

GUIDELINES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL COUNCILS



Revised with new contract language and updated

2019

HISTORY OF INSTRUCTIONAL COUNCILS

In 1984, a book entitled *A Nation at Risk* was instrumental in creating a national perception that our public schools were the underlying cause for our nation's economic downfall. Shortly thereafter, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy published *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. This document offered solutions in contrast to the first book's accusations.

The Carnegie Forum Report focused on the following:

- To remind Americans of the economic challenges pressing us on all sides.
- To assert the primacy of education as the foundation of economic growth, equal opportunity and a shared national vision.
- To reaffirm that the teaching profession is the best hope for establishing new standards of excellence as the hallmark of American education.
- To point out that a remarkable window of opportunity lies before us to reform education.

The Carnegie Forum Report went on to recommend:

- Teachers should be provided with the discretion and autonomy that are the hallmarks of professional work.
- Districts should foster collegial styles of decision making and teaching in schools.
- School districts should consider a variety of approaches to school leadership.

While this was not the only report written during this decade of school reform, it was a pivotal one. As a result of recommendations from the Carnegie Forum, school districts and unions across the nation started to work collaboratively on restructuring schools. A cornerstone belief of the restructuring movement was that those closest to the instruction of students—the teachers—should have a voice in making decisions about teaching and learning, in an attempt to ensure that the practitioner voice was heard, school districts and unions agreed to contract language in support of site-based management and shared decision-making.

Our efforts in Albuquerque resulted in the creation of Site Restructuring Councils (SRC). SRCs were intended to create a venue for collaborative decision-making that included teachers, school administration, paraprofessionals, parents and community members.

In the 2002 Negotiated Agreement, the District and the Federation revised the SRC language to clarify the scope and purpose of the Councils and to add a training and facilitation component. In addition, the SRC was renamed Instructional Council (IC) to more clearly reflect its mission to address school issues that fall within the scope of instructional improvement by means of collaborative processes with the goal to improve and support teaching and learning in the Albuquerque Public Schools.

Article 7, INSTRUCTIONAL COUNCILS (ICs)

- A. The District and the Federation agree to support the work of each school’s Instructional Council (IC). ICs are established as part of a collaborative effort to improve and support the teaching and learning process in the Albuquerque Public Schools. It is the intent of the District and the Federation to allow the individuals on each council to use their collective expertise and experience concerning their site and community to address school issues that fall within the scope of instructional improvement. The following requirements and recommendations set limited parameters.
1. The IC includes the principal, a federation representative elected by federation members at the school, teachers elected by teachers, and parent representative(s) of the school parent body recognized by the school and may include representatives of other bargaining units as defined in their respective negotiated agreements, and any other personnel and/or students deemed appropriate by the IC and elected by their constituent group.
 2. Teachers shall comprise at least fifty percent (50%) of the IC.
 3. Meetings shall be open to any member of the school staff or school community.
 4. The IC shall comply with Negotiated Agreements, Board policies, District procedures/directives, New Mexico laws/regulations and Federal laws/regulations when addressing issues. Issues shall be addressed in a collaborative manner.
 5. Specific structure and protocol for the IC shall be developed by the IC and published for the school community.
 6. If a decision concerning an issue cannot be reached, and a decision must be made because the issue at hand is time-sensitive, then the IC will defer to the principal.
 7. IC members have certain obligations, rights and responsibilities of membership, including attending and actively participating on the IC; reaching out to the diversity of the represented group to hear their opinions and ideas; communicating those opinions to the IC; supporting goals and strategies to implement the school’s Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS); checking with supportive documents such as Board Policy and the Negotiated Agreement; and collectively supporting the school improvement process.

Note: The term “Instructional Council” is a generic term for all leadership/management teams at a school. Individual sites may choose different titles for their Instructional Council.

- B. Leadership Councils: At large Constituent Groups
1. Employees may create district-wide at-large Leadership Councils when employees with common areas of interest and expertise are assigned at different schools throughout the district. Constituent Leadership Councils will include administrators and employees and shall be recognized by the District and the Federation.
 3. APS and ATF recognize the following Leadership Councils:
 - a. Nurses
 - b. Counselors

- c. Social Workers
- d. Speech and Language Therapists
- e. Transition Specialists
- f. Evaluators (Diagnosticians, School Psychologists, SLP & OT Evaluators, Audiologists)
- g. Special Education Department Head Teachers
- h. Motor Therapists (OT, PT, OMS, APE)

C. Instructional Councils: Process and Content

1. The Instructional Council is concerned with both process and content. The process will be similar at all sites. It is collaboration among stakeholders working together to develop common visions for their sites. The content or issues addressed by each IC will vary in nature. What may be an instructional priority for one school community may not be for another.
2. There are two strategies usually associated with this process: site-based management and shared decision-making. These strategies are dependent upon collaboration and consensus building. For shared decision making to work, the issues to be decided must be meaningful and not merely symbolic. Important decisions must be reached in a collaborative manner. Participants can readily discern the difference between involvement and influence. Without experiencing influence, participants may soon choose not to be involved.
3. IC's are empowered to address school issues that fall within the scope of instructional improvement.
4. Gather both qualitative data and quantitative data to inform decisions made within the scope of instructional improvement.

