

New Hampshire Department of Education



Planning Resources for Developing a School or District Improvement Plan

As required by NH RSA 193-H and Federal Law 107-110 for Schools and Districts in Need of Improvement

April 2011

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PLANNING RESOURCES

A Research-Based Process for Developing an Improvement Plan A1 – A8

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A RESEARCH-BASED PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A PLAN

Establishing a Focus

A logical starting point in the planning process is to establish the purpose and focus of the plan. The primary focus of the school improvement plan required by New Hampshire's school accountability law (NH RSA 193-H) must be to improve student achievement in the content area(s) in which the school did not make adequate yearly progress for two years, resulting in the designation as a school in need of improvement.

Selecting a Research-Based Planning Process

The inquiry-based planning process outlined in this document was developed through a synthesis of school improvement planning models¹. The steps guide the school's planning team through a series of reflective questions regarding the school's practices and policies and resulting student performance data. The reflection prompts the planning team to not only look at what's working and what isn't, but to ask the questions "why", and "how do we know?" This level of analysis can increase the likelihood of identifying the underlying "root cause" issues getting in the way of improving student achievement. Based on the feedback from New Hampshire schools using some form of "root cause analysis" as the basis for developing their plan, this process has resulted in a more evidence-based improvement plan focused on core issues rather than a plan based upon unsubstantiated hunches.

Step 1: "Taking Stock" of Current Practice

A. Reviewing the School's Current **Initiatives** to Improve Student Achievement

Consider the following questions:

- what is the purpose of our current initiatives? What are they designed to do or improve?
- do any of our current initiatives target the areas in which the school did not make AYP?
- have the initiatives been fully implemented and sustained? How would we know?
- what student achievement evidence do we have that shows our initiatives are making a positive impact?

¹ Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes: Implementing the Components of Systemic Schoolwide Improvement. ©2002. New England Comprehensive Assistance Center at Education Development Center, Inc. <https://secure.edc.org/publications/prodview.asp?1500>

B. Reviewing the School's Current Practices

This portion of the self assessment involves the planning team in a review of current practice in areas identified through research as critical to student achievement:

Standards-based Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. *To what extent –*

- is our curriculum in core content areas regularly reviewed and evaluated?
- is our curriculum aligned with state frameworks and grade-level/grade-span expectations?
- do teachers provide appropriate differentiated instruction in their classrooms?
- do instructional strategies emphasize higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking?
- does the faculty regularly analyze and discuss assessment results to plan instruction, identify student strengths and pinpoint areas that need reinforcement?

Accountability. *To what extent -*

- do we disaggregate student achievement data to follow the progress of each student?
- do we systematically identify and provide appropriate supports to struggling learners?
- do we use disaggregated student achievement results to set priorities for professional development?
- do we analyze program effectiveness in order to plan instruction and set priorities?
- do we share results of assessments through newsletters, PTO meetings, local press releases, and the school/district web page?
- do we provide such information, to the extent possible, in languages that parents can understand?

Structural reform strategies. *To what extent –*

- are structured planning opportunities for staff a regular part of the school schedule?
- are teachers provided with the opportunity to plan their work collaboratively?
- is support for novice teachers available?
- is uninterrupted time dedicated each day and week to instruction in core areas?
- have there been significant changes in staff, teaming structures, leadership structures, or enrollment?

Leadership and governance. *To what extent –*

- has the school implemented an improvement plan with results-oriented objectives?
- is shared leadership evident, as appropriate, to support and improve instruction?

Professional development. *To what extent –*

- is professional development aligned with curricular priorities and student achievement goals?
- are professional development opportunities available to paraprofessionals so to ensure consistency in knowledge and practice among all instructional staff?

Culture and climate. *To what extent –*

- are disciplinary issues interfering with instructional time?
- do teachers work independently rather than collaboratively?
- is collaboration and reflective practice valued?

External support and resources. *To what extent –*

- is the school aware of federal resources received at the district level that could be leveraged to support its improvement plan?
- are partnerships with businesses or organizations actively supporting the school's improvement goals?

Parent and community involvement. *To what extent –*

- are parents familiar with grade-level expectations so to better understand assessment results?
- are resources, tools, or training provided to help parents support their child's learning?

Extended learning activities. *To what extent –*

- are extended-learning activities available at our school?
- are students most in need participating?

Step 2: What Results Are We Getting? What are Possible Reasons Why?

