

## CHAPTER

# 4

# School Improvement through Systematic Planning

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*If you don't know where you are going, It doesn't much  
matter what you do.*

—ALICE IN WONDERLAND<sup>1</sup>

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**T**his chapter describes a process of organizing for school improvement through a systematic plan of action. It also describes some of the tools that may be used to aid in systematic planning.

ISLLC 1

The principal's role in instructional leadership discussed in Chapter 2 pointed out the importance of beliefs and values in establishing a vision for the school. Out of the vision and the underlying values the principal holds about education, he or she should develop expectations for the school. Expectations may begin from a person's individual values or may start from ideas suggested or mandated by others, but eventually they must grow to the collective expectation of a larger set of stakeholders of the school. Plans for improvement should grow out of these expectations.

Efforts to bring about change or initiate something new for one's school should usually begin with a plan. Good local school planning involves the translation of concepts, ideas, beliefs, and values into a vision of what a good school should be, as well as a clarification of the general mission for the school.

The idea of school improvement suggests a change of some type within the organization. Often, we may think of a document as being the end product of the planning, but the real focus should be on the process. As Hall and Hord noted, "Change is a process not an event."<sup>2</sup> Michael Fullan refers to change as a journey, not a blueprint. However, Fullan goes on to say that vision and strategic planning come later.<sup>3</sup> The learning community essential to high-performance organizations discussed in Chapter 2 is an appropriate vehicle through which to develop strategic or school improvement plans.<sup>4</sup> However, keep in mind that involving a wide array of participants who are stakeholders in the school is critical to the success of the process. Furthermore, the process

must entail more than the participation in the decision-making process—it must involve the “teacher as learner” in the fashion described by Fullan and colleagues.<sup>5</sup> If school improvement is to be successful in implementation as well as in planning, school leaders must ultimately transform schools into places for teachers to learn continuously about their content areas and ways to promote student achievement. This is of particular importance in times of significant change, such as the movement to Common Core Standards.

**ISLLC 3**

Most often, the plan is for improvement of an existing, ongoing school. Therefore, planning begins with gathering and analyzing information about the existing school program and the community and students it serves. The planning continues with the review or development of the stated school mission and beliefs held about education. The third task is to determine goals and expectations for student learning and how to measure them. Analysis then turns inward to a comparison of current instructional and organizational practices to research-based indicators of high-performing systems. Analysis of data generated from these steps provides the basis for the development of an action plan for school improvement. The final step is the implementation of the plan and the recording of the results.

## The Principal’s Role

Schools really can make a difference in the achievement levels of students, but a school is usually only as good or bad, as creative or sterile, as the person who serves as the head of that school. Research has shown a direct link between principal leadership and student learning: “Principal leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed upon and worthwhile direction for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions.”<sup>6</sup>

What do effective principals do?

Principals of effective schools are strong instructional leaders who know how to manage time and money effectively . . . they concentrate on priority goals . . . they set as their main goal the acquisition of basic skills . . . effective principals have high expectations for all students and they will enlist the support of others in meeting common goals.<sup>7</sup>

The principal is the one person in a school who can oversee the entire program because of his or her interest in the success of the entire school and all of its parts. Therefore, the principal is in the best position to provide the necessary sense of direction to the various aspects of a school. The most effective principals have a clear sense of purpose and priorities and are able to enlist the support of others toward these ends.

**ISLLC 4**

Many of the problems of direction within a school organization are subtle, will be difficult to solve, and require great conceptual and technical knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and learning. The principal must have the necessary understanding to find proper and just solutions to these problems and many others like them.

Above all, it is absolutely necessary for the principal to involve others. The success of any school improvement rests with the active involvement of all stakeholders in the school. From the collective gathering of baseline data, through the hammering out of the collective beliefs and goals, to the review of expectations for student learning, to the ultimate decisions of how to improve the school, a variety of people must be involved for their ideas and for their ultimate ownership.

