Best Practices in Strategic Planning, Organizational Development, and School Effectiveness [1]

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Running Head: Strategic Planning, Organizational Development, and School Effectiveness

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Overview

Over at least the past twenty-five years, virtually every state and school district in the country has worked in the area of school improvement in order to improve the academic and social-behavioral outcomes of all students. Prompted in the 1980s by the business community's demand for a more prepared workforce, in the 1990s by eight National Education Goals (National Education Goals Panel, 1999), and in the new millennium by the No Child Left Behind legislation, school-wide efforts to hold educators accountable for student outcomes are now required, continuously monitored, and reported annually. And while a number of school improvement models exist, their outcomes have varied (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2006), largely due to the interdependency between these models' ability to adapt and respond to local school and district conditions, and the local acceptance of a particular model along with a commitment to its sound implementation. In the end, schools and districts should focus first on the evidence- or research-based blueprints that can help guide their school improvement efforts. Using these blueprints as a foundation for all school-based initiatives, strategies, and activities, schools should be able to individualize their school improvement efforts while utilizing defensible, accountable school and schooling practices.

This chapter will integrate a number of evidence-based blueprints to provide schools and districts with a strategic "road-map" toward successful strategic planning, organizational development, and school effectiveness. Focused ultimately on students' academic and social-emotional progress and success, the blueprints also will address school management, classroom instruction, and professional development. As a first pragmatic step, however, schools need to be guided by four fundamental questions as the core of their continuous, outcome-based improvement journey:

1. How do we design and deliver an evidence-based academic and instruction system that successfully addresses the differentiated needs of all students while improving their rate of learning such that they progress through the grade levels and graduate from high school with functional and extended skills; and how do we create functional assessment and monitoring approaches that are curriculum-based and that are used to evaluate the impact of this instructional system and guide development of successful, strategic interventions when students do not respond to effective instruction?

2. How do we design and deliver an evidence-based positive behavioral support system that increases all students' interpersonal, problem-solving, and conflict resolution (i.e., social) skills; that creates safe and connected classroom and school environments; and that maximizes students' motivation and their academic engagement, independence, and confidence; and how do we create functional assessment and monitoring approaches that are ecologically-based and culturally-sensitive, and that are used to evaluate these school-wide efforts and guide the development of successful strategic and/or intensive interventions when students do not respond?

3. How do we increase our parent outreach and involvement so that all parents are motivated, capable, and involved in activities that support and reinforce the education of all students? To complement this, how do we increase our community outreach and involvement so that real interagency and community collaboration occurs resulting in effective, efficient, and integrated services to all students at needed prevention, strategic intervention, and intensive service levels?

4. Finally, how do we design and deliver this integrated, unified educational system through a strategic planning and organizational development process that incorporates data-based functional assessment and problem-solving to guide decision making and provide ongoing formative and summative evaluation? Moreover, how do we institutionalize this process such

that it becomes self-generating, self-replicating, and responsive to current and future student needs?

All of these needs and questions are essential to ongoing school improvement and success. But one "common denominator" determines all levels of improvement and success: the positive, collaborative relationships among the individuals actually implementing any strategically planned evidence-based initiative. That is, any school can choose and plan to implement an evidence-based school improvement program. But, process determines outcome. If that program is not implemented with integrity, enthusiasm, commitment, collaboration, and consistency, the "evidence base" becomes irrelevant and insignificant. School improvement and success is "all about the people." And the process needed for success involves "Seven C's": Communication, Caring, Commitment, Collaboration, Consultation, Consistency, and Celebration.

On a more formal level, we have known, figuratively, about the Seven C's for over a decade. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (1995) sponsored a 5-year, five community New Futures grant program to prepare disadvantaged urban youth for successful lives as adults. After investing an average of $10 million in each community over 5 years, the foundation evaluated the implementation and planned change process to help future initiatives to be more efficient and effective. In the end, the key lesson was that, in the low-income communities involved, systems-level initiatives, by themselves, could not transform poor educational, school, and health outcomes for vulnerable children and families. That is, institutional change was not enough; the comprehensive change process required home school and community collaboration that included social-capital and other economic-development initiatives targeting entire low-income neighborhoods. Among the other lessons described in this report were the following:

1. Comprehensive reforms are very difficult and involve, at times, the path of most resistance. True integration at the service-delivery level requires collective decision making across budgeting, staffing, and resource allocation; good communication and clear program planning, purpose, design, and expectations; attention to issues of power, race, and ethnicity; and time, trust, risk-taking, and perseverance.

2. Comprehensive reform requires advanced and ongoing efforts to build constituencies that are committed to long-term efforts, to strategic planning, and to the development of systems that can sustain the change process over time and through changes in leadership.

3. Comprehensive reform is not for every community, nor is every community at a readiness level to begin this process. Comprehensive reform efforts must be planned, public, realistic, and shared; and they need core leadership, management systems and skills, conviction and momentum, and credibility and legitimacy to have any hope of success.

4. Comprehensive reform requires a blend of outside technical assistance and local commitment, leadership, planning, funding, and evaluation that results in local ownership and self-renewal.

5. Comprehensive reform requires repair, revision, reassessment, and recommitment. Significant modification should not be interpreted as a sign of failure.

6. Comprehensive reform often requires the development of entirely new systems and ways of being. The alteration of existing systems or the implementation of new systems built alongside old systems often will not lead to real change and enduring outcomes.

And so, with the focus on people, process, and the Seven C's as a given, the remainder of this chapter will describe some essential evidence-based blueprints outlining a "road-map" toward successful strategic planning, organizational development, and school effectiveness.

