

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of School-Based Behavior Teams:  
An Exploratory Examination

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Running Head: Factors Influencing Teams

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We have reached the point in schools that whenever two or more school staff members are together, those people are viewed as a school-based *team*. Teams are employed by many schools for almost all kinds of school activities whether the focus is behavioral or academic, individual student or school-wide, related to curriculum or other issues. Sometimes popular language or a *catch phrase*, gets overused as a kind of *fad*. As a term gains popularity, it sometimes tends to lose its meaning. Perhaps *team* is the latest example.

The purpose of this paper is to identify, illustrate and explore some of the issues and concerns surrounding the use of school-based teams. We will discuss the distinction between teams and committees, and try to illustrate how these are used in schools. Literature available pertaining to these issues will also be presented and reviewed. In addition, we will explore the size, characteristics and implementation issues related to teams in schools, particularly using examples of behavior planning teams. Some of the various underlying factors that may contribute to the overall effectiveness of the group process within teams will also be identified. These factors include the purpose of the team, duration of the team, available resources, team size and composition, leadership of the team, administration support, delegation of responsibilities within the team, and the commitment or motivation of members.

This paper will draw on examples of team processes that have occurred within the Safe and Responsive Schools Project (SRS), a “project of national significance” funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The project

developed and tested a comprehensive model of system change in schools related to school discipline and violence prevention. All of the fourteen schools that were involved in the project over three school years employed school-based teams to undertake a needs assessment, a planning process, and implementation of activities related to violence prevention and improving student behavior, although we will report on six schools here who provided more specific data. As a result, the examples included in this paper address school-based teams that deal with behavioral issues. Project staff perceptions of team issues and group processes throughout the three years of this project are the basis of the paper. Some of the participant's perceptions regarding the teams to which they belonged will also be shared. This paper will further delineate some of the various courses each of the teams took throughout the project and the adjustments, or changes, that were made along the way in an effort to improve team functioning. The data presented here are intended to be illustrative and exploratory. Hopefully they will provoke further research and discussion.

### **Types and Purposes of Teams**

Schools seem to already have many teams. There are various grade level and subject teams in elementary and secondary schools such as the *Fourth Grade Team*, the *Math Team* or the *Administrative Team*. There are sometimes *Interdisciplinary Teams* serving groups of students at the secondary level. There are also *Curriculum Planning Teams* which advise district or school-wide decisions on curriculum, textbook selection and coordinated materials. Many states now also require *School Improvement Teams* to address performance improvement within that building. As a result of state standards, many schools may now have standards implementation or assessment teams. Other

teams may include various extra curricular or out-of-school activities teams, parent-advisory groups, or other ad-hoc teams (Oswald, 1996). Team teaching situations, which are usually quite different from the other teams we describe, are not addressed here.

Many of these teams have clearly identified purposes. School-based teams can serve a variety of functions from focusing on the needs of specific students, to coordination, implementation and planning for school-wide staff development; to the choice of a school or district reading textbook; to addressing school-wide issues or problems (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse), among many others. The word team is also used with groups of teachers within a building based on grade level assignment, subject assignment, etc. where the purpose may not be so obvious, but where the term is a convenient way to identify subgroups within the school staff which may have occasion to meet or make certain decisions. Clearly, there are not only a variety of different teams, but also an equally large variety of purposes served by these teams.

### **Teams in Special Education**

In addition, special education has a set of teams beginning with a Student Assistance Team (SAT or Teacher Assistance Team, TAT) to engage in problem solving among teachers and parents regarding specific students. The SAT team meets before students are referred to the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to evaluate students for special education. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team develops, implements and monitors the individual program for students admitted to special education. There may be other teams as well, such as a Transition Plan Team (typically a subgroup of the IEP team) or Individual Family Service Plan Team for preschool children with disabilities,

among others. Most of the special education teams focus on individual students and have their origin in law or policy.

