CDM,” argues one long-time member. “That’s like having the superintendent as a voting member of the board.”

Many principals are not altogether happy with CDM’s either, but for different reasons. “My job is to ensure that children are well-educated,” says one frustrated principal, “I don’t need parents and business people to do this. I need to spend more time in classrooms and less time in meetings.” “When the phone rings,” says another, “the principal is the bottom line.” Some principals, particularly those in areas where CDM participation is low, complain about the amount of time they spend trying to get parents involved. “There are multiple opportunities for parents to get involved. CDM’s are the least used,” notes one principal. She adds: “I’m tired of it. It’s not my favorite thing.”

Not all of those who are unhappy with CDM, or who want change, blame the principal. As indicated earlier, the central administration is perceived by many respondents as not providing information, particularly budget information, with enough lead time for action by the CDM’s. Others decry the lack of central administrative support, and claim that the administration does not care about CDM action. “We don’t have site-based management,” notes one active parent. “We can put things in place, but it can change at the whim of downtown. They don’t want to let go of the control strings—why bother?” This response is echoed by others. “The district shows benign neglect for the CDM and other processes and jealously guards its power,” says one parent and district committee member. “People at DPS have to realize that you don’t just use CDM’s to validate what you are doing,” says a CDM business representative.

A few respondents complain that their CDM’s are controlled by small groups of teachers, as noted above, or even, in a few instances, by parents. “Teachers made all the decisions before CDM,” notes one parent; “they won’t give it up.” But it is teachers as often as parents who
complain about principal or central administrative interference. “Half of the CDM’s are run by principals,” notes a parent activist and CDM member, “which has a chilling effect on staff.” In other instances, teachers see the CDM as just another requirement for teachers. “CDM doesn’t empower teachers,” says one principal. “I just think it takes up their time. When it’s time to elect teacher representatives, no one will make eye contact.” Yet, a teacher leader notes, “If we believe our voice will really count, we’ll participate.”

**Related Concerns**

Issues related to control and influence can significantly affect how participants assess a collaborative decision-making model. It is therefore essential to identify common beliefs related to these issues.

Thirty percent of the overall survey respondents feel that one group or individual controls the decisions of the CDM. This opinion is held by 41% of the teachers and by 30% of the parents. Only 3% of the principals agree that one group or individual controls decisions of the CDM.

In order to make reliable comparisons at the school level, the survey responses were aggregated for 81 schools where survey responses were received from 50% or more of the current CDM members. The response rates at the other schools were not sufficient for this type of aggregation. Comparisons were made of the aggregated responses for 56 elementary, 14 middle and 11 high school. The aggregated responses revealed that 32% or 18 of the elementary schools, 14% or 2 of the middle schools and 36% or 4 of the high schools feel that CDM decisions are controlled by one group or individual. Thus, this issue of control is prevalent at 24 of the 81 schools with the highest response rates.

A related issue concerns the influence of special interest groups. In the aggregate, 36% of the respondents feel that special interest groups influence the decisions of the CDM. Nearly half of the teachers (49%) express this belief as well as 28% of the parents and 24% of the principals.

Returning to the 81 schools, the data indicate that special interest groups are viewed as having an influence on the decisions of the CDM at 34% of the elementary schools, 21% of the middle schools and 46% of the high schools. This comprises 27 of the 81 schools.

The aggregated school level data were also used to establish “satisfaction” ratings. Satisfaction was based on composite ratings of the various areas of communication, meetings, decision-
making, support and scope. Based on these composite ratings, the 81 schools were divided into three satisfaction levels: low, moderate and high satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Levels</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the elementary schools with low satisfaction ratings, 76% feel that one group or individual controlled the CDM decisions and 67% agree that special interest groups influence CDM decisions. Of the 41 elementary schools in the moderate to high satisfaction groups, only 39% feel that decisions were controlled by one group or individual while 46% believe that special interest groups influence decisions. At the middle school level, one low and one high satisfaction school indicate that decisions were controlled by one group or individual. Special interest group influence is indicated by only two middle schools—both in the low satisfaction group. At the high school level, four schools (44%) in the low satisfaction group indicate that one group or individual controls decisions. Four low satisfaction and one moderate satisfaction high school indicate that special interest groups influence CDM decisions.

C. Accountability

The need for accountability is closely tied to perceptions of overall CDM effectiveness and impact. Although most of the survey respondents believe that the schools are accountable for implementing CDM decisions, there is little evidence to support this belief. Neither the interviews nor the review of existing practices provide evidence of effective mechanisms for accountability. One member of the Board of Education succinctly summarized the core issue by noting, “Nobody owns the responsibility for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of CDM.” This captured the perspective of most interviewees, from board members to site level practitioners.

The line of authority that runs from the school board to the schools is not focused on CDM effectiveness. An exception is the perception that highly vocal CDM members can occasionally pressure the central administration to take (or force the principal to take) action on a particular item. This more closely approximates power politics than accountability.

A variety of mechanisms could be used for the purpose of accountability. Principals and teachers can be held accountable via a range of supervisory and evaluative practices. Holding a committee responsible for substantive activity, particularly if that committee includes large numbers of volunteers, requires a regular on-site presence. The CDM/SCIC Office (discussed in Section 4-C, Supports and Linkages) currently focuses more on compliance than accountability. While this office collects information, it does not tend to act on it. The office is not currently designed to be an on-site service operation.

As indicated earlier, the principal’s leadership role is pivotal to the success of CDM. It is therefore noteworthy that this contribution to the CDM process is not a significant factor in the evaluation of principals. Every central level supervisor of principals confirms that district goals drive these evaluations. The principal’s contribution to CDM is, in practice, an important evaluative factor only when there is visible discord emerging from the CDM committee. Given the breadth of responsibilities faced by urban principals, this sends a message regarding what priority to place on CDM. In this context, it is a compliment to many principals that their essentially independent efforts to facilitate CDM are valued by many teachers and parents.

In establishing parameters and considering how to assign decision-making authority to the sites, the district should make sure that authority and accountability are appropriately matched. With respect to CDM, there is a need for greater clarity on these issues at site, central administrative and policy levels.
Supports and Linkages

A. Overview

CDM is a district-wide initiative. To be successful, it requires support at school site, central and policy levels of the district and from the broader community. Many functions, if performed well, enhance the success of a CDM committee. Similarly, if any of these functions are performed poorly or insufficiently, they present barriers to CDM effectiveness. Both the surveys and interviews probed current practices and attitudes to determine their impact on the committees. The relational analysis of this data provides considerable information on barriers and supports that affect CDM.

Two categories of support emerge from this analysis—perceptual and structural. Perceptual supports include the perceived attitudes of and about participants. Structural supports include the formal mechanisms that have been established.

B. Perceptual Supports

Schools and Community

Local support for CDM is high. Although, as noted earlier, there are concerns related to the control of the CDM’s at some schools, the prevailing trend line is distinctly positive. For example, 87% of the survey respondents feel that the administration at their school supports CDM, 79% believe the teachers and staff at their school are supportive, 75% see the parents at their school as supportive, and 71% consider business and the community at large to be supportive.

There are several notable items within the reported data. As an example, 98% of the principals see themselves as supporting CDM. Also, a few parents share the view of a PTSA president who says that “Teachers feel it would be
a dangerous precedent for parents to be allowed to make educational decisions for children.” However, only 27% of the teachers and 17% of the parents feel that teachers and staff are not supportive of CDM.