Basic Considerations

To coordinate and facilitate a school-based organizational change and strategic planning process, school psychologists must have expertise and skills in four primary areas: (a) the evidence-based components, activities, and interactions underlying effective schools and educational practices; (b) the data-based problem-solving and decision-making processes, including the planning and development cycles, of schools and districts from an organizational perspective; (c) how to guide or support strategic planning processes such that effective, functional school improvement plans are written and executed; and (d) the consultation skills to facilitate proactive organizational change, effective group processes, student-focused instructional and behavioral skills and mastery, functional assessment, and strategic and intensive interventions. Among the more specific skills needed to succeed in these primary areas are the following: effective functional assessment and data-based problem solving skills; system, school, and classroom ecological or environmental assessment and intervention skills; system, staff, and student instructional, academic, and behavioral intervention skills at the prevention, strategic intervention, and intensive need levels; and action research and program evaluation skills. Among the beliefs needed to succeed in these primary areas, school psychologists need to: accept responsibility for all systems, staff, and students while differentially evaluating and attending to their respective strengths and needs, weaknesses and limitations, history and experiences, and opportunities and potential; deliver services based on functional needs and not perceptions or labels; commit themselves to continuous growth, viewing all challenges as professional development opportunities; and recognize that people, not just programs and interventions, facilitate short- and long-term change.

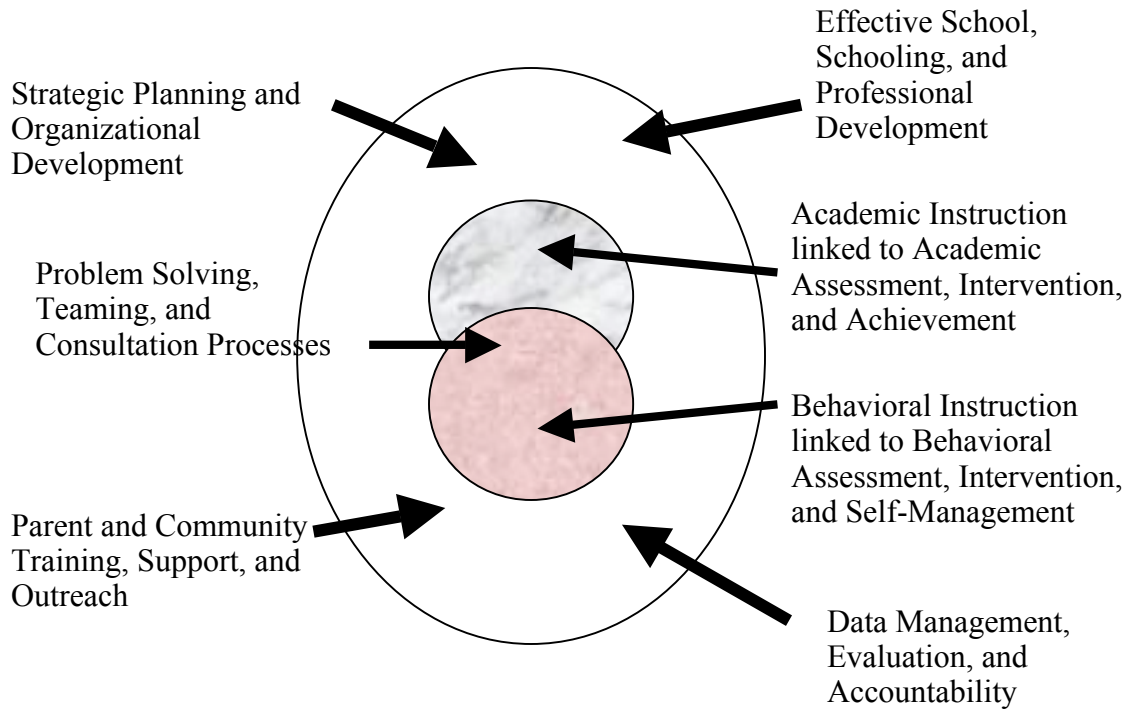
Best Practices

In the context of continuous school improvement (or any other planned change process), it is important to note that organizational change and strategic planning should be natural, necessary, and ongoing components of any healthy, evolving school. Indeed, as schools focus on student outcomes, they must attend to these organizational change and strategic planning processes to build the "infrastructures"—at the staff, school, system, and community levels—that coordinate resources, build capacity, support school-wide programs, and maximize success. As with most systemic endeavors, a comprehensive problem-solving process is needed (see Chapter XX in this Volume). But this process is facilitated by understanding (a) the components of an effective school; (b) how strategic planning fits into these components; and (c) how the school improvement process is organized through the committee structure of the school and the activities of school-level committees. Ultimately, a school or district's School Improvement Plan (SIP) is the public "document of accountability," and it synthesizes all of these planning and implementation processes. And yet, an essential question is, "Is the SIP a piece of paper written annually by one or two individuals to meet a state mandate, or is it a functional, comprehensive document that guides the monthly, weekly, and daily operation of the entire staff in the school?"

The Components of an Effective School. While their specific titles may vary slightly across different evidence-based school improvement models, a common core of effective school components has been consistently used to organize organizational development and strategic planning processes and procedures. Using Project ACHIEVE's evidence-based model as a guide (e.g., Knoff, Finch, & Carlyon, 2004), seven interdependent components are described briefly—components that form the foundation of a school's continuous improvement, committee-focused, professional development, and student-specific instructional activities. These components—(a) Strategic Planning and Organizational Analysis and Development; (b) Problem Solving,

Teaming, and Consultation Processes; (c) Effective School, Schooling, and Professional Development; (d) Academic Instruction linked to Academic Assessment, Intervention, and Achievement; (e) Behavioral Instruction linked to Behavioral Assessment, Intervention, and Self-Management; (f) Parent and Community Training, Support, and Outreach; and (g) Data Management, Evaluation, and Accountability—are also depicted in the figure below.

Figure 1. Project ACHIEVE's Seven Interdependent Components of an Effective School



1. The Strategic Planning and Organizational Development Component initially focuses on assessing the organizational climate, administrative style, staff decision-making, and other interactive and interpersonal processes in a school. Activities then move into identifying and reinforcing, or establishing and implementing the organizational policies, procedures, and cyclical approaches that support the academic and social-emotional/ behavioral success of all

students. While this process is outlined in more detail below, the ultimate "product" of this component are three- and one-year School Improvement Plans that help schools build capacity and autonomy, identify and focus resources, facilitate stability and sustainability, and realize student, staff, and system success.

