



Introduction

An Orientation to Developing an Effective School Plan

Increasingly, educators are realizing that continuous school improvement is dependent on having a clear, well-articulated action plan. *Developing an Effective School Plan: An Activity-Based Guide to Understanding Your School and Improving Student Outcomes* helps district staff, school leaders, or external facilitators engage school staff in a thorough process of developing and monitoring the implementation of this action plan, commonly known as a school improvement plan.

For schools that don't already have access to them, the guide contains tools for collecting and displaying the kinds of data that are essential to understanding and, therefore, improving a school. But because good data are only as helpful as the decisions they ultimately inform, the guide's greatest value lies in its activities, drawn from the extensive experience of WestEd facilitators who have worked with schools across the country. The activities are designed to support a series of structured conversations in which participants grapple with data and ideas, raise questions and investigate challenges, evaluate hunches, and consider possible solutions. In short, they take schools through the messy business of planning and, then, implementing effective school change.

COMPONENTS OF DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PLAN

The guide consists of three components: this *Change Manager's Handbook*, facilitation notes

for the activities, and a CD that includes the activities, tools, and related resources. The activities are organized into five modules: Get Ready for Inquiry; Organize and Analyze Data; Investigate Factors Impacting Student Achievement; Determine Effective Practices and Write a Plan; and Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate.

Because schools are in different places in their improvement efforts, not all activities will be appropriate or necessary for every school. This handbook helps you understand the inquiry, planning, and implementation process that is essential for school improvement. Equally important, it helps you identify, based on a school's needs and timeline, the appropriate activities that will take your school through this improvement process.

The facilitation notes, found in the accompanying publication, include background information for each activity, as well as detailed instructions. The same information is available on the CD, but it is offered in hard copy as well for the many people who are more comfortable with this traditional format. It is also useful to have the printed version in hand when choosing activities.

The CD is your vault, containing everything needed for developing and monitoring the implementation of a school improvement plan. Chiefly, you'll find the activities (with overheads, handouts, templates, and resources), facilitation instructions, and supporting tools, all organized by module. The tools, such as data analysis templates, teacher

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surveys, and classroom observation forms, are provided for districts or schools that don't already have them available.

We recognize that most districts have abundant sources of achievement, perceptual, demographic, and program data. What they more likely lack is a process for making sense of these data and using them constructively to inform improvement decisions. The activities across the five modules serve this purpose. The resources in this guide are sufficiently generic that they can be tailored to work with any data system and in any instructional context. You are invited to adapt the activities and the associated handouts and overheads to fit your inquiry needs.¹ Additional resources for *Developing an Effective School Plan* are available online at SchoolsMovingUp.net.²

The remainder of this introduction orients you to the *Change Manager's Handbook*, which serves as your instruction manual for the important tasks ahead.

AUDIENCES FOR THE CHANGE MANAGER'S HANDBOOK

Several audiences will find this handbook useful. If you are a central office administrator who either individually or as part of a group has been charged with leading a change process districtwide or for selected schools, this handbook is for you. The most effective planning group we have seen for a district effort combines district and site staff. One district, for example, used two members of central office

staff, two principals, and two teachers. They were particularly effective in planning because they were able to address the needs at all levels — district, school, and community.

At the school site level, if you are a member of a leadership or data team responsible for organizing data analysis, investigating, writing a plan, and ensuring its effective implementation, this handbook is for you. While an administrator may be in charge of the effort, it is not recommended that one person serve as *the* change manager. We suggest, instead, a team approach. The composition of the team should reflect the school structure, with different departments, grade levels, and programs (e.g., special education, English learners) represented.

If you are an external facilitator engaged by the district or a school to work with school-site teams to develop and implement their school improvement plan, you, too, will find this handbook helpful. You might use specific full activities with a school or district but, as a skilled facilitator operating within a short timeline for a school, you might decide instead to strategically use only a few handouts, overheads, or portions of activities to accomplish specific tasks.

Whatever your role, whether you are working individually or as part of a district or site leadership team to help school staff develop and implement a school improvement plan, you're referred to in this handbook as change managers or the change management team.

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² This WestEd website is designed to inform and provide supporting materials to schools engaged in the change process, especially those serving student populations considered at risk of underperforming. The site offers regular information updates, a reading room, useful links, examples of schools successfully making change, and an entire section on implementation of No Child Left Behind. There are also specialized, subscription-based tools such as School Forward: An Online System for Maintaining Continuous School Improvement (www.schoolforward.org). Schools Moving Up also offers online surveys in which teachers take a survey online and the results are tabulated and displayed graphically by WestEd.