D. Instructional Councils: Decision-Making Processes

1. Consensus Decision-Making: The primary decision-making model is a consensus process, especially when the issue affects the entire staff.
 - a. Definition of Consensus Decision-Making: Consensus decision-making is a process in which participants make decisions by agreement rather than by majority vote. A consensus process is where representatives of the affected parties with a stake in an issue work together to find a mutually acceptable solution. Decisions are reached through a consensus process that includes the following:
 - 1.) There has been communication with and input from constituents.
 - 2.) Participants have reached a meeting of the minds sufficient to make a decision and carry it out.
 - 3.) There is agreement that no one who could block or obstruct the decision or its implementation will exercise that power.
 - 4.) There is agreement that everyone needed to support the decision and put it into effect will do so.
 - b. This definition does not mean unanimity of thought. The resulting agreement may be a package of various levels of enthusiasm and support, but the agreement is one that each party can accept and live with.

2. Alternative Decision-Making Models
 - a. There may be alternative decision-making processes that are appropriate at times. IC's must determine which decision-making model is best suited for the issue at hand (i.e.: consensus, majority vote of the IC, vote of the entire staff, adoption of committee recommendations, etc.).
 - b. Determination of the model to be used needs to be made through consensus. The model used may change from issue to issue.
3. Decisions reached by the IC must be collaborative in nature among the role groups participating in the IC process. Collaborative problem solving provides more resources, more diversity of ideas and more social support for the decision.

E. Instructional Councils: Considerations for a Successful Collaborative Structure

1. IC representatives are elected.
2. The representatives are elected to serve a specific constituency.
3. The selected representatives constantly communicate with their constituents.
4. Communication with constituents is focused on giving information and getting their constituents' perspectives in order to represent all points of view at the meeting.
5. The IC has taken the time necessary to be clear about:
 - a. What decisions it makes and;
 - b. How it makes those decisions.
6. All members of the Instructional Council openly discuss and share all information pertaining to an issue so that the best decision can be reached.
7. The IC is able to focus on issues related to teaching and learning because there is some other structure or mechanism to address the daily "nuts and bolts" issues.
8. The IC positions are desirable and there is healthy participation.
9. Agendas and past minutes from IC meetings are made public.
10. ICs make meaningful decisions; they are not solely "advisory."
11. All IC members are viewed and treated as equals.
12. Decisions made by the IC that affect the staff or a specific constituency group must be made in collaboration with the staff or constituency group.

F. Instructional Councils: Time for Professional Development

1. The Albuquerque Public School and the Albuquerque Teachers Federation agree on the importance of professional development. Professional development is the process by which teachers individually and jointly enhance and update their knowledge of standards, curriculum and content, and improve their instructional skills and strategies.
2. It is the Instructional Council's responsibility to work collaboratively with the whole staff to decide the content of the professional development. Schools may not bank additional time for professional development unless they have utilized all other optional time allowed in the negotiated agreement. Article 5, C.5. states: "Schools may utilize an additional thirteen (13) hours annually for staff development activities collaboratively planned through the IC. Any district-mandated training will be included in these hours." It is optional to use part or all of the 13 hours set aside for professional development. It is the Instructional Council's responsibility to:

- a. Decide in collaboration with the whole staff whether or not to use up to 13 hours for professional development;
 - b. Come to consensus with the staff on the content of the professional development;
 - c. Come to consensus with the staff on the scheduling of up to 13 hours for professional development.

- G. Instructional Councils: Connection to School Committees and Other School Structures
 1. All school committees, task forces and work groups will communicate directly with or through the Instructional Council in order to coordinate planning and implementation of their work. It is recommended that committees follow protocols similar to those for the Instructional Council.
 2. Connection to Teacher Leadership Positions
 - a. It is essential that a purposeful connection between various teacher leadership positions (e.g. department chairs, team leaders, study group leaders, etc.) and the Instructional Council be created and maintained.
 - b. It is up to each school to determine how those leadership bodies and individuals communicate and coordinate their work.