2. The Problem Solving, Teaming, and Consultation Processes Component focuses on consistent, school-wide data-based, functional assessment, problem-solving approaches that all staff learn and use when developing effective instructional processes and then addressing students who are not responding to this instruction and the next "level" of evidence- or research-based classroom instruction or interventions. This "Response-to-Intervention" component emphasizes a "problem-solving/consultation/ intervention" mode of operation that directly contrasts with past "wait-to-fail" and "refer-test-place" approaches, and it is applied with students experiencing academic and/or behavioral concerns. As such, this component provides a foundation to the primary (whole-school), secondary (strategic intervention), and tertiary (intensive need, crisis management, and/or wrap-around/systems of care) prevention continua reflected in the academic and behavioral components below. And, as noted earlier, it recognizes that problem solving and intervention processes involve teams that work collaboratively for the school's "greater good," and professionals who work, as colleagues and consultants, to share knowledge, skill, expertise, and experience for the benefit of all students.

3. The Effective School, Schooling, and Professional Development Component focuses on processes that ensure that effective and differentiated instruction and effective and positive behavior management exists in every classroom for every student, and that involve all teachers, administrators, related service professionals, and others. To support this, effective schools recognize that professional development occurs, formally and informally, every day for every

staff person, and they systematically plan and implement ongoing professional development programs and processes resulting in increased knowledge, enhanced skills, and emerging confidence and autonomy. This occurs through in-service instruction and a clinical supervision approach that involves modeling, guided practice, informed feedback, planned applications, and the transfer of training. Ultimately, as with other components, the primary goal is to maximize students' attention to task, academic engaged time, positive practice repetitions, and academic and behavioral achievement.

4. The Academic Instruction linked to Academic Assessment, Intervention, and Achievement Component focuses on positively impacting the "Instructional Environment" in every classroom within a school. The Instructional Environment consists of the interdependent interactions, in a classroom, of the Teacher-Instructional process, the Student, and the Curriculum. Expanding briefly, the Instructional Environment involves (a) the different curricula being taught, as well as their respective standards, benchmarks, and scope and sequence objectives (i.e., "What needs to be learned?"); (b) the teachers who are teaching, and how they organize and execute their classroom instruction (i.e., "Are appropriate instructional and management strategies being used?"); and (c) the students who are engage in learning, and their capacity to master the instructional material, along with their response to effective instruction and sound curricula (i.e., Is each student capable, prepared, and able to learn, and are they learning?").

Critically, the data-based, functional assessment, problem-solving process and effective school and schooling practices, described in earlier components, are implicit in this component as the three facets of the Instructional Environment are analyzed continually to determine how students can be most academically and behaviorally successful, and what is happening when success is not occurring to the degree desired. When the latter occurs, a functional, curriculum-

based assessment and intervention approach to student achievement that uses, as much as possible, direct instruction and a mastery-model perspective of academic outcomes is recommended (e.g., Shapiro, 2004). This involves teaching teachers how to identify and analyze curricular and instructional variables and their relationship to student achievement outcomes, how to assess curricular (i.e., scope and sequence) placement and performance expectations, and how to complete curricular task analyses such that assessment is functionally linked to intervention in the classroom. Additionally, research results from learning theory and practice are integrated into the classroom to enhance the learning environment and process and to facilitate more positive outcomes (e.g., Stoner, Shinn, & Walker, 2002).

5. The Behavioral Instruction linked to Academic Assessment, Intervention, and Self-Management Component focuses on implementing comprehensive positive behavioral support systems across schools. Again using Project ACHIEVE and its evidence-based Positive Behavioral Self-Management System (PBSS), this whole school approach involves students, staff, administration, and parents building and reinforcing (a) students' interpersonal, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills and interactions; (b) positive, safe, supportive, and consistent school climates and settings; and (c) school and district capacity such that the entire process becomes self-sustaining. Thus, "Self-Management" occurs at three levels: student, staff and school, and system and district. This is accomplished through six domains at the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention levels. The first three domains include: (a) the direct instruction of social skills for all students in the classroom by general education teachers with the support of other mental health professionals for more challenging students (e.g., Knoff, 2001); (b) the development and use of school-wide accountability systems that specify expected student behavior, connected with positive responses, incentives, and rewards, and "intensity levels" of

inappropriate behaviors, connected with evidence-based responses and interventions that help decrease or eliminate these behaviors while establishing and increasing appropriate behaviors; (c) staff, setting, situations, system, and strategic consistency relative to social skills instruction and student accountability. The latter three domains include: (d) analyses and interventions, as needed, for a school's "setting and student special situations", which involves the common areas of the school (i.e., setting) and incidents of teasing, taunting, bullying, harassment, and fighting (i.e., student); (e) crisis prevention, intervention, and response; and (f) community and parent outreach and involvement, which should occur within all five of the domains noted above.

When students do not respond, behaviorally, to the preventative strategies within the six domains above, functional assessment is conducted and linked to strategic behavioral interventions that are designed to resolve identified behavioral problems and/or to improve staff's related instructional and classroom management procedures (Kerr & Nelson, 2002; Stoner, Shinn, & Walker, 2002). These interventions focus, for example, on specific referred problems exhibited by students (e.g., not completing homework, noncompliance, swearing, threatening others) or specific behaviors that, inappropriately, are or are not exhibited by teachers as part of the instructional process (e.g., not providing advanced organizers or appropriate instructional feedback, reinforcing inappropriate behavior through attention or using discipline inconsistently). In this context, staff need to have skills in behavioral observation, data collection, consultation, intervention, and intervention evaluation strategies and techniques. Interventions here typically address the direct instruction of specific behavioral skills, stimulus control approaches, behavioral addition approaches, behavioral reduction approaches, behavioral maintenance approaches, and behavioral generalization approaches (Kerr & Nelson, 2002; Stoner, Shinn, & Walker, 2002).

