

**SCS THEORY OF ACTION FOR CHANGE: ALIGNED
INSTRUCTIONAL and MANAGED
PERFORMANCE/EMPOWERMENT SYSTEMS**

I. PREAMBLE

In order to accomplish the commitments in our statement of Core Beliefs and Commitments (link will be provided), the Shelby County Schools (SCS) Board of Education sets forth in this policy its theory of action designed to create a high-performing school district that educates all children to high standards and eliminates the achievement gap. A theory of action is a coordinated method for delivering high quality instruction. It is a coherent set of strategies that shall ensure academic rigor and maximize student learning at all levels by shaping management goals, policies, strategic planning and budgets.

The theory of action adopted by the District builds on beliefs about how students learn and is based on current research and best practices. It also rests on our knowledge of the history and current state of education in the United States, as well as our local context. Our theory of action is driven by the radically new and more challenging state standards adopted by the State of Tennessee, as well as the unique challenges faced by students living in a city/county with a 43% school-aged child poverty rate. Associated with this poverty, for example, are poor health indicators (33% of students surveyed exhibit chronic conditions), persistent student mobility, weak literacy skills (2014-2015 - 32% 3rd grade RLA proficiency rate), chronically low performing schools (36% of all schools), low indicators for career and/or college readiness (2015-2016 – ACT composite of 16.8), and an increasing, yet at a slow pace, graduation rate (average 1.5% per year over the last 8 years). Additionally, the District must address and be held accountable to its increasing English Language Learner population as its diverse population grows.

II. PURPOSE

To provide a framework for aligning district-wide goals, strategic plans, policies, budgets, and administrative actions necessary for accomplishing the Shelby County Schools' Core Beliefs and Commitments.

III. SCOPE

This policy applies to SCS Board of Education, the Superintendent and employees.

IV. POLICY STATEMENT

A. Aligned Instructional System¹ and Managed Performance Empowerment System

SCS Board of Education's theory of action is two-fold: 1) implementation of an Aligned Instructional System (AIS), and 2) gradual transition into a Managed Performance/Empowerment System (MPES) with earned levels of autonomy as schools become high performing, demonstrated by student academic achievement, operational efficiency, and continuous improvement.

1. Aligned Instructional System

An Aligned Instructional System is a comprehensive theory of action that embraces many partial theories of action, including adequate resources, effective management, small learning communities, highly qualified teachers, and pre-Kindergarten. At its heart is our belief that SCS must be redesigned to manage its core business of teaching and learning in the most effective way possible.

In accordance with our theory of action, SCS must create a comprehensive and coherent instructional management system. This begins with content standards, performance standards, assessments, and consequences, which are provided by the State accountability system. All of this must be supported through effective and efficient District systems.

Building on this foundation, the two (2) primary objectives of an aligned instructional system are:

¹ *Defining a Comprehensive Aligned Instructional System to Ensure Powerful Teaching and Learning in Every Student in Every Classroom*, by Louise Bay Waters, The Stupski Foundation, with Kiley Walsh O'Meara, Fall 2007.

- a. to align curriculum and materials, instructional strategies, assessment and data, and professional development around the curriculum to ensure that teachers have the necessary support and empowerment to make effective instructional decisions for the full range of students they serve; and
- b. to ensure that all students have access to a rigorous academic program in every school.

Description of an Aligned Instructional System

An Aligned Instructional System clearly articulates how schools and departments are to implement a standards-based school design through an aligned system of:

- a. *Performance Standards* - defines what students are expected to know and be able to do, and the quality of student performance needed to meet those standards.
- b. *Curriculum and Materials* - presents what is to be taught at each grade level and in each course in order for students to meet the performance standards.
Shelby County Schools must have a District curriculum that covers every subject for every grade in elementary school and every course in middle and high school, creating a seamless flow between grade levels and schools in a district with a highly mobile student population. The curriculum must be coherent, aligned, and detailed down to individual lesson plans, teaching materials, and sample assessments, all of which must be available to teachers for easy and timely access.
- c. *Instructional Strategies* – describes the way in which the curriculum is presented; focused on the needs of students and is, therefore, differentiated because of a student’s background knowledge and experience, learning style, and personality.

Shelby County Schools must maintain a workforce of effective instructional leaders and teachers. Human resource policies, structures, and practices must support this objective.

Interventions by child, by teacher, by subject, and by school must be carefully calibrated, appropriate, and timely.

- d. *Assessment and Data* - designed to provide teachers, schools and districts the information necessary to improve teaching as well as to provide directed instruction and intervention for students.

Periodic formative and summative assessments of student achievement must be conducted, and the results must be disaggregated by State performance areas and pathways and student groups², classroom, subject, ethnicity, gender, poverty level, teacher, or in any other way useful to drive continuous improvement. This will require the establishment of a comprehensive student information system.

