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Introduction

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

—*Anne Frank*



School improvement in its current form is ubiquitous in public and private schools in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, as well as most developed nations around the world. For North Americans, at least a generation has passed since the wholesale adoption of school improvement planning as a means to improve student achievement and build capacity among staff. A number of school improvement models identify the attributes that increase student achievement, the most notable being Larry Lezotte's seven Correlates of Effective Schools, which were updated in 2008 to reflect refinements in the process. The correlates continue to offer a solid and consistent framework for school improvement. Other models such as Schools that Learn (Senge, 2000), Success for All (Eide, 2001), and Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 2004) have influenced school improvement practices and state and district improvement templates for decades. A 2004 innovation is the PIM school improvement process (Reeves, et al. 2007), which identifies planning, implementation, and monitoring as distinct phases of school improvement and school change (see appendix A for sample rubrics from the PIM framework). Each phase is supported by deep research in leading change, educational reform,

high-yield instructional strategies, data analysis, collaboration, and strategic planning (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Elmore, 2004; Fernandez, 2006; Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, 2006; Reeves, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2008b; Reeves et al., 2007; Rushkoff, 2005; Schmoker, 2006; Surowiecki, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2002; White, 2005a).

For this book, we applied our experience reviewing thousands of written plans, as well as supporting schools and district officials in carrying out these plans, to identify the critical best practices, approaches, and antecedent conditions necessary for the next generation of school improvement efforts. Schools will need the added clarity in focus and delivery that this volume provides in order to meet the changing needs of students; respond to new dynamics in technology, teaching, and how schools are structured and operated; and maintain a cohesive focus that is predictive of improved achievement and narrowing of student gaps. Collaboration is critical, but not enough in itself, and must be used smartly to improve the quality and efficiency of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Accountability is also critical, but unlikely to yield the necessary gains or to inform school practitioners unless it is embedded in a comprehensive framework and practical cycle of improvement, as this book outlines.

School Improvement for the Next Generation changes the school improvement emphasis from creating an improvement cycle to refining the quality of that cycle, with clearly defined planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation protocols undergirded by extensive collaboration and accountability. We draw on these next-generation components to examine school improvement in a new light for a new era.

A conservative estimate of the number of professional hours spent developing and publishing school improvement plans since the early 1980s is staggering, representing several thousand dollars each year for the smallest of schools. With over one hundred thousand schools in the United States alone, one has to ask, has the investment been worth the effort? What changes have occurred in terms of student achievement? To what degree has this collaborative process raised the level of professionalism? Has the profession been informed by the lessons learned through school improvement? In 2004, we embarked on a journey to answer these questions through an extensive review of school improvement plans across the continent. The first generation of school improvement plans established a foundation for change that offers today's educators an opportunity that prior generations did not enjoy: widespread, collaborative, shared decision making with broad stakeholder representation in which parents and students are accepted team members. The first generation introduced the need for measurable goals, exclusive accountability, and aligned district and school efforts—often for the first time. The process reminded schools everywhere to step back and establish their vision: what they wanted to achieve, why, and when. Finally, first-generation school improvement offered educators a means to introduce innovations and determine their effectiveness. These huge changes set the stage for a second generation, or second order, of improvement. We are all indebted to those pioneers who have brought us thus far.

School Improvement for the Next Generation is designed to address a few fundamental shifts in thinking and practice that will allow schools to achieve ambitious goals that have been elusive

in the past. In subsequent chapters, we examine practical and proven ways schools and school districts can close achievement gaps while serving all students with greater clarity and deeper implementation.

Chapter 1 introduces a hypothetical high school—Kelly County High School—that experiences very real challenges in school improvement. In addition, it reviews the school improvement literature to provide the reader with ample evidence to warrant a sea change in school improvement efforts—one that requires the shifts in thinking described in the Kelly County High School scenario to meet the needs of all students in this increasingly complex new century. Readers will also become acquainted with colleagues who are learning to utilize this familiar mechanism to raise the bar in terms of both achievement and teaching.

Chapter 2 describes the inherent challenges of school improvement and the difficulty educators face in managing competing priorities and limiting the scope of the improvement plan to a few critical targets that will change practice. Implicit in school improvement for the next generation is the ability of the school improvement process to not only accomplish goals in terms of student achievement but to build capacity and shape a culture as well.

Chapter 3 describes the planning process and the importance of gathering data from multiple sources ensuring a solid process of inquiry that yields powerful SMART goals targeted to meet the needs of specific students. School improvement efforts are only as focused and effective as the data used to inform the design of the plan and the goals that describe a preferred outcome at the end of the improvement cycle.