6. The Parent and Community Training, Support, and Outreach Component focuses on increasing the involvement of all parents, but especially the involvement of the parents of at-risk, underachieving, and students with disabilities (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Parental involvement in the school and educational process often occurs less in the homes of these latter students, and it often discriminates achieving from underachieving students (Christensen, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992; Dunst, Trivette, & Johanson, 1994). Relative to community involvement, many schools do not use, much less know, the expertise and resources available to them that can help their mission and the progress of their students. For students with significant academic or behavioral challenges, the coordination and integration of community-based professionals and services often results in stronger and more pervasive progress and outcomes.

Among the activities that schools may consider here are: (a) conducting needs assessments to look at the current and desired state of parent involvement and home-school-community collaboration; (b) organizing building staff around collaboration and community outreach through the school improvement process and plan; (c) teaching parents about the school's academic program and how to support students at home relative to study skills, homework, and literacy; (d) directly training parents to transfer critical school academic and behavioral interventions into the home; (e) creating Parent Drop-In Centers to encourage parent participation in school activities and parent access to training and learning materials; (f) completing community audits and resource directories to identify important organization, agency, and professional programs, skills, and expertise in areas relevant to the school, staff, and students; and (g) reaching out to these community resources, formally and informally, to establish communication, collaboration, and coordination, especially relative to services for at-risk, underachieving, and challenging students.

7. The Data Management, Evaluation, and Accountability Component focuses on actively evaluating, formatively and summatively, the status and progress of students' academic and behavioral mastery of skills and concepts, as well as the processes and activities inherent in all of the other supportive components (see above) of an effective school. Part of this process involves collecting formative and summative data that validate the impact of a school's strategic planning and school improvement efforts; its professional development and capacity-building efforts relative to the staff; its selection, training and implementation of academic and behavioral curricula and, later, interventions; and its effectiveness relative to the functional assessment, strategic intervention, and response to intervention services for students not making appropriate academic and behavioral progress. Another part of this process involves evaluating the consultative success of related service and support personnel with classroom teachers, as well as the interpersonal interactions that address the other process-oriented parts of the Seven C's that influence system, staff, and student success. Critically, this latter evaluation should evaluate "staff to staff, staff to parent and community, staff to student, and student and student interactions. All of these interactions collectively determine the climate and functioning of a school.

The Strategic Planning Process. Strategic planning is a continuous, systematic process that helps schools and districts to anticipate and plan their annual and multi-year goals and activities by analyzing their system-specific strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, as well as those of their communities. Designed to increase organizational and staff capacity and resources while facilitating outcomes, strategic planning involves ongoing activities whereby schools and districts (a) develop, implement, and evaluate programs and activities designed to meet their mission, goals, and student-related outcomes; (b) track their needs, plans, and progress over time,

(c) analyze and decide what programs, curricula, or interventions to add, delete, substitute, or supplement to existing programs, while determining when and how to make the "mid-course adjustments" to maximize these programs' success; and (d) anticipate and respond to upcoming or future events that may affect them in their pursuit of educational excellence. Ultimately, strategic planning uses a systems perspective to the organization and execution of the educational process emphasizing effective and efficient data-based planning and decision-making, personnel and resource development and management, fiscal and technological integrity, and school and community integration. While virtually every school and district is now mandated to have a School/District Improvement Plan, the "public" outcome of strategic planning, this does not mean that they have been trained in or have engaged in effective or comprehensive strategic planning.

Cook (1990) and Valentine (1991) provide two complementary perspectives as to how strategic planning should occur. Cook divides strategic planning into five phases: Phase I-- Preparing for Planning and Change; Phase II-- Developing the Goals and Outcomes of the Strategic (or School Improvement) Plan; Phase III-- Outlining the Strategic Plan's Implementation Process; Phase IV-- Implementing and Monitoring the Plan; and Phase V-- Renewing the Plan.

During Phase I, the school or district engages in the following activities:

1. An External Environmental Scan and Analysis where (a) economic, demographic, social, political, and education trends are analyzed; (b) national, state, regional, and local patterns in the trend areas above are evaluated; (c) scenarios that predict future environmental events and their impact on the school are created; and (d) school-based responses to the most likely scenarios, within the resources and the school's capabilities, are generated.

2. An Internal Organizational Scan and Analysis where the strengths (or assets), weaknesses (or limitations), resources (or opportunities), and barriers within the school are identified, guided by the components of an effective school described above (see again Figure 1).

3. An Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions and Expectations, where the needs and goals of the staff and students are identified and analyzed, along with those of critical stakeholders (e.g., parents, businesses, others) in the community.

4. A Community Education Process that ties the entire process together (a) by helping all internal and external stakeholders understand the data that have been collected, the trends and scenarios identified, and how these data will be utilized during the next strategic planning phases, and (b) by involving these stakeholders as equal partners in the change process to come.

In Phase II, the foundation to the strategic (or school improvement) plan is drafted by taking the results of the external and internal scans and sequentially developing a vision statement, a mission statement, strategic goals and desired outcomes. Consistent with the previous section, the strategic plan should have prominent sections focusing on the each of the components of school effectiveness. That is, sections of the plan should describe the annual goals and outcomes for the school or district's (a) strategic planning and organizational development processes; (b) early intervention, problem solving, teaming, consultation, and response to intervention processes; (c) effective school, schooling, and professional development processes; (d) student-focused academic achievement, and curriculum and instruction processes; (e) student-focused behavioral outcome and positive behavioral support processes; and (f) parent and community training, support, and outreach processes. Beyond this, each section of the plan should have its own data management, evaluation, and accountability activities built in to determine the whether the specified goals and outcomes have been attained.

Once drafted, this foundation to the strategic plan is reviewed by members of the planning team, by critical client and stakeholder groups, and by others who might be either politically or functionally important to the implementation process. Ultimately, the feedback from this review process is synthesized and evaluated, and revised goals and outcomes are finalized. According to Cook (1990), when first engaging in the strategic planning process or when a strategic plan is being changed in comprehensive ways, the Phase II process may take a school or district up to 3 months. Even then, the strategic plan's goals and outcomes still may be adapted in Phase III.

