Decision Making Guidelines
(Source: SCC Handbook II, 2008)

School Community Councils are required at every school. The Hawaii State Department of Education has expanded the role of the SCC to include oversight of the Academic Plan and Financial Plan, a recognition that all stakeholders (students, parents, community members, teachers, other staff and principals) must contribute to the success of the school.

School principals are the critical leaders at schools. They are responsible for establishing a vision for improving achievement for all students. Principals are ultimately accountable for achieving the goals of the school. Therefore, principals must ensure that the Academic Plan and Financial Plan are focused on meeting the needs of all students.

Principals and School Community Council members should consider the following guidelines for decision making:

• Focus decisions based upon the school’s vision especially what is best for ALL students
• Seek involvement by the wider community rather than limiting discussions to the SCC. School Community meetings are designed to involve the larger community in discussing educational priorities.
• Take risks and learn from mistakes. Seek solutions outside what has “traditionally been…”
• Create a critical study process to support decisions with data and research. Become a “learning community.” Network, learn from each other, seek information, allow for reflection, and don’t feel decisions must be made to show progress. What is most important is a climate where everyone is allowed to learn.
• Create “issue task forces” to study and/or make recommendations.
• Guard against “group think.” (A human phenomenon whereby members of a group go along with a group decision because of their desire to “please one another” or to be a “team player.” It overrides their ability to choose alternative courses of action.)
• Collective Bargaining Decision Making Issues:
  • Only SCC decisions that impact collective bargaining agreements must follow the approval process identified in the Memorandum of Understanding in the respective union contracts. If the unit membership does not approve the contractual issue, then the SCC is informed by the unit SCC member that the issue has failed to pass and further discussion can take place to resolve the concerns or the issue may be deferred.
  • For all other SCC issues that do not impact collective bargaining agreements, unit membership may decide against the issue, but if the majority of the SCC role group members vote to approve the decision, it passes and is moved forward.
Decision Making Defined

Voting: In “majority rules,” a simple majority of those eligible to vote is needed for making decisions.

Compromise: Compromise decisions can produce a decision that actually does not represent any member’s view. A collection of viewpoints are put together in a manner where most preferences are included in the decision, but where some may have to give up a part of their ideas if someone else will also give up a part of theirs.

Consensus: Consensus decisions are made “for the good of the whole” and should be based upon the school’s vision/mission. Aiming for consensus teaches the group to explore and pool the knowledge and experience of all its members. People learn to modify viewpoints based on logic, reasoning, and new information. The group reaches a conclusion which has blended the best ideas into a decision that everyone in the group supports.

Planning for Decision-Making:

In order to ensure that stakeholders understand how they will participate, the SCC chairperson should:

1) Clarify the issue so that people will know what they are discussing and/or deciding upon.

2) Recommend a method for making the decision. If the goal is decision by consensus, there should be a “fallback” decision-making option defined by the bylaws. (BOE SCC Policy 2411)

- Not all decisions are best made by consensus. Consideration must include the level of involvement desired by participants.

- A disagreement regarding what decision-making option to use should be decided in favor of the option requiring greater involvement.

Consensus Defined: A consensus decision is an agreement that each member can live with and actively support. A group "arrives" at consensus through a series of small agreements. It is reached when each member can honestly say…

a) “I believe that you understand my point of view and that I understand yours”;

b) “Whether or not I prefer this decision, I can support it because it was reached fairly and openly and it is probably the best solution for us at this time.”
Options for Moving a Group Toward Consensus:

- Polling, using the “fist of five” technique can be used to get a sense of how far along the group is toward reaching a consensus.

- Consensus can sometimes be reached by asking both sides…"What would it take or what conditions might you add/change to make it okay for us to reach consensus?" or the facilitator could ask the minority, “Do you feel you understand what the majority is saying? (Have the person(s) paraphrase what they think the majority is saying. Ask the majority to validate what was said.) If the minority fully understands the majority point of view, the facilitator should then ask the majority the same question and to paraphrase the minority point of view.

If that is satisfactory, the facilitator then could say to the minority…”It appears that the various points of view are clearly understood by both sides. I know you may not prefer this decision, but could you support the decision because we have all had a fair and open discussion on the issue? Could you say that it is probably the best solution for us at this time?”

If the answer is no…go back to the strategy of asking “Then what would it take…etc.” (The majority could also be asked to suggest ways to help the minority “win.” They could say…”What if we…could you live with that?”) If the two conditions of consensus have been achieved, ask once again if all sides can “live” with a decision. Emphasize that the discussion has been open/honest and clearly, each side understands the others’ point of view.

When a decision appears to have at least (80%) support, no one person or a small group of persons should block the decision without coming up with an alternative or pointing the group in another direction. E.g. “We have at least (80%) support for this decision, can those who cannot support this decision suggest other alternatives or at least point the group in another direction?” Once a decision is made, everyone must be committed to its implementation. 100% support is expected. No one undermines or sabotages the decision.

When consensus can’t be reached, it may be appropriate for the facilitator to determine which persons are directly involved in the implementation or impacted by the decision. The facilitator might say…”This issue doesn’t appear to involve you in its implementation neither does it appear to impact you directly. Do you agree with that?” If the person agrees, then their objection is no longer a roadblock to reaching consensus. The facilitator need only obtain consensus from those impacted.

A key to consensus is to “help the other side win.” When consensus appears to have been reached, it is important for the facilitator to declare…”It appears we have reached consensus. For the last time, is there anyone who cannot live with the decision?” (Record the decision in the minutes.)
Fallback from Consensus Decision Making: A “fallback” decision-making option can be prearranged if it is felt that the group may not be able to reach consensus. (For educational reform decisions, a vote which garners the support of a large majority, e.g. 80% of participants, may be appropriate.) Once a decision is made, everyone commits to its implementation. 100% support is expected and no one should undermine or sabotage the decision.

• **Issue:** Presented to the group.

• **Agreement:** Based in the issue, the situation and the need for “buy-in,” the group agrees on how the decision will be made prior to the discussion.

• **Discussion:** the issue is discussed. The group tries to reach consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, the facilitator may ask if the group ready to consider the fallback. If the group is not ready for the fallback, discussion continues.

• **Decision:** the group agrees through consensus that it is time to use the fallback.

• **Decision:** The decision is made using the agreed upon fallback.