

LEADERSHIP

Traditionally, decisions for our school have been made by our principal and Program Facilitator. Our administrators invited and encouraged staff input and advice for in-school policies, events and staff development topics. The majority of our staff was comfortable with these decisions being made by the administrators. However, demands highlighted by the School Strategic Plan evolvment and a growing variety of student accountability demands increased the necessity of faculty involvement in the school decision-making process. Current measures of student achievement span a wide range of ages and academic levels, including IEP's, Brigance Inventory, the Alternate Pre-School Assessment, South Carolina Alternate Assessment, Pre-Vocational Transition, ELDA, etc. Our student population has broadened to include diagnoses of Moderate and Severe Mental Disabilities, Autism and Multiple Disabilities. We also serve a pre-school population at Washington Center@Hollis. This variety of accountability required teachers to represent each specialty in school-wide policy making. Our self-assessment during the Continuous Improvement Continuums brought into focus that staff involvement in decision-making was necessary for substantial school-wide improvement. Our staff represents a variety of disciplines and job duties, ranging from teachers and therapists to nurses and para-educators. Our common thread is the challenge of meeting the needs of our special needs population. In order to represent everyone in our school improvement plans, decisions must be made by the entire staff. A decision-making structure was designed to clarify how decisions would be made and by whom. This structure is illustrated at the end of this section and described below.

Decision-making Structure

The Leadership Team and Committee Structure in Decision-Making

In order to address our needs, the School Advisory Committee (SAC) teams, were organized according to the age and disabilities of students served. These committees serve a two-fold purpose for making school-wide decisions and for School Strategic Plan facilitation. These teams formally meet monthly to discuss and develop strategic plan information, instructional strategies, needs, interests and concerns. Representatives from each group meet with administrators monthly to relay results of small team meetings. Institution of School Advisory

Committee teams create several positive results. Teachers are able to share productive teaching strategies gleaned from professional development. Suggestions for related staff development are formulated. Within smaller groupings, staff finds it easier to offer suggestions for school improvement within the Strategic Planning format. The chairperson of each group is available to meet with staff members at any time. Staff members, including transportation employed Para-educators who are unavailable after school hours, use this process to their advantage for a means for input into school issues. These small group committees are used to suggest, formulate, and implement policies. For example, these committees decide topics for each year's special events. Chosen school-wide events such as Boo in the School, Valentine Dance, Black History Recognition, and Craft Day stimulate school spirit in promoting our diversified student-centered vision. This process creates an outlet into school-wide decision-making.

The School Advisory Committee groupings also serve as a perfect structure for creating Action Leadership Teams. With the discussion of instructional strategies and school issues, the work of the strategic plan is mutually formulated and discussed. Deadlines for information are met within the monthly team meetings. Findings are shared in the small committees and with the portfolio coordinator, and then presented to the rest of the staff during SAC and/or faculty meetings. Input includes focus on assessment, technology, and curriculum for the varied areas of our student population. Discussions also center on implementation of study team results. This process results in harmonious consensus and ease of progress.

Our School Technology Committee, consisting of administrators, teachers, speech therapists, and our media specialist, serves our school in technology needs decision making. This committee is utilized to access and implement our vision of technology needs and its use for our students. This committee's input is essential for Washington Center to maintain state-of-the-art technology for student instruction.

Our School Improvement Committee, made up of representative faculty, para-educators, administrators, staff members, community representatives, and parents serves as another resource for making decisions. Comprised of a cross-section of concerned educators, citizens and parents, this committee provides information for parent and community involvement regarding student

achievement needs. Our PTA board also serves as a community/parent resource for mission facilitation, school policies and decision-making.

The Principal oversees all Washington Center programs in their entirety to include the added Washington Center @ Hollis which serves students ages 3 - 8 years. In addition to regular faculty meetings, our principal has instituted monthly meetings with non-certified staff. During these meetings, current school information is shared as well as an opportunity for staff to express concerns. These meetings have presented an opportunity for Para-educators, cafeteria and nursing staff to stay abreast of school operations and to be respected as important components of the school family.