In Phase III, all of the strategic (or improvement) plan's implementation steps and processes are written and formalized at the school and/or district levels. Thus, in each of the six components noted, the objectives, activities, timelines, resources, and evaluation tools and procedures needed to attain the previously identified goals and outcomes are specified. In addition, the strategic planning process now must be coordinated with the district's budgeting cycle. More specifically, most districts finalize their budgets each new school year (typically beginning on July 1st), during the prior spring. This provides the district, and its schools, with operating funds to, for example, hire new staff, purchase new equipment and curricula, and initiate needed construction projects. Given this, most schools complete their strategic plans with budget requests by early February. Most districts present these plans and budgets to their school boards by March. And, most school boards approve these plans and pass their budgets by May. Once these activities are completed, the district and its schools know what financial, personnel, and material resources will be available to support strategically planned activities.

At times, school districts write 3- to 5-year "Strategic Operation Plans" (SOPs) to guide the development of their annual district improvement plans. These strategic operation plans most often contain a series of operational goals and objectives for each of the district's organizational

units or departments (e.g., Administration, Leadership, and Human Resources; Financial and Legal; Transportation, Maintenance, and Food Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Personnel and Professional Development; Public Relations and Community and Family Outreach, Accountability and Evaluation), along with a prioritization of these goals, and the activities, resources, and budget needed to accomplish these goals. These operational plans work symbiotically with the district and its schools' annual school improvement planning process and eventual plans, providing structure and direction for their Phase III planning.

In Phase IV, the strategic (or school improvement) plan is implemented and evaluated formatively and summatively. While the SIP guides all school, staff, and student activities, it is supplemented—at the staff level—by a Professional Development Plan (PDP) or Individual Performance Plan for every staff person in a school. The PDP documents each staff member's professional goals, objectives, and responsibilities for the school year, and it identifies the outcomes and procedures needed to evaluate every staff member's year-long performance and accomplishments. Significantly, PDPs are based on the activities outlined in the district's strategic operation plan and the school's individual strategic plan. In fact, PDP goals and outcomes directly assist the school and district to accomplish SIP goals and outcomes. Thus, an important interdependence exists across SOPs, SIPs, and PDPs, and across the entire strategic planning process.

Finally, after implementing a strategic (or school improvement) plan for almost a year, it is reviewed and renewed during Phase V. At this point, the school typically has accomplished a great deal, and yet it must determine if its strategic direction and activities are still valid. To do this, the strategic planning team should re-evaluate the school's external and internal environmental conditions since the writing of the original plan, re-visit the mission statement and

strategic goals, review the district's SOP, and re-focus the strategic plan as necessary, assessing the organization's commitment, resources, and energies toward the next level of accomplishment.

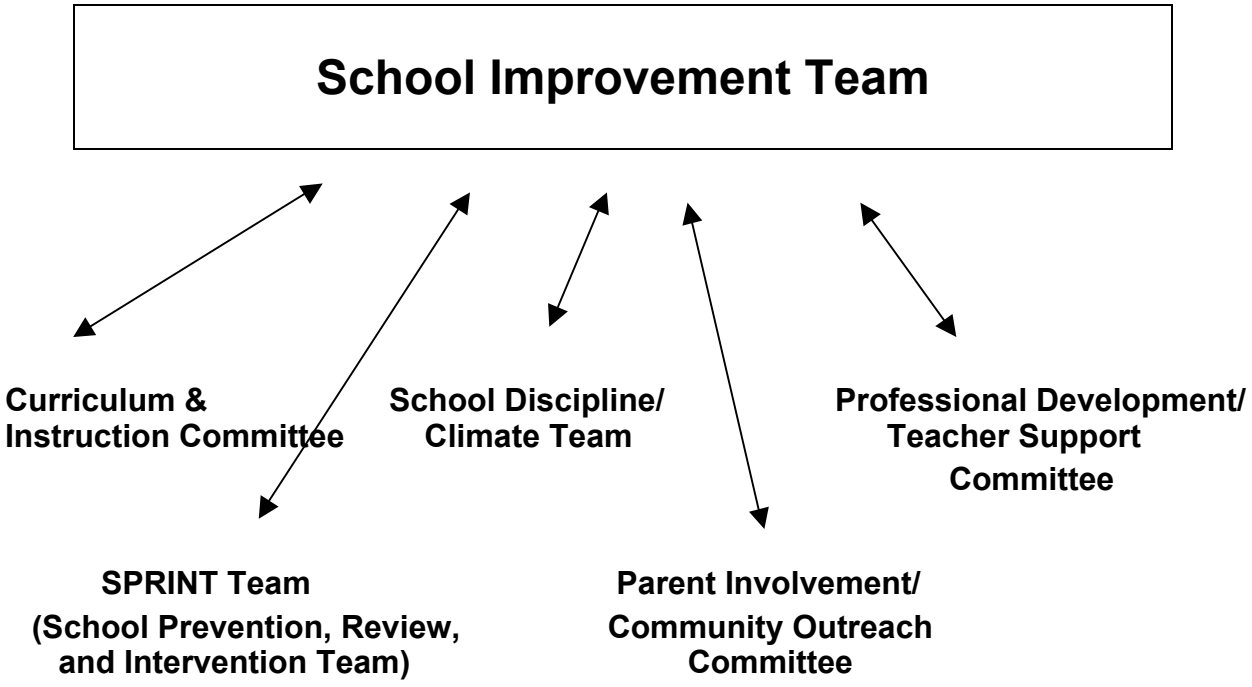
Valentine (1991) organizes her strategic planning process into five levels: Level 1-- The Pre-Planning Stage of the Planning Process; Level 2-- Re-Defining the Organization's Direction; Level 3-- Developing the Strategic Mind-Set; Level 4-- Implementing Goals, Objectives, and Strategies; and Level 5-- Reassessing and Institutionalizing the Change Process (see Figure 2). While Valentine's strategic planning process appears more complex and comprehensive than Cook's (1990), hers is actually just a more descriptive expansion. Thus, it is instructive to review her process and compare it to Cook's approach above. In the end, every facet of Valentine's model has already been described. It does, however, provide a good summary to this section of the chapter.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The Committee Structure of a School. The SIP, which operationally reflects the characteristics of an effective school (see discussions above), is best implemented through a school committee structure that maintains the same consistent organization. To this end, the diagram below presents a recommended "organizational map" for a school's building-level committees. The suggested structure is a flexible blueprint that should be adapted to fit a school's strategic needs, organizational realities (e.g., state statutes, school size, local politics), and desired outcomes. But, the premise behind this structure is that, just like a business, an effective school must have committees and people to take responsibility—in organized, planful,

and coordinated ways—for the goals, activities, and outcomes of its SIP using shared leadership approaches.