## Gathering Baseline Data

**ISLLC 11**

Data-driven decision making is a major theme of the previous chapter and is clearly illustrated by the flowchart in Figure 3.1. What kinds of data are available about one's school? How might these data be organized to help make wiser decisions? What data should be gathered to help better profile the school?

The National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), now AdvancED,<sup>8</sup> has proposed a framework for data-driven decision making with four major steps:

1. *Mining the Data.* Collect and organize pertinent data and information from four major categories: (a) student performance data, (b) student and community characteristics, (c) school and staff characteristics, and (d) stakeholder perspectives.
2. *Analyzing the Data.* Analyze and synthesize the data to create knowledge. Analysis should lead to an understanding of the school's strengths, limitations, and emerging issues of importance. Data should be disaggregated by appropriate subgroups so that comparisons can be made. Emphasis should be on both problem finding and problem solving. Where possible, data should be translated into concrete terms (i.e., 92 percent average daily attendance means almost three weeks of instruction missed per child on average during the course of a year).
3. *Communicating the Data.* Develop a shared understanding of the meaning of the data. Construct narrative summaries with clear, concise major points of analysis. Include graphic overviews with tables and charts. Seek feedback from the users to help refine the process of data collecting and analysis. Organize into learning communities to promote shared learning through ongoing conversations about the meaning and application of data.
4. *Using the Data.* Place an emphasis on improvement planning purposes rather than data for reporting purposes. Improvement efforts should be based on the use of objective data rather than fads, traditions, or anecdotal evidence. Use the analysis of data to guide the selection of goals and objectives for improvement and establish baseline measures to help monitor progress over time. Examine data as a function of organizational learning and a tool for instructional improvement.

A school generates a massive amount of data each year for each child. Data are often not used effectively because of the difficulty in linking related pieces of information together. For example, imagine a database of all the information gathered on one child across his or her school career—all the tests, major assessments, teachers, attendance, discipline records, grades, and so on. Now multiply that by the number of children currently in your school and add those who have matriculated or transferred out during the past three years. This is the data set needed along with the ability to cross-reference many of the components to carry out the analysis suggested. The task of gathering and maintaining current as well as historic records is sometimes referred to as *data warehousing* and the process of retrieving and reporting data-based management systems.<sup>9</sup> Many states have compiled these databases for the purpose of linking student test results to teacher evaluation but they can be used for school self-assessment also.

## Demographic Data

### ISLLC 7

Basically, principals are looking for descriptive or demographic information about their students, their staff, and parent and community involvement with their schools. A list<sup>10</sup> of what data principals might gather is as follows:

#### *Student Data*

- Enrollment history (length of time in current school and previous school)
- Attendance, tardiness (percent)
- Living in one-parent or two-parent household
- Ethnicity, gender
- Parental education level
- Free/reduced-price lunch (percent and number)
- Academic assistance program enrollments (percent and number) (special education, bilingual, English as a Second Language [ESL], gifted, etc.)
- Program or course enrollments (percent and number) (regular academic, vocational, advanced placement, etc.)
- Number of retentions
- Office discipline records
- In-school and out-of-school suspensions (with reasons)
- Expulsions (with reasons)
- Dropouts (percent and number)
- Postgraduation activities (college, military, employment)

