

Leadership in School Improvement Planning

Kimberly Martini

EDU6510

Dr. Booth

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The following paper will analyze Taft Grade School's School Improvement Plan and process in order to later engage in a collaborative discussion on the similarities and differences between Taft's plan and plans from other schools represented by other cohort members. Specifically, this paper will concentrate on four facets of school improvement: the content and structure of each goal (indicator), the Best Practices being utilized to achieve the goal, the assessment strategies to be employed in measuring improvement, and the principal's role in the school improvement process. Finally, a reflective piece will be written at the end on new learning that has been acquired from this experience, comparing and contrasting the four facets of school improvement.

Traditionally, a School Improvement Team has been coordinated by the building principal in each school in order to evaluate each and every indicator on both the school and district level in order to see what exactly needs to be improved upon. After some discussion, the state of Illinois is now moving in the direction of trusting each school to know themselves well enough to not have to evaluate every indicator; just the ones they feel are most applicable to their building. In order to evaluate the indicators, the School Improvement Team uses an assessment process located on the Illinois Board of Education website for poor schools. There they can find the "Assess Indicators" worksheet. The overall ideal best practice for assessing indicators is doing it as a whole team, not splitting off into clusters. Once indicators for the school are identified, the Rising Star program has come up with what they call "Wise Ways," which provide research that tells why each indicator will improve the school and what those improvements will look like (Dixon, 2013).

Since Taft is both a school and a district, the indicators are for both as well. The first five pages of Taft's school improvement plan focus on Rising Star SmartStart Indicators. Six SmartStart District Indicators are mentioned. Included in this information are the best practices that are being utilized to achieve the goal, the level of development (Partial

Development/Implementation or Full Implementation), Index (Priority Score x Opportunity Score), Priority Score (3-highest, 2-medium, 1-lowest), Opportunity Score (3-relatively easy to address, 2-accomplished within current policy and budget conditions, 1-requires changes in current policy and budget conditions), current level of development or implementation of the indicator mentioned, and the principal's role in achieving this goal. The six indicators are as follows:

	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
1	(IA07) In collaboration with its schools, the district will set district and school achievement targets for all students and for AYP subgroups	Specific focus needs to be given to students with learning disabilities, and for all students in the areas of reading, math, and writing	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 6 <u>Priority Score:</u> 3 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	Principal facilitates data team discussions focused on student growth for the student body as a whole, and each of the respective demographic subgroups (IEP, LEP, SEC). Specific focus needs to be given to students with learning disabilities, and for all students in the areas of reading, math, and writing
2	(IA11) The district ensures that key pieces of user-friendly data are available in a timely fashion at the district, school, and classroom levels	Collaboration takes place between the superintendent and principal to harvest data and present it to the staff in a user-friendly manner. Mini "data retreats" take place and allow for continuous conversations related to data and what information is present to indicate or prescribe the learning needs of the students. Additional conversations take place	<u>Level of Development:</u> Full Implementation	Collaboration with superintendent and staff

		in a variety of settings including Response to Intervention problem-solving meetings.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
3	(IB01) The district operates with district-level and school-level improvement teams.	Ongoing conversations related to student performance are tied directly to staff development needs; data drives our decisions. Ongoing and more in-depth conversations will need to be continued as we transition to implementing and assessing the Common Core State Standards and expanding the acceleration and support structure developed to problem-solve within the Response to Intervention model.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Full Implementation	The building principal, who will be serving as the SIP coordinator, is in the process of compiling a representative team of stakeholders for the School Improvement Plan. In addition, the building principal facilitates a professional learning community related to school improvement, staff development, and community relations.
4	(IB02) In collaboration with its schools, the district will examine improvement strategies being implemented across the district and determines their value, expanding, modifying, and culling as evidence suggests	Ongoing improvements have required continuous reflection on the part of the staff. This has been particularly true through the efforts of the building principal and staff as they have moved forward to enhance reading instruction. Additional time has also been built into the schedule to allow for acceleration and intervention time for struggling students. The impact of this practice has had some evaluation for overall effectiveness; however, additional reflection should take place and will require	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 3 <u>Priority Score:</u> 3 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 1	Principal reflects on the data that will be acquired as a result of implementing for time for struggling students.