Figure 3. Blueprint and Recommendation of an Organizational Map of a School's Committee Structure



Briefly, the committee structure recommended above has six primary committees. The committee that coordinates and guides all of the strategic plan and implementation processes in a school is the School Improvement Team. This committee is made up of the chairs of all of the other school-wide committees and a representational sample of teachers, related service staff, support staff, school administrators, parent and/or community leaders, and sometimes students. This committee is primarily responsible for overseeing the Strategic Planning and Organizational Analysis and Development component and activities of the SIP, for most site-based management and related fiscal decisions, and for evaluating all school-level and student-specific outcomes. It

is significant to note that the School Improvement Team is the super-ordinate committee to which all other committees report. The remaining five committees include:

The Curriculum and Instruction Committee looks at the most effective ways to implement new and existing district- and building-level curricula into the classroom such that they are most effectively taught to all students. This committee is largely responsible for the school and SIP's Academic Instruction linked to Academic Assessment, Intervention, and Achievement component and activities.

The School Discipline/School Climate Committee is the building-level committee that oversees the implementation of the school's positive behavioral support system consisting of the social skills, accountability system, special situation analyses, crisis prevention and management, and related parent and community outreach programs. Thus, this committee is largely responsible for the school and SIP's Behavioral Instruction linked to Behavioral Assessment, Intervention, and Self-Management component and activities.

The Professional Development/Effective Instruction/Teacher Mentoring Committee organizes and oversees the school's professional development and peer-supervision activities to ensure that all teachers and staff are teaching and interacting with students at the highest levels of effectiveness and professionalism. This committee is largely responsible for the school and SIP's Effective School, Schooling, and Professional Development component and activities.

The SPRINT (School Prevention, Review, and Intervention Team) Committee (Knoff, 2005) is responsible for developing and implementing—especially in general education classrooms with the teachers teaching there—the data-based problem-solving and intervention process that addresses the academic and/or behavioral needs of students who are not responding to effective instruction. The SPRINT team is composed of the strongest academic and behavioral

intervention specialists in and available to the school, and it is also responsible for determining a student's eligibility for more intensive special education services if strategic interventions, over time and consistent with IDEA, are not successful. Given this, this committee is largely responsible for the school and SIP's Problem Solving, Teaming, and Consultation Processes component and activities, but this committee's activities clearly overlap with other committees, especially those focused on the school's academic and behavioral programming for all students.

Finally, the Parent Involvement/Community Outreach Committee is responsible for actively involving parents in school activities and in supporting the educational process for all students at home. It also helps to coordinate community resources such that needed and effective home-school-community partnerships are created to address the needs of all students, parents, and others. Thus, this committee is largely responsible for the school and SIP's Parent and Community Training, Support, and Outreach component and activities.

Bonus Best Practices

Beyond the best practices already discussed, five practical "bonus best practices" are recommended to complement the broader, more systemic strategies above. These best practices emphasize the importance of effective team functioning, resource recognition, periodic reviews of consultation and intervention activities, and the need to transfer the "student lessons learned" in effective ways.

Choosing and Rotating Committee Members. In order to fully implement a "shared leadership model" of organizational development and school improvement, it is strongly recommended that every instructional staff member be on at least one school-level committee (some staff, due to their leadership positions either at a grade level or of a committee, also may be on the School Improvement Team). If a grade level has, for example, four teachers, a sound

approach to committee membership would have one teacher on a separate committee (e.g., on the Curriculum and Instruction, School Discipline/School Climate, Professional Development/Effective Instruction/Teacher Mentoring, and Parent Involvement/Community Outreach Committee, respectfully). Beyond this, it is recommended that the teachers on each committee serve a three-year term (that may be renewed once), and that the committee terms be staggered so that only one-third of a committee rotates off a committee in any one year. All of this ensures that school-level committees have appropriate grade-level teacher representation (related service and other non-instructional specialists are assigned to committees more in line with their skills and potential contribution to the committee), continuity, and yet, that their membership periodically changes so they don't become "stale" or "institutionalized."

Publishing a School Resource Directory. In order to facilitate problem-solving and formal and informal consultation for teachers who have students with academic or behavioral challenges, the development of a School Resource Directory is recommended. Developed after a school's entire staff has completed a brief two-page questionnaire, this Directory identifies staff member's formal degrees and areas of certification or specialization, formal areas of in-service training and professional development, academic and/or behavioral areas of expertise, and special skills or talents or hobbies. The front section of the Directory is organized by grade level and teacher, while the back section is organized across specific skill areas, listing all of the teachers who feel comfortable being formal or informal consultants to another colleague in each area.

Completing Report Card Scans. Given the primary focus on students' academic and behavioral skills, mastery, and self-management, it is important to functionally track students' progress over time. While this is best done by classroom teachers who continuously monitor the

progress of students using classroom- and curricularly-sensitive authentic measures, other evaluation "layers" help to confirm and extend teacher-generated data. One layer involves the academic, behavioral, and attendance data on students' report cards.