Chapter 4 describes the necessary ingredients and strategies for deep implementation that are designed not only to introduce and establish best practices but sustain them. Master plan design, targeted instructional strategies, and focused and supported professional development are described holistically rather than as separate elements of school improvement, enabling schools to respond with agility to the changing needs of students and changing requirements and challenges for teachers. Examples from champion school systems illustrate the power of pursuing best practices in school improvement as relentlessly as educators have pursued the most effective classroom practices and strategies.

Chapter 5 delineates the importance and purpose of monitoring, its common pitfalls, and the reasons monitoring is as important to school improvement as feedback is to classroom learning. Sample strategies from districts in the United States and Canada illustrate what will be needed in order to succeed during the next generation of school improvement.

Chapter 6 describes the evaluation process in school improvement as a process that systematically identifies lessons learned and subsequent next steps needed to apply that learning. We suggest that this component of school improvement has been the least utilized to improve achievement and establish best practices. The evaluation cycle is examined from a practical perspective to help practitioners learn as much from school improvement processes as can be learned from solid item analysis of student achievement.

Chapter 7 describes how school improvement is itself an opportunity for leaders to establish credibility, refine innovations, develop expertise, and mentor and coach others in leadership development. This chapter describes the unique attributes of school improvement that make it the key unit of educational reform in terms of leadership development, collaborative inquiry, and application of action research at the classroom level.

Chapter 8 makes a frontal assault on initiative overload and ambitious but unattainable school improvement plans that attempt to do too much too quickly with too little. This chapter offers readers a compelling rationale to do more by attempting less, and offers explicit strategies to not only achieve excellence but continue to raise the bar in terms of rigor, cross-curricular integration, and deep schoolwide implementation.

Chapter 9 frames the emerging best practices in school improvement as an opportunity for discovery and substantive action research in every school and school district. We encourage readers to capitalize on the level of expertise that exists within their schools and districts to improve professional practice and sustain gains in student achievement. Throughout this volume, readers will recognize themselves in the skill and talents of our hypothetical high school principal and faculty, as well as extensive examples from practitioners in the field who have discovered the potential in a new look, a fresh look, a next-generation look at the process known as school improvement.

We believe your own sense of urgency will be heightened as a result of this book, and that you will join with us in calling for a renewed effort to improve schools that takes no more time and certainly no more effort than is expended today.

A next-generation monitoring plan describes a continuous improvement cycle and provides an agile mechanism to respond to data monitored through midcourse corrections. Quality plans routinely examine results in both student achievement and professional practice by monitoring two forms of data: (1) the teaching and leadership practices that precede student results and specify the quality and fidelity of implementation of selected best practices and (2) the indicators of student achievement from a variety of perspectives, including student behavior, preparedness, and participation.

Monitoring Frequency

Monitoring frequently—at least five to ten times annually—allows teams to assess and respond to the need for adjustments in instruction and leadership support in order to deliver that instruction more effectively. While a number of studies recommend even more frequent assessments of student achievement (Marzano, 2007; Yeh, 2007), we recommend a level of frequency that provides frequent review and sufficient response time to change practices systematically.

Evaluation

While monitoring is a formative process, evaluation occurs within the improvement cycle (formative) *and* represents the final step in the improvement cycle (summative). Evaluation is the reflection-after-action part of the process that causes school teams to examine results, infer cause-and-effect relationships, recall specific examples to support their inferences, determine the degree to which improvement efforts worked, and more importantly, roll this identified collective learning into the next improvement cycle. This allows teams to weed out practices that fail to yield desired results and to replicate successes that do.

Evaluation ensures that each school compares planned outcomes with actual outcomes, identifies lessons learned, and applies those lessons to future plans. Next-generation evaluation is also transparent in that compared results (positive and negative), as well as plans to update future cycles, are systematically communicated to primary stakeholders (families, educators, staff, patrons, partners, and the public). Evaluation is part of a continuous improvement timeline—a yearlong calendar that identifies specific, coordinated dates for each of the steps of the school improvement cycle for *all* goals. Quality evaluation always explicitly describes the actions that will be taken in light of the evidence presented. Powerful evaluation plans respond to a series of hypotheses for action, first in the inquiry process and subsequently in the action plan components. As a result, schools and districts will have more complete information at their disposal to identify lessons from their efforts.