This step involves coming together to review student assessment data. What are the results telling us? Are there achievement gaps? Where?

- to what extent is each student making progress towards Proficiency (Levels 3 and 4) in Reading and Math?
- when we disaggregate by student subgroups, to what extent is each group making progress towards Proficiency (Levels 3 and 4)?
- when we examine our data by student subgroup, are there patterns or trends? Do these patterns hold up over time? (Note: review the new longitudinal NECAP reports for your school and district available on the NHDOE website at <http://www.education.nh.gov/longitudinalreports/index.htm>)
- what factors or conditions might be contributing to the achievement gaps we have identified, and...how do we know?

When answering the "how do we know?" question, the team should take care to differentiate between unsubstantiated hunches and responses that can be supported with evidence. For example, if the "CHECK ENGINE" light remains on after starting your car, what's the nature of the problem? Is it a minor electronic malfunction? Is it a symptom of a bigger problem? Do we rely on gut instinct alone? How do we know for sure without "digging deeper?"

“Digging Deeper”: Root Cause Analysis

In his book *“School Leader’s Guide to Root Cause Analysis: Using Data to Dissolve Problems,”*² author Paul Preuss outlines a process for distinguishing between causes and symptoms:

Symptoms – the “red flags” that draw attention to the gap between expected desired outcomes and the reality.

Root Cause “...the deepest underlying cause, or causes, of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom (p.3)

Cause or causes – As education is a complex **social** system, the symptoms that we experience usually have more than one root cause acting in combination to bring about the results. But: “*The good news is that often by dissolving any one of the multiple root causes, the symptoms can be reduced or even eliminated*” (p.4).

Positive or negative – Root causes can be found for both failures as well as successes. Understanding successes can contribute to identifying effective strategies that may work to address negative symptoms.

Process – Everything we do involves process. At its most basic, a simple process consists of input, added value, and output.

Dissolve – The purpose of root cause analysis is to identify the root cause(s) of a symptom, and, where the symptom is negative or undesirable, to find ways to dissolve the root rather than simply patching up and/or hiding the symptom.

Step 3: Setting Goals and Achievable Objectives

Once the team has a sense of the underlying, “root cause” issues that need to be addressed, the next step is to set priorities. As this plan is for two years, what should be worked on first, and what can be worked on over time?

Writing goal statements: The ultimate goal of the plan is to improve student achievement for struggling learners in the area(s) causing the designation as a school in need of improvement. The goal statements, however, must be measurable. How much improvement? By when? For which students? The goal statements in the plan should specify the achievement gap(s) to be addressed, and the anticipated reduction in the gap(s) as a result of the activities to be implemented.

² Preuss, P.G. (2003). *School Leader’s Guide to Root Cause Analysis: Using Data to Dissolve Problems.* www.eyoneducation.com

Step 4: Selecting Strategies and Activities for Implementation

As the team considers which research-based strategies and activities to implement to reduce the identified achievement gaps, the following checklist may be beneficial:

- the rationale for the strategy – how will it help?
- in what settings and for which populations has the strategy been effective?
- is the strategy appropriate/feasible for your situation?
- is there credible research demonstrating the strategy's effectiveness?
- “more is not necessarily better”

PLANNING PROCESS: EXAMPLE

Step 1: “Taking Stock” of Current Practice

Step 2: What Are the Results? What are Possible Reasons Why?

The ABC School is identified as a school in need of improvement for Mathematics. Through an analysis of student data (NECAP results), the team found that while students with educational disabilities are not meeting the performance target, they are not the only student group falling behind. By “digging deeper”, the team identified the following issues as possible contributing factors:

- the mathematics curriculum is not fully aligned with state grade-level expectations
- core curriculum instructional practices do not sufficiently address key concepts and skills
- general and special educators do not regularly collaborate on what is being taught, when, and how
- training for paraprofessionals providing direct instruction is inconsistent
- professional development has been devoted to other priorities

Step 3: Creating the Action Plan: What Will the Priorities Be?

When considering which of the above issues to address first and how, the team must decide what can realistically be accomplished within the time frame of a one-year action plan.

What’s the Goal? (related to student achievement)

Students in Level 1 in the “All Students” and “Educational Disabilities” groups , as evidenced by our 2010 NECAP results, will demonstrate progress towards proficiency in Math, as evidenced by results from (name the local assessments to be administered) during the 2011-12 school year.

What Strategy or Strategies will be Implemented?