### **Teams Related to Student Behavior or Violence**

Recently there have been suggestions that additional teams are needed to address student behavior and behavioral issues in schools. These include a *positive behavior support team* used to define and teach behavioral expectations and monitor behavioral issues within a building (Sugai & Horner, 2001). It also includes individual behavior management teams (often all or some of the IEP team members for students in special education) that might conduct a functional analysis related to a student's behavior and develop and supervise the implementation of an individual behavior plan (Tilly, Knowster, Kovalski, Bambara, Dunlap, and Kincaid, 1998). While teams such as the IEP team may be created only for students in special education, some have called for similar individual behavior management teams to be created for non-disabled students (Jones, 1991). Additionally educators have been asked to participate in Wraparound Teams (Eber, 1997) or other service coordination teams as a vehicle for assisting families to create support networks and to coordinate services.

Others have suggested that a Bullying Prevention Team be created in a building to insure that bullying prevention and intervention remain at the forefront of educators' agendas (Olweus et al., 1999). A variety of others have been proposed as well including, Crisis Response Teams (Poland, 1999), which respond and help process crisis situations when they occur in schools; Security Assessment Teams (Trump, 1998) which identify school security issues, and offer suggestions to improve school security; and School

Safety Teams (Stephens, 1995), which plan overall school readiness for various potential safety risks or hazards in school.

Clearly there are a large number of potential teams in schools, and many may have similar or related functions if they are functioning simultaneously. The overuse of team may be a result of the old saying that when you have a problem you don't know how to solve, "create a committee" to study the issue. In this case teams are used to replace committees. This leads us to the saying that when some policy is overly complex, detailed and confusing that "it must have been written by a committee".

### **Distinguishing Teams and Committees**

The term "team" appears to be used for almost any group or meeting within a school, and its usage in schools seems to suggest that it is being simply used as a replacement for words like "committee," "task force," or "work group." According to one dictionary a team is a "number of persons working or playing together as a unit, especially one side in a competitive game or sport." (Williams, 1977, p. 934) Another defines it as a "group of people constituting onside in a contest or competition; or a group of people working together in a coordinated effort" (Agnes, 2001, p. 1468). The word team seems to imply a longer-term rather than simply an "ad hoc" association of people, with specialized roles or assignments (such as positions on a sports team or departments within a business), which are grouped together to accomplish some goal (such as winning a game or increasing sales). The term "team" may imply close cooperation or agreement about the objectives and the methods of the team and fairly frequent interaction.

On the other hand a "committee" is defined as "a group of people chosen ... to consider, investigate and report or act on some matter, or on matters of a certain kind"

(Agnes, 2001, p294), an apparently more broad but more formal grouping of people. A committee is usually chosen from some larger body of people, and has no implications regarding the relationships between members.

Leadership in teams usually occurs less formally than for committees. Sports teams have “captains” being elected by the team, but the “coaches” are usually appointed. It is ambiguous how leadership is established in other team situations, but sometimes teams are viewed as having less formal leadership, de-emphasizing leaders’ roles. Leadership for a committee is usually through an elected or appointed chairperson, who can have considerable power and influence in the agenda, pace and work of the committee.

Building a team might imply needing to develop a “sense of team” or “team spirit” which might include delineated and distinct roles, close familiarity, personal relationships or bonding, reliance on each other, mutual support, more open communication, common sense of goals, etc. These are sometimes developed in activities identified as “team building” activities and procedures. A whole industry has developed which focuses on building the underlying values associated with teams such as trust, camaraderie, loyalty, etc., in outdoor rope courses and challenge courses conducted during staff retreats (Priest, 1996). While “teams” are expected to comply with “the rules of the game”, their functioning with each other is usually less formal, is based on skill contributions and interpersonal relationships, is focused on mutual goals, and is one that extends through time.

None of the “team building” activities or methods of functioning would seem necessary or even appropriate for a “committee”. A “committee” usually implies a more

formal organization where business is conducted in the context of a meeting. The meeting has many formal properties, such as an official convening of the meeting, an agenda that is to be followed, predefined rules for interactions and conducting business such as Roberts Rules of Order, a procedure for making decisions or taking actions (voting on motions, etc.) and an adjournment. Work is assigned to subcommittees or individuals in between meetings. Moreover an official record is kept of committee meetings. While individuals or subcommittees might work outside of committee meeting times that work is validated at committee meetings. There does not seem to be any implication about the frequency of meetings, nor the roles served when people are on a committee.