#### *Community Data*

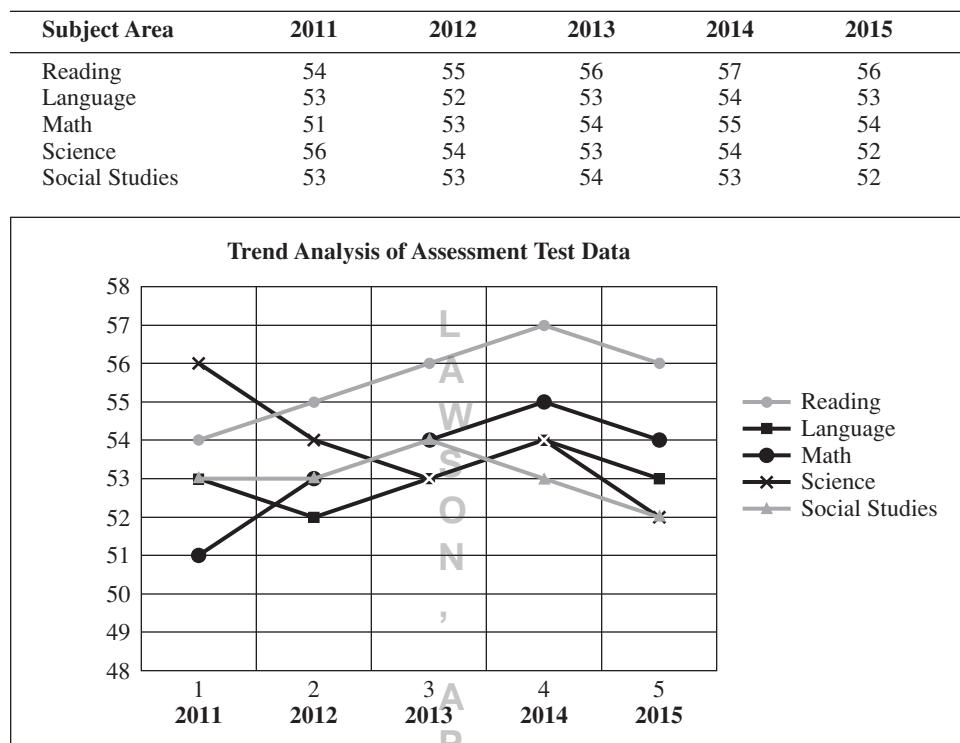
- Description of community residents by age, level of education, race, marital status, income, education, etc.
- Economic and social conditions of the community
- Measures of the extent of the community's involvement in the school
- Residents with school-age children (percent and number)
- Other youth-serving organizations in the community and services available

#### *Staff Data*

- Size and deployment of staff
- Summary of staff qualifications (degrees and institution, certifications, years of experience)
- Staff absenteeism (number of days, sequence of days, days of week, reason, etc.)
- Outside interests (hobbies, travel, businesses, etc.)

## Student Outcome Data

Each year, assessment or achievement information is gathered from students to determine each child's individual academic progress. Many of these same data can be used in a collective way to assess the performance of the school and its various programs. The data are usually of most value for analysis when they are recorded in such a way as to allow trend analysis across three or more years, as shown in Figure 4.1. These data are particularly useful when they can be disaggregated



**FIGURE 4.1 Ubben Elementary School Trend Analysis of Assessment Test Data**

by logical demographic categories such as those listed in the student and staff data sections just shown. This means that each item of data carries the identifying number of the student who generated it. In this manner, trend information can be calculated across years. Some of the data are easily quantifiable, allowing for statistical analysis, whereas others are more qualitative in nature, allowing only for classification by demographic category. Assessment data<sup>11</sup> commonly gathered by schools include these:

- Standardized norm-referenced achievement tests
- Writing assessments
- Competency tests (criterion referenced—measured against predetermined curriculum standards)
- End-of-course assessments
- Gateway tests (required for passage to higher grade or graduation)
- SAT/ACT
- Early childhood assessments (readiness tests)
- Authentic assessment artifacts (portfolios, performances, projects, etc.)

### School Processes

Before school leaders can seriously think about how they want to change or what they wish to become, they must consider and describe who they currently are. Baseline data are necessary as the platform from which to help identify current strengths and weaknesses and ultimately as the

platform from which to launch new strategies. Here is a list of categories to include in this description of the school. Remember, the point is to describe current actions—on a day-to-day basis—with an eye on evaluation of each process to suggest possible changes.

