15 Areas of Autonomy Secured by
Teacher Teams Designing and Running Schools

By Amy Junge and Kim Farris-Berg

Kim Farris-Berg, Edward J. Dirkswager, and Amy Junge originally identified ten potential areas in which teachers could secure collective autonomy—from their state, district, CMO, or other authorizer—when conducting research for *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots*. That list was developed from research about school decentralization and autonomy by Fordham Foundation, William Ouchi of the Anderson School of Management at the University of California, Los Angeles, and RAND Corporation. It was also based on the observations of field practitioners and observers at the Center for Collaborative Education, EdVisions Schools, and Education Evolving.

Farris-Berg, Dirkswager, and Junge added five additional areas of autonomy after the *Trusting Teachers* investigation, to reflect their findings about what teams of teachers had secured or what they thought was possible to secure. In each of these 15 areas, teams of teachers are able to secure full or partial autonomy. The online Inventory of Teacher Powered Schools indicates which autonomies teachers have per school site with a check mark. If a team has partial autonomy that is explained in the "more" button.

What follows are descriptions of each of the 15 areas of autonomy, which are grouped into three high-level categories. Below each description is a series of real-life examples of decisions teams of teachers have made using full or partial autonomy in each autonomy area. These descriptions and examples should not be used to limit ideas about the autonomy teams could potentially secure. We imagine that some teams, in pursuing and maintaining teacher-powered arrangements, will ask for and receive state and/or federal exemptions from certain state laws and thereby redefine how we describe what constitutes full and partial autonomy. These autonomies will continue to evolve over time as the initiative progresses

Program
1. Learning program
2. School level policy
3. Professional development
4. Determining assessment
5. Broadening assessment

Personnel
6. Selecting colleagues
7. Evaluating colleagues
8. Transferring or terminating colleagues
9. Setting tenure policy
10. Selecting leaders

Administrative
11. Budget
12. Staff pattern
13. Compensation
14. Work hours
15. Schedule

Program Autonomies

1. Learning program: The autonomy to make all learning program and learning material decisions. This includes educational philosophy, teaching methods, curriculum, types of materials, physical learning environment, and levels of technology within state law and regulations.[1] For example:

- Teams may decide to offer a self-directed, project-based learning program and allow students to earn credits for classes outside of their district's scope and sequence.
- Teams may advance a bilingual and bicultural program that is different from the district's standard language immersion.
- Teams may decide to use technology to allow students to move at their own individual pace.

2. School-level policy: The autonomy to make school level policy decisions that influence the day to day runnings of the school within state law and regulations.[2] This includes, but is not limited to, homework, discipline, parent and community engagement, and dress code. For example:
- Teams may decide to limit homework to a certain amount of minutes as a whole school, or decide that each teacher has the authority to set their own homework policy.
- Teams may choose to use various discipline strategies, including restorative justice (the most common choice).

3. Professional development: The autonomy to decide on the topics, methods, and implementation of all professional development for teachers and other personnel within state laws and regulations. This can include teachers leading professional development. The team may also choose how professional development money is spent both for individuals and the collective group. For example:
- Teams may have full autonomy when they have total control over how all professional development time and money is spent.
- Teams may have partial autonomy if they are required to attend one district inservice, but have control over the rest of their professional development budget.

4. Determining assessments: The autonomy to decide whether to take, when to take, and how much to count district/CMO/authorizer assessments. This does not include state mandated exams. For example:
- Some teams may have agreements that allow them to opt-out of district/CMO/authorizer assessments. In these cases, district, CMO, or authorizer leaders often require teacher teams to specify how student achievement will be measured, and to co-define expectations for accountability based on those measures.
- Teams may have partial autonomy if teachers control part of the assessment process. For example, teachers may be required to have students take a district benchmark, but they control when to take it and how much it will count for student grades.

5. Broadening assessments: The autonomy to make formal arrangements with district/CMO/authorizer to allow for multiple measures in determining student success (not only a mean proficiency score from state standardized tests). Teams may decide to measure and accept

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[1]Law and regulations including certain minimums (time, teacher-to student ratios, etc.), legislative policy, state-adopted curriculum, state proficiency exams, etc.

[2] This includes state zero tolerance policies for drugs, alcohol, and weapons on campus.

accountability for levels of student engagement, students' ability to direct their own learning, students' ability to defend entire portfolios of work, etc. For example:
- Teams may decide to use student portfolio work to determine a student's grade, or perhaps video record students at multiple times throughout the year to show growth.
- Teams may decide to use the Hope Survey to measure students' intrinsic motivation over time. The Hope Survey studies autonomy, mastery goal orientation, academic press (students perceptions of teachers' high expectations), and belongingness.

Personnel Autonomies

6. Selecting colleagues: The autonomy to hire or select certificated (teachers) and classified (office staff, aides, etc.) team members . A school leader may be part of the hiring or selection process, but as a single voice in a team, not as the final decision maker. Often parents, students, and community members are also part of the hiring process. For example:
- Teams may have full autonomy when the collective group of teachers makes the final decision on who is the best candidate for the position, or when the team delegates and provides oversight to a committee making that decision.
- Teams may have partial autonomy when they control the hiring of some positions, but not others. For example, a school may have autonomy to select teaching colleagues, but not all classified staff.