		consideration of changing current practices. Additional consideration should be given to expanding basic skills associated with mathematics.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
5	(IC05) The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular expectations on the school	The district presently has full correlation to the Illinois Learning Standards were necessary and appropriate, and continues to transition and support staff in their efforts to redefine instruction as it relates to fully implementing the Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. In particular, a CCSS aligned resource in mathematics for grades K-6 was adopted. Presently, work is being done with the 7 th and 8 th grade math teacher to address curricular gaps realized when moving from ILS to CCSS. This shift will include accelerating and intervening for those students lacking in pre-algebraic and algebraic skills, considering a resource that will address this shift in content, and require restructuring of the instructional process to include emphasis on the 8 Mathematical Practice Standards for which students will be assessed on the PARCC	<u>Level of Development:</u> Full Implementation	The building principal has made continuous strides with the staff in reforming the curriculum guides to address these larger scale changes being made at the State and Federal levels.

		assessment.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
6	(ID01) A team structure will be officially incorporated into the school improvement plan and school governance policy	We presently have a philosophical approach to working collaboratively. With the small size of the building we have, it can often seem as if we have the same faces on each of the teams, committees, etc. This is something we are looking at addressing and balancing, as per conversations with the building principal. We are expanding this "team" approach to include other stakeholder groups, including parents/guardians and other community members.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial Development/Implementation <u>Index:</u> 6 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 3	The building principal will work on creating cohesive and differentiated teams and committees within the school staff.

The second part of this plan contains twenty-one pages of 14 SmartPlan Indicators for Taft School District. These indicators follow the same format as above and are listed as follows:

	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
1	(D7) The district will monitor to ensure the intended curriculum is implemented with fidelity.	Teachers collaborate with grade level partners and also have cross-grade level articulation to develop coherent curricular documents. The curricular documents are being updated to reference the Common Core Standards. An assessment system has been established which includes national, state, and local assessments. New curricular materials are selected that align with the student learning	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal oversees the implementation of effective curriculum in accordance to the CCSS.

		expectations listed in the curricular documents. Teachers attend professional development sessions regarding effective implementation of the new curricular materials. Follow-up discussions regarding effective implementation take place in meetings with an administrator, in small groups, and as a whole staff.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
2	(IA06) The district will provide schools with technology, training, and support for integrated data collection, reporting, and analysis systems.	Currently, we have taken time during our Institute Days and School Improvement In-services to analyze student achievement data, plan research-based activities to provide appropriate levels of support and challenge for students, and determine ways to group students for effective instruction. Technology is used for data analysis, differentiation, curriculum integration, and engaging students in learning.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	Principals will direct and lead these in-services and Institute Days in order to aggregate student data.
3	(IA08) The school board and superintendent will present a unified vision for school improvement.	At present, we use the following to help unify our district's vision for continued improvement: school/public discussions, surveys, community/district committee meetings, teachers' self-evaluation using organized data regarding student progress, and the discussion of how to	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal will help develop the school vision and tools used to evaluate it.

		maintain improvement for our students and district.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
4	(IA09) The superintendent and other central office staff will be accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.	A comprehensive school improvement process is implemented each year.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 2 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 1	The superintendent/principal focus on the goal of all students learning and meet and provide some resources to accelerate school-level improvement.
5	(IA10) The district will regularly allocate/reallocate resources to support school, staff, and instructional improvement.	The district maintains small class sizes, provides professional development, participates in articulation sessions with administrators and teachers from the area schools, increased the length of the school day, has a Title I Reading Program, and implements RtI.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Full Implementation	The principal participates in articulation with staff members and area administrators.
6	(IA12) The district will intervene early when a school is not making adequate progress.	Examples of interventions include implementing RtI, expanding the special education service delivery model, maintaining small class sizes, differentiating instruction, and providing additional staff support	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial Development/Implementation <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 3	The principal will provide additional staff support.
7	(IA13) The district will work with the school to provide early and intensive intervention for students not making progress.	All students in the school are assessed. As a result, students who are in need of intervention are identified. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and AIMSWeb are used as universal screeners. MAP is administered in the areas of reading, language arts, and math to students in	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 6 <u>Priority Score:</u> 3 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The building principal will be present at all meetings involving student needs and progress.