The local press and media are seen as supporting CDM by 54% of the overall respondents. This includes 68% of the principals, but just 51% of the parents and 49% of the teachers. Press and media support is generally perceived as taking the form of positive coverage. These findings suggest a potential need for outreach activities by the district’s public relations staff.

Overall, the responses of site level practitioners and volunteers are positive.

**Denver Classroom Teachers Association**

DCTA is considered supportive of CDM by 78% of the survey respondents. This view is shared by 87% of the classified staff, 84% of the teachers, 77% of the principals, 66% of the parents, and 56% of the community/business representatives.

Overall, these findings are consistent with an approach that provides teachers with increased decision-making opportunities at the schools.

**Central Administration**

The perception of the support received from the central administration, while still positive, is lower than for the other levels of the system described above and for the Board of Education. This somewhat mixed message is reflected in the interviews and survey responses. Most respondents feel the central administration is not highly supportive of CDM, but also indicate that it is not extremely oppositional either.

The perceptions of the central administration appear to be mediated through several factors. These are described below.

First, many respondents note that CDM was initially imposed on the district by the Governor in 1991. They describe the previous administration as having been antagonistic to CDM. When contrasted to that administration, the current administration is frequently described in positive terms.

Second, most districts have tensions between the school sites and the central administration. These are heightened in Denver because the district has cogent, assertive central leadership. Such leadership contributes, for example, to the previously cited success in generating a district-wide understanding of the literacy initiatives. It also contributes to the emphasis on centrally-defined objectives in the evaluation of principals, to the exclusion of CDM as a significant evaluative factor. It should be noted, though, that strong district leadership is not a contradiction to a shared decision-making process.

Third, certain budgetary decisions have been delegated to the sites. As discussed previously, the degree of budgetary authority vested in the sites is open to legitimate differences of opinion. Also, the district’s overall fiscal constraints lead numerous respondents to question the genuineness of the delegated authority. This view suggests that it is far easier to delegate authority when small levels of funds are involved. Nonetheless, the sites do have the authority to make conversions of several staff positions and budgetary line items. Many large districts do not share this level of decision-making with the sites.

Fourth, the central administration has established, staffed and provided resources to the CDM/SIAC Office. This represents support of CDM.

The central administration is described as supportive of CDM by 61% of the survey respondents. This includes 84% of the principals, 75% of the classified staff, 61% of the community/business representatives, 59% of the teachers and 52% of the parents. These are positive statements which also leave considerable room for improvement.

The dissenting viewpoint is shared by 48% of the parents and 41% of the teachers. These percentages shift when the responses are disaggregated to determine the perspectives of those who previously served on CDM’s, but no longer do so. For these former CDM members, 54% feel that the central administration does not support CDM. This view is shared by 62% of the parents previously involved and 52% of the teachers.
previously involved. This suggests an area for longitudinal follow-up research.

Outsiders and insiders characteristically describe the central administration of the Denver Public Schools, referred to as “900 Grant Street,” as having a legacy of top down management. One active CDM committee member (with experience on the CDM, DSIAC and other bodies), expresses the view of many: “I don’t think the central office is comfortable with sites making decisions.”

Several principals agree. One notes, “The success of CDM depends on the focus of the superintendent—whether there is a hierarchical or a collaborative relationship. It is difficult to see a structure of support from the superintendent.” Typical of principal comments on district and board support is: “Board support is okay. District level support depends on who you know.” Another notes, “900 Grant Street is on Mars in relation to what we’re doing at the sites.”

As indicated above, most respondents who are skeptical or negative regarding the administration see the issue more in terms of a lack of support rather than obstruction. The comments from the community came from active parents and business leaders who have served on multiple committees over the years. One DSIAC member comments that “Some board members are supportive. I’m not sure about the principals, and the superintendent is definitely not committed.” A business leader perceives the attitude of the administration as “patronizing towards citizen committees,” saying it would “rather direct actions than explain what and why. The district is significantly backsliding on its commitment to the CDM process, and the principals are overwhelmed.” Another active district level committee member says that “the biggest change needed is a cultural change where the district’s leadership moves quickly to embrace the CDM process.”

The administration’s stance on CDM needs to be formalized. If it wants to see CDM prosper, it needs to provide greater support, require greater accountability and publicize both the CDM process and the administration’s commitment to that process. CDM’s do exist and are active in many schools. The administration could reap substantial public relations benefits for the district as a whole simply by publicizing successes and by more visibly and actively expanding the level of support to the CDM committees.

**Board of Education**

During the interviews, many respondents initially linked their opinions on the Board of Education with those on the central administration. When these are separated, board members are seen as more supportive. However, many respondents question the degree of board exposure to site realities.

The scope of board responsibilities, particularly in a large urban district, is extensive. The board needs to be knowledgeable about the differentiated needs of the individual school sites, yet establish and support district-wide policies. This makes the board’s role in CDM more delicate and complex than often acknowledged.

In the aggregate, 69% of survey respondents feel that the board supports CDM. This view is shared by 95% of the principals, 85% of the classified staff, 64% of the teachers and community/business representatives, and 61% of the parents. This also means that 39% of the parents and 36% of the teachers do not share this point of view. The parents who have previously served on CDM’s, but no longer do, are split 50:50 on how they view the board’s support on CDM. Some interviewees feel that the board occasionally abrogates the responsibility of ensuring the quality of CDM district-wide. They feel that the board can too quickly delegate a given problem to the sites by categorizing it “as a CDM issue.” Several board members express a concern in this regard, as well. Overall, though, the interviewees generally feel that the board supports CDM.

Numerous board members note that board support of CDM is not always effective. “The board says that they support it but we don’t always act like it,” says one member. Another
describes the central administration as “not really committed to site-based management.” Still another notes that “we need to be more vigilant in making sure that the administration does more for CDM.”

A marked trend in the interviews is the stated belief that “the board supports CDM, but does not necessarily understand it.” Numerous site-level CDM members indicate that CDMs are rarely provided the opportunity to make presentations to the board. Several board members share this concern. They note that CDMs do not provide direct reports to the board, so that “most of our information is anecdotal, and then it’s usually negative.”

Overall, the board is perceived as supportive of CDM. Board members and site participants alike identify the need for more direct and frequent communication between the CDMs and the board.

C. Structural Supports

CDM/SIAC Office

In 1996, DPS established the CDM/SIAC Office. This included creating the position of CDM Public Resources Officer and allocating resources to this office. Over a period of two years, several functions and services which had previously been provided by the Center for Quality Schools (discussed below) were transferred to this office. Thus, DPS assumed the responsibility for supporting and monitoring CDM operations. The CDM/SIAC Office is the designated vehicle for meeting this responsibility.

The Center conducted an on-site review of the management and operations of the CDM/SIAC Office. This included interviewing appropriate DPS administrative personnel, reviewing all material sent in the past two years by the Office to school sites as well as their responses, examining randomly selected copies of school improvement plans, and reviewing the brochures, guidelines, reports and training materials generated by the Office.