The administration will commit time and resources for faculty to collaboratively complete the alignment of the Math curriculum with the GLEs or GSEs, and also begin development of common assessments to align with the curriculum.

Objectives: (What change/changes in professional practice are anticipated?)

Instruction, lesson plans, and use of common assessments will reflect implementation of the products (aligned curriculum and assessments) the faculty has collaboratively produced and agreed to.

Objectives: (What change/changes in student learning opportunities are anticipated?)

Students will be exposed to a curriculum aligned to the state/local GLEs or GSEs, and their learning will be measured by assessments aligned to that curriculum.

Step 4: Selecting Activities for Implementation

The school will implement the following activities to meet these objectives:

- continue alignment of mathematics curriculum with grade-level expectations
- revise scheduling for students so that instructional time in mathematics is not lost
- revise professional development schedule to ensure this priority is implemented;
- improve collaboration among general and special educators so that all students receive consistent access to the aligned curriculum

See next page for an example of completing the “Action Plan” matrix

2011-2012 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN (EXAMPLE)

Instructions: Use the format below to describe the action plan for 2011-2012. Duplicate this form as needed. Complete one form for each strategy.
Provide sufficient detail regarding how the proposed activities are designed to achieve the anticipated changes/outcomes in professional practice and student learning, especially to improve outcomes for students who are working below proficient in the area(s) for which the school is identified.

Goal (to be written as achievement gaps)	Students in Level 1 (substantially below proficient) in the "All Students" and "Educational Disabilities" groups , as evidenced by our 2010 NECAP results, will demonstrate progress towards proficiency in Math, as evidenced by the 2011 results and locally-administered interim assessments (<i>name the local assessments to be administered</i>).				
Strategy	Provide time and resources for faculty to collaboratively complete the alignment of the Math curriculum with the GLEs/GSEs, and the development of common assessments based upon the aligned curriculum.				
Objectives (to be written as responses to the italicized questions)	<i>What changes in <u>professional practice</u> are expected as a result of this strategy?</i> Objective: The faculty will use the aligned curriculum to develop lesson plans and deliver instruction. Common assessments collaboratively produced will be consistently implemented to inform instruction.				
	<i>What changes in <u>student learning</u> are expected as a result of this strategy?</i> Objective: Opportunities for learning will be aligned with GLEs , and assessment results to identify student strengths/weaknesses will be proactively used to adjust instruction and provide appropriate assistance to struggling learners.				
Proposed Activities for 2011-2012 Describe the activities to be implemented to achieve the desired outcomes in school practices and student learning. Provide sufficient detail so that reviewers will understand the purpose and proposed implementation of each activity.	Resources What existing and/or new resources will be used to accomplish the activity?	Timeline Projected timeframe for this activity	Oversight Who is primarily responsible for this activity?	Monitoring of Activities (Implementation) What evidence will be collected to document that the activity is being implemented as intended? How often and by whom?	Monitoring of Effectiveness What evidence will be collected to demonstrate effectiveness of this activity?
Provide a detailed description of proposed activities here.					

Resources

***Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes:
Implementing the Components of Systemic Schoolwide Improvement.***

Education Development Center, Inc. ©2002.

<https://secure.edc.org/publications/prodview.asp?1500>

School Leader's Guide to Root Cause Analysis: Using Data to Dissolve Problems

Paul Preuss © 2003

www.eyoneducation.com

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

Developing a School Improvement Plan: Where Are We Now? How Do We Know? Use of the “Modified Continuum” for School Improvement Planning

The “Modified Continuum” is a research-based tool for collecting perceptual data from stakeholders regarding the school’s status as it relates to 11 key areas critical to school improvement. The “Modified Continuum” is a shortened version of the Continuum found in the *Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes* developed by Education Development Center, Inc. It was developed specifically for New Hampshire, as a result of the feedback received from school improvement planning teams over a three-year period.

Using the Modified Continuum with your team:

- 1) Review the *Continuum* tool. Discuss how the *Continuum* can be used with the team and how it can support the team’s work.
- 2) Next, develop a process to provide staff (those that are not part of the planning team) with an opportunity to complete the “Modified Continuum”. In an ideal scenario, staff members would have adequate time to complete the tool, publicly (and possibly anonymously) share their ratings, and review/discuss issues that might arise as a result of using this material. For example, having small group discussions around each of the 11 Components might be a way to gather staff member’s perceptions about each Component area and identify key issues or concerns.