- e. *Professional Development* - focuses on standards and strategies as well as the ability of personnel to use the assessment and data systems, and apply the knowledge gained through instruction to ensure access and rigor for all students.

Shelby County Schools must put into place a comprehensive professional development system that centers on the curriculum and effective ways to teach it, based on the best evidence-based research. This system may include curriculum coaches in the schools, daily monitoring (including observation) of teaching, and just-in-time professional development to support teachers in the classroom.

- f. *Accountability* - an accountability system must hold people responsible for meeting standards, changing behavior, and delivering excellent results. The accountability system, for schools and other functional units, must identify important performance indicators, measure performance using these indicators, collect and distribute performance data, and apply appropriate consequences (positive and negative) for achieved outcomes.

Acknowledging the difference between the roles of schools and central office support functions, the Board codifies accountability through

² Refers to the Tennessee School and District accountability framework as provided in TN Succeeds: ESSA State Plan (4/3/17).

policies pertaining to the School Performance Framework, Operational Scorecard and Financial Scorecard.

2. Managed Performance/Empowerment

Building on the foundation of an Aligned Instructional Management System, schools should be given more or less control over school operations and instruction, based on student needs and school performance as measured by the State and District's accountability system. Recognizing that individual school leaders are best equipped to understand the learning needs of their students, schools will be given as much flexibility as practicable to implement effective teaching and operational methods within the standards established by the Board and Superintendent.

Managed Performance/Empowerment provides an approach to PreK-12 education that strikes a balance between centralized direction (aligned instruction) and freedom for innovation in local implementation (performance/empowerment), with an emphasis on creating a culture of accountability throughout every level of the school district. It combines the effectiveness of a centrally managed academic program with the dynamics of a performance culture, while ensuring that freedom and flexibility (empowerment) is earned as a result of performance and improvement. District employees are responsible for effective operations and teaching that fosters learning for every student, while recognizing that learning is the responsibility of the student with support from parents and the community.

The primary objectives of managed performance/empowerment system are:

1. continued aligned curriculum and materials, assessment and data, and professional development around the curriculum to ensure that teachers have the necessary support and empowerment to make effective instructional decisions for the full range of students they serve;
2. earned freedom and flexibility to principals and schools/teachers only after rigorous measurement and assessment of individual school performance, using the District's accountability system, in order to ensure accountability and continuous improvement; and
3. to ensure that all students have access to a rigorous academic program in every school.

Description of a Managed Performance/Empowerment System

Schools and departments implement the school design through a managed performance/empowerment system of:

- a. *Aligned Performance Standards, Curriculum and Materials, Assessment and Data, Professional Development and Accountability* as provided above.
- b. *Flexibility in Instructional Strategies* - as schools demonstrate mastery of the Performance Standards and Curriculum and Materials through sustained, continuous student academic growth/achievement, flexibility will be provided to teachers to teach the curriculum according to their preferred teaching styles, but within the parameters of best professional practices and research-based teaching strategies that lead students to high levels of mastery of the District curriculum. Furthermore, it is the Board's intent to give maximum freedom to schools, consistent with school performance.
- c. *Empowerment* - places decision-making authority at the lowest possible level consistent with effectiveness and efficiency. Some decisions belong in the central office, some in the principal's office, and some in the classroom. Some decisions belong with educators, and some with parents and students. Striking the right balance between accountability and empowerment is an on-going responsibility of the Board and Superintendent team. The goal is to provide principals and teachers maximum empowerment in the highest-achieving schools as measured by the State Accountability Framework, within the boundaries of effective and efficient operations; for empowerment builds ownership and stimulates innovation, and balanced with accountability for results, it creates a performance culture.

The starting point for school empowerment is in the area of school operations. High-performing schools should be given wide latitude to manage budgets, procurement, hiring, the configuration of the workforce, schedules, student affairs, extracurricular activities, parent and community relations, etc. School empowerment does not mean

that school communities or teachers assume responsibility for campus decision-making. Principals should listen to their customers and involve their employees, but because they are accountable for school performance, principals must exercise executive power and have the authority to hold others accountable.

B. System Capacity

To increase the likelihood of systemic improvement, all other District systems, including accountability and planning, human resources, budget and operations, specialized student supports, technology, and governance must be initially aligned to support a comprehensive Aligned Instructional System. As the District transforms into the Managed Performance/Empowerment system, the Board and Superintendent recognize the need to ensure all necessary District Systems are aligned and appropriately funded. District leadership, which includes central office leadership and principals, shall be responsible for implementing the Aligned Instructional System and transition into the Managed Performance/Empowerment System. Moreover, using the best change management techniques, District leadership must build a new District culture that embraces its theory of action.