The CDM/SIAC Office is structured more for purposes of compliance than for capacity building. Due to work load and resource constraints, site focused support and outreach is not emphasized. Also, neither the principals nor the area superintendents are linked structurally to the Office around issues of CDM operations or impact. Thus, it is easy to by-pass the Office. This exacerbates the perceptions that CDM is not structured to be an accountable process. It also leads, especially given the lack of communications or accountability mechanisms, to suspicions as to the level of commitment by the administration to the concepts of collaborative decision-making.

Much of the compliance activity relates to the DCTA contract and/or state requirements. This activity focuses on securing data from the CDM’s such as by-laws, committee rosters, meeting agenda, attendance records, minutes, annual progress reports to the community (required by the state for accreditation), school improvement plans, and communication plans. The Office seeks to gather this data, but is neither structured to analyze the data, nor equipped to develop comprehensive support programs that address the findings from the sites. From the documents available, it was not possible to determine the overall levels of school progress or compliance with the DCTA contractual requirements (identified in Section 5.8.1 of the contract).

The Office is engaged in several additional activities. It provides CDM member orientation programs. It provides support to the CDM Improvement Council (discussed below), particularly in facilitating the formal dispute resolution process. There is no record of a more proactive response by the Office to intervene informally at an earlier stage of a dispute.

The Office distributes a “Principal Performance Review” form. When or if a CDM completes this form, it is sent to the appropriate area superintendent or director. Since no record or notice is sent to the Office, no appropriate follow up action can be determined. The Office provides a “Suggested Calendar of CDM
Activities" to all sites and CDM members. It is impossible to tell from file documents what use is made of it by the schools. The Office provides CDMs with a sample survey (in English and Spanish) to gauge the satisfaction of the school community with the CDM. However, this instrument is not linked to the CDM Self-Evaluation form. These instruments, if administered and returned to the Office along with the State Accreditation Review, would be excellent mechanisms for determining where additional assistance is needed.

The survey responses suggest areas of concern. For example, the CDM/SIAC Office is not seen as providing leadership to CDM by 60% of the community/business representatives, 53% of the parents and 51% of the teachers. In addition, the Office does not provide useful assistance to the CDM's in the view of 52% of the community/business representatives, 51% of the teachers and 47% of the parents. In concert, these two data sets indicate that the Office's activities are not resulting in accomplishments that are valued highly by the local CDM's.

**CDM Improvement Council**

The CDM Improvement Council (CIC) is a construct of the contract. The core objective of the CIC is to "review the roles and operations of the CDM Committees to determine how they can be improved in order to achieve the primary goal of CDM which is to improve student achievement." The CIC has several specific charges. These include providing resources for facilitation and technical assistance, providing and overseeing the implementation of training programs, assisting schools to collect data on CDM operations and effectiveness, and helping schools to conduct annual evaluations of their CDM Committees. The CIC is also intended to serve as the conflict resolution mechanism for CDM.

The composition of the CIC is delineated in the contract. It includes the Superintendent, a member of the Board of Education, the President of DCTA, two school administrators, two parents, two community members and two classified employees.

The CIC is not viewed favorably. Only 43% of the survey respondents believe that "the CIC contributes to the effective operations of CDM." In contrast, 60% of the teachers and 40% of the parents disagree with that statement. The interviews were equally critical. It was noted that "the CIC is a waste of time," is considered "irrelevant," and "the process moves too slowly to be of any use." The CIC is clearly not seen as a support to CDM.

**Center for Quality Schools**

In 1991, a group of citizen volunteers, including business, higher education and foundation leaders, formed Citizens for Quality Schools. The group's goal was to "assist and support the CDM committees in meeting the educational needs of DPS students."

The following year, this group created a project called the Center for Quality Schools. The mission of Citizens for Quality Schools became the mission of the Center. This included working "toward fundamental change of the institutional culture and structure of the DPS District to dramatically improve the education of all children."

Local foundations and businesses primarily funded this effort. DPS also provided a grant to support CDM training. The Piton Foundation served as the financial anchor and fiscal agent.

During a six year period, the Center for Quality Schools provided on-site individualized CDM training, district-wide training and conferences, topical workshops (e.g., site-based budgeting), team building and conflict resolution assistance. It also provided an information clearinghouse function and related services.

The Center for Quality Schools was intended to be a time-limited project. In 1998, the Center disbanded and transferred its remaining functions to the CDM/SIAC Office. Interviews suggest that the Center's independent assessment and advocacy functions have not been incorporated into the scope of operations of the CDM/SIAC Office.
Linkages and the Educational Advisory Councils

The Educational Advisory Councils (EACs) were created to foster positive relationships between specific racial and ethnic communities and the Denver Public Schools, and to improve educational opportunities for the respective student populations. The Denver Public Schools Board of Education established the Hispanic Educational Advisory Council in 1969, the Black Educational Advisory Council in 1971, the Asian Educational Advisory Council in 1985, and the American Indian Advisory Council in 1987.

The objectives of the EACs include serving as a link from their respective communities to the district, advising and making recommendations to the Board of Education and Superintendent regarding the educational needs of the students and parents, assisting in the development of programs to increase parent education and involvement, and reviewing, evaluating, and helping to develop curriculum to reflect the contributions made by ethnic groups of the district.

The Councils' membership is appointed by the Board of Education and consists of 14 community members and parents, 6 DPS educators and a DPS Advisory Council Coordinator.

There does not appear to be a strong relationship between the CDM and EAC structures. CDMs focus on individual schools; EAC's promote responsiveness to the needs of populations spread across the schools. A similar range of reactions to the central administration may be seen from both groups—from distrust to wariness to cooperation. Several EAC members indicate a lack of support from the central administration for needs identified within their ethnic communities. “The district is willing to take credit for academic gains of our children,” said one, “but is not passionate about addressing their other needs at school.”

EAC members interviewed are supportive of CDM, but some indicate that CDMs are not always supportive in return. “CDMs are not always open to the EAC point of view,” observes one. “They take the attitude that if it doesn’t affect the whole population they are reluctant to support it.”

The lack of linkage between the CDMs and the EAC appears emblematic of a larger problem that extends to such groups as the Bi-Lingual Parent Advisory Councils and the SIACs. There is a clear lack of integration and coordination across these vehicles for involvement.

By not developing more effective linkages with the EACs, the schools and the district overall are by-passing an opportunity to increase the diversity of participation on the CDM Committee. This also represents a missed opportunity to identify issues that unite parents across racial and ethnic lines.

Training

Providing high quality training is a necessity for effective collaborative decision-making. In Denver, the approach to training has gone through many transitions. In the early years of CDM, the entire CDM process was new to all participants. Everyone was essentially at the same starting point. This made it easier to train all the members of a CDM concurrently and to train groups of CDMs together.

Training has focused on issues of process (i.e. consensus decision-making) and content (i.e. budgetary understanding). As CDM has matured, the levels of experience and expertise and the areas of focus have varied between and within CDMs. Now, there is an increasingly greater need for training that responds to the differentiated needs of the individual CDMs and their members.

Many different entities and individuals have provided training to the CDMs. Initially, much of the training was provided by the Center for Quality Schools. In recent years, as indicated earlier, this has become the responsibility of the CDM/SIAC Office. A range of consultants, district officials and DCTA representatives are involved in responding to training requests.

Training is currently provided according to the following general calendar:
September and October: General orientation training. Topics include the CDM handbook, team building, consensus decision making, and problem solving/conflict resolution.

January: Personnel Subcommittee. Topics include the duties and responsibilities of subcommittee members.