We have identified six common phases—collaboration, accountability, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—in school improvement planning, which the following chapters will expand on in greater detail, but the strategies and structures that will define the next generation of school improvement are drawn from ideas and solutions that champions of school improvement have applied in schools and systems across North America.

Table 5.1: A Comparison of Monitoring Plans

	Strategy/ Action	Responsible Person	Measurement	Timeline
School A	The sixth-grade PLC will meet weekly to analyze data to establish instructional decisions and interventions.	F. Halderon Principal Science lab teacher Sixth-grade classroom teachers	Weekly teacher-made tests, benchmark tests every three weeks, Central Region Benchmarks, common assessments, rubrics, portfolio reflections, vocabulary development	Aug. 2007–May 2008
School B	All teachers will provide tutorials after school two days per month in each of the core subject areas. Tutorials will be based on common assessment disaggregated data provided the prior week. Schedule will be developed and monitored by department chairs.	Instructional coach will (1) disaggregate tutorial data, post it weekly, and present at faculty meeting each month and (2) guide four modified lessons, one per week for all teachers. English/language arts chair will monitor the percentage of modified lessons completed.	Every third Friday, students take a common assessment. One process paper will be written for each grade level; a minimum of six process papers will be completed per semester.	Tuesday/Thursday tutorials begin Oct. 11–Dec. 11 Review Dec. 18 Jan. 7–Mar. 11, review Mar. 18 Mar. 25–May 14, review May 18

White & Smith, 2006

Although a process of continuous improvement is not easily discernible from this snapshot of School B, it is possible to identify the connections between the tutorial activities and the development of modified lessons based on tutorial data. These connections are not so clear in School A's plan, which describes PLC meetings as a strategy. School A's measurements are broadly defined, and the action to "establish instructional decisions and interventions" is obtuse. Ironically, School A may have selected the more powerful intervention, but School B has developed a monitoring plan that reveals with greater clarity what they hope to accomplish.

Elkhart Community Schools in Indiana provide an excellent example of a districtwide monitoring system. In 2005, the district began an aggressive staff development program for all teachers and administrators. Leaders selected three related content areas for widespread training: Making Standards Work, data teams, and utilization of Marzano's (2001) effective teaching strategies. Unlike many districts, Elkhart realized that without ongoing coaching and embedded just-in-time training, deep implementation would be difficult to achieve, and even more difficult to sustain. Consequently, Elkhart constructed a monitoring plan to measure the degree to which these

The monitoring phase frequently captures evidence of the degree to which the master plan is implemented with fidelity. It examines progress in student achievement, quality of adult implementation, and capacity building. Selection of insightful information sentinels that indicate early warning or early success are also critical to monitoring, as compliance activities rarely inform meaningful midcourse adjustments.

Monitoring frequency refers to the timeliness of feedback received, particularly corrective feedback that identifies strengths and challenges participants to stretch to a higher level of rigor and a more consistent delivery of instructional and leadership practices.

The evaluation plan allows the school to compare planned outcomes with achieved outcomes. Table 9.8 compares the first generation of the KCHS school improvement evaluation to its latest iteration following efforts to meet next-generation improvement standards.

Table 9.8: KCHS First- Versus Next-Generation Evaluation Cycle

First-Generation School Improvement Plan				
Strategy/ Action Plan	Formative/ Summative Measurement	Responsible Person	Resources Needed	Timeline
Monitoring and evaluation will occur.	KCHS interim fall/ spring English/ language arts assessments English department common assessments HSPA spring results	English department Learning improvement team Principals		Quarterly October January March May
Next-Generation School Improvement Plan				
Evaluation Cycle: At the end of the 2011–2012 school year, KCHS will collectively engage in a process to compare planned outcomes with achieved outcomes, how compared results (positive and negative) are communicated to primary stakeholders (families, educators, staff, patrons, partners, and the public), and how lessons learned will be applied to future (2012–2013 school year) school improvement planning.				

The final component of this phase is evaluation, a process described in chapter 6 as both formative and summative. It provides key input for the next cycle of improvement by informing the comprehensive needs assessment with lessons learned and recommending next steps. The evaluation process is simple in itself, but as part of a powerful cycle of continuous improvement, evaluation has real potential to improve schools and build a culture of evidence. As the data shown in earlier chapters suggest, schools that implement these practices well are more apt to reach higher achievement gains than schools that implement casually. Evaluation is neither a one-time event, nor a mere reporting of results, but rather a profound form of organizational and team learning.