		grades 3-8 in the fall and spring. AIMSWeb is administered in the areas of early literacy, fluency, and comprehension to students in grades K-8 in the fall, winter, and spring. Struggling students are identified through analysis of student achievement data and additional information from teachers. Teachers meet with the Student Assistance Team to discuss the needs of struggling students. The RtI process is implemented which includes identifying specific areas of needs, planning and implementing interventions, and monitoring progress.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
8	(IA14) The district will recruit, train, support, and place personnel to competently address the problems of schools in need of improvement.	The district provides professional development sessions on site and provides opportunities for teachers to attend workshops and graduate classes off-site. The district increased personnel so that the special education service delivery model could include some co-taught classes, push-in support for students, and pull-out services. In addition, the district hired assistants to work with students in greatest need throughout the school.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 3 <u>Priority Score:</u> 3 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 1	It is the principal's responsibility to provide these opportunities for staff members and hire appropriate faculty.

	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
9	(IC01) The school will report and document its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent will report the school's progress to the school board.	The superintendent and School Board recognize challenges (such as with funding) and develop ways to address these challenges.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal and superintendent report the school's progress at School Board Meetings.
10	(IC02) The district will designate a central office contact person for the school, and that person will maintain close communication with the school and an interest in its progress.	We have a principal and superintendent who lead us in reviewing the assessment data.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 2 <u>Priority Score:</u> 1 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	Reviewing assessment data
11	(IC06) The district will provide the technology, training, and support to facilitate the school's data management needs.	Data from national, state, and local assessments are being used to guide decision making regarding differentiation of instruction and to inform the RtI process. MAP, AIMSWeb, Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), Accelerated Reader (AR), and envision diagnostic assessments are examples of assessments that incorporate the use of technology.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal will make sure these programs are up-to-date and ready to be implemented.
12	(IC07) Professional development is built into the school schedule by the district, but the school is allowed discretion in selecting training	On-site professional development sessions are aligned with school improvement goals and initiatives such as implementation of RtI and CCSS. Teachers provide input regarding	<u>Level of Development:</u> Full Implementation	The principal will be in charge of gathering teacher data and setting up professional development sessions according to data.

	and consultation that fit the requirements of its improvement/restructuring plan and its evolving needs.	professional development topics. Continued professional development is necessary regarding implementation of the CCSS.		
	Indicator	Best Practices	Assessment Strategies	Principal's Role
13	(IC08) Staff development will be built into the schedule for support staff as well as classroom aides.	The telephones are answered by office staff that are cheerful and helpful. The office staff greets visitors promptly and in a helpful manner. The signs that are posted are clear about the need to register in the office. The school tries to limit interruptions to the classroom by making announcements at the beginning and end of the day only.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 4 <u>Priority Score:</u> 2 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal is in charge of organizing this staff development.
14	(ID10) The school's Leadership Team will regularly look at school performance data and aggregated classroom observation data and use that data to make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs.	Taft School District 90 is a single-school district. The professional staff regularly analyzes student achievement data from national, state, and local assessments. The analysis that guides the school improvement process which includes identifying improvement priorities, setting goals, developing and implementing action plans, and monitoring progress.	<u>Level of Development:</u> Partial <u>Index:</u> 6 <u>Priority Score:</u> 3 <u>Opportunity Score:</u> 2	The principal will gather and provide student data for staff to analyze.

As seen in the data and SIP plan above, Taft District 90 has a lot of work to do. Plans are set in motion to change this, but it will not happen overnight. Creating a comprehensive plan that each staff member is on board and familiar with is important to reaching and achieving the vision set forth by the district administration. While all schools will be using the same format

within the Rising Star program, each school will have their own set of indicators and plan to work on in order to improve their building. Illinois is moving toward a better way of keeping each district across the state cohesive in terms of the standards addressed in curriculum and how each school addresses their downfalls through the use of the Common Core State Standards and the Rising Star School Improvement Plan.

References

Dixon, B. (2013, July 17). *The continuous improvement plan: A new direction for Illinois*.

Lecture presented at Rising Star in Aurora University, Aurora.

Sekulich, K. (2012, December 12). *Taft School District 90 District continuous improvement plan*

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