Given these comparisons, many of what are actually called *teams* in schools are actually more like *committees*. Most school teams do not engage in team building activities. While there is usually some commonality of purpose, many times teams in schools do not have clearly distinguished roles for the members of the team. Most operate more formally than one normally thinks would be appropriate for teams. As a result, it is unclear why the usage of the word team has been emphasized so heavily in education. There is no apparent reason for using the word *team* based on its definition, and rather it may be merely a substitute for using the word *committee* when that definition might actually apply better.

For purposes of this paper we will use the word *team* to broadly address the actual usage of the word in schools, and will not limit it to its narrow definition. We will include both committees and teams when we refer to teams in the remainder of this discussion.

### **Effectiveness or Outcomes of Teams or Committees**

The utilization of teams within schools is well documented in the educational literature, and although teams are often viewed as the *best* vehicle for many school-related decision making activities, there is actually little research that validates teams (or committees) over other methods of problem-solving or decision-making in schools (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997), and none that compares group-made decisions to individual or other non-team forms of decision-making. In a search of the literature on this topic for this report (See Table 1), no studies were found which compared the outcomes of team decisions to decisions made by individuals, for any of the types of team/committee decisions we discussed above. There were also few studies that attempted to identify whether a team or committee had produced outcomes related to its charge. While there appears to be some anecdotal evidence supporting positive outcomes from team decisions, this may be related to other factors such as administrative leadership style and personality, motivation and interest of team members related to the topic or student, and size of school or other factors which have not been identified or controlled in these reports. As a result there appears to be no empirical basis on which to say that team decisions are superior or more likely to be implemented than individual-made decisions.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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It appears that most of the actual support for the use of teams in schools may arise from certain assumptions regarding teams, rather than data. These might include:

1. Multiple perspectives of individuals adds richness to the discussion and decision-making process, and may result in creative alternative options not possible by one person.

2. Because of the number of individuals, teams are less likely to make mistakes.

3. Team participants learn from each other, and as a result improve their knowledge and skills through their participation.

4. Teams making decisions add more legitimacy to the decision than individuals making decisions, especially in environments where individuals have considerable autonomy such as in schools.

5. Outcomes of team decisions are more likely to be implemented than other decisions, as members may represent the school, and provide multiple voices in support of decisions.

6. Teams are vehicles for shared decision-making, and thus shared power and responsibility; individual decision-making may be viewed as more authoritarian.

Several of these assumptions were the basis for the creation of the Multidisciplinary and IEP Teams at the time of the creation of what is now the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act and developed in part as components of due process procedures (Nazzaro, 1976). Many of these same assumptions are used to justify the creation of school-based teams related to behavior planning today (Sugai & Horner, 2001), and may also be used as a justification for the use of teams in other contexts. Although these assumptions still drive the use of teams in school, there is apparently no research that empirically tests whether teams actually result in the outcomes assumed.

### **The Process of Decision-making in Teams or Committees**

There has also been little research regarding the process of group decision-making that occurs in groups (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997) whether in teams or committees. When we conducted our literature search, we found that just as with outcomes of group (team or committee) decisions, there is an absence of empirical research with regard to the social psychological phenomena or group processes underlying team functioning. In fact, there are only a handful of empirical studies on teams (see Table 1), with most of the current knowledge base assumptive (Pryzwansky, 1981).

Gutkin & Nemeth (1997) cite several factors that may impact decision-making within school-based teams. These factors include the need for criteria for assessing the quality of group decision-making, power of the majority, value of the minority dissent, group polarization, and shared norms. **Add more here??? No evidence. Discuss Gutkin article in more detail here. Tie to Topics like those listed below.**

### **Method**

In the context of gathering evaluation data regarding the Safe and Responsive Schools Project, the participating school-based teams functioning in 6 of the 14 project schools were asked to complete a brief questionnaire. All of the schools were in midwestern states, and generally they were in small urban cities or towns. Participants included educators with a variety of roles. Respondents included a total of 41 individuals out of 67 members of these teams; a total of 41 responses were analyzed, for a response rate of 61%. In all 6 schools, 4 teams were created specifically for this project, while in 2 schools existing teams were given the responsibility of project related activities. Three of the teams were in elementary buildings, 2 in secondary buildings, and 1 in a small

community was a district wide (K-12) committee. The teams and their composition are illustrated in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Questions for participants included items about the number of teams or committees that individuals participated in, the quantity of time involved for them, and how important they felt a variety of factors were to the success of the team (see Table 3).