The Program Facilitator provides leadership and coordination for all due process proceedings, monitoring student placement and records. The Program Facilitator serves as an advisor for student and family services, facilitates training for the school and District, and provides consultation with teachers regarding the implementation of the special education curriculum.

The Administrative Assistant provides a liaison between administrators and staff. As a former teaching member of the faculty, the Administrative Assistant understands teachers' concerns and interprets these issues to the administration. The Administrative Assistant serves as the School Strategic Plan Coordinator, keeping time schedules and assembling information from study teams. Study results were routinely presented to committees and administrators, usually during the monthly School Advisory Team meetings. The role includes serving as the District Test Coordinator for the Alternate Assessment, Headliner media contact and school-based/ district PAS-T evaluator. She also supports due process and principal responsibilities.



*PTA board for
2010-2011*

Washington Center boasts an active PTA and advocacy for community involvement. The following PTA sponsored events took place during the 2010-2011 year:

On April 17, 2010, Washington Center held its fourth annual “Walk and Roll.” The walk always inspires community awareness and raises funds for the school. Community sponsors, with middle and high school supporters, including the Klaver Klub, and the Washington Center family all participated. The slogan for the walk is “Some kids need a hand... others need a push.”



*One of the many families who
participated in the Walk and Roll*

The PTA sponsored events planned for the 2010-2011 year are:

- Welcome Back Breakfast for Staff: August 9, 2010

- Nine teacher grants awarded
- Appreciation luncheons for staff
- Fundraiser lunch sales for staff: Third Thursday of each month.
- PTA meetings: First Friday of each month.
- Family Night November 11, 2010
- Honey Baked Ham fundraiser
- Annual Holiday campus decorating in December
- Walk and Roll on April 9, 2011
- Teacher Appreciation Week: May 2-6, 2011

Summary of Progress

Our principal, Dr. Brownlee advocates our goals with student centered emphasis and fresh ideas for progress. Our school encourages shared decisions. Our principal invites staff input for many areas of our school's operation. Staff members are respected as professionals having valuable suggestions. This policy has made creating and implementing our vision a streamlined process. As a public school separate facility, we are on the "same page" regarding student issues because our student population needs are generally similar. Our focus on functional curriculum, quality personnel, meaningful assessment, and appropriate environment drive our school-wide decisions. Likewise, our mission for providing student opportunities for independent functioning targets student focused decisions. Administrative decisions are usually made with staff input and awareness. Departmental decisions evolve into school-wide policies. All school decisions are reported to the Leadership Team. Reports from these committee meetings are shared with faculty members. In turn, faculty members discuss these findings with classroom Para-educators and staff. To complete the

cycle, comments and recommendations are referred back to the Leadership Team.

Opportunities were also expanded for faculty to share decision making opinions and operational strategies. An after school meeting schedule was established to include:

- Faculty meetings on the first and third Wednesdays
- Strategic Plan committee meetings on the second Wednesday
- SAC chairpersons meetings on the fourth Wednesday

Para-professional meetings are scheduled during school hours providing opportunities for staff who also serve as bus drivers and riders to be included in school policy making. The staff and parents are consulted for direction in establishing revised policies and safety plans. Staff committees guide strategies for school activities and special events. With the initiation of the PAS-T evaluation, administrators are regularly involved in classroom activities. The creation of a PAS-T portfolio has given teachers a format to showcase their instructional strategies and professionalism.

Next Steps

We feel that our leadership improvements have yielded cohesiveness in decisions. A new objective is to strengthen leadership qualities within the classroom structure. We will continue to strive to involve more parents and community members in our plans for Washington Center's future. Our staff has decided that our next focus should involve:

- Continuing our focus on student needs.
- Emphasizing parent involvement
- Communicating our mission and vision to our school community.
- Involving non-certified staff in the school communication loop
- Continuing to communicate the importance of shared staff responsibility for implementing our vision

- Provide training for teachers to become effective leaders within their classrooms



Principal Brownlee welcomes parents and new students during our annual Meet Your Teacher afternoon