

Involve all stakeholders in aligning district, school, classroom goals

By J. Jay Marino

Closing achievement gaps and increasing student learning have never presented a more difficult challenge. Under the pressures of the No Child Left Behind Act, districts around the country are working to implement best practices in instruction, professional development and school improvement in hopes of increasing test scores. But this isn't enough. To harness the efforts of every employee, stakeholder and resource, superintendents are discovering the power of "systemic alignment," which means you align all processes in your school district with your strategic plan.

5 key steps to systemic alignment

Step 1: Establish clear vision, mission, core values and goals.

Create these elements through a process of participative leadership and let them serve as the compass that guides the improvement. Be sure you communicate your strategic plan to all stakeholders and that they use it as a critical decision-making instrument.

Step 2: Engage support service departments in aligning their work to the district strategic plan.

Systemic alignment means that *all* support service staff (or non-classroom personnel) can contribute to raising student achievement. Often, support service departments are forgotten in continuous quality improvement initiatives, as most of the focus is on work at the classroom level. Effective organizations ensure that all employees, regardless of their position or rank, understand how their work directly contributes to the vision, mission, core values and goals of the district. For example, by maintaining a positive atmosphere on the bus, a bus driver is helping students get a good start in the morning. Likewise, when the cafeteria staff provide vital nutrition to students, they should know they are making a positive contribution to the learning process.

Step 3: Ensure school improvement plans are aligned to the district strategic plan.

The typical school plan includes goals; action plans that define the strategies used to accomplish the goals; and a professional development component. Effective school districts ensure that school plans are tightly aligned to the

district's strategic goals. For example, if a goal of the district strategic plan is to have 100 percent of all second-graders reading at grade level, then every school needs to include a goal in its school improvement plan that ensures students in pre-K through first grade have the necessary interventions and support to be on grade level by second grade.

Step 4: Establish classroom goals that are aligned to the school improvement plan.

One way to promote alignment is to have classrooms establish SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound) goals that directly align to the school improvement plan. Classroom goals written in student-friendly language can be posted in classrooms, where progress can be measured and monitored by the students. For instance, if the school improvement plan calls for a reduction in discipline office referrals, then each classroom should have a goal to increase the percent of students who follow the rules. Teachers and students should collect, monitor and analyze classroom data and implement strategies.

Step 5: Connect every student to the school improvement plan.

When teachers assist students in setting individual goals, students begin to understand how their work connects to the goals of the classroom (which are aligned to the school improvement plan, which, in turn, is aligned to the district strategic plan). Classrooms should involve students in the monitoring and tracking of their own progress toward classroom goals in an individual student data folder. If the classroom goal is to increase the percent of students who follow classroom rules, then each student can track and monitor his own progress in doing so. Students can display their progress toward following classroom rules on a run chart and compare their achievement against the class average. ■

Insider Resources

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American Society for Quality: www.asq.org.