Some of the questions required Likert-like responses, and others were open ended. Two variations of these questionnaires were administered. The data were based on individual perceptions about their team for the 01-02 school year.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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## **Results**

### **Factors Influencing Team Functioning**

According to Pryzwansky (1981), “school-based teams have experienced a number of significant problems involving both process and product elements, probably as a result of their mandated origin.” The following considerations are derived from our own experience with implementing several school-based teams as well as from the responses obtained from team members on the SRS Project. In each case we review the literature regarding that issue, and then provide a brief summary of the responses or examples from the SRS Project data.

### **Number of Teams or Committees in Schools**

It is very difficult to estimate the number of teams that may actually exist in a school. A review of literature on teams, could find no empirical information regarding the number of teams or committees typical in schools, nor any information about how many different people serve on teams or committees. Obviously this would also vary based on the size of the school. However, it might be possible to make some estimates. Excluding for the moment special education related committees, one might expect in a typical elementary school that there could be from four to ten committees including all of the various types mentioned earlier (various grade level or subjects, parent involvement, school improvement, crisis response, etc.). A larger secondary school might have many more.

Teams related to special education are somewhat easier to estimate because they typically focus on individual students. In a typical school of 400 school students, we might expect about 12% of the students to be in special education requiring around 48 IEP teams. There would be one or more Student Assistance Teams (organization, composition and membership of these may vary or be constant depending on how the school implements these teams), and probably from 8-27 functional assessment or behavior plan teams for the commonly estimated 2%-7% of students who might need these behavior plans. As a result, from 57 to 76 of these types of teams might exist in such a building. Many of these teams would typically meet only on an infrequent basis, perhaps only about once per year, although some may meet much more frequently. Obviously there might be considerable overlap in the membership on these individual student related teams, with some individuals such as an administrator, special education

teachers and psychologists on virtually all of these teams, while other staff members might serve on only a few. Based on these estimates, and counting both individual student teams and other types of teams or committees, it is apparent that the number of teams even in a relatively small school could be quite large. In our hypothetical example it might be between 60 and 80.

**SRS Team Data.** Respondents indicated that they were involved with a mean of 3.63 teams in their building, with a range of from 1 to 8 teams (n=41). Although prompted to include all teams or committees of all types including teams for individual students, it is unclear whether respondents included all of the teams, while it is unlikely that they overestimated the number. Of course each individual is reporting only the teams for which they are members, not the total combined for the building. The average number of teams, times the number of staff members in the school, divided by the overlap in team membership would be a way to estimate the number for a building.

### **Selection for Team Membership**

One of the first considerations when implementing a team is the selection of its members. Clearly the selection of team members will depend on the purpose of the team. For example, a behavior team for an individual student should include “individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the student and his or her behavior as well as individuals with more limited background with the student but who have particular expertise in working with student behavior” (Jones, 2001). On the other hand, a planning team for assessing a school’s goals and making plans to implement school-wide behavior or violence prevention procedures might require team members who will provide credibility to the resulting plans. It may be imperative that the team be comprised of several

members who are considered to be “leaders” within the school and who are respected by a majority of school staff. School-based teams also need to consider whether or not they are representative of the entire school staff. It is important that the school staff view the team as working for the entire school versus a selective or elite group working on their own priorities.

**SRS Team Data.** In our experience with school-based teams, there have been several methods for selecting team members. One method has been for administration to approach staff members to solicit volunteers for the team. Another method might be to identify people with key roles, or expertise appropriate to the team. More commonly in our observations of the teams created for the SRS Project, it has been our experience that administrators use their executive power to select members. This selection may be a way to spread time commitments out among staff, may be an effort to avoid previously known interpersonal conflicts, or may be an effort to avoid choosing those staff who have a reputation for not contributing or otherwise not being effective members. They may also choose to use an existing team that has functioned well in the past, or a team into which new goals can easily be embedded into the team’s current purpose, in part to avoid creating another “new” team. For some of our teams, the members were not clear why they were selected to participate, and this did seem to, at least initially, hinder their full participation.

