
School Improvement Plans

A

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SUMMARY

tate and federal regulations require school districts and individual schools to prepare a variety of school improvement plans (SIP). Federal regulations require certain schools that receive

Based on my review, I believe there are several factors contributing to the inability of the SIP process at PPS to fulfill its potential.

- ✖ First, the multiple, evolving requirements of federal and state mandates for school improvement planning adds uncertainty and complexity to the preparation of school SIPs.
- ✖ Second, the current PPS template for the SIP may be too prescriptive and lengthy. A template that is focused primarily on academic improvement might help concentrate efforts. Changing the timing and frequency of the process should also reduce effort and increase value.
- ✖ Third, the district lacks a defined process for reviewing, approving, monitoring, and assessing school improvement plans. Consistent and rigorous oversight by management might ensure SIPs are a more effective tool for improvement.

If the district takes action to revise the current SIP process, it should consider the Oregon Department of Education's new planning approach for Title One schools and Oregon school districts. This new approach uses an automated tool called the Customized Planning Process Tool (CPPT) that offers some advantages over the existing planning methods. However, the tool as currently designed may prove impractical for general school improvement planning due to its length, complexity, and

INTRODUCTION

School improvement plans (SIPs) are intended to help schools increase academic performance

School Improvement Grants. Schools that received a special School Improvement Grant

Richard and Rebecca DuFour in their writings about Professional Learning Communities also describe an improvement process as part of building shared knowledge as a team. For example, all teachers at a school need to:

- ¥ build knowledge about students should learn
- ¥ analyze data to make decisions
- ¥ clarify essential common outcomes by course and content area

Plans prepared by Portland Public Schools

In response to state and federal requirements, PPS has prepared district improvement plans and school improvement plans. The most recent SIPs for all PPS schools are for school year

The 2011-12 SIP template used by PPS schools contains six parts as follows:

- I. Organization for Collaborative Work: Narrative description of how the school has selected and prepared the Data Team, how communication between the team and stakeholders is structured and supported, and how diverse views and multiple perspectives are embraced and reflected in the plan.

- II. Data Interpretation Leading to Areas for Improvement

Audit objectives, scope, and methods

This audit had one primary objective: to evaluate the school improvement plan process at PPS

AUDIT RESULTS

The Portland Public School district has produced school improvement plans (SIPs) as required by federal and state laws. While the content and nature of these plans has varied over time, the plans contain information on student achievement, goals to improve school performance, and strategies to address problems in teaching practice. While the process for preparing school improvement plans has strong support from upper and mid-management at PPS, many building administrators believe the plans are largely a compliance exercise that holds limited value in improving student achievement at their schools. In addition, management does not routinely monitor or assess SIPs to determine success in meeting school goals or to ensure schools are accountable for planned results. Several opportunities exist to improve the value of the SIP process at PPS by clarifying the

development, and equity issues. While SIPs appear to be more focused on data than in the past, the quality of SIP can vary considerably based on the experience of principals and staff with assessment tools and data analysis. One administrator stated that the big issue for the SIP process was what the district does with SIPs after they are prepared. How should plans be monitored? How should plans be used for evaluation of principals and teachers? How are plans used to hold the district and schools accountable for results? Connecting SIPs more directly to district Milestones is still a work in progress.

The school principals I talked to were supportive of the concept of school improvement plans but find the current process too driven by compliance requirements. The SIP template includes various elements that are prescribed by top management that may not be reflective of the particular and specific needs of the school. For example, the requirement in past years to present writing improvement as the central goal of each SIP negates the value of evaluating data to identify the actual weaknesses of the school and the problems in practice contributing to the weaknesses. In addition, while improving educator skills and increasing family engagement are important, requiring lengthy schedules and calendars of professional development and community engagement events may dilute the central focus of the SIPs to improve student achievement or to close the achievement gap. For some principals, the SIP has evolved into a “catchall” for various district initiatives and state compliance requirements