It is recommended that schools' SPRINT teams complete a "report card" scan, after each marking period, of every students' academic grades, behavior ratings (if documented), and attendance. Usually done electronically (or by teacher report), students can be "red-flagged" if there are significant (downward) changes in grades or classroom behavior from one quarter to the next, and/or significant problems with attendance, including school tardiness or requests to visit the nurse's office. By creating decision rules (e.g., a drop of three total grade blocks in more than one academic subject—say, three courses dropping from Bs to Cs—or a drop of two grade blocks in any one academic subject; being absent from 10% or more of the instructional days in the quarter), teachers and other professionals can be consulted regarding red-flagged students to determine the need for further problem solving, functional assessment, and interventions.

Conducting a Year-End Consultation Referral Audit. In order to analyze the referral patterns for early intervention services at any level of the SPRINT process (i.e., grade-level or building-level SPRINT requests for consultation), it is essential that SPRINT teams conduct at least an annual Consultation Referral Audit. Typically done in April or May, this audit involves summarizing all of the SPRINT referrals for the past year across the following dimensions: (a) student age and grade; (b) time of year when referred; (c) specific presenting problem(s) (e.g., reading fluency, mathematical applications, ability to sustain academic attention and engagement); and (d) specific interventions identified, implemented, and successful. With this information, the SPRINT team can identify referral trends and patterns; "early warning"

indicators so that younger students, who may eventually experience similar concerns, can receive early, preventative interventions; and professional development needs so that teachers, who will likely need more intensive interventions for underachieving and challenging students, can be trained before actually needed these interventions—thus facilitating the consultation and intervention process. In this way, past referrals result in future effective and preventative practices, allowing students to receive strategic intervention services, earlier, more quickly, and more successfully, from more prepared general education teachers with or without the need for related service or other SPRINT-related consultations.

Identifying "Get-Go' Students for the New Year. Too often, teachers and SPRINT teams or consultants spend a lot of time completing functional analyses of students experiencing academic or behavioral challenges and implementing successful strategic or intensive interventions only to have all of these processes discontinued with the end of the school year. That is, many schools do not strategically plan a transition process for student interventions from one school year to the next. Using the belief that "the new school year begins in April," it is recommended that the SPRINT team, with relevant classroom teachers, complete a review of all students who have received pre-referral or early intervention services, at any level of intensity, during April. Thus, the review should include all students on IEPs, 504, or state-required Academic Intervention (or Behavioral) Plans. During this review, three groups of students are identified: (a) "Get-Go" students who need immediate academic or behavioral interventions on Day 1 of the new school year, (b) "At-Risk" students, who have enough intervention needs that their new teacher(s) need a systematic briefing from the previous year's teacher(s) and consultant(s) before the next school year begins; and (c) "Check-In" students, who need someone from the SPRINT team to check in

with their teacher(s) approximately 2 to 4 weeks into the new school year. Medically fragile and students with attendance problems should also be "challenges" that the SPRINT team considers.

By completing this "Get-Go" process, the probability that the functional assessment, consultation, and intervention "lessons learned" will be effectively transferred from one school year to the next is increased. Moreover, this process may help determine how students will be functionally grouped the next year, and what teachers will have the greatest potential for success. And, finally, this process can ensure that the "next year" teachers will receive the needed intervention information, training, and support before the new school year begins so that the services and strategies needed by the selected students are delivered in timely and effective ways.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the important processes and procedures that relate to school improvement and effectiveness as facilitated by strategic planning and organizational development strategies. Focusing on students' academic and social-emotional progress and success, four fundamental questions—addressing academics and instruction, behavior and school climate, parent and community involvement, and planning and evaluation decisions, were presented as the core of any school's continuous improvement journey. To further guide this journey, three major areas were detailed: (a) the components of an effective school; (b) how strategic planning fits into these components; and (c) how the school improvement process is organized through the committee structure of the school and the activities of school-level committees. The school or district School Improvement Plan (SIP) was identified as the public "document of accountability" that synthesizes all of these planning and implementation processes. During this discussion, two complementary strategic planning models were presented by highlighting their most important elements across five sequential phases: Phase I--Creating a

Base for Planning and Change; Phase II--Developing the Strategic Plan; Phase III--Developing the Implementation Plan; Phase IV-- Implementing and Monitoring the Plan; and Phase V--Renewing the Plan. The chapter concluded by briefly describing five "bonus best practices" related to choosing and rotating committee members, publishing a School Resource Directory, completing report card scans and year-end Consultation Referral Audits, and identifying "Get-Go" students in May for the new school year.

Today's children are coming to the schoolhouse door significantly at-risk for both educational and social failure. Schools and districts must use systematic and strategic planning and implementation processes so that they build the "infrastructures"—at the staff, school, system, and community levels—that help to coordinate resources, build capacity, support school-wide programs, and maximize the academic and social-emotional/behavioral success of all students. With this success, current and future generations of students will more quickly and readily demonstrate the independent learning and behavioral self-management skills that they need—not just when they are in school, but when they return to their homes, when they enter the workforce, and when they progress beyond to lead their communities and our country.

