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Accelerating decision-making with dynamic group processes and state-of-the-art systems.

Case Study

Multi-criteria decision making

According to Kim Fontana, Director Staff Development and Research, Ithaca City School District (ICSD), "Both teachers and administrators said they could not remember a decision-making process that went as smoothly or that resulted in as great a commitment to the outcome. One teacher commented, 'Because I had confidence in the process, I was able to really learn and think through the individual questions rather than feeling as though I had to keep my mind on staking out a position.'"

ICSD needed to select an early literacy assessment. There were eight literacy assessments being considered and little apparent agreement regarding which best supported teaching and learning.

Preliminary research
An enormous amount of work was done prior to the decision session. Team members generated preliminary criteria and identified eight early literacy assessments. Staff developer Liddy Allee prepared a succinct presentation that evaluated each assessment against the set of decision criteria. Research and presentation were crucial to the team's success. With this solid, shared information base, decision makers were less likely to base their judgments on speculation, untested assumptions or personal agenda.

Decision matrix
The 40 member team agreed to a final set of decision criteria and weighted them using Prism's group decision support system. They then assessed how well each literacy assessment contributed to each criterion in a 1 to 9 vote (see graphic representation to right).

Each vote's result was displayed in a histogram. The group discussed the vote range. Where the range indicated disagreement, they shared additional information and clarified their assumptions. In most cases, they then re-voted the cell and narrowed the range.

After the group voted the last cell, the decision matrix displayed each literacy assessment's total worth (the sum of the raw scores times the criterion weights).

Strong consensus
The results of the multiple criteria decision matrix assessment were compelling for the group. After reviewing the final results, they quickly reached very strong consensus support for selecting one early literacy assessment.

Reading teacher Carol Cedarholm commented: "I was impressed with how Sean Brady's facilitation and the use of the technology helped everyone to share experiences, opinions and information about all of the tests in a respectful and constructive manner. The process allowed accurate information to be shared and limited the effect of politics and ego on decision making." Ms. Cedarholm continues: "Because of the thoroughness and integrity of the process, I have confidence that we have made a decision that will improve instruction and learning. This conversation was truly one that held the best interests of children's learning at the core."