Standards, accountability, and empowerment are not enough. They establish goals, provide incentives, and build ownership, but high performance also requires capacity. In short, to meet high standards, all involved in the teaching and learning enterprise need knowledge, skills, and tools appropriate to the task. Building this capacity is the responsibility of the Board and Superintendent team. The Board knows that high performance is not inexpensive. Therefore, broad public support for its core beliefs and commitments and theory of action will be required.

A. Degree of District and School Control

As theories of action, Aligned Instructional Management and Managed Performance Empowerment offer differing degrees of control by the District and the school with respect to instructional management, school operations management, school resource management and performance management. The levels of control represent areas where schools can earn autonomy as they demonstrate achievement and/or growth in their core business of teaching and learning.

Degrees of Control Defined

Instructional Management – Excellent instructional leaders focus relentlessly on ensuring that great teaching and worthy content are evident across classrooms, resulting in achievement for students. Instructional leaders lead schools with a content-specific vision; diagnose classrooms and deliver feedback that leads to improved teacher practice; and invest teachers in their vision. Acting as an instructional leader may often mean delegating duties such as school operations, scheduling, and facilities maintenance, to focus on the core work of instruction and culture.

School Operations Management – Excellent school operations personnel ensure a safe, caring, and effective learning environment that enables achievement for students. This includes but is not limited to facilities maintenance, communications, technology, transportation, safety, food service, compliance, and schedules.

School Resource Management - Excellent school resource managers, similar to operations managers, enable student achievement via the best use of available resources. This includes managing monetary resources such as budgets and procurement; managing human capital processes such as staffing allocations; or managing instructional materials acquisition and distribution.

Performance Management – Excellent performance management entails defining, monitoring, and using objective indicators of performance to focus accountability, management, and decision-making processes on the core work of a school. Measures may be derived from state, district, school, principal, teacher, and student standards and assessments.

Aligned Instructional System:

- Instructional Management – Tight
- School Operations Management – Tight
- School Resource Management – Tight
- Goals and Performance Measures – Tight
- Accountability Measures – Tight

Managed Performance/Empowerment System:

- Instructional Management – Varies by school
- School Operations Management – Loose
- School Resource Management – Loose
- Goals and Performance Measures – Tight
- Accountability Measures – Tight

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Change Management Responsibility – Superintendent & Board

a. *The Superintendent* – is responsible for the following:

- designing and managing the systems, including bringing forward policy recommendations and budget proposals, recognizing significant District redesign may be necessary to align all District systems with the aligned instructional and managed performance/empowerment systems
- developing a criteria for system transition
- reporting on the Theory of Action status and providing an assessment report on a quarterly basis. Reports may include, but not be limited to, information regarding District’s accomplishments, challenges, aligned curriculum, earned levels of autonomy, professional development, student information systems, assessments, monitoring and intervention strategies and the performance review process

b. *The Board* – is responsible for the following:

- revising the Theory of Action based on student academic progress as reported by the Superintendent, recognizing, however, commitment to the Aligned Instructional and Managed Performance/Empowerment systems as a broad path for improving student achievement
- developing and supporting a communication plan designed to educate and enlist the workforce, parents, community leaders, and the community-at-large on the Theory of Action

2. Development and Approval of Aligned Policies and Resources in Support of the Theory of Action – Superintendent & Board

The Board and Superintendent are responsible for collaborating on the following:

- revising, developing and approving District standards for curriculum, promotion, graduation, etc.
- revising, developing and approving focused and meaningful District academic assessments
- revising and developing performance indicators, measures, and rating systems
- revising and developing policies for staff selection, promotion, and transfer
- revising and developing professional standards, requirements, and programs
- approving partnerships with universities/colleges regarding teacher education programs
- funding development of a comprehensive, aligned curriculum
- funding research-based instructional materials
- approving contracts with vendors for instructional materials and support services
- approving and funding professional development programs for principals and teachers
- approving and funding school-based supports
- ensuring flexibility is provided within the instructional management system at differentiated levels as demonstrated through school-based student achievement (MPE only)

3. Continuous Improvement – SCS Board Commitment

It is the intent of the Board that the Aligned Instructional and Managed Performance/Empowerment Systems as a theory of action for change provides a stable, long-term framework for improving student achievement in Shelby County Schools. This theory of action will provide the framework to drive forward and align goals, strategic plans, policies, budgets and administrative actions.

However, we recognize that from time to time, based on research and experience, this theory of action will need revising. While we welcome opportunities to continuously improve our theory of action, we are committed to the Aligned Instructional and Managed Performance/Empowerment Systems as a broad path for improving student

achievement. We pledge our best efforts to educate the workforce and the public and mentor new Board members so that subsequent Boards will hold constant to this vision.