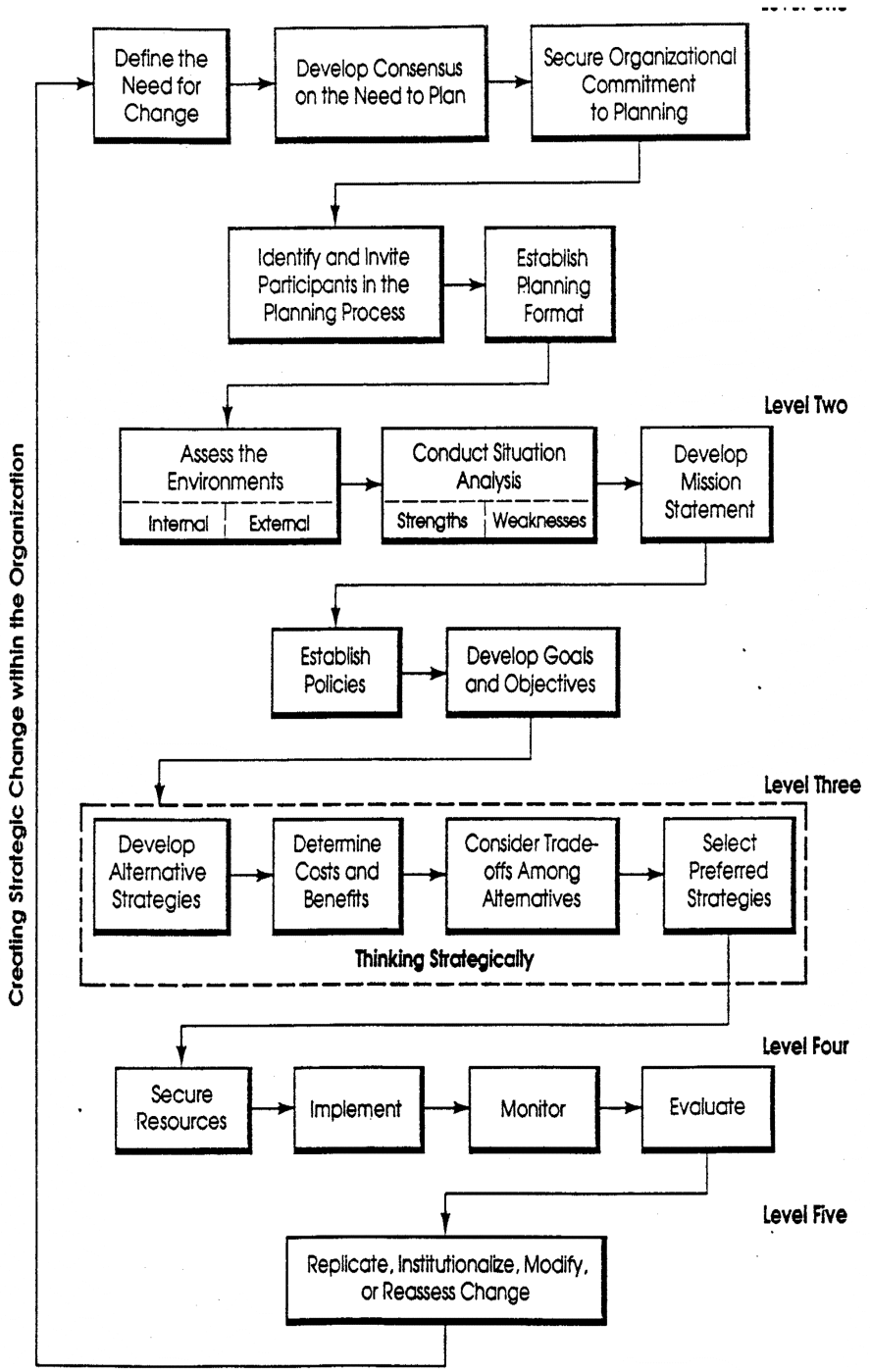


Figure 2. Valentine's Strategic Management and Planning Model
Adapted with permission from Valentine (1991).

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Annotated Bibliography

Blankstein, A. M. (2006). Failure is not an option: Six principles that guide student achievement in high performing schools. New York: Sage Publications.

Based on fifteen years of practical research on what is working in schools, this book emphasizes the importance of professional learning communities as the center of school reform. In this context, six guiding principles are described for creating and sustaining a high performing

school: (a) a common mission, vision, values, and goals: (b) systems for prevention and intervention; (c) collaborative teaming for teaching and learning; (d) data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement; (d) active engagement from family and community; and (f) building sustainable leadership capacity. The book provides a theory-into-practice perspective, and provides a number of case studies or vignette that help to concretize its points. It also looks at ways that schools have been both successful and unsuccessful so that schools can avoid pitfalls while implementing successful strategies.

Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center. (2006). CSRQ Center Report on Elementary School Comprehensive School Reform Models. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

This updated guide reviews and evaluates 22 comprehensive school reform models relative to their quality and effectiveness. Providing snapshots of each approach's implementation process, first-year adoption costs, and effects on student achievement, this guide also lists papers, articles, and books about each model and their documented effectiveness. While the guide does not endorse or discredit any of the approaches—trying, instead, to describe and objectively evaluate—this resource provides a good overview of many of the school reform approaches used nationwide with decision-making guidelines on how to evaluate school reform and improvement efforts.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

An important work by an educator and researcher who began her work as a public school teacher and has been involved in the policy and practice of school reform for many years. Darling-Hammond's book describes ways to significantly improve not only individual schools but the overall system of education. Focusing especially on the needs and diversity of students, this book addresses such topics as how to structure "learner-centered" schools, to staff schools for teaching and learning, to reinforce teaching as a profession, and to respond to standards without losing the educational process.

Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (2006). The knowledge deficit: Closing the shocking education gap for American children. Charlottesville, VA: The Core Knowledge Foundation.

Authored by the founder of the Core Knowledge, this book provides a roadmap toward closing the achievement gap in our country's schools. Recognizing that many students, even those who have mastered reading skills during the early elementary school years, begin to slide after fourth grade and fail at more difficult comprehension tasks, this book advocates the use of core curricula that are explicitly outlined, focused on content and comprehension, and that provide students the foundational knowledge and context that they need to understand concepts, constructs, and areas requiring higher ordered thinking skills. This book is the culmination of Hirsh's many years implementing the school reform principles and practices of Core Knowledge, one of the long-recognized national school reform models that has been implemented in hundreds of schools across the country. It integrates the latest scientific thinking on neurological development and applies it to instruction that must meet state, national, and international standards. And, it takes a preschool through high school perspective that is specific, practical, and has already been "scaled up" and demonstrated to be successful.

Valentine, E. P. (1991). Strategic management in education: A focus on strategic planning. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

This "book" (which is actually sold in a three-ring binder) provides a comprehensive strategic management model that is designed to assist the reader in guiding a school district through the strategic planning process. Supported by case studies and citations from the management literature, the book has three parts: Strategic Management—Its Role in Education; Planning for Strategic Change; and Creating Strategic Change Within the Organization. In addition, the book has over 30 step-by-step worksheets that operationalize the process and make the author's approach an easy one for anyone who understands the interdependent components of the school system to implement. This is a useful book that can help a reader to more completely understand the inner workings of strategic planning.