**ISLLC 4**

- *Curriculum and its articulation across grades and subjects.* Have we done curriculum mapping? Are we aligned with current state standards? Are we progressing with Common Core Standards adoption?
- *Instruction and current instructional strategies employed.* How are we identifying and dealing with students' individual differences? How does this inform our instruction? Have some of our teachers begun using project-based learning and the flipped classroom?
- *All the ways students are grouped for instruction and with what student/teacher ratios.* Are students heterogeneously grouped? Homogeneously grouped? Both? Do class or group sizes vary significantly and, if so, why?
- *Learning and teaching spaces and how we use them.* Do we organize spaces to facilitate learning communities? Do teachers who share a common group of students share adjacent classrooms?
- *How we schedule time and its allocation across the curriculum.* Is time strictly controlled from the office, or do teachers or learning communities have flexibility in the use of time?
- *How we identify and track student learning.* What are our measures of student progress? How frequently do we measure? How do we track individual student progress across multiple years?
- *What we do when a student is not learning at an expected rate.* How do we identify problems and how quickly does the system respond? Do we have a response to intervention (RTI) system in place?
- *How we handle individual differences in learning styles and abilities of students.* Does our practice suggest we really believe in individual differences and/or multiple intelligences?
- *Our philosophy and practice of school-wide and classroom management (discipline).* Do we have good classroom management procedures in place and are they working? Do we have an antibullying policy that is working?
- *Personal relationships among teachers, and among teachers and students.* Does our school have a good organizational climate that is conducive to learning? Does our school have a culture that emphasizes learning and supports quality instruction?

This is by no means an all-inclusive list. Many other categories and questions can be included.

**Perceptual Data****ISLLC 7**

Another very important data source to help profile a school can be found in the opinions and attitudes of the school's stakeholders. Recall that stakeholders are individuals who have some reason to believe they are part of the school community. For example, stakeholders could be students, parents, community members and local business employees, school faculty and all other staff members, administrators in the building as well as those in a district office, school board members, and others. Valuable information can be gathered from stakeholders through informal contacts, but carefully prepared surveys sent to representative samples of the stakeholder groups often allow for easier data analysis and reporting.

Many tools are available to measure the perceptions of stakeholders on school dimensions such as culture,<sup>12</sup> climate,<sup>13</sup> organizational health,<sup>14</sup> teacher efficacy,<sup>15</sup> teacher empowerment,<sup>16</sup>

and school leadership.<sup>17</sup> All of them relate at least indirectly to student performance and all can provide insight to inform a school improvement plan. The faculty members of the school are a significant stakeholder group because of their in-depth knowledge and history of the school as well as their great influence on the school's future direction.

**Organizational Climate and Health Data.** There are a number of good instruments that draw on teachers' perceptions of their school to assist in an evaluation of the climate or health of the organization. School climate is a system of shared values, norms, and tacit assumptions that hold a school together and give it a distinctive identity.

The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ)<sup>18</sup> is available in revised form with versions for elementary, middle, and secondary schools. It measures these dimensions: Supportive Principal Behavior, Directive Principal Behavior, Restrictive Principal Behavior, Intimate Teacher Behavior, and Disengaged Teacher Behavior. The 42-item instrument produces a score for the school based on an open to closed continuum and offers norms that allow comparisons with other schools.

The Organizational Health Inventory (OHI)<sup>19</sup> goes a step beyond simply measuring climate to a broader vision of a healthy organization. A healthy school is one in which the institutional, administrative, and teacher levels are in harmony, and the school meets functional needs as it successfully copes with disruptive external forces and directs its energies toward its mission. The five dimensions, or subtests, of the OHI are institutional integrity, collegial leadership, resource influence, teacher affiliation, and academic emphasis. The OHI is available in an elementary, middle, and secondary form.

ISLLC 1

**Survey Materials.** Survey forms for stakeholders are available from various educational organizations; examples are the AdvancED Staff and Student Satisfaction Surveys for elementary, middle, and high schools. Using an agreement scale, statements are posed such as "Our school has continuous improvement goals based on data, goals, actions, and measurements of growth." (staff) or "In my school my teachers want me to do my best work," (student).<sup>20</sup>

In many cases, using a similar approach, it is better for the principal to develop his or her own survey materials when specific program areas or problems are to be targeted. A needs assessment instrument can be created by using belief statements as a base. A series of items that can be rated on a five-point Likert-type rating scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, are developed for each belief statement. An illustration of a needs assessment statement follows:

SA	A	N	DA	SD	Programs and varied instructional techniques are provided to respond to each student's individual needs and differences.
1	2	3	4	5	

Statements can be grouped into logical categories, weighted, and scored. For example, if belief statements are organized around concepts from the effective schools research—including time, climate, basic commitment, staff, curriculum, leadership, and evaluation—several assessment items could be written for each of the categories. Responses can be divided by the number of items in the category in order to be viewed equally. This will allow comparison between categories for later priority determination. Figure 4.2 gives a complete illustration of a needs assessment instrument, including a weighted scoring sheet that is organized around effective schools concepts.

