

The School Improvement Planning Process

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Adapted from:

A Technical Assistance Document For: Planning and Evaluating Your School Improvement Process

Florida Department of Education
Division of Public Schools, Bureau of School Improvement
<http://www.bsi.fsu.edu/pdf/2005TA.pdf>

The WINSS School Improvement Planning Tool: An Overview

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
North Central Regional Education Laboratory
North Central Regional Technology Education Consortium
<http://goal.ncrel.org/winss/sip/ppt.asp>

The School Improvement Planning Process

- **The Guiding Principle**
- **The Federal Requirements**
 - General
 - Districts and Schools in Improvement
- **Planning for Success: The Critical Elements**
 - Organizing
 - Planning
 - Implementing
 - Sustaining

The Guiding Principle

District or school improvement is a "continuous institutional process rather than a sporadic set of activities or isolated projects."

-Craig Jerald

Why?

Improvement planning is a requirement of federal law

- ESEA, Title I, Sec. 1111 requires that all State Education Agencies have a general improvement plan that addresses the requirements of the law such as academic standards, assessments and accountability.
- ESEA, Title I, Sec. 1112 requires that all Local Education Agencies (LEA) have a general improvement plan that addresses the requirements of the law such as a description of the actions the LEA will take to assist its low achieving schools identified as in need of improvement.

Plans must be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary

Additional Requirements When a District or School Has Been Identified for Improvement

"Districts and schools identified for improvement must develop, or revise, an improvement plan which outlines the district or school's course of action for the next two years."

ESEA, Title I, Sec. 1116(b)(3)

Planning For Success: The Critical Elements

- Organizing
- Planning
- Implementing
- Sustaining

Organizing for Improvement

- The Improvement Planning Team
- Assessing Needs

Organizing: The Improvement Planning Team

Federal law requires that the improvement planning team include, at a minimum—

Parents

School Staff

District Staff

Outside Experts

ESEA, Title I, Sec. 1116(a)(3)

Organizing: The Improvement Planning Team

Best practice indicates that the work of the improvement team must be more than fulfilling a legal requirement.

"Involve a wide range of other stakeholders from the outset, including parents, representatives of community groups, and business leaders... Too often, participants from outside the school or district are included simply to meet a requirement and are not full participants..."

http://www.centerforcsri.org/PDF/The_Center_Policy_Brief_January_2005.pdf



POLICY BRIEF

www.centerforcsri.org

January | 2005

Establishing a Strong Foundation for School Improvement

By Craig Jerald

A New Challenge for a New Century

Three years ago, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act instituted a fundamental change in the emphasis and aims of federal education policy. The stated purpose of the decades-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act became "closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers." For the first time, states were required to hold schools and districts accountable not simply for making some progress, but rather for making sufficient progress so that all students can achieve proficiency on state assessments by an established date—the year 2014.

Of course, states have used the flexibility in the NCLB Act to set up different kinds of timelines with different rates of progress required in those early years. And the law includes a kind of safety net called "safe harbor" which establishes a minimum benchmark under which schools and districts can be judged as making adequate progress if they

reduce the proportion of students not yet reaching proficiency by 10 percent a year.

But make no mistake: This shift in goals and accountability is a historic and unprecedented one. Even the minimum amount of progress demanded under the safe harbor provision is more than many states required before 2002.

Because of NCLB, schools and systems are under pressure to improve at much faster rates than ever before. And because assessment results must now be reported for separate groups of students, the achievement gaps that have long plagued American education can no longer be ignored. Low levels of achievement among poor, minority, and special education students can no longer be hidden behind average test scores, and all of those groups must be making adequate progress if a school or district is to be judged as doing so.

Such goals are unprecedented on a national scale, and the challenge facing America's schools and districts is a considerable one. There has been very little progress in closing achievement gaps over the past 15 years. The reading gap between African-American and white 17-year-olds, for example, actually increased from 21 to 31 points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress between 1988 and 1999.



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Organizing: The Improvement Planning Team

A well represented improvement planning team ensures that all perspectives and expertise are represented.

A well represented improvement planning team facilitates effective improvement plan implementation.

Organizing: Assessing Needs

The challenging task of "a full, honest and transparent accounting of the current state of affairs."

-Craig Jerald

Organizing: Assessing Needs

Step 1 - The Team addresses the following questions:

- How will needs be identified?
- What data will be collected?
 - Multiple data sources
- How will data be collected?
- How will data be presented?
 - Disaggregated by school, grade level, subject areas, mandated subgroups, gender, other categories as identified
- What are the unmet objectives from last year's improvement plan?