March and April: Topics include budgets and school improvement planning.

The survey responses indicate several positive trends regarding training. They also identify several areas that need additional attention.

Overall, 71% of the respondents feel that the training is provided at a convenient location, 65% feel it is available at the appropriate time of the year, and 64% feel it is provided at a convenient time. These are positive responses. They also indicate that training is provided at an inconvenient time for 36% of the respondents, at an inappropriate time of year for 35%, and an inconvenient place for 29% (particularly noted by parents). This suggests that significant numbers of CDM members may not be reached by current methodologies.

Respondents are particularly interested in training that could be provided at their respective schools. This is noted by 86% of the community/business representatives, 82% of the parents, 82% of the classified staff, 81% of the teachers, and 68% of the principals. These are strikingly high responses.

The trainers are considered knowledgeable by 83% of the respondents and the training is seen as well presented by 76%. Further, 66% say that the training helped them and 57% feel it increased their skill level. Again, these are positive figures. Yet, they also mean that 34% of the respondents believe that the training didn’t help them, and 43% feel it did not advance their skill levels. A related concern is that 41% of the parents and 35% of the teachers feel the training did not prepare them for participating on their CDM.

Many respondents think there should be additional training topics. This view is shared by 96% of the community/business representatives, 88% of the parents, 82% of the teachers, and 66% of the principals. It is particularly noteworthy that 89% of all respondents indicate the need for "training that addresses the needs of my CDM." In the interviews, most agree that training for the CDM as a team is more valuable than training provided only for new members.

There are clear indications that respondents are concerned about the levels of training being provided. "Different levels of training are not available" in the view of 64% of the teachers, 63% of the principals and 60% of the parents.

From the interviews, several areas emerge as training priorities. These include training which focuses on the roles and responsibilities of CDM’s, and on the leadership role of principals in working with parents and community groups. There are also frequently stated requests for more advanced training in the areas of budgets, personnel issues and school improvement planning.

Many interviewees indicate that leadership training at DPS has been historically weak. While one respondent suggests that the training currently offered is "much better, more significant, more inclusive," this is distinctly a minority opinion. Most feel that the scope and frequency of training opportunities are not keeping up with the increasingly sophisticated needs of the CDM’s.

Training is expensive. A substantial increase in training services would require a substantial commitment from the district. But, as one teacher who serves on the Hispanic Education Advisory Council notes, "If training is an example of district and board support, then CDM is not a high priority." If the district’s goal is to improve effectiveness and involvement, particular attention to this issue is needed.
Impact and Perceptions

Overview

When CDM was established in 1991, the district neither collected nor established baseline data against which to measure the relationship of school improvement to CDM. In addition, indicators of quality performance for CDM’s were not defined.

Recognizing these gaps, the Study Steering Committee requested that a significant portion of the study focus on perceptions of satisfaction with CDM’s, and perceptions of impact, as reported by a range of interested parties. It also requested that the study identify such relationships as may exist between perceived impact and actual school results.

Accordingly, this study addresses impact at both levels. First, the study considers the extent to which CDM has achieved its primary goals: improvement in school climate and learning environment, improvement in parent and community involvement, and improvement in student achievement. The analysis for this question relies both on site level data concerning student outcomes and perceptual data from the survey. The extent of the relationship between the perceptions of success or impact at the schools and actual indications of that impact is also examined. Second, the study analyzes the extent to which respondents believe that their CDM’s have had an impact at their schools. Given the difficulty that exists in showing relationships in a complex environment such as a school, perceptions can be extremely important in providing indicators of impact.

To show improvement in any of the three categories based on site level achievement and behavior data, a district must have collected and compiled sufficient data, over time, to measure trends. Few districts in the country collect and disaggregate sufficient data on student achievement to show strong and valid trend lines. Fewer still collect data that adequately measure school
climate or parent involvement. The Denver Public Schools' Department of Research and Planning is superior to many in its ability to collect and analyze data. The study correlated data made available by this department with respondent perceptions of impact at the schools.

In addition, even if districts do collect appropriate data, significant events often intervene. In the case of Denver, this included changes related to desegregation. These resulted in a significant change in the population of many of the district's schools. When school populations change significantly, the statistics relevant to school performance are not useful for longitudinal comparisons. In
Denver's case, trend lines reaching earlier than 1995 cannot be relied upon to show trends in improvement for many schools because of these changes. Finally, even if appropriate data is kept and compiled, and if other events do not intervene to weaken or change the data, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate causal relationships with a single factor—in this case the hard-to-quantify activity of school site CDM's.

Within this context, the study explored the extent of statistical correlation between perceptions of impact and measurable school results, using data made available by the district, and the results of the survey responses regarding the perceived impact of CDM's across the city. The results are presented below in two sections. The first section examines the correlation between the overall perceptions of all respondents and measurable school results. The second examines the differences in perceptions among respondent groups.

In order to compare survey response data by school with school level data provided by the Department of Research and Planning, survey responses were aggregated for the 81 schools whose respondents represent 50% or more of the CDM. These responses by school were averaged to yield an impact rating for the areas identified above. They could then be directly related to school level data. Correlation analysis was used to determine if relationships existed, as described below. Except as noted, all statistics and inferences comparing perceived impact to school level data in this section are drawn from these 81 schools.

1. Perceived impact compared to available school results

The Center established three sets of school data for use in comparing actual and perceived impact, based on data supplied by DPS. The three areas of consideration were school climate and learning environment, parent and community involvement, and student achievement.

An initial correlation between the impact ratings themselves indicated that the perceived impact on school climate and on student behavior is significant ($r=.712, p<.000$).

A. School climate and learning environment

Significant indicators for determining climate at the schools include attendance, graduation, dropout, suspension, and mobility rates of students. Practically speaking, though, none of these fully measures school climate. Measures such as attrition and mobility tend to be driven by parent circumstances more than satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school. Graduation rates affect high schools, and do not provide a way for drawing inferences about elementary and middle schools. Also, many children attend school regardless of how they or their parents perceive the climate, and the variability of this statistic is generally narrow. Most schools have an attendance rate in the 90-99% range. Nonetheless, attendance was selected as the best available indicator, as it affects all schools and is a positive indicator.

The study tested the correlation between perceptions of survey respondents regarding the impact of their CDM's on school climate and student behavior, and the following four school-site statistics: attendance, attrition, dropout, and suspension rates. Overall, 71% of respondents believe that their school's CDM had an impact on school climate. As noted above, there is a strong correlation between the perceptions of CDM on school climate and the perceptions of CDM on student behavior.

The only positive relationship identified between perceived impact and school level data was for attendance. Specifically, the correlation between school climate and attendance is statistically significant at $p<.05$ ($r = .226$). While the magnitude of this correlation is small, it does indicate that a relationship exists between the survey responses and the empirical data.

It is relevant that those schools where respondents believe they are having an impact in these
areas do show this correlation. Further, it is possible that CDM impact on school climate may be stronger than shown, since attendance is itself only one indicator of school climate. Consequently, while there are limited data which demonstrate that CDM's are having an impact on school climate, the relationships that are statistically significant are positive. In this, as in all statistical measures, correlation does not equal causation. Rather, correlation suggests a positive relationship between variables. There is a positive correlation between CDM impact on climate—as perceived by survey respondents—and student attendance rates.