### **Size of Team**

The size of a school-based team will also affect its ability to function. While a large team may provide the broad representativeness that is sometimes sought in these teams, the larger size will also limit the ability to schedule meetings where all

participants will be able to attend, thus also limiting continuity of participation on the team. There is some research to suggest that a team consisting of from 5-8 people may be the most likely to be successful (Gutkin, 1997). Fewer people may provide inadequate breadth of perspectives, while more people makes logistics and continuity of involvement more difficult.

**SRS Teams Data.** Our teams reported that on average they have participated on teams with 7.01 members (n=41), with the smallest team reported as 2 and the largest as 30 members. When asked, what in their experience is the best number of people on a team like the SRS team, respondents indicated an average of 8.49 members (n=41).

All too often in our experience with teams, a small handful of the same teachers and staff are the volunteers and active participants on numerous teams or committees within the same school. This complicates scheduling, limits the number of people involved in contributing to decisions of the various teams, and may lead to overload for some individuals. Several considerations when building teams include how to prevent burnout by the small group of active participants and how to involve a greater number of the school staff or more effectively disseminate team membership. This begs the question as to whether or not the same people can serve on several teams effectively.

### **Large versus Small Schools**

In considering the concept of teams within schools, the size of the school is not often taken into account. A relatively large team in a small school may represent a large proportion of the total staff available for that school, while a small team in a large school may be only a small fraction of the staff of that school, leading to concerns about how representative the team may be. The appropriate percentage may be arbitrary.

In considering team size relative to total school staff, it is also important to consider that there is typically more than one team functioning within a school at any given time. As a result the same individuals may serve on numerous student and other types of teams, thus leading to conflicting schedules, meeting overload and burnout. This may in turn lead to diminished productivity and disorganization for the team as a whole. These kinds of problems may be exacerbated in smaller schools with fewer staff members, but where there is a need for large numbers of teams. Of course this overload can also happen in larger schools.

There may also be advantages to these small schools with smaller numbers of staff members. It may be possible within a smaller school for more effective communication with other staff members not on the team. It may also be possible for programs to be put in place more readily and more quickly in smaller schools, thus leading to less lengthy terms for teams, and perhaps less frequent or shorter meetings.

**SRS Team Data.** In the school-based teams created for the Safe and Responsive Schools project, the number of team members ranged from about 14% to 38% of the total staff of the school (see Table 2.), even though the number of team members ranged only from 8-17. As can be seen in the table, the percentage of special education, administrator and related service personnel involved in the SRS teams is much larger than for classroom teachers.

### **Length of Time a Team Meets**

There are both permanent and temporary teams in schools. Permanent teams “specialize in a particular function” such as curriculum or age-level teaching, while temporary teams are “organized for a particular short-term purpose and are dissolved

when the task is completed” (Snyder & Anderson as reported in Oswald, 1996). While some of the teams related to behavior planning for a school (for example a team to choose a school-wide discipline approach) might be a temporary team (i.e., existing for a school year), most of the other behavior planning teams such as crisis response, safety, or security teams are likely to be viewed as permanent.

While we might tend to think of the student specific teams as more long term (at least while that child is attending that school), the composition of these teams likely varies each year as the student changes teachers. Additionally, schools with high levels of family transience also have student teams that must be discontinued when students leave, and other new teams formed when new students arrive.

**SRS Team Data.** It is currently unknown whether the teams created through the SRS project will continue beyond the project even though the planning process associated with the project would presumably be an ongoing need. Our guess is that some will continue where other factors support the team (administrative support, needs, strong sense of team accomplishment, etc.), but that others will not.

### **Leadership of the Team**

Although all team members may be viewed as leaders, in that they are all part of a team that represents and is working for the school, it is important the team itself has a leader or chairperson (one or two members) who can guide the team through the process, provide motivation, and keep the team focused. At the start of a team there is generally a lot of enthusiasm and energy, but as the process gets underway the enthusiasm and energy level begin to taper off. Therefore, an important role of the team leader is to foster a continued sense of team purpose and cohesiveness throughout the process.

**SRS Team Data.** The attitude of the team leader was indicated by team members to be one of the most important components or factors contributing to successful team functioning (see Table 3). In some of our teams, administrators were the leaders, and in others other school staff members led the team. In both cases however, some of these leaders appeared to do an excellent job, and in others the leadership was not as strong. In addition to attitude of the leader, some other components that were viewed as encompassing strong leadership included the organization by the leader in terms of developing agendas for meetings and follow-up on project activities and delegation of responsibilities to other team members.

### **Delegation of Responsibilities**

Another important role of the team leader or facilitator is the delegation of responsibilities to other team members. All too often it seems as if a small minority of the team (one or two members) take on the majority of the work-load outside of the actual meeting. This may be by choice or it may be that no one else on the team readily volunteers for outside duties. Although participation in the meeting is an important responsibility that everyone on the team should fulfill, there is also a lot of leg-work or work to be done outside of the meeting to put the meeting discussions into action and to move the process forward. Again it is impossible for a few members to shoulder the entire responsibility of fieldwork and to expect effective and efficient products and progress. By disseminating responsibilities to all team members, we are better utilizing the resources within our team to accomplish both the desired short term and long-term goals.

The team leader is also in a position to act as a communication link between the team and the rest of the school staff. On-going communication with the school staff regarding the team's purpose and goals, the team's course of action, and the team's progress, is imperative if one desires to create a sense that this team is important, this team is working for the school. This on-going communication is especially important if the team's actions and desires will ultimately impact the entire school, staff and/or students. In some cases, there is such poor communication regarding what teams exists and what they are actually doing that when it comes time to implement a developed plan or structural change, school staff are caught off guard and express resistance and/or resentment.

**SRS Team Data.** Again, team members indicated that they felt it was important for the team leader to delegate responsibilities amongst the team members. In our observations at the team meetings, in some cases the team leader would assume the majority of the duties where as in other teams, the leader would ask for volunteers. However, on teams in which members were given outside responsibilities, there appeared to be more ownership of the team process as evidenced by members' regular attendance at meetings and their enthusiasm and motivation at these meetings. One phenomena that was observed during our involvement with the SRS teams was that for the majority of teams there was a lack of communication with the rest of the school staff. For teams that did regularly communicate with and involve the rest of the school personnel, these teams were more likely to fully and successfully implement their SRS team plan.

### **Available Resources**

At the crux of all teams is the issue of whether or not the necessary resources are available to support the existence of a team. One of the most precious resources for school personnel is time. Teams mean meetings and meetings mean time. And although most school personnel would probably agree that teams are beneficial to schools and students, the issue becomes one of finding the time or making the time so that a team can function and accomplish its goals. Administrative support is crucial to team survival; administrators may be in a position to provide substitutes to enable school staff to meet during the school day or may be able to allocate funds for school staff stipends for time spent outside of the school hours on team activities. In addition to normal school duties, team members whom we surveyed indicated that they spent on average approximately 10 additional hours per month on activities related to teams.

A second issue regarding available resources is that of training. In order for a team to develop a plan and/or to implement a school wide program, team members need to be familiar with the current research literature in the particular area, on the particular topic that the team is addressing. The foremost questions become who will gather the literature and information to dispense to the team, and will this literature be easily read and understood by all team members? Is outside training necessary? Will all school staff require training if a school wide program is to be implemented? There are often a limited number of staff development days and the allocation of time on these days is often determined well in advance by administration.

**SRS Team Data.** Prior to analyzing the results of the questionnaire, we would have hypothesized the availability of resources would be one of the factors that team members considered one of the most important factors in team functioning and success.

To our surprise, team members rated availability of resources as one of the least important factors on our questionnaire (see Table 3). While members did indicate that resources were important, they also indicated that there were other factors contributing to team functioning that were of equal or greater impact. Of all the factors assessed by the questionnaire, money for staff training was rated as the lowest with a mean rating from team members of 3.94, 5 being “very important.”

### **Team Focus & Motivation**

As mentioned previously, one priority of the team leader should be to keep the team focused and motivated throughout the process. One means of accomplishing team focus includes developing a team mission statement at the start of the process and referring to it frequently throughout. Another helpful focus strategy is to map out an agenda for each meeting. Meeting agendas do not need to be extremely detailed but they should guide the discussion and act as a means for monitoring team progress. It is sometimes easy for team members to become side-tracked or for one or two members to dominate or direct the conversation elsewhere only to discover that the meeting time has been eaten away and not a whole lot has been accomplished. This often results in team members feeling they are wasting their time and becoming increasingly frustrated with the team process and progress.

