

Making Your Decision

It's important that early on in your adoption plan (Step 2: Develop Your Process), you determine with your team how the final selection and recommendation will be made. There are multiple approaches to doing this, but the end goal is the same: that everyone on your committee, as well as other stakeholders, understands what approach your team used to make the final decision. Transparency is key here and communicating how the decision will be made is critical. Clearly articulating how the final decision will be made gives members of the committee a clear understanding of their roles, how their work will contribute, and how they can later share the committee's process with others. Whatever approach you choose, start your process by having a conversation about the needs you are addressing with the new materials and the evidence you collected during your investigation (Step 4: Investigate the Materials).

What is this resource?

Making Your Decision has two parts. Part 1: Decision-Making Options provides descriptions of three approaches you could choose for how to make your decision, sample pros and cons of each option, and a space for you and your committee to record your own ideas, pros, and cons. Part 2: Sample Consensus Protocol provides an example of how committees that choose the consensus approach can structure its process.

How should this resource be used?

The first section of this resource can be used as a conversation starter when your committee is establishing how you will make a final decision (Step 2: Develop Your Process). There may be more than these three approaches to making a decision, but these are the three that we generally see when we are working with districts. If you have additional approaches to decision-making in your district, feel free to add those and discuss the pros and cons.

The second section is a sample that teams can use or adapt. We have seen districts take a variety of approaches to this protocol; however, the most important aspect is making sure the group understands what it means to come to consensus. Facilitation and planning are key to the success of this process, and teams should be careful to select a facilitator who understands the process and will ensure all voices are heard.

Part 1: Decision-Making Options*

Below are three approaches to making a final decision regarding your instructional materials adoption. As a committee, have the discussion about how you will eventually make a final decision. You may even have an additional approach based on your district guidelines. Discuss the options and build upon the pros and cons of each.

Approach	Pros	Cons
Single Decision-Maker – All evidence comes to one person and he/she makes the decision.	<i>Easy and straightforward</i>	<i>Buy-in and investment from stakeholders might be diminished.</i>
Voting – Committee/stakeholders vote and the product with 50 percent of the vote or more is selected.	<i>An understandable process for stakeholders</i>	<i>Some stakeholders may feel as though they've "lost."</i>
Consensus – A collaborative process whereby committees agree that the will of the group drives the decision and all members support the decision.	<i>All voices are heard</i>	<i>Needs to be well facilitated.</i>
Other		

*adapted from [Instruction Partners' Curriculum Support Guide resource](#)

Part 2: Sample Consensus Protocol

If you decide your team will use a consensus approach, here is an example of a protocol to help facilitate your decision-making process. This protocol will support your team to generate widespread agreement in a way that respects the contributions of all participants and has been adapted from the [School Reform Initiative](#).

<p>Action Step 1: Prepare for Consensus</p>	<p>1.1 Establish norms. Consider the following suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let everyone be heard. • Assume positive intentions. • Be present and prepared. • Respect opinions and time. • Base decisions on evidence collected from multiple perspectives.
	<p>1.2 Introduce the tenants of consensus. This is best if made visible on chart paper. A consensus decision means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can live with the decision. • I will support my colleagues in implementing this decision. • I will do absolutely nothing to impede the implementation of the decision.
	<p>1.3 Ask adoption committee members to consider and eventually affirm the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My voice has been heard. • I understand the proposal. • It's clear to me that the will of the group has emerged around this proposal.
	<p>1.4 Next, ask adoption committee members to agree to express and defend their level of support for each program. Introduce the four levels of support.</p>

<p>Action Step 1: Agree on a Decision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1 – I strongly agree that this program is the right choice and can support it. Level 2 – I accept this program and will support the implementation of this choice. Level 3 – I can live with this program and will support the implementation of this choice Level 4 – I have concerns and cannot support this program at this time.
	<p>1.5 Agree that if the adoption committee is unable to reach consensus, a fall-back decision-making approach will need to be implemented. Communicate the fall-back approach with the entire group (<i>e.g., sole decision-maker with input, or a vote with majority rule</i>).</p>

<p>Action Step 2: Present Your Goals and the Options</p>	<p>2.1 Review district data pertinent to the materials adoption, including student achievement data, teacher demographic data, and classroom observation data.</p>
	<p>2.2 Share the goals of the adoption, your vision for instruction and the priorities you’ve established.</p>
	<p>2.3 Present the options for selection.</p>

Action Step 3: Review the Evidence	<p>3.1 Examine the evidence collected from your study of the materials, including the evidence from EdReports reviews as well as locally collected evidence from book studies, field tests and/or publisher presentations.</p>
	<p>3.2 Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each program using the evidence collected.</p>
	<p>3.3 Ensure that each option is understood fully and that all questions have been addressed</p>

Action Step 4: Test for Consensus	<p>4.1 Give committee members time (to determine their level of support (Levels 1-4 above) regarding each option (3 to 5 minutes).</p>
	<p>4.2 When all members are ready to be polled, polling begins on the options. This can be done at first privately and then moved to public polling. Note that members may express any level of support for the programs—for example, a member may decide to fully support two programs.</p>

Action Step 5: Discuss, Cite Evidence, and Work Toward Consensus	<p>5.1 If program selections are in opposition to one another, invite participants to voice their opinions citing specific evidence (<i>e.g., reference charts, notes, and data from Action Steps 1-3</i>).</p> <p>Depending on group size, this might take the form of a simple discussion or a more structured process that breaks</p>
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	<p>the team into smaller mixed groups for discussion and charting.</p>
	<p>5.2 Discuss patterns of strengths and areas of concern. Ask the group to narrow the existing strengths and concerns to items that might inhibit consensus. Encourage each member to share their concerns, rationale, and supporting evidence for those concerns in a way that will inform and provide knowledge that will enable the group to reach consensus.</p>
	<p>5.3 Conduct another poll to see if the level of support has shifted after the discussion.</p>
	<p>5.4 Record results on poll chart. If the group favors one program over another, congratulate the group on having reached consensus.</p>
	<p>5.5 If there are still Level 4 concerns, repeat the process (Action Steps 1-4).</p>

<p>Action Step 6 (if needed): Examine Other Considerations</p>	<p>6.1 If the group is struggling to reach consensus, consider additional differences based on priorities or other district requirements. Considerations may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging needs and hopes for programs in addition to the district’s top priorities (<i>e.g., perceived ease of use for novice teachers, desire to incorporate new technology features, resources to support parent communications</i>). • Factors such as cost or availability of professional development support within the program or from the publisher. • Opportunities to maximize articulation across schools.
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	6.2 Facilitator reviews consensus definition chart. Even though a program may not be a member's first choice, the facilitator reminds the group of the agreed upon definition of consensus from Step 1.2.
	6.3 Conduct a final poll of individuals in the group.

Action Step 7: Fallback Decision-Making Option	7.1 If consensus is not reached, the fallback decision-making option is in effect.
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Learn how the Newport-Mesa Unified School District reached consensus in its adoption process in [this case study](#) and [blog](#) from the consensus process facilitator.