B. Parent and community involvement

No measure of school results was available in the area of parent and community involvement, the second of the primary goals identified by the Study Steering Committee, so no correlation between perceived impact and site level data could be measured. Sixty percent of all respondents to the survey indicated that they thought their CDM's had an impact on parent and community involvement.

Based on survey results and anecdotal evidence that emerged in the interviews, it appears that CDM's have had a positive impact on parent involvement, but such impact has not occurred equally at all schools or for all parent groups. For 62% of the parent respondents to the survey, CDM has been successful in increasing parent involvement. Most also indicate that CDM's have been less successful in drawing other people from the community.

C. Student achievement

The second correlation analysis examined the relationship between perceived impact on student achievement and the percent of students scoring in the fourth quartile on the reading and mathematics sections of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 1997–98, across all grades. This is a measure of impact against current student achievement rather than improvements in achievement over time.

The results of the two correlations are not statistically significant. In Denver, as noted above, the changes in student population that occurred in 1995 make the attempt to chart school achievement trends difficult. This does not mean that such a relationship does not exist. Rather, it means that the data available for this analysis are not sufficiently robust, or do not exist in sufficiently great numbers, to justify that claim.

The Center does recommend establishing indicators of quality and success for school attributes such as school climate, parent involvement, and CDM effectiveness. A baseline should be established, and data related to these indicators should be collected regularly. In addition, the Center recommends further disaggregating available student data against a range of student and school factors. These recommendations are contained in Section 6.

2. Perceived impact by respondent category

Overview

Many of the factors that CDM's are designed to address are, to a significant extent, based on the perceptions of individuals. For example, if most people perceive a school as having a friendly and open climate, then that school has a friendly and open climate for them. No statistic can disprove those perceptions. Similarly, if some people perceive the same school as having an unfriendly or hostile climate, they are not wrong, even though they are in the minority. They simply perceive the climate differently.

To measure perceptions regarding the impact of CDM on various aspects of student life, the Center asked respondents to rate the extent of CDM impact from high impact to no impact in several areas. These responses do not measure the quality of perceived impact or whether that impact is seen as negative or positive. They only measure the extent of perceived impact, from high to none. The results are summarized on page 40.
A. Student Achievement

As already noted, 72% of respondents believe that CDM activity has an impact on student achievement. The range of levels and types of impact that people are considering varies widely. For some respondents, a CDM may have an impact on parent involvement and student behavior which, they feel, affects student achievement. From this interpretation, some of these respondents draw a direct connection between CDM activity and student achievement. They will respond that CDM impact on student achievement is moderate or high. Others will conclude that the CDM impact on student achievement, while real, is indirect, and will rate the CDM impact lower. Still others will feel that the impact is insubstantial, and give correspondingly low ratings. Figure 9 breaks down responses by level and respondent group.

B. Parent Involvement

Out of all respondents, 60% believe that CDM's have a moderate or high impact on parent involvement. There is little variation by level. Among elementary school respondents, 62% rate CDM impact on parent involvement as moderate or high. Among middle school respondents, 60% rate impact as moderate or high. Among high school respondents, the figure is 55%. As with many of the questions discussed above, this response may be seen in two different ways. Sixty percent is a positive number indicating positive results overall. But since one of the easiest and most direct areas where CDM might be expected to have an impact is parent involvement, an overall rating of 60% is unacceptably low.

Perceptions of CDM impact on parent involvement are consistent across respondent groups. Parents rate CDM impact on parent involvement as moderate 43% and high 19%, for an overall positive response of 62%. Principals rate CDM impact as moderate 40% and high 26%, an overall positive rating of 66%. Thirty-eight percent of teachers indicate a moderate impact, while 18% indicate a high impact, for a total of 56%.

C. High and Low Impact Areas

The other areas where survey respondents indicate the highest extent of CDM impact are in school budgets (72%) and school climate (71%). In considering climate, 87% of principals, 73% of parents, and 62% of teachers indicate that their CDM had a moderate or high impact. Other respondent groups, including students, report similarly.

Given the discussion of CDM involvement in school budgeting, the extent of impact respondents' report may seem discordant at first. Ninety-two percent of the principals rate CDM impact as moderate or high in this area, along with 71% of the parents and 70% of the teachers. These results allow for multiple interpretations. It seems reasonable that 72% of CDM's have an impact on budget issues within their

---

**FIGURE 9**

**CDM Impact on Student Achievement by Level and Respondent Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By respondent group, this breaks down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Group</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Business</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>08.3%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Staff</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CDM, although this does not necessarily equate to a substantive role in decision-making. It must also be remembered that the perception of moderate or high impact by the CDM in a given area may not be viewed positively by everyone. Of the 92% of principals who responded that CDM has an impact, some may view this level of impact negatively rather than positively.

The lowest area of CDM impact, as rated by respondents, is personnel hiring and transfers. Fifty percent of teachers, 48% of community and business representatives, 42% of principals, and 40% of classified school staff rate CDM impact on these personnel issues as moderate or high. Given the exclusion of parents from the personnel subcommittee and the principal's veto authority with respect to that subcommittee, this response seems appropriate.

3. Summary
At the outset of this report, it was noted that approximately two thirds of respondents support CDM, and believe their CDM has an impact. These results vary from school to school, and from one respondent group to another, depending on the question. The responses to perceived impact generally reflect this trend: significant numbers of respondents believe that the CDM at their school has an impact in the areas under consideration. It has already been noted that support at this level is reason to be pleased but not reason to be satisfied. The final section of this study summarizes where issues and problems with CDM lie, and recommends steps that may be taken to strengthen CDM and increase the levels of participants' satisfaction.
Major Issues and Recommendations

Introduction

Collaborative Decision-Making is at a pivotal juncture in Denver. It is perceived positively by school, community and policy level participants. Yet significant and legitimate concerns are repeatedly expressed regarding how CDM is being implemented. The purpose and scope of CDM are defined differently at different sites, empowering some communities and not others. The breadth of representation and involvement are inconsistent from school to school. Although many of the goals of CDM are being advanced, overall accountability could be significantly enhanced.

This section summarizes and recommends steps to address the salient issues emerging from this study. The recommendations urge the district to take a more active role in shaping, steering and influencing the direction of CDM. They respond directly to the issues identified by teachers and parents, site and central administrators, board and committee members, classified staff and business leaders, and other concerned members of the Denver educational community.

The vast majority of survey and interview respondents want CDM to continue and be improved. This has implications for the district. For example, evaluating the principal is stated as a priority for CDM activity. If the district truly wants to CDM to focus on this objective, there are implications for changes of structure, responsibility and accountability that follow from this decision. If, however, the district does not feel that evaluating the principal is a legitimate priority for the CDM’s, such a decision implies a different set of actions.
Whether the district directly adopts the recommendations presented below, or finds alternative ways to accomplish the same objectives, addressing these issues along the lines recommended will strengthen both CDM and the Denver Public Schools.

The summary and recommendations follow.

A. Charter, Charge and Decision-Making Roles

The purpose and decision-making responsibilities of the CDM committees all need to be clarified. This includes defining the division of duties and responsibilities at the sites. For example, although the contract delineates a range of responsibilities, confusion still exists as to whether CDM’s are truly decision-making or advisory committees. The following three issues must be addressed together.