Note that the goal here is NOT to come to consensus on the ratings. The goal is to collect information from faculty about their perceptions of where their school falls in each of the 11 Component areas, and use that information to inform the school improvement plan development process.

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

1A. Standards-Based Curriculum

Our school’s curriculum is aligned with state and district content and performance standards in each content area and is articulated and continual within and across grade levels. Teachers use content and performance standards and assessment information to identify curricular priorities and instructional materials and to design relevant, challenging student learning experiences.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
1. The learning goals in teachers' unit/lesson plans are aligned with state and district content and performance standards.					
2. Teachers can explain the scope and sequence of the curriculum within and across grade levels in the content areas they teach.					
3. Curriculum material used are appropriate and challenging for ALL students.					
4. The curriculum in a given content area addresses everyday life applications and show the relevance of the subject matter to our student populations.					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

1B. Standards-Based Instruction

Teachers differentiate instruction to encourage and support the needs of students of diverse sociocultural backgrounds, genders, and academic experience and of special populations, such as differently abled (Special Education) students and English Language Learners, in order to meet state and district content and performance standards. Teachers incorporate research-based practices that have been proven effective with their student populations or are engaged in reflective practice to monitor the effectiveness of “home grown” instructional practices

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers' lesson plans contain instructional strategies and learning experiences that address the selected content and performance standards					
Teachers' lesson plans include differentiated instruction that addresses the needs of all learners					
Students who have difficulty meeting the standards are provided with individualized instructional support					
Instructional collaboration and coordination is a topic on the agenda at grade-level and/or cross grade-level meetings at least once a month					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

1C. Standards-Based Assessment

Our school uses multiple classroom, school, district, and state assessments, both formal and informal, to assess and monitor each child’s progress (including English Language Learners and Special Education students) in achieving content, performance, and graduation standards. Achievement data is disaggregated to identify standards and equity gaps, develop strategies to eliminate these gaps, and identify instruction goals.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers regularly use multiple assessments to assess and monitor each students’ progress in achieving content, performance, and graduation standards					
Grade-level and teacher meetings include discussions about student achievement data at the individual, classroom, and school level.					
Teachers use classroom data to a) plan instruction, b) set curricular goals, and c) analyze program effectiveness					
Our school is able to provide appropriate accommodations as needed to ensure the valid measurement of ALL students’ performance					
Assessment strategies include formal and informal classroom, school, district and state measures					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

2. Data-Based Accountability and Evaluation

Our school has a fully implemented accountability system that includes a school improvement plan based on disaggregated achievement and other data, ongoing diagnostic and performance assessments of all students, an aligned professional development plan, and regular supervision and evaluation of teachers and administrators. Appropriate accommodations are provided for English Language Learners and Special Education students to ensure valid measurement of their performance.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Baseline achievement data is disaggregated by demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, limited English proficiency, socio-economic status, etc.) to determine who is and who is not succeeding and in what areas.					
Our school improvement plan is based on data from a comprehensive needs assessment					
Our school improvement goals are aligned to the school's vision and mission statements, and to the needs assessment outcomes.					
Our school improvement goals incorporate criteria for meeting AYP.					
There are public forums on student achievement appropriate to different audiences.					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

3. Structural Reform Strategies

Our school structures its schedule, organization, support mechanisms, and resources to provide all students, including English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education students, with equal access to resources and the support to achieve to high standards. Reform strategies include (1) increased amount and quality of learning time, (2) time and resources for teacher/staff collaboration, (3) assignment of highly qualified teachers for at-risk students, (4) inclusive practices for ELL and Special Education students, and (5) avoidance of systematic tracking that reinforces stereotypes based on classism, sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
School scheduling and classroom organization are designed to match student needs and maximize learning opportunities					
All students have equitable access to resources and receive the supports needed to succeed					
Students in special programs (English Language Learners, Special Education) are integrated into regular classrooms and activities					
Teachers receive adequate resources to effectively instruct diverse populations					
Teachers' planning time allows for collaboration and joint planning					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

