



Advanced Planning Institutes on School Improvement Planning

by

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Through its Advanced Planning Institutes, the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, provides educators with the opportunity to participate in ongoing, comprehensive professional development. The design of these Institutes follows the recommendations of the National Staff Development Council, recommendations such as organizing “adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district” and using “disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement” (NSDC, 2001).

In collaboration with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), LSS is providing a series of Advanced Planning Institutes on School Improvement Planning for school and district teams. This Institute series provides leadership teams with information and guidance on the development of research-based and data-driven school improvement plans. The Institute series is based on NSSE’s six-part school improvement framework (NSSE, 1998), discussed below.

Focusing on Student Performance

As indicated in its foundational statement, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*, the heart of the NSSE school improvement model

is student achievement. This model has a dual focus, which addresses the quality of the work of the student and the quality of the work of the school in support of student learning.

Participants in the yearlong Advanced Planning Institutes explore the six-part framework and are provided with guidelines and activities that support the development of individualized school or district improvement plans. In addition, teams receive NSSE resources and services, such as publications, surveys, and scoring and analysis services, to support their work.

The NSSE/LSS Collaborative Model

The alliance between NSSE and LSS enables both organizations to link relevant and valuable resources, both human and material, on improving the conditions for learning in schools. NSSE is a nonprofit, educational research and development organization founded in 1933 by the regional school accreditation associations in the United States (e.g., Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools). LSS is one of ten regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Its primary focus is to revitalize and reform educational practices in the service of student success by providing professional development and technical assistance.

Through funding provided to regional laboratories, LSS and NSSE

have been able to provide Advanced Planning Institutes on School Improvement Planning at no cost to school leadership teams. During the 2001–02 school year, improvement teams from Pennsylvania and New Jersey districts will participate. In Year 2, teams will be identified from other states within the mid-Atlantic region; efforts then will focus particularly on both rural and urban schools most in need of assistance in improving student achievement.

The NSSE School Improvement Model

NSSE’s data-driven, research-based school improvement model provides a comprehensive plan for improving student learning. The model is designed to strengthen the instructional and organizational effectiveness of schools in light of identified needs for student learning. The framework provides for the customization of improvement plans, helping schools be accountable for enacting the plan while addressing the expectations for which they are held accountable by their states or districts.

The process for developing and implementing the improvement plan has six parts:

PART 1: DEVELOPING THE PROFILE

This stage of planning outlines a process for gathering and analyzing

data in a variety of critical areas necessary for a comprehensive profile of the school, its students, and the community served by the school.

PART 2: DEFINING BELIEFS AND MISSION

This part assists the school's stakeholders in articulating beliefs and developing a mission statement that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school.

PART 3: DEFINING DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

In Part 3, a variety of data are analyzed to determine the extent to which students are reaching expectations for student learning, and targeted goals for improvement are identified.

PART 4: ANALYZING INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In this part of the improvement model, schools or districts assess the quality of their work by analyzing their instructional and organizational practices in support of the targeted goals for improving student learning. Schools review research-based indicators of high-performing systems to determine the extent to which these practices are currently evident in their schools, gathering evidence to support those perceptions. Goals for improving the capacity of schools in both instructional and organizational arenas are identified.

PART 5: DEVELOPING THE ACTION PLAN

In this stage of the model, teams determine the goals for the improvement plan and the specific action steps to achieve those goals. Schools identify resources necessary to implement the action steps along with the timelines and persons responsible for implementing the plan. An important final step in Part 5 is the identification of the means for evaluating the results of the action plan, that is, the impact on student learning, changes in the school's instructional and organizational systems, and evidence that the plan was implemented. This

evaluation plan provides direction regarding the types of data to be collected during the implementation stage.

PART 6: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN AND DOCUMENTING RESULTS

Schools monitor the implementation of their plan and collect evidence of improvement. As part of a continuous improvement plan, Part 6 provides direction on reviewing the impact of the plan and identifying new areas for focus in future cycles.

Procedure

Invitations and applications were initially sent to superintendents within a 25-mile radius of Philadelphia, inviting them to nominate school or district teams to participate in the Advanced Planning Institutes. The following seven schools or districts were selected to participate in Year 1:

- Alloway, NJ
- Clayton, NJ
- Fountain Woods, NJ
- Garnet Valley, PA
- New Hope-Solebury, PA
- Palisades, PA
- Rancocas Valley, NJ

During the initial two-day Institute in July 2001, participants were introduced to NSSE's school improvement model and the Institute's expectations and structure. It was explained that "just-in-time" training would be provided at each workshop, with teams completing or making progress on identified parts of the process prior to the next meeting. The July institute focused on Part 1: Developing the Profile and Part 2: Defining Beliefs and Mission.

A second two-day Institute held in October 2001 focused on Part 3: Defining Desired Results for Student Learning and Part 4: Analyzing Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness.

Work was initiated to collect information from participants for use in "Lessons From the Field," a publication that will tell the story of school

improvement at each of the team sites.

A third Institute held in December 2001 focused on Part 5: Developing the Action Plan.

Team members are expected to complete their action plans for the final meeting date in May 2002, which will address Part 6: Implementing the Plan and Documenting Results. NSSE staff are available to respond to questions and concerns from the participants throughout the process, from profile development to plan implementation and documentation of results.

Conclusion

The NSSE/LSS collaborative model appears to be well received based on evaluations gathered at the end of each Institute. NSSE staff find the Advanced Planning Institute model particularly effective due to the yearlong association with schools and districts and the provision of resources to assist with plan development (e.g., publications, surveys, scoring and analysis services).

In addition, natural networking has taken place among school/district teams. While participants appreciate the opportunity to plan and reflect on school improvement in their own settings, there is the added benefit of being able to exchange ideas and experiences with colleagues from neighboring districts. At the end of the Advanced Planning Institutes cycle, it is expected that participants will have developed viable school improvement plans for their own settings and established networks that will serve them in their continuing focus on school improvement.

References

- National Staff Development Council. (2001). *NSDC standards for staff development* [Online]. Available: <http://nsdc.org/library/standards2001.html>.
- National Study of School Evaluation. (1998, May). *School improvement: Focusing on student performance*. Schaumburg, IL: Author.