Issue 1: Clarity of Purpose and Vision

OVERVIEW

There is a critical need for a common understanding of the objectives of CDM and the CDM committees. The purposes articulated in the contract present a vision of site CDM’s as directing many aspects of school functioning. The actual practice of CDM in Denver does not provide that level of authority to the local committees. The DPS community must define the purpose of CDM, and structure decision-making authority accordingly.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- Convene a citywide summit to define and confirm the purpose, expectations and priorities for CDM.
  The summit should be broad-based, fully representing all constituent groups. It should be structured to identify issues, ascertain areas of agreement and refer areas of disagreement to a structured, credible resolution process.
- Communicate the finalized agreements to school and community audiences. Minimally, this should include all principals and site level staff, all parent representatives on district and site committees, all central level supervisors of the schools and the broader community via Denver’s two daily newspapers.
- Include the finalized agreements as an addendum to the DCTA contract. This would reconfirm the provisions in the contract. Since the inception of CDM, formal changes have been attached to the contract.

Issue 2: Scope and Priority of CDM Responsibility

OVERVIEW

The scope of CDM is so broad that it is impractical and, at times, intimidating for the local committees. It is simply not possible for parents, staff, community/business representatives and students to make informed and careful decisions in all areas designated in the contract. With such a breadth of responsibilities, CDM’s are over-stretched.

Committees operate best at the levels of planning, policy and evaluation, not day-to-day implementation. Thus, where the contract defines CDM functions in such terms as review and approve and determine the procedure for, success is more likely than where the CDM has operational responsibility. Daily operational responsibilities should be reassigned. Instead, CDM’s should have authority in and should focus on the substantive areas of climate, school improvement planning, budget and personnel. The scope and structure of this authority needs to be more clearly delineated.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- Define and focus the scope and priorities of CDM responsibility. This requires itemizing all of the areas of responsibility currently outlined in the contract, establishing the priority areas for CDM activity and ascertaining the roles and levels of authority for CDM’s with regard to each area of high priority. This will require a multi-step process, involving site and central participants. This should be the precursor to the summit described above.
• **Redefine the CDM role to become more focused on policy, direction and evaluation.** The CDM role should be honed to focus more on decision-making in the most significant areas of student achievement and behavior, the budget and personnel.

• **Reassign daily operational decisions to the purview of the principals.** The contract currently assigns certain decisions to the CDM’s that are more appropriate to the on-site manager. These include such areas as determining the use of equipment, supplies and space, organizing and assigning staff time, and approving the use of job sharing arrangements.

• **Elevate the importance of school improvement planning.** If school improvement plans are used as the driving force for improving student achievement at the site level, this should be a central priority for CDM activity and community involvement. School improvement plans can play this pivotal role if they are based both on district goals and the careful identification of conditions at the sites. These plans can then drive personnel, curriculum and instructional reviews, and can be used to measure school progress, allocate resources to the school, and determine accountability for principals and other school personnel.

• **Resolve the issue of the parents’ role on the personnel subcommittee.** The lack of a parent voting role on this subcommittee is one of the few salient areas of disagreement among respondents. It is also contradictory to the collaborative intent of CDM. The district should examine the practices of others who have dealt with this issue, including the districts of Anchorage, Alaska, Dade County, Florida, Hammond, Indiana and Edmonton, Alberta, plus the Kentucky General Assembly.

**Issue 3: Parameters for Decision-Making**

**OVERVIEW**
The decision-making and advisory roles of CDM’s are unclear. Many respondents indicate that one group or individual controls the decisions of their CDM. Much of this reaction is specifically traceable to clashing views of the roles and functions of the CDM’s.

The district needs to develop parameters for decision-making. These parameters should indicate which decisions are made centrally, which are made at the sites, who is responsible in each area of decision-making, and what is meant by involvement. Without such parameters, differing interpretations of who decides what inevitably lead to misunderstanding, mistrust, and inefficiency.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

• **Develop parameters for decision-making.** The overriding purpose for creating parameters is to delineate the levels of authority and organizational permission that will govern CDM. For each major decision area in the contract, it is critical to determine who is authorized to make decisions, who must be consulted before decisions are made, and who must be advised of a decision before implementation.

• **Create a Parameters Task Force.** This should consist of representatives from the major participant groups—teachers, classified staff, principals, central administrators and parents, each of whom should be charged with communicating with members of their constituencies. Overall, the task force should analyze current practice and develop recommendations for board approval. As part of this effort, the task force should assess the historical delegation of authority in the district, analyze current regulatory constraints and examine current authority relating to the major categories of the budget.

**IMPACT**
The overall impact of these steps will be substantial. First, key interested parties will be given a forum for expressing their opinions as to the overall purpose and the locus of decision-making authority for each of the significant areas of site responsibility. Second, growing out of these comments and responses, areas of agreement
will be identified and incorporated into the working understanding of CDM responsibility and authority. Specific areas where conflicting points of view remain will then be addressed in a structured resolution process, which will ensure the fairness and openness of the deliberations.

The delineation of purposes, responsibilities, and parameters for decision-making will be finalized, distributed and publicized. These will be built on the foundation of school improvement planning. This will reconfirm that student achievement is the central focus of CDM. Finally, all parties will have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. CDM's will function in a powerful and appropriate planning and policy-making role, and principals will function as the operational and instructional leaders of their schools.

As the district resolves questions of role, charge and responsibility, and creates a general sense of clarity around scope, charge, and parameters of decision-making, both the satisfaction with and the effectiveness of CDM will increase. The end result will be more productive and more satisfied CDM's, and schools that are more learner centered and more effective in their instructional roles.

**B. Student Achievement**

Improving student achievement is described as the primary goal of CDM. It is also the first priority of the district. Yet operationally, improving student achievement is often not the primary focus of the CDM's. Some CDM's focus directly on student achievement. Some address this objective indirectly. Others focus CDM activity in entirely different areas of activity.

The following recommendations focus on assisting CDM's to address this priority goal. This requires a far greater emphasis on using school improvement planning to drive student achievement.

**Issue 4: Addressing the Conditions at Each School that Most Influence Learning**

**OVERVIEW**
If school improvement planning is to be meaningful, the resulting plans must be based on the realities of each school, as perceived by all members of the school community. In this context, it is critical to understand and utilize the perceptions of school staff, parents and students (at middle and high schools) when determining which conditions at a given school most affect student learning, either negatively or positively. Once these issues have been identified, the school community can then make a serious effort to determine the causes of conditions needing improvement, and set priorities as to which of these causes it will address in the coming year. The CDM's are ideally situated to manage this task.

The second reality that sites and the central administration need to understand is how students are performing, not just in the aggregate, but how each student—in each different program and from each different background—is performing at each school. Armed with such disaggregated student achievement data, schools are much better equipped to identify the conditions that have the greatest impact on achievement for different groups of students, to address the causes of those conditions and, as a consequence, to increase student achievement.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- **Reinforce the primary goal of CDM—to increase student achievement.** Based on this goal, the CDM's should be delegated the responsibility and authority to assume the lead role in school improvement planning.

- **Begin school improvement planning with a rigorous assessment of school conditions.** This assessment should include the perceptions of all significant groups within the school community. The assessment should identify critical conditions at the school and identify their causes.
• Target those conditions and causes that most impede student achievement for one or more student groups. Addressing these conditions should be the basis of the school improvement plan. Align budgetary, personnel, professional development, and other resources to address the highest priority issues identified through this form of organizational assessment.