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EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE CHANGE MANAGER'S HANDBOOK

The resources in this handbook will help you

- * understand the modules in the planning and implementation process, the research behind them, and the related activities;
- * determine the appropriate set of activities for your school and the appropriate participants for each activity;
- * identify who has sufficient data knowledge and facilitation experience to lead each activity;
- * create a timetable for the activities; and
- * prepare for success.

The end product for this handbook will be a tailored roadmap of activities for developing and implementing a school improvement plan. The roadmap will identify the specific activities appropriate for your school, who will facilitate each one, and when each activity will be conducted. A roadmap produced by a *district* change management team might vary depending on how the district intends it to be used. In some instances, a district team may be working with particular schools for which it would develop individual roadmaps. In other instances, a district team may develop a roadmap that outlines a set of basic or recommended activities for all of its schools. Using these district recommendations as a starting point, individual schools can then add more activities depending on their own needs.

OVERVIEW OF HANDBOOK CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Previewing the Program Content

This chapter introduces you to the five-phase inquiry cycle that underlies the school plan development and implementation process captured in this guide. Each phase is represented in one of five modules. In this introductory chapter, you'll start with a quick preview of the five modules and

their related activities. The purpose is to let you know which components we've included in our cycle of inquiry and how we've organized them — to give you the big picture. Then, you'll read in more depth about the research and theory behind each module's activities and find a concise module-by-module description of the activities and related tools.

Chapter 2: Selecting Activities and Determining Participants

Although there are nearly 40 activities and supporting tools in *Developing an Effective School Plan*, it would be an unusual school that needed them all. This chapter introduces you to the process of building a roadmap for creating, implementing, and monitoring your school improvement plan. That process begins with you taking stock of current improvement efforts and other conditions at your site(s). With that understanding in hand, you can strategically select activities that will be most helpful for developing your school improvement plan or, if you are a district-level change manager, you can choose activities that are most appropriate for a set of schools with common characteristics.

It would obviously be easiest and fastest for a small group, or even just the principal, to sit down and write the plan. After all, as important as it is, the job of developing a school improvement plan competes for time and attention with other high-priority efforts at a school. But the time saved would be ownership lost. With the plan's improvement strategies, activities, and practices imposed from the top down, implementation would likely suffer. The process provided in this chapter for selecting activities and determining the appropriate participants will help you maintain the right balance between available time for and ownership of the change process. The intent is to involve as many staff members as are needed to build ownership, but not to bog down the process by involving everyone in every activity. You'll see

that each activity includes a note about intended participants: a leadership team, a data team, or the whole school staff. Some allow leeway, suggesting, for example, either a school's data team *or* the full staff.

To familiarize you with the format of the activities, the bulk of Chapter 2 is itself organized as an activity.

Chapter 3: Identifying the Right Facilitators

Data-based inquiry is not for the faint of heart. Conversations about change, issues of equity, and shortcomings in instruction or curriculum can bring a staff together or tear it apart. The activities in this guide have been taken directly or adapted from the toolkits of highly skilled facilitators from WestEd and elsewhere who have been working with hundreds of schools across the United States. These facilitators have a deep knowledge of data and how to analyze it, as well as the facilitation skills to help participants engage in and make the most of difficult conversations and decisions. Even so, they often work in teams to ensure that they can lead an activity to a successful conclusion. Based on this experience, we advise those leading the development and implementation of a school plan to consider putting together a leadership team — and also, perhaps, a data team — to take advantage of the diverse strengths that staff can contribute to this change effort. It is quite possible — in fact, likely — that no one staff member will have both the data knowledge and facilitation skills needed to lead these activities. The data-knowledge assessment and facilitation-skills survey will help you determine the right people

to lead different activities. It may be that these individuals are school staff members or, it may be that you will need to use an external facilitator for one or more of the activities, either from the district or from outside the district. Whether your facilitator(s) is internal or external, we recommend that he or she have adequate time for preparation and practice before facilitating an activity.

Chapter 4: Scheduling Your Activities

The next step in the process is to create a timetable for your activities. Your roadmap will have a place to note when each activity will be done. It will be important to carefully evaluate how the activities will fit with the school calendar, deadlines imposed by the district or an external agency, and other timelines, such as for professional development.

Chapter 5: Preparing for Success

Taking a school through the activities to develop and implement a school plan can be an exciting process leading to lasting change that improves education outcomes for all students. Key to the success of your efforts will be preparation. A well-constructed roadmap, skilled facilitators, and adequate preparation before engaging in an activity will help make your efforts successful. This final step is to ensure that your team (school or district) has sufficient time to prepare before each activity. The handouts, overheads, and many of the supporting tools can be adapted to fit your local context. Chapter 5 provides organizers and questions to help your team be well-prepared to lead your school through a successful school improvement process.