**FIGURE 4.2** Needs Assessment**School Excellence Inventory**

Directions: Rate the following items on a scale of 1 to 5 to reflect your opinion of your school.  
(1 = Low . . . 5 = High)

	(Low)					(High)				
1. Students have favorable attitudes toward school and learning.	1	2	3	4	5					
2. Students' learning is frequently evaluated using curriculum-referenced materials.	1	2	3	4	5					
3. The staff has high expectations for the students and adults with whom they work.	1	2	3	4	5					
4. Students' time-on-task behavior is maintained at a high level because:										
a. A climate of order and discipline has been established.	1	2	3	4	5					
b. Limited time is used in maintaining order.	1	2	3	4	5					
c. Classroom management tasks have been "routinized" to maximize available instructional time.	1	2	3	4	5					
d. The school staff has made a commitment to maximize learning time by reducing impediments to learning and interruptions of the school day.	1	2	3	4	5					
5. Each student and parents receive regular feedback regarding the student's progress.	1	2	3	4	5					
6. Student attendance rates are high.	1	2	3	4	5					
7. There is a clear understanding of what the school believes in and stands for, which includes:										
a. An academic focus.	1	2	3	4	5					
b. A belief that all students have the ability to learn.	1	2	3	4	5					
c. An expectation that each student will learn.	1	2	3	4	5					
d. High expectations for each student.	1	2	3	4	5					
8. Teachers regularly utilize techniques to assure that all students are learning.	1	2	3	4	5					
9. Staff members are evaluated regularly.	1	2	3	4	5					
10. Programs and varied instructional techniques are provided in order to respond to each child's individual needs and differences.	1	2	3	4	5					
11. Students feel valued and successful.	1	2	3	4	5					
12. Individual help is provided to students when needed.	1	2	3	4	5					
13. School staff members exhibit a high degree of concern and commitment for the achievement and well-being of each student.	1	2	3	4	5					
14. The principal is effective because:										
a. He or she understands the process of instruction and accepts the responsibility for being an instructional leader.	1	2	3	4	5					
b. He or she is an able manager.	1	2	3	4	5					
c. He or she has high attainable expectations for the students and adults with whom he or she works.	1	2	3	4	5					
d. He or she has goal clarity (a clear sense of purpose and priorities) and is able to enlist the support of others in understanding, accepting, and accomplishing those ends.	1	2	3	4	5					

*(continued)*

FIGURE 4.2 Needs Assessment (*continued*)

							(Low)	(High)			
e.	He or she recognizes the importance of (and actively involves) the people who work in and who are served by the school.						1	2	3	4	5
f.	He or she assists the school staff in implementing sound instructional practices.						1	2	3	4	5
15.	Students receive prompt feedback on their work.						1	2	3	4	5
16.	A high level of staff and student morale exists.						1	2	3	4	5
17.	Members of the school staff are cooperative and supportive of each other.						1	2	3	4	5
18.	The curriculum:						1	2	3	4	5
a.	Emphasizes mastery of basic skills.						1	2	3	4	5
b.	Is well defined based on a common set of standards.						1	2	3	4	5
c.	Is appropriately sequenced and articulated from grade to grade and from subject to subject.						1	2	3	4	5
d.	Includes clearly defined learner goals.						1	2	3	4	5
e.	Is regularly evaluated.						1	2	3	4	5
19.	Techniques are used to pinpoint individual student's strengths and weaknesses.						1	2	3	4	5
20.	The staff is competent and continues to grow and learn.						1	2	3	4	5
21.	The school is open to and encourages participation and involvement by parents and other citizens.						1	2	3	4	5
22.	Parents, students, and staff place a high priority on learning.						1	2	3	4	5
23.	Students are instructed at the appropriate level of difficulty.						1	2	3	4	5

**Summary Sheet**  
**School Excellence Inventory**

Time	Climate	Basic		Staff	Curriculum	Leadership	Evaluation	
#4a =		#1 =		#7a =		#10 =		
#4b =		#6 =		#7b =		#14a =		
#4c =		#11 =		#7c =		#14b =		
#4d =		#16 =		#7d =		#14c =		
Total =		#21 =		#22 =		#14d =		
÷ 4 =		Total =		#20 =		#14e =		
				8		#14f =		
				T		#19 =		
				S		Total =		
					÷ 6 =		÷ 7 =	

## Survey Administration

Whenever a survey is to be administered, these questions always arise: Whom should we survey? How should we do it? It is not always necessary to survey everyone; however, it is important to follow the general rules of survey research to ensure that the results are truly representative of the population. Surveys distributed and collected on site with a captive audience produce the highest rate of return. Surveys handed out to whichever adult happens to walk in the building often are not truly representative of the community. Surveys sent home with students often do not get returned. Think through and develop a plan for survey administration that fits your stakeholder group to ensure maximum and balanced returns.

Electronic surveys using the Internet or telephone texting are becoming popular ways to administer surveys in some communities. Of course, only people with Internet access or texting capabilities on their cell phones are going to be reached. See Chapter 14 for more details on electronic surveys.

## Determining Vision and Mission

### ISLLC 1

Every school must strive for quality. When improvement is seen in a school's quality, it is usually because the school has a vision of what quality represents and a sense of direction toward creating a quality program. The sense of direction can be developed through the creation of a statement of beliefs. Out of our beliefs we develop a vision for our school. Our vision is what we would like our school to become, our dream of a much improved or perfect school for our community. Collectively, our beliefs (vision), our goals (mission), and specific objectives to be achieved (outcomes), each of these three levels—beliefs, goals, and objectives—has a specific purpose in the planning process and each contributes in determining direction and showing interrelationships (see Figure 4.3).

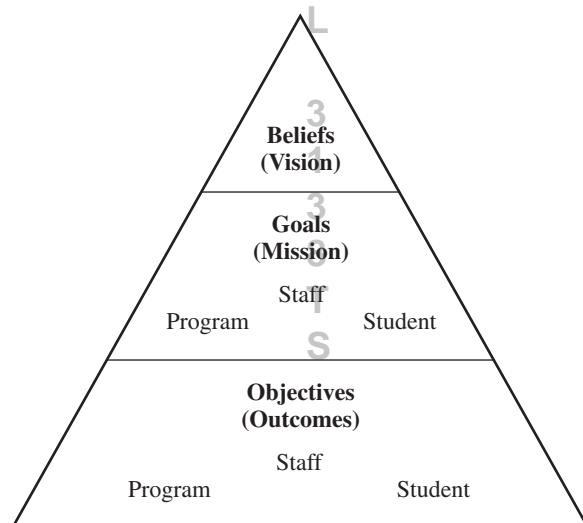


FIGURE 4.3 Determining Direction and Purpose for the School

A *statement of beliefs* can be thought of as a foundation or a philosophy for the school and should represent the collective thinking of the staff and community representatives. For example, the statement “Every child can learn and achieve mastery” is a statement of belief. It is part of one’s philosophy of education and is the foundation for our vision for the future of our school. Here is a list of belief statements from a recent award-winning elementary school:

***Eaton Elementary School Beliefs:***

1. All students learn, achieve, and succeed when they are actively engaged in the learning process and have appropriate opportunities for success.
2. Instructional practices and special services incorporate learning activities that include differences in learning styles and rates and are aligned with best practices.
3. A safe, nurturing environment promotes student learning.
4. A student’s self-esteem is enhanced by positive role models and relationships within the school.
5. Given positive and challenging learning opportunities, students learn to become independent thinkers and lifelong learners.
6. The curriculum must be developmentally appropriate to meet the needs of the whole child (physical, social, emotional, and intellectual) while promoting awareness of cultural diversity.
7. Assessment data drives the instructional programs and instructional decisions of the staff.
8. The education program, communication, and student motivation is enhanced by the wise use of technology in the classroom.
9. Teachers, parents, students, and the community share the responsibility for the support of the school’s mission.<sup>21</sup>

Our vision leads directly to our goals. It is, in fact, based on a discrepancy analysis between our vision (what we would like to become) and our current reality of who we are. Given our current circumstances, i.e., curriculum, instruction, staffing, etc., what must we do to achieve or move toward our vision? This discrepancy analysis should lead us to a series of goal statements.

A *goal statement* indicates our intended direction (mission) relative to a belief statement (vision). For example, a school goal could be “Successful learning experiences will be provided for every child each day.” This is a specific statement of intent. A goal, however, often can be something that a school strives toward but may never totally achieve.

***Eaton Elementary School Goals:***

1. We see Eaton Elementary as being a school of excellence that sets the standard for other schools in the state of Tennessee.
2. We see Eaton Elementary as a school capable of achieving excellence in all accountability measures, social and extracurricular activities, and technology integration and innovation.
3. As a school in Loudon County, we see ourselves fully implementing the best practices of Learning Focused Strategies.
4. We will consistently base instruction on prioritized curriculum standards.
5. We will continue to seek out and develop alternative assessments to best measure student learning and provide data to improve instruction.

6. Teachers in all grade levels will meet individual student needs through flexible grouping strategies and by providing intervention and enrichment.
7. We will provide extracurricular activities and enrichment opportunities for all students.
8. We will seek out relevant professional development opportunities aligned with goals and best practices, and we will share out expertise with other educators.
9. We will seek out opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles and provide consistent mentoring to new educators.
10. We will continue to fully integrate technology into the curriculum in order to enhance learning and motivation.
11. We will continue creating a positive, caring climate where all students, teachers, support staff, and parents support one another, including expanding the opportunities for student and parent involvement in decisionmaking.
12. We will consistently meet and exceed the demanding goals of our state accountability model and NCLB [No Child Left Behind] mandates.<sup>22</sup>

Just as goals should be an outgrowth of a philosophy or belief, *objectives* should be extensions of goals. Objectives are more specific than goals and should be obtainable, often within a stated period of time. These objectives may result from a review of unfulfilled goals from last year, or from identified discrepancies between our vision and goals, and self-assessments.

Here is an illustration of a program objective: "Instructional objectives will be developed by the staff for the reading and math curricula this year." Here are some of the objectives selected by the staff for Eaton Elementary for the year.

**Eaton Elementary School Curriculum:** The major curriculum challenge facing Eaton (and all schools) is that curriculum is not static. There is a constant need to spend time to adequately train teachers in the new standards each year. Yearly adoption of new textbooks compels us to blend the standards and pacing to content that might not necessarily match. This involves time, personnel, and professional development to realign pacing guides for unit and lesson planning.

■ Our immediate challenge is to incorporate the Common Core Standards in math and ELA [English Language Arts] at all levels.

- Another challenge is finding curriculum resources to help us narrow the achievement gap in advanced proficiencies linked to gender and socioeconomic status. This challenge involves research, identifying effective materials, and providing the resources and professional development necessary to implement these curricular tools.
- There is a challenge to provide to all teachers the necessary physical space and technology to effectively and equitably deliver curriculum to all students.<sup>23</sup>

### Framework for Establishing Beliefs or Vision Statements

The vision, beliefs, and philosophy for a school should relate to societal expectations, wants and needs of the community, and the individual differences of children. A list can best be organized with an outline or framework of concepts and ideas to be included. There are many different ways such a framework can be organized. Three different frameworks, or structures, are described next.

## ISLLC 1

**AdvancED Framework for Beliefs and Vision Standards.** Accreditation Standards proposed by the national education accrediting associations offers one approach for establishing a framework for beliefs and vision statements. AdvancED suggests the following standards:<sup>24</sup>

- *Standard 1: Purpose and Direction.* The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.
- *Standard 2: Governance and Leadership.* The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.
- *Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning.* The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.
- *Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems.* The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.
- *Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement.* The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

**Effective Schools Framework.** The research done over 30 years ago by Edmonds, Brookover, Lezotte, and many others highlighted seven main correlates of effective schools.<sup>25</sup> An *effective school* was defined as one that is achieving high and equitable levels of student learning. All children will learn essential knowledge, concepts, and skills needed to be successful at the next level of schooling. The seven correlates are as follows:

1. *Clear School Mission.* The mission needs to include the concept of learning for all.
2. *High Expectations for Success.* The climate should reflect what the staff truly believes and demonstrate that all students can obtain mastery of essential content areas.
3. *Instructional Leadership.* The principal acts as the instructional leader and communicates the school mission to the staff and community.
4. *Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress.* Academic progress is measured frequently. The results of assessments are used to improve instruction.
5. *Opportunity to Learn and Time on Task.* Directed instructional time is maximized, greatly reducing noninstructional activities.
6. *Safe and Orderly Environment.* Orderly, purposeful atmosphere must be free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is conducive to learning.
7. *Home/School Relations.* Partnerships are established with parents who assist in their child's education.

What is unique about these correlates is that they represent some of the first research-based characteristics of schools that were producing better student learning. Studies found that public schools can make a difference even with children of poverty. Replication research in recent years reaffirms the original findings.

**Essential Schools Framework.** The Coalition of Essential Schools has developed a set of common principles around which their member schools organize their schools. These principles also can be a framework for establishing belief and vision statements:<sup>26</sup>

1. Learning to use one's mind well
2. Less is more, depth over coverage
3. Goals applicable to all students
4. Personalization
5. Students-as-workers, teacher-as-coach
6. Demonstration of mastery
7. A tone of decency and trust
8. Commitment to the entire school
9. Resources dedicated to teaching and learning
10. Democracy and equity

These three frameworks for identifying beliefs statements obviously have some degree of overlap. But each also has a certain rationale for its own structure. The school might elect to use one of the three frameworks or create its own structure from a combination of them. One or more belief statements can be written for each of the areas on the outline.

### Vision and Mission Development Process

ISLLC 1, 4, 11

The process of establishing a sense of direction in a school must be a dynamic one involving teachers, community members, and, in some cases, students. In reality, the interaction and debate of the processes in determining what the document is to include is more important than the product itself, because the vision and mission are important only if they are alive. Beliefs must be kept alive in the minds of staff and community, and those people must feel that the goals and objectives relative to those beliefs are appropriate.

**Staff/Community Consensus.** The initial formulation as well as the regular reviews and updates of the belief statements can be done using a staff/community/student consensus model. The participants are separated into writing teams consisting of three to five members, including all members of the faculty. Each writing team is structured to create maximum internal variability. This means that each team has teachers from different grade levels, subject areas, and experience background. If community members and students (secondary) are participating, one or more is assigned to each writing team.

Each writing team is given a complete list of belief topic areas. The team's task is to write one or more statements regarding what it believes for each of the topics. For example, if one of the topic areas asks the team to list its beliefs regarding curriculum, the members might ultimately write a statement such as this: "We believe that the school staff should collectively review the basic objectives and strategies for teaching and learning and periodically reexamine and reconstruct objectives in view of current curricular priorities."

Each writing team develops statements for each aspect of the belief framework. This may require 6 to 12 or more statements from each writing team. Upon completion of the initial writing task, each writing team is asked to select one representative member from the group to meet with a similar member from each of the other teams to form a consensus team to discuss the statements written by each team on the first topic. A second representative is identified for the second topic as well as a third and fourth until all writing team members are representing their team to a consensus team consisting of one member from each of the other writing groups. Figure 4.4 illustrates the writing team-consensus team structure.

ISLLC 8