**Issue 5: Understanding Student Achievement**

**OVERVIEW**

Denver is noteworthy in that the Department of Research and Planning has more capacity than such units in many comparably sized districts. This unit is capable of collecting and analyzing data at significant levels of disaggregation. The full nature and extent of district data analysis were not reviewed for the purposes of this study. However, it appears that DPS has the capacity to analyze existing data to a greater level of specificity than in the past. This could be used to provide a more complete picture of the success of different student groups and sub-groups to each of the CDM’s.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

• *Strengthen the efforts of the CDM’s and school sites to become more data driven.* Building on the district’s current data capacity, identify and track the performance of students according to a range of factors that may influence their level of achievement. Develop the capacity further to determine which schools are performing well for which student groups, and what the most significant factors are. This data will have two uses. First, it will provide greater information to the school sites as to their specific level of success with various groups of students. Second, it will allow the district to determine strengths and weaknesses of district-wide programs, to identify pockets of success with particular populations, and to correct weaknesses and build on strengths.

• *Present disaggregated data on student achievement as a core component of CDM training.* This is exactly the kind of training that site participants are requesting.

**IMPACT**

Taken together, these two recommendations will provide the basis for more effective CDM decision-making at the school sites and contribute to improvements in student achievement. To focus school improvement planning around both district goals and site conditions, the district must provide the authority, support and information required by the sites. By providing such support and accountability, school improvement planning can be strengthened and CDM’s can become a vehicle for increasing student success.

**C. Composition and Communication**

The levels of involvement on CDM’s differ significantly from school site to school site. In particular, parents and community members tend to be under-represented, particularly in school communities that have large Hispanic, African-American and Asian populations. At some schools, teachers are also hard to recruit and involve. This undercuts the effectiveness of CDM. It also results in many parents, and often many teachers, who are poorly informed and unengaged in CDM.

Respondents indicate that communication is flawed: board to CDM, district to principal, principal to CDM, district to broader community, CDM to school community. As a consequence, the successes identified by many CDM’s are not widely known. The potential and actual clout of CDM’s is poorly understood. CDM’s are not necessarily seen as a vehicle for addressing concerns or creating change. These are widely held perceptions.

Poor communication is typically a symptom of the problems associated with an inability to use structure and information channels effectively. As an example, many site-based respondents believe
that CDM involvement in principal evaluation is not valued. Respondents also suggest that decisions made centrally, that disagree with CDM decisions, are not explained. The central administration is not perceived as communicating either high expectations of, or faith in, the CDM process. Finally, issues of trust and attitude frequently enter into the discussion about CDM.

**Issue 6: Involvement—Reach, Diversity and Visibility**

**OVERVIEW**

One of the primary functions of any collaborative model is to create a vehicle to involve parents from the different segments of the community. However, creating such a vehicle does not address community concerns if it is not used, or if parents perceive the mechanism as ineffective. On this score, CDM is not fulfilling its purpose sufficiently.

Community involvement is low at many schools. Parents of color are disproportionately involved. A core component of an activist communications strategy must be targeted to involving all constituent groups. Simply put, CDM must represent the currently under-represented.

Despite a recent brochure mailing, contact with current and prospective CDM participants is primarily left to individual sites. To the extent that the district wishes to increase the involvement of parents, particularly parents of color, district publicity is necessary. Parents who are not already involved indicate a distinct lack of knowledge of CDM. The central administration could communicate both its support of CDM, and further the objectives of CDM through a sustained communications initiative.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- **Design and implement a district-wide campaign to increase the visibility of CDM.** This should start with the release of this study. It should build through the district-wide implementation of the recommendations. This campaign should be a sustained effort that emphasizes the importance of the CDM’s, disseminates success stories, and reiterates the purpose and impact of CDM involvement. Such a campaign presents an opportunity for positive publicity that the district should welcome.

  - **Target a significant portion of the campaign to under-represented populations.** Set goals and benchmarks for increasing the involvement of these populations. Convene site representatives, members of related district-wide committees, and leaders of community organizations to help develop and implement strategies to increase involvement.

  - **Target a segment of the campaign to area businesses and corporations.** The success of CDM, and the broader long-term success of the district, requires an informed, involved corporate sector.

  - **Include a meaningful involvement component in each school improvement plan.** Compare CDM demographics with school population demographics, and take steps at the school level to assure full representation. Hold the CDM and principal accountable for addressing issues of composition and representation.

**IMPACT**

External communication significantly affects the level of interest in and involvement on CDM site committees. Internal communication significantly affects the support given to CDM’s, the extent and nature of the follow-through, and the level of accountability. Both forms of communication can reinforce the district’s commitment to representative community involvement. Moreover, by the simple act of responding to site concerns and addressing site issues, the district will significantly increase the belief in its support of CDM and the respect accorded to CDM’s at the sites.
**Issue 7: Responsibility and Accountability**

**OVERVIEW**

There is very little accountability associated with CDM. True accountability results from several inter-related components. These include the alignment of responsibilities and authority, the priority placed on evaluation and the organizational emphasis placed on measuring effectiveness. The lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and authority makes it difficult to link accountability for school improvements to the CDM.

Greater accountability would markedly strengthen CDM. Principals fill the most pivotal leadership role at the schools and on the CDM’s. Yet, principals are essentially not held accountable for the success or failure of the CDM’s. Further, there is little specialized training or support to help principals in making CDM’s function more effectively. Similarly, central administrators are not trained, encouraged, or held accountable for building this capacity within the principalship. Lastly, the board needs to establish benchmarks, indicators of success, and procedures to determine how well CDM’s are functioning and where they have needs. Without this organizational imperative, CDM’s will not reach their potential.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- **Convene a board/cabinet retreat to establish performance measures for the superintendent and cabinet in relation to CDM.** This will set the tone and the direction for the rest of the district. It will demonstrate the board’s interest in and commitment to the effective use of CDM as a management process.
- **Require all CDM’s to evaluate the principals.** In practice, this should be a core function and should include the evaluation of how the principal is contributing to the overall school improvement effort.
- **Link CDM effectiveness to the principal’s evaluation.** If the principals are accountable for supporting the CDM’s, this should be reflected seriously in the formal evaluation procedures.

**Issue 8: Measures of effectiveness and quality**

**OVERVIEW**

While successful at many schools, CDM is not uniformly administered from school to school. The central administration generally treats CDM’s similarly, regardless of whether they fulfill their mandated duties and regardless of the quality of their work.

As with any district-wide initiative, CDM needs clear expectations, measurements of performance, benchmarks, and timelines. These were not defined when CDM was initially established. They are long overdue. With such expectations and indicators, both the CDM’s and district support structures can be held more accountable.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- **Establish indicators of quality and effectiveness for CDM.** These are needed for the CDM’s at the site level. They are needed for the mechanisms and units which are intended to support CDM. They are also needed for training provided to CDM members, prospective members and DPS administrators. These indicators should be formally integrated into the expectations and evaluation criteria for the respective individuals or units.

**IMPACT**

Accountability and impact are closely related. Greater accountability will increase the impact of CDM. Better measures of quality and effectiveness will make it easier to ensure the accountability of the CDM process.
E. Leadership, Support & Linkages

Leadership and support on behalf of CDM is diffuse. Most respondents credit the current administration with being more open to CDM than the previous administration. However, there is a need for an integrated structure for both leadership and support—either through the CDM/SIAC Office or a revised configuration of several offices—to enhance the effectiveness of CDM.