7. Evaluating colleagues: The autonomy to choose the process and methods for teacher evaluation. This may include peer evaluation, 360-degree evaluation, coaching and mentoring, or a combination of systems. For example:
- Teams may choose to have a person or committee trained in handling personnel issues, such as due process and maintaining confidentiality. This committee is accountable to the larger team of teachers without having to break personnel confidentiality laws.
- Teams may have partial autonomy when they can choose to engage in peer evaluations, but need the signature of an administrator to meet district and state requirements.

8. Terminating or transferring colleagues: The autonomy to dismiss and/or recommend a colleague for transfer to another site, including certificated and classified team members. For example:
- Teams may have full autonomy in this area if the team can decide that a committee of teachers makes the decisions in this area.
- In some district schools, the school autonomy agreement between the school district and teachers union indicates that teachers do not have tenure in the context of the school. If teams decide to recommend a colleague for transfer, or if a teacher decides they do not want to work in the school, the teacher maintains their district tenure and goes back into the district hiring pool.

9. Setting tenure policy: The autonomy to decide if teachers will have tenure as negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement, one year at-will contracts, or some other alternative system. They can also decide how their system will be implemented. For example:
- Teams may decide to have tenure after five years instead of the traditional two.
- Teams may decide to only have one year, at-will contracts and no tenure in the context of the school. This autonomy works in concert with the autonomies to select colleagues and

recommend them for transfer. If teams decide to recommend a colleague for transfer, the teacher maintains their district tenure and goes back into the district hiring pool.

10. Choosing school leader(s): The autonomy to hire and dismiss school leaders. This includes the ability to choose their leadership positions. Positions could include a principal, lead teacher, co-lead teachers, a head committee, committee chairs, department chairs, grade-level chairs, and so on. For example:
- Teams may have partial autonomy if they can hire, but not dismiss school leaders.
- Teams may have partial autonomy when teachers control some school leadership positions, but not others. For example, they may choose committee chairs, or members of the leadership team, but not the principal.

Administrative Autonomies

11. Setting the budget: The autonomy to control all financial decisions at a school site. This includes decisions about how to allocate categorical (restricted) funds as well as discretionary monies (this amount can vary by teacher teams' negotiation around their teacher-powered school). Note, salary and benefits is a separate autonomy (we have intentionally separated the two to emphasize that teachers have a choice to pursue autonomy over this area of the budget, which is often assumed to be non-negotiable). For example:
- Teams may decide to spend more money on a certain grade level or department one year with the understanding that this benefits all students, such as buying new science lab equipment. The next year, they may do something entirely different.
- Teams may decide to spend a majority of their discretionary funds on field trips to enhance their students' real world experiences.
- Teams may have partial autonomy if the district only gives them part of the school's per pupil funding, or if they are required to use some line-item budgeting in a "use it or lose it" system. For example, when there is a line item for textbook money that must be used on textbooks. In this case, the team doesn't have discretion to spend that money on other curricular materials due to district (not state) policy. But in some cases, teams have been able to free up line items one at a time.

12. Setting staff pattern: The autonomy to determine the mix of teachers and other positions and to decide if each position is full or part time. This includes the number of teachers, special education providers, paraprofessionals, support staff, and administrators within state laws and regulations and budget. For example:
- Teams may choose to have a social worker instead of two teaching assistants based on the needs of their students.
- Teams may choose to hire multiple aides instead of another teacher.
- Teams may have partial autonomy when some positions are mandated by the district, but the teachers can distribute all other positions. For example, a district might mandate an office manager, but all other positions are at the discretion of the team.

13. Determining compensation: The autonomy to decide pay scale, benefits, and extra pay laws and regulations for all colleagues, including leaders, at the school site. For example:
- Teams may determine the salary formula.
- Teams may choose to have a traditional steps and lanes pay scale.

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- Teams may choose to have pay for performance or award bonuses for extra skill sets valuable to their student population.
- Teams may choose to give stipends for taking on extra duties or leadership positions.
- Some teams have arranged to pay actual salaries instead of the district average salary when determining their school budgets.

14. Determining teacher work hours: The autonomy to choose the hours related to teacher work day. This autonomy is most relevant in teacher-powered schools associated with a district (including district-authorized charter schools) and where teachers' working conditions are negotiated in a collective bargaining agreement. Teams can secure full autonomy in this area when a district and teachers union sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) waiving aspects of the collective bargaining agreement. Sometimes the MOU authorizes teachers to collectively develop an Elect to Work Agreement (EWA) on an annual basis, setting their own working conditions. Teachers who do not want to abide by the terms of the EWA retain their district tenure and go back into the district hiring pool. For example:
- Teams may write into their EWA that teachers must collaborate with their colleagues, which requires hours beyond the negotiated work day.
- Teams may choose to add work days to their school calendar for staff retreats, student trip supervision, parent engagement time, or for other reasons.

15. Schedule: The autonomy to decide the annual school calendar, weekly schedule, as well as start times and end times of each day within state laws and regulations for minimum instructional minutes and days. This includes decisions about how student and teachers' time will be used. For example:
- Teams may decide to have a late start because research shows teenagers need more sleep.
- Teams may choose to have minimum days two days a week to allow students to have after school internships and teachers to have collaboration time.
- Teams may decide to adopt a year-round schedule to better meet the needs of the students and community.
- Teams may have partial autonomy if they can control some parts of the schedule, but must work within the parameters of a shared campus with shared personnel.