- H. Instructional Councils: Connection to Budgeting
 1. School budgets are open and public documents. It is the responsibility of the Instructional Council to work in collaboration with the staff to set priorities for discretionary funds in the school's budget and in developing and overseeing the implementation of a budget that places resources where they will effectively support the school's goals.
 2. When using discretionary money for a full or partial FTE, in order to ensure decisions are program-based, a change in the agreed use of that money must wait until the current position is vacated.
 3. Training in Budgeting may be requested of the District and the Federation for Instructional Councils.

- I. In the event that differentials are provided for positions on the school's Instruction Council, the Federation Representative position will be eligible.

Instructional Council Wellness Checklist

1. IC representatives are elected.
2. The representatives are elected to serve a specific constituency.
3. The selected representatives constantly communicate with their constituents.
4. Communication with constituents is focused on giving information and getting their constituents' perspectives in order to represent all points of view at the meeting.
5. The IC has taken the time necessary to be clear about:
 - What decisions it makes and;
 - How it makes those decisions.
6. All members of the Instructional Council openly discuss and share all information pertaining to an issue so that the best decision can be reached.
7. The IC is able to focus on issues related to teaching and learning because there is some other structure or mechanism to address the daily "nuts and bolts" issues.
8. The IC positions are desirable and there is healthy participation.
9. Agendas and past minutes from IC meetings are made public.
10. ICs make meaningful decisions; they are not solely "advisory."
11. All IC members are viewed and treated as equals.

Instructional Council Protocols

In order for an Instructional Council (IC) to function well, it is recommended that you establish protocols or ground rules. For example:

1. Meeting days, times and location
2. Facilitation assignment/role description
3. Recorder assignment/role description
4. Minutes dissemination procedure
5. Agenda-setting procedure (screening, prioritizing, setting times)
6. Decision-making method (define "consensus" to avoid confusion)
7. Membership configuration: include a list of IC representatives, names of the constituency groups, when and where constituency groups meet and the election cycles and length of terms
8. Communication procedures with constituent groups
9. Communication procedure with community
10. Publication and distribution of group protocols
11. Publication of all decisions made
12. Procedure to revisit protocols routinely (date each review/revision)
13. Orientation for new IC members

Information About Consensus Decision Making

A Group Reaches Consensus When:

It finally agrees upon a single alternative; and

Each group member can honestly say:

- I believe that you understand my point of view.
- I believe that I understand your point of view.
- Whether or not I prefer the decision, I support it
 - because it was arrived at openly and fairly; and
 - it is the best solution for us at this time.

Guidelines on Reaching Consensus

- Listen.
- Pay attention to others.
- Encourage participation.
- Share information.
- Don't agree too quickly. Ask questions.
- Don't bargain or trade support.
- Treat differences as a strength. Don't compete.
- Create a solution that can be supported.
- Avoid arguing blindly for your own views.
- Seek a win-win solution.

Guidelines on Reaching Consensus

- Listen.
- Pay attention to others.
- Encourage participation.
- Share information.
- Don't agree too quickly. Ask questions.
- Don't bargain or trade support.
- Treat differences as a strength. Don't compete.
- Create a solution that can be supported.
- Avoid arguing blindly for your own views.
- Seek a win-win solution.

The following section about consensus decision making is taken directly from Resolving Conflicts at Work by Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith, Josey-Bass, 2005. Pages 262-264.

Consensus is the preferred method for making team decisions because it is naturally collaborative, includes everyone, involves them in brainstorming and selecting options, promotes understanding and ownership, respects and learns from dissent, and prevents sabotage after the decision is made. It is highly democratic because it allows everyone to have an equal voice regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy, encourages differences of opinion to surface and be incorporated in the solution, and increases unity and a sense that the group is moving in a common direction. Here are some typical statements that indicate that consensus has been reached:

- "I can say an unqualified 'yes' to the decision."
- "I find the decision acceptable."
- "I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group."
- "I can live with the decision, although I'm not enthusiastic about it."
- "I do not fully agree with the decision and need to register my disagreement. "However, I do not choose to block consensus."

You will know that consensus has been reached when every participant feels the process was fair, there was sufficient opportunity to influence the outcome, and they are willing to live with what was decided by the rest of the group and support it as though it were their first choice. A lack of consensus, on the other hand, can be recognized in statements like:

- "I feel there is no clear unity in the group."
- "We need to do more work before I can reach consensus."
- "I feel I haven't been heard."
- "I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of its being accepted."
- "I strongly (or repeatedly) disagree."

There is a common misunderstanding that consensus requires everyone to "be a team player" and surrender their opposition so as to satisfy the group. In our view, consensus requires the opposite. Consensus can become a cover for coercion when it is used to suppress the open and honest expression of differences or to compel formal agreement and only appear to solve problems collaboratively. Consensus, in our mind, means refusing to compromise over principles, going deeper into what is preventing agreement, and holding out for better solutions.