Team motivation as mentioned earlier tends to peak at the start of the process and then slowly wane. When motivation diminishes, team members begin to lose focus of the ultimate goal and team composition may begin to deteriorate. This deterioration may occur through negative attitudes that are displayed by members; deterioration may also surface with members no longer being able to attend meetings or fulfill team duties. In

order to spur continued motivation and energy within the team, team leaders may want to consider occasionally incorporating team-building activities into meeting agendas.

Motivation may also be contingent on the sense of progress or utility of the team's activities. By celebrating the team's accomplishments of short-term goals and mapping out the path to the ultimate goal, team members may be able to better appreciate the importance of their efforts and to recognize the progress that they have made.

Another important issue to address regarding teams that may influence focus and motivation is the duration of the team's existence. Is the team a team with a focused goal that can be accomplished within a relatively short, or at least a fixed, amount of time? Or is the team a team of many hats? Will this team be a team that addresses a variety of issues and be seen as a more permanent team? If the latter is true, then the issue again becomes one of team composition and preventing team burnout.

**SRS Team Data.** Team members also endorsed team focus and motivation as important factors (see Table 3). For two of three schools which participated in the project over the course of three years, team participation by the third year had waned. Two of these teams, both representing elementary schools, were both very enthusiastic the first two years of the project. Both teams partially implemented their plans during these two years; however, by the third year, focus of the school administrators appeared to have shifted and these teams dissipated. For other school who participated for the three years of the project, their team motivation and focus accelerated over the course of the project. During the first year, this high school team appeared to lack focus and motivation, with members sporadically attending meetings and not fully understanding the purpose of the

team; now in the third year, almost all of the 17 members regularly attend the meetings and are actively planning for next year.

*ADD Summary of SRS here*

### **Conclusions**

Much more research is required to validate the presumed benefit of team decision making in schools. In spite of their widespread use, little is known about the number or types of teams that actually exist in schools, nor about the makeup of the members of these teams. Little has been done to understand the group dynamics or other logistical issues which might make teams more or less effective in schools. The exploratory data in this study show that the actual accomplishments of various teams may depend heavily on other factors regarding their size, selection of members, administrative leadership, etc. More research would be helpful to begin to prioritize these issues in such a way that they might lead to more effective outcomes and efficient functioning of school-based teams for various functions.

Table 1

## Results of Literature Search from PsycINFO Database

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Key words used	Result of search, not limited	Search limited to empirical studies & journal articles
Teams	6634	2327
Group dynamics	9008	2266
Group process	1843	474
Group dynamics and teams	636	217
Teams and schools	335	89
School-based teams	17	4
Collaborative teams	17	6
IEP teams	11	0
Student assistance teams	1	1
Pre-referral teams	0	0
Problem-solving teams	34	12
Group dynamics and teams in schools	1	0
Teams and schools and group dynamics	9	3

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Table 3

Components of team process as rated by team members

Component <sup>1</sup>	Mean of Responses <sup>2</sup>	Standard Dev.
Leadership of team – attitude	4.75	0.52
Support from building administration	4.68	1.08
Opportunity for member input	4.63	0.49
Clear purpose of team	4.61	0.49
Members of team representative	4.57	0.55
Leadership of team – follow-up	4.55	0.70
Team commitment	4.54	0.69
Participation by members	4.52	0.68
Scheduling of meetings	4.51	0.72
Leadership of team – agenda	4.47	0.69
Team motivation	4.49	0.76
Use of meeting time	4.45	0.65
Delegation of responsibilities	4.43	0.81
Team focus	4.35	0.76
Availability of resources – time for implementation	4.32	1.02
Work done outside of meetings	4.27	0.75
Absence of interpersonal conflict	4.25	0.79
Availability of resources – information	4.24	0.73
Availability of resources – time for training	4.21	0.96
Use of time between meetings	4.17	0.73

Availability of resources – consultation	4.15	0.82
Availability of resources – money for implementation	4.10	0.94
Availability of resources – money for training	3.94	1.04

<sup>1</sup> n= 41 of 67 team members

<sup>2</sup> 1 = not important; 5= very important

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