Principals do not view plans as integral to school management and improvement

Principals I met with do not think that the SIP is an integral part of school management and improvement. While some principals believe the SIP helps focus school efforts, most believe

primary elements of the SIP should be an assessment of current academic and behavioral performance at the school, identification of specific problems or

contributes to or inhibits the achievement of district Milestones. The *Major Problems in Practice* should identify the major causes that contribute to the outcomes and results found in the Data Analysis and the specific areas that students are struggling to learn or perform, with particular attention to racial equity and achievement gaps. The *Academic Action Plans* should identify the elements of instruction that need to be improved and educational

Limited SIP review and monitoring

The transition to a two-year or longer SIP plan will require a more deliberate and defined review and update process. While regional administrators told me that they comment on the plans before finalization, and review the plan accomplishments at year-end, many principals I spoke with indicated that management input and review was limited and sometimes not provided. I did not find any written procedures on when draft SIPs were reviewed, the nature of the review, or how plan results were evaluated and updated. The section below shows some suggested points of supervisory review of school improvement plans.

Elements of Management Review of SIPs:

- ✖ Written feedback on draft SIP
- ✖ Final written approval of final SIP
- ✖ Periodic review and update of SIP - every 6 months
- ✖ Approve changes and modifications to SIP
- ✖ Reporting and assessment of results
- ✖ Initiate new cycle

Performance evaluation. The SIP could also serve as a primary source document in the annual performance evaluation and goal-setting session between regional administrators and building administrators. The success of the school in meeting goals, implementing action plans, and improving teaching practices should be factors in the overall performance evaluation of principals. Using the SIP in annual goal setting sessions establishes an accountability link and ensures that the SIP is a meaningful, living document. While the failure to meet SIP goals does not necessarily lead to low evaluation scores, it is one element to consider when judging the performance of school administrators.

Changing state and federal requirements add uncertainty

The federal government approval of the State of Oregon request to waive certain elements of the NCLB provisions has contributed to several changes in how Oregon school districts will assess and report on achievement, and how districts will prepare school improvement plans. While the Oregon state laws (ORS 329.095) for district and school reporting remain in place, the new tool for self-assessment and improvement planning currently being used by Title One Priority and Focus schools will be required for all Oregon districts in submitting their biennial electronic Continuous Improvement Plans (eCIP). Individual schools in the state may use the CPPT at their option but there are no current requirements for the CPPT to be used for schools other than for Title One schools and the District eCIP.

According to ODE officials, the state hopes to incorporate other required plans into the CPPT process. For example, the state hopes that professional development, ELL, and TAG planning will be part of the plan developed with the CPPT process. In addition, the state officials indicate that the indicators developed as a part of the Oregon Achievement Compacts will also be incorporated and aligned with the CPPT process. These efforts are intended to reduce the number of separate planning efforts and simplify and align the various plans required under state and federal law.

The ODE has also revised elements of the CPPT based on feedback from districts that have used the instrument. Specifically, ODE has reduced the number of indicators to be assessed from almost 200 to 34 in order to reduce the time and effort required to identify objectives and produce action plans. ODE also plans to post revised requirements on how districts will complete their eCIPS using the CPPT tool but at the time of the completion of this audit guidelines have not been posted on the ODE web site.

The adoption of the CPPT process for Title One schools and for Oregon districts adds a degree of uncertainty to the development and improvement of the current SIP template used by PPS. Should most PPS schools continue to use the current SIP template while PPS Title One schools and the district as a whole employ an entirely different method for school improvement planning? Should the district require all schools to adopt the CPPT tool that is still under review and modification by ODE? Although the district has not yet made a decision about how to change or revise school SIPs, adoption of the CPPT has several advantages and disadvantages as follows.