In seeking consensus, it is important not only that you be clear about the process and encourage others to express dissenting opinions, but also that you avoid rushing decisions or asking people to vote before it is absolutely necessary. It is equally important that you actively encourage every- one's participation, prevent anyone from dominating the process, and agree to avoid acting unilaterally until it has become completely clear that consensus cannot be reached.

Consensus at a Glance

Adapted from Resolving Conflicts at Work by Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith, Josey-Bass, 2005. Pages 262-264.

Indications that consensus has been reached:

- "I can say an unqualified 'yes' to the decision."
- "I find the decision acceptable."
- "I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group."
- "I can live with the decision, although I'm not enthusiastic about it."
- "I do not fully agree with the decision and need to register my disagreement. "However, I do not choose to block consensus."

Indications that consensus has not been reached:

- "I feel there is no clear unity in the group."
- "We need to do more work before I can reach consensus."
- "I feel I haven't been heard."
- "I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of its being accepted."
- "I strongly (or repeatedly) disagree."

Some Steps A Group Could Take When Consensus Is Not Reached

- Use brainstorming to expand options.
- Separate out the issues over which there is no consensus to return to later.
- Bring in a subject matter expert to advise the group.
- Break issues down into separate pieces and try to reach consensus on each piece separately.
- Look at objections to see if solutions can be created to them while moving ahead with the proposal.
- Create a small team of representatives from each side to brainstorm, prioritize, and recommend solutions.
- Take the decision to a larger group for suggestions or additional problem solving.

- Reach consensus on shared values, commonalities principles, interests, or criteria; then develop procedures or guidelines for further problem solving that flow from them.
- Use the same process with vision, mission, goals, barriers, strategies, or action plans.
- Look for hidden issues or agendas and address them privately or publicly.
- Refer the issue to a completely uninvolved group to develop compromise proposals
- Take a break and allow time for reflection
- Bring in a mediator or facilitator to help bring about consensus or resolve the underlying dispute.
- Ask proponents to meet separately and return with three to five suggestions for compromise.
- Divide into factions and create a dialogue.
- Table the decision or decide not to decide.
- Take a straw vote.
- Vote based on majority rule.
- Prepare majority and minority reports and submit them to a higher level.
- Allow the minority group to continue trying to convince the majority to change its mind.
- Allow the group's primary decision maker to decide.

TIME CHART

The Negotiated Agreement and District practices allow for additional time and flexible scheduling to be used for professional development and other school-specific functions. The chart below clarifies how the time can be used and who determines how it is used.

Article of agreement and/or description	What	Who decides
5, C.4. Lengthening of the duty day (see page 12)	The duty day can be extended up to two (2) hours every twenty workdays. The time must be used for school business and must be attached to the duty day. In other words, teachers cannot be required to return to work in the evenings.	<i>Principal/Supervisor can use these hours at his/her discretion</i>
5,C.5. Professional Development time (see pages 12 and 32)	Schools may utilize up to an additional thirteen (13) hours annually for professional development activities collaboratively planned through the Instructional Council. Any district-mandated training will be included in these hours in accordance with the procedures outlined in Appendix D.	<i>It is the Instructional Council's responsibility to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Decide in collaboration with the whole staff whether or not to use up to 13 hours annually for professional development;</i> • <i>Come to consensus with the staff on the content of the professional development;</i> • <i>Come to consensus with the staff on the scheduling of up to 13 hours annually for professional development.</i>
5, C.6. Federal, state or judicial training requirements (see page 12)	Up to fourteen (14) hours per school year can be used if required by a federal, state or judicial mandate.	<i>The district notifies teachers of the training and the entity requiring the training.</i>
"Banking" of instructional time	Schools sometimes extend the student instructional day in order to get blocks of time for school-specific activities. By extending the instructional day, schools meet state requirements concerning instructional time. This provides time when students are excused from school so that staff can have time for professional development, in-service, training etc.	<i>It is the Instructional Council's responsibility to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Decide in collaboration with the whole staff whether or not to bank time;</i> • <i>Work collaboratively with the whole staff to decide the content of the professional development and the date or dates it will be held.</i>
<i>Open House/Curriculum Night</i>	It is a professional responsibility of teachers to attend up to two (2) evening activities such as open house, curriculum night or graduation.	<i>ATF and APS mutually agreed that it is the responsibility of the teacher to attend up to two of these functions. It is the principal who decides when the function will occur.</i>

The negotiated agreement and district practices allow for additional time and flexible scheduling to be used for professional development and other school-specific functions. The chart above clarifies how the time can be used and who determines how it is used.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL COUNCIL FLOWCHART