4. Leadership and Governance

Our School Improvement Team (or other governance structure) includes teachers, staff, parents, community members, and students (where appropriate) in a shared leadership structure to support and improve school programs. It uses student learning and other data to identify areas of instructional focus and guide the development, implementation, evaluation, and public reporting of progress toward achieving our school improvement performance goals.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Our School Improvement plan includes measurable performance goals and an action plan that reflects the school's vision and mission statements					
There are mid-year and yearly evaluations of progress in meeting our school's performance goals, and the data are used to revise our School Improvement plan					
Our school's governance structure is representative of the diversity of the student population and our community					
Student learning is a primary criteria used in decision-making and goal setting					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

5. Professional Development

Our school has a structure and process for developing and implementing a professional development plan that is aligned with our school’s improvement goals, is research-based, meets the needs of our student populations, is regularly monitored and evaluated, and builds in-house expertise. As teachers learn new practices and programs, they receive adequate support during the school day through peer or expert coaching, classroom observations, mentoring, and/or study groups in order to ensure success for every teacher.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Analysis of student performance guides the focus of our school’s professional development plan					
Our professional development process helps teachers change their classroom practice, implement the instructional program, and meet the needs of our student population					
Teachers and school staff have an individual Professional Development plan that is designed to complement the school improvement plan					
Professional Development activities are research-based and: a) are tied to instructional content, b) include opportunities for collaborative dialogues, and c) provide sufficient follow-up					
Our school schedule provides sufficient time to implement school-wide and individual professional development					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

6. Culture and Climate

Our school’s philosophy, norms, values, beliefs, and visual images promote the following: high achievement for all students, collaboration and collegiality among all staff, mutual respect and trust among all individuals, affirmation of diversity, and use of language and behavior that is respectful and free from ethnic, racial, sexual, and other stereotypes and biases. Our school values and supports a safe and equitable environment that is welcoming of all students and their families, built on shared ownership and responsibility, conducive to personal growth and learning, and free from violence and substance abuse.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Our school has a shared philosophy and vision that reflects some of the following norms: a) a belief that all student can achieve, b) high performance expectations for all students and adults, c) shared responsibility for the success of the school, and d) affirmation of diversity					
There is shared responsibility for implementing norms that create a welcoming, safe, supportive and respectful environment on a day-to-day basis					
Adults and students can be observed supporting and encouraging respectful and collaborative behavior					
Adults and students intervene when they observe inappropriate behavior					
Our school has a fair and equitable code of discipline that supports students’ understanding of the stated norms, rules, and expectations for behavior					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

7. External Support and Resources

Our school accesses external support and resources from a variety of sources to implement, supplement, and/or extend our goals, initiatives, and priorities. We are strategic in determining our specific needs and communicating them to the appropriate audiences, and are not distracted by offered resources that do not serve to help us meet our goals. Our use of external resources is based on thorough research of their effectiveness and their alignment with our school's overall improvement plan.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Potential new programs are thoroughly researched and evaluated against our school improvement goals prior to adoption					
Our school uses resources from a variety of sources in order to implement, supplement, or extend initiatives and priorities					
Our school trains and utilizes human resources from outside of the school (including adult and student volunteers, and business people) to further student learning goals.					
Partnerships are in place between our school and community-based businesses					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

8. Parental and Community Involvement

Our school has active partnerships with parents and linkages to community organizations and institutions. Collectively, we have developed activities, strategies, and shared responsibilities for school governance, educational and other programs, and the overall health and learning of the school community, students, families, and staff.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
Parents and children meet annually with their teachers to set individual learning goals. Parents learn about their child's progress and how they can support and expand it.					
Parents, teachers and the Principal have an open, frequent, and culturally appropriate flow of information					
Parents are active partners in the governance of our school and participate in school improvement and accountability systems					
Parent education activities occur at least once per month during the school year					

Composite Rating

Comments

Assessment Continuum of Schoolwide Improvement Outcomes

9. Extended Learning Activities

Our school provides informal learning experiences and extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, art, and clubs, that appeal to our diverse students. These offerings are provided directly or through community partnerships.

Transportation and financial assistance are available to all students and families to ensure equitable student participation by socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/race, language, and disability status.

Evidence	To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?				
	Everyone		About Half		No one or very few
	5	4	3	2	1
A variety of extended-day or/or extended learning activities are available at our school. These include a mix of academic support, enrichment, and recreational activities					
Transportation and financial assistance is available to all students who wish to take advantage of extended learning opportunities					
Information about extracurricular activities and extended learning opportunities are distributed regularly to all parents					
Participation in extracurricular activities is representative of the student population					
Summer programs are available to all student in our school who need them					

Composite Rating

Comments

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April 2011**

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