ADVANTAGES:

- ¥ Web- based, on-

¥ State training and support may be available to ease adoption and learning curve

¥ Best-

Missed potential to guide actions and concentrate efforts

Improving the current school improvement planning process may help address the concerns of building administrators, fulfill the hopes of PPS management, and meet the compliance and accountability needs of state and local government officials:

- ✚ School administrators support a more streamlined, useful, and focused school planning tool that deemphasizes compliance requirements but highlights the importance of improving teaching practices that lead to better academic achievement.
- ✚ PPS managers share many of the goals of building administrators but also want to see a more coherent connection between district milestones and school-based activities and a clearer process for assessing and documenting school and district accountability.
- ✚ Federal and state officials want to create a new model of accountability that provides more flexibility, reduces excessive duplication and administrative burden, and focuses on improving educational outcomes, particularly those schools most in need of better achievement.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

March 11, 2013

Richard C. Tracy, District Performance Auditor
Portland Public Schools Board of Education
501 N. Dixon Street
Portland, OR 97227

Dear Mr. Tracy,

Thank you for your work reviewing the efficacy of School Improvement Plans at Portland Public Schools. You makes several useful observations and recommendations that will help our District create a more streamlined and effective School Improvement Planning process.

APPENDIX A

School Improvement Plan Literature and Research

I. Organization for Collaborative Work

1. How have team members been prepared for the work of the Data Team? Describe how members were selected, the experiences and perspectives they bring and training they have had individually or as a group to prepare them for the examination of data, racial equity and special populations in the building.
2. How is communication between the team and stakeholder groups (teachers, classified staff, parents and community members) structured and supported? This can be described through narrative or demonstrated through the school calendar (attach).
3. What diverse views and multiple perspectives are present in your school community? How are these reflected in and embraced by the work and recommendations of the Data Team?

II. Data Interpretation Leading to Areas for Improvement

1. Looking at all the assessment data available at your school (more than just OAKS data), what do you know about your student achievement results? What trends are evident within the academic year and as students progress through grade levels. How has the program served groups of students over time?
2. Which groups of students at your school are doing well and in what content area(s) (e.g., reading, writing, math) or behavior (s) (e.g., attendance, discipline)? Which group(s) of students, isolating race, language and special population, are your lowest performing students and how does their performance compare to other students' achievement or behaviors in and across sub groups?
3. What causes (your problem(s) of practice) contribute to these outcomes? Which of these have you identified as your highest leverage points and why?

III b . Academic Action Plan for Closing Achievement Gaps

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOAL (SMART GOAL): Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely
MILESTONE: Schools should be considering all milestones across grade-spans as part of their goal setting. For instance, a K-5 elementary schools should still be considering whether their students are on track to meet 7 th grade writing and 8 th grade algebra milestones
LEARNER-CENTERED PROBLEM (What are your students struggling to learn or to be able to do?):
PROBLEM OF PRACTICE (What elements of instruction need to be improved in order to address the learner -centered problem?):
Content Area And/Or Instructional Framework: *2011 -12 All schools are required to identify a content area and adopt an instructional framework to guide teacher practice. 2012 -13 All schools identify a research -based instructional framework to support content area focus (foci). PPS supported Instructional Frameworks include Sheltered Instruction, Differentiation, Assessment for Learning, Writing and / or reading across contents areas, Classroom Strategies that Work, and SIM; Safe and Civil Schools, PBIS

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS FOR STAFF	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION	ASSESS PROGRESS
What administration and staff is going to do to address the Problem of Practice.				

III c

V. Professional Development Plan

Please describe briefly how school meeting time will be organized for the year.

B. TRANSITION PLAN				
LEVEL	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE PERSON/TEAM	KEY DATES	Costs/ Sources
Preschool to Kindergarten				
Elementary to middle (Grade 5-Grade 6)				
Middle to high school (Grade 8 -Grade 9)				
Students with disabilities				
Students receiving ESL services				
TAG-identified students				

C. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR PARENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY	FUNDING SOURCE (DISTRICT, CONSOLIDATED, TITLE I OR OTHER GRANT, PARTNERSHIP) What are your funding sources? What district-level support for professional development (coaching, materials and visitations) will you access? What other partnerships and supports does the school benefit from and how do they align to school improvement objectives?	DESCRIPTION How will you align your resources to accomplish your goal?	GOAL Reference goals by section number (III a., III b. or III c.).	ESTIMATED COST (UNLESS IN-KIND)
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