Long time participants and observers, both inside and outside of DPS, trace many CDM-related concerns to the fact that it was imposed externally during a time of district stress. Thus, gaps in structure evolved over time. Some may result from the lodging of the CDM processes and requirements in the teachers' contract rather than in board policy. Some mechanisms that were created to support and advocate for CDM, specifically mechanisms lodged in external organizations, have been changed. Some functions have been transferred to the central administration; some have not. Structural holdovers and misalignments need to be re-examined and recast.

Greater support must also be provided to CDM's. This means providing extensive training and considerably more follow-up. To the extent that some CDM's are not functioning properly, the central administration should be addressing the issues with the principal and the CDM. Further, the CDM/SIAC office should be well aware of the issues at the individual CDM's and should be providing appropriate assistance. If the district chooses other means to support the sites and hold them accountable, these structures need to be identified and given the authority and resources to act.

The board's role is critical in influencing the success of CDM. The board is supportive and must consider the extent to which it wants to build CDM into the structure and priorities of the district. Although opinion is split regarding whether CDM should be lodged in the teachers contract or in board policy, this is a symptom of a core issue. All parties need to ensure that the intentions of CDM, regardless of where they are embodied, are uniformly and consistently implemented.

Issue 9: Formal Reporting and Coordination

OVERVIEW

Central administrators describe the wide range of decisions that the sites are able to make. Concurrently, many CDM members believe they are ignored or blocked by the central administration. This causes frustration. Much of this problem is structural.

CDM's report to and interact with the CDM/SIAC Office; principals report to and interact with other supervisors and central administrators. There appears to be no regular, substantive coordination between the Office and other key central administrative units. This structure gives the impression of the CDM/SIAC Office as being marginally important. If CDM's are to be taken seriously, this needs to be addressed structurally, in deed as well as word. While the CDM/SIAC Office may remain the primary vehicle for interaction between the central administration and the local CDM's, there is a critical need for structured means of communication and coordination around issues related to CDM's. These include concerns related to school improvement plans, personnel and budgetary issues.

There also needs to be greater interaction and communication between the Board of Education and the CDM's. The current lack of linkage is unintentionally sending the message to CDM members that their contributions are not valued. This issue must be addressed for CDM effectiveness to improve.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- Determine the locus of the following roles relative to CDM's: support, compliance, accountability, and leadership. For the office playing the leadership role, emphasize integrating the CDM role with the school improvement planning
function. Leadership, support and accountability may all be housed in the same office, but they need not be. Whether provided out of one or several offices, the most important factor is that the office or individual charged with each task has the capacity to perform the function—and is held accountable for doing so.

- **Link the reporting structures for the CDM's and those for the principals.** These operational linkages are needed laterally, between the CDM/SIAC office and other central administrative units. They are also needed vertically, between the CDM's and principals at the sites and the appropriate units in the central administration.

- **Bridge the awareness gap between the CDM's and the Board of Education.** On a regular basis, CDM's should make presentations to the Board of Education. Where possible, these should be in a study session format so that CDM representatives and board members have more opportunity to examine site issues in depth.

**Issue 10: Service to CDM's**

**OVERVIEW**

As indicated, the CDM/SIAC Office is essentially positioned outside the line of authority that runs from the board of education to the sites. In part, this results from the initial formation of the office, which took over several support functions previously supplied by an outside service provider. In more significant measure, it results from being a unit that is primarily focused on issues of compliance.

Frustration with the CDM/SIAC Office exists on several levels. Some frustration results from the Office's lack of readiness and capacity to analyze and act on the issues emerging from the sites. Some results from the lack of mandate to intervene when problems develop. Some results from the perception that it is considered a unit of minor importance within the central administration. Many of the purposes of this office remain unclear, as does its ultimate relationship both to the CDM's and to the central administration. While training services are valued, they are not perceived as sufficiently addressing existing or emerging needs. As greater clarity is achieved regarding the purposes of CDM, the expectations of local CDM committees, and the roles to be played by the central administration, the role and function of the CDM/SIAC office will need to be recast.

The CDM Improvement Council (CIC) raises similar concerns. Respondents simply do not give the CIC high marks for providing support to CDM.

The overall effectiveness of CDM is also undercut by the lack of communication and coordination among and between Denver's community committees and councils. As a result, the potential of community involvement is often not paralleled by a comparable sense of accomplishment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- **Realign the CDM/SIAC Office to focus more on capacity building.** To be more valued by the schools and more credible in the central administration, the functions of the CDM/SIAC Office need to be redesigned. The emphasis of the Office should shift from seeking site compliance with information requests to more actively strengthening and advocating for CDM's. Particular attention should be given to expanding the scope, sophistication and on-site availability of training services.

- **Reexamine the operations of the CDM Improvement Council.** The contractual charge of the CIC is appropriate. In particular, CDM currently needs a formal dispute resolution body. However, in practice, the CIC is seen as cumbersome and ineffective. Over time, as the implementation of CDM becomes more sophisticated, the need for the CIC will lessen. At present, its operations need to be critically examined.

- **Increase the coordination between the district's structures for community involvement.** The efforts of the various councils and committees need to
be integrated. In this context, the district should take the lead in convening participants in the CDM's, EAC's, Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils, SIAC's and related councils. The focus should be on identifying issues—shared in common across the groups—that require district and site level action.

**IMPACT**

Leadership and support are pivotal to the future success and impact of CDM. This requires defining, strengthening and integrating support structures. It also means carefully aligning the district in support of CDM, from the Board of Education to the local committees.

**F. Summary**

The Center began this study with five questions.

The first two questions explored the extent to which CDM has achieved its primary goals, and the extent to which the perceptions of the school communities match the available data on school improvement. Based on the quantifiable data on school results, analysis shows an emerging positive correlation between school climate and perceived effectiveness. Beyond the quantitative data, there is the general perception that CDM is helping to get people involved and to improve school climate. There are also indications that CDM is having an impact on student achievement at several schools. Often, this is impact is perceived as being indirect. The predominant view is that CDM is now a core part of the educational landscape in Denver.Yet, many improvements need to be made.

The third and forth questions asked what factors correlate most closely with CDM effectiveness, and what barriers inhibit or what supports enhance CDM effectiveness. Throughout the body of this report, these questions have been addressed extensively. As indicated, barriers and supports are often two sides of the same effectiveness coin. For example, disagreement and misunderstanding regarding the scope of CDM decision-making inhibit and limit the effectiveness of the process. Providing clarity and delineating the scope of site and central decision-making authority will strengthen and increase the effectiveness of CDM. The overall impact of and perceived satisfaction with CDM—already positive—will increase significantly by addressing the issues identified in the study.

The final study question focused on what steps could be taken to improve the effectiveness of CDM. The recommendations above delineate a course of action that will markedly improve the effectiveness of both CDM and the schools. The recommendations provide a pathway to more responsive and effective Collaborative Decision-Making in Denver.

The community expects CDM to make a difference for the children and for the schools. This expectation significantly enhances the prospects for strengthening and using CDM as a more effective vehicle for improving the educational opportunities for all of Denver's children.