Organizing: Assessing Needs

Step 2 - The team performs the following tasks:

- Collects data from multiple sources
- Disaggregates data in multiple categories
- Analyzes data to identify problems and needs to be addressed in improvement plan

Organizing: Assessing Needs

Step 3 - The team evaluates the needs assessment process:

- Were all stakeholders part of the process?
- Was needs assessment information current?
- Were needs assessment items directly related to the desired conditions?
- Were all populations equitably represented?
- Has the needs assessment process been documented?

Organizing: Assessing Needs

Step 4 -

The team revises the needs assessment based on the information gathered in Step 3.

Planning for Improvement

- Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving
- Establishing Vision & Mission
- Goal Setting
- Identifying Objectives
- Identifying Implementation Strategies

Planning: Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving



POLICY BRIEF

www.centerforcsri.org

April | 2005

Planning That Matters: Helping Schools Engage in Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving

By Craig Jerald

Problems With the Planning Process

Earlier this year, the Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence released a report highlighting practices in Kentucky's high-performing, high-poverty schools. Researchers collected information using the same audit tool that the Kentucky Department of Education uses to diagnose problems in schools identified for improvement, then compared those results with similar information amassed by state-conducted audits of low-performing schools.

The analysis yielded some unanticipated results. While the successful schools scored well on some areas of the audit, they did not score well on indicators related to comprehensive planning. Indeed, the data revealed no

significant difference between high- and low-performing schools on any of 16 indicators measuring how well schools had followed the recommended process for creating Comprehensive School Improvement Plans.¹

What can this mean? Do high-performing schools really not bother to engage in systematic planning? Is there no real relationship between good planning and measurable school improvement?

The answer, of course, is no. The same study revealed that high-performing schools engage in more collaborative decision making, work harder to connect professional development to student achievement data, and make more efficient use of time and resources. None of those activities is possible, or at least possible to do well, without serious and thoughtful planning.

"High performing schools engage in more collaborative decision making, work harder to connect professional development to student achievement data, and make more efficient use of time and resource. None of these activities is possible, or at least possible to do well, without serious and thoughtful planning."

<http://www.centerforcsri.org/PDF/April.policy.final.pdf>



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Planning: Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving

Step 1 - The team establishes a results-based orientation focused on tangible student outcomes.

- Staff members firmly believe that they are at least and primarily responsible for making sure that students learn.
- Staff members take direct responsibility for student achievement.

Planning: Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving

Step 2 - The team:

- Relentlessly analyzes data and other empirical evidence at all levels of disaggregation to identify problems.
- Gathers additional evidence to identify internal weaknesses that are causing or abetting low outcomes and obstructing improvement.

Planning: Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving

Step 3 - The team (continued):

- Identifies possible solutions to problems and opportunities for making changes that will lead to greater success.
- Uses common sense, creativity, and extensive investigation of research- and evidence-based practices to decide among possible solutions.

Planning: Collaborative, Strategic Problem Solving

Step 4 -

The team revises the collaborative, strategic problem solving strategies based on the information gathered in Step 3.

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

"A clear vision and a common mission that identifies the learning to be achieved can help keep a school and the efforts of its staff and students on target. A shared vision is critical to an organization's future because it provides the underlying foundation upon which all decisions are made."

*-A Technical Assistance Document For:
Planning and Evaluating Your School Improvement
Process*

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

A **vision** statement—

- Provides a compelling picture of what the district or school can become in the future.
- Answers the question *What are we working to become?*

A Technical Assistance Document For: Planning and Evaluating Your School Improvement Process

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

A **mission** statement—

- More specific than a vision statement.
- Often defines what the district or school is trying to accomplish and for whom.
- Answers the question *Why do we exist?*

A Technical Assistance Document For: Planning and Evaluating Your School Improvement Process

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

Step 1 - The team:

- Identifies a process for building consensus about vision and mission.
- Reviews literature related to district and school improvement to inform the development of the vision and mission.
- Drafts vision and mission statements.

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

Step 2 - The team:

- Has adequate time and resources to meet and deliberate.
- Engages in a transparent process where drafts are produced and distributed for comment.
- Uses consensus to determine the final vision and mission statements.

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

Step 3 - The team evaluates the vision and mission statement development process:

- Do the statements incorporate a concern for the academic success of **all** students and reflect the belief that **all** students can learn?
- Do the statements reflect the belief that **all** teachers are responsible implementing instructional strategies that meet the needs of **all** students?
- Are the statements attainable?
- Do the statements address increasing subgroup performance?
- Are the statements aligned to “other” plans?
 - Title I plan
 - District plan

Planning: Establishing Vision & Mission

Step 4 –

The team revises the vision and mission statements based on the information gathered in Step 3.

Planning: Goal Setting

Knowing what you want to accomplish and making a plan to get there.

Planning: Goal Setting

A **goal** is -

- A **general** statement about an area to be improved over a period of time.
- Focused and clearly stated.
- Directly based on data that demonstrates a problem.
- Leads to sustainable, systemic change.
- Can be achieved.

Planning: Goal Setting

Step 1 - The team:

- Uses data, needs assessment results, and the vision and mission statements to identify areas for improvement.

Planning: Goal Setting

Step 2 - The team:

- Drafts goal statements that are –
 - Clear and Motivating
 - Based on data
 - Challenging
 - Attainable

Planning: Goal Setting

Step 3 - The team evaluates the goal setting process:

- Do the goals reflect the vision and the mission of the district or school?
- Are the goals aligned with federal, state, and district requirements and priorities?
- Do the goals address the critical needs determined by the needs assessment?
- Are goals written to increase student performance for subgroups that did not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress?

Planning: Goal Setting

Step 4 –

The team revises the vision and mission statements based on the information gathered in Step 3.

Planning: Identifying Objectives

The steps needed to accomplish the goal.

Planning: Identifying Objectives

An **objective** is—

- Measurable.
- Developed to address specific problems related to the goal.
- **S**pecific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Timebound

Planning: Identifying Objectives

Step 1 - The team:

- Develops a process for identifying objectives for each goal.
- Develops objectives based on available data.

Planning: Identifying Objectives

Step 2 - The team:

- Identifies at least one measurable objective for each goal.
- Ensures that all objectives have **SMART** qualities.
- States objectives in terms of student achievement to be attained.
- Ensures that objectives lead to increased student achievement and put the district or school on the path towards achieving Adequate Yearly Progress.
- Chooses objectives that promote systemic, positive change.

Planning: Identifying Objectives

Step 3 - The team evaluates the identifying objectives process:

- Are the objectives challenging and attainable in the timeframe given?
- Do objectives include measurable expectations for all student populations, particularly mandated subgroups?
- Is each objective aligned with its corresponding goal?

Planning: Identifying Objectives

Step 4 -

The team revises the objectives based on the information gathered in Step 3.

Planning: Identifying Strategies

*The **HOW** of Implementation*

Planning: Identifying Strategies

A strategy—

- Specifies the actions to be taken to achieve the objectives.
- Addresses research-based instructional approaches to be implemented.
- Addresses research-based instructional materials to be used.
- Determines professional development necessary to implement instructional approaches.
- Is continuously monitored.

Planning: Identifying Strategies

Step 1 - The team:

- Extensively investigates strategies whose effectiveness have been validated by scientific research.
- Ensures that strategies support stated goals and objectives.
- Determines who will be responsible for implementing strategies.
- Determines a timeline for strategy implementation.
- Determines all resources necessary for implementing the strategies.

Planning: Identifying Strategies

Step 2 - The team:

- Identifies effective research-based strategies that will address needs.
 - Instructional Programs and Curricula
 - Professional Development
 - Instructional Materials
- Identifies strategies to monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan

Planning: Identifying Strategies

Step 3 - The team evaluates the identifying strategies process:

- Are the strategies clearly aligned with needs?
- Will the strategies address the needs of all subgroups?
- Have the necessary resources been allocated?
- Is there a process for evaluation that includes procedures and a timeline?

Planning: Identifying Strategies

Step 4 -

The team acts to correct any strategies that are not producing the intended results.

Implementing Improvement

➤ Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

"The implementation stage is the most difficult of all...Implementing an improvement plan...really comes down to changing a complex organization in fundamental ways."

http://www.centerforsri.org/files/August_Policy_Brief.pdf



POLICY BRIEF

www.centerforsri.org

August | 2005

The Implementation Trap: Helping Schools Overcome Barriers to Change

By Craig Jerald

Is School Improvement a "Bad Bet"?

In May 2004, two influential philanthropic groups held a briefing for education grant makers to help them decide whether to keep giving large sums of money to support school improvement. A moderator kicked off the event by asking, "Is it possible to get the types of schools that we need... [by] fixing the schools we have?" In other words, "Should foundations and donors continue to write checks to superintendents [for school improvement]?"

The answer to that question, detailed in a report² summarizing the two-day session, was sobering. A clear consensus emerged that grant makers should continue to support school improvement efforts, but at

progressively lower levels than in the past. Instead, they should consider putting more of their dollars behind the creation of new "startup" schools to supplement—and perhaps eventually replace—existing schools.

Why is there such skepticism about the capacity for America's schools to get better just at the time when federal education policies are putting greater pressure on schools to improve than ever before? As a speaker at the 2004 education funders briefing put it, "We've learned a lot in the last two decades. First, we've learned that changing schools is extremely difficult. In fact it is almost impossible to change them in fundamental ways... I don't believe we are likely to get the kinds of schools we need by changing the schools we have."¹



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Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Step 1 - The team:

- Confronts the **internal** barriers to change.
 - Technical challenges—the lack of “know how”
 - Cultural challenges—traditional beliefs, expectations, norms, habits, and ingrained patterns of behavior that run counter to new ideas
 - Political challenges—passive or overt resistance to new strategies and/or conflicts among competing interests

Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Step 1 – The team (continued):

- Confronts the **external** barriers to change.
 - Insufficient support at the district level for specific school improvement efforts
 - Insufficient control over budgets at the school level
 - Insufficient control over personnel

Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Step 2 - The team:

- Becomes knowledgeable about the research on organizational change.
- Restructures district offices to provide schools with the support they need to implement ambitious improvement plans.
- Provides principals with the time to focus on implementing improvement plans.
- Distributes the responsibility for implementing the plan among the school staff.
- Allocates resources to support school improvement.
- Enacts policies to give schools real control over their own budgets.
- Enacts policies to give schools real control over personnel.

Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Step 3 - The team:

- Begins to think outside the box and engages in creative strategies to help schools overcome internal and external barriers to serious organizational change and improvement.

Implementing: Overcoming Barriers to Improvement

Step 4 -

The team evaluates their progress in overcoming the barriers to improvement and makes changes as necessary.

Sustaining Improvement

- Communicating
- Maintaining
- Extending
- Evaluating
- Adapting

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Adapting, Evaluating



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September | 2005

More Than Maintenance

Sustaining Improvement Efforts Over the Long Run

By Craig Jerald

Maintain: To keep in an existing state: CARRY ON, KEEP UP

Sustain: To give support or supply with maintenance; NOURISH, PROLONG

School personnel often mistakenly believe that sustaining improvement over a long period of time simply requires them to keep up new practices past the implementation year. But that initial maintenance is only the first step of a much longer journey. School leaders and staff members must also learn how to intentionally nourish and prolong improvement initiatives by extending and adapting them over time. In other words, sustaining an improvement effort requires more than simple maintenance. Prolonged, continuous improvement requires continually asking and acting on the answers to several key questions: How can we do even better tomorrow? What's working and what's not? What do we need to change next?

The first part of this policy brief breaks down the process of sustaining improvement and examines each of its key elements. The second part offers several important strategies for protecting and abetting that process over the long term.

The stakes are huge. Too many school improvement efforts wither and die after a year or two of hard work, often just following the first flush of success. At the same time, research shows that sustaining reforms beyond a few years can create big payoffs for students. One large-scale study of student achievement in schools implementing comprehensive school reform (CSR) models found that "after the fifth year of implementation, CSR effects began to increase substantially."

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"Sustaining an improvement effort requires more than simple maintenance. Prolonged, continuous improvement requires continually asking and acting on the answers to several key questions: How can we do even better tomorrow? What's working and what's not? What do we need to change?"

http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/Center_PB_Sept_fnl.pdf

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Evaluating, Adapting

Communicating

*Create a strategy for communicating the district or school vision, core values, and reform efforts to all staff, both new and old, and other key stakeholders so they understand not just **how** things are done, but **why** things are done the way they are.*

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Evaluating, Adapting

Maintaining

Maintaining an improvement effort beyond a few months or the first year of implementation requires keeping a sharp eye on how the change process is affecting staff members and students; keeping a constant lookout for warning signs of obstacles that might threaten the effort; and keeping a very open mind to how challenges can arise from even the most unlikely places.

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Evaluating, Adapting

Extending

Sustaining success over the long term requires a fierce, very intentional kind of "opportunism." The organizations that are most successful at sustaining improvement over long periods of time learn to enact new, "next generation" improvements even as they work to maintain practices that are already working.

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Evaluating, Adapting

Evaluating

Evaluation gives direction to future improvement efforts by changing and improving district and school improvement plan. It's informative, not punitive. It is the process that: identifies the successes of the current plan; identifies the needs for the next year's plan; and evaluates and adjusts the plan's progress throughout the year.

A Technical Assistance Document For: Planning and Evaluating Your School Improvement Process

Sustaining:

Communicating, Maintaining, Extending, Evaluating, Adapting

Adapting

Organizations that sustain growth over long periods of time cling fiercely to the core visions while considering everything else—practices, structures, job definitions, schedules—up for grabs.

Organizing for, planning for, implementing an, and sustaining a reform effort is a complicated process that requires intellectual honesty, creativity, and unflinching courage. There is plentiful evidence that sustaining improvement is possible, even over very long periods, and that the benefits for students are great indeed.

Resources

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http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/Center_PB_Sept_fnl.pdf

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Part A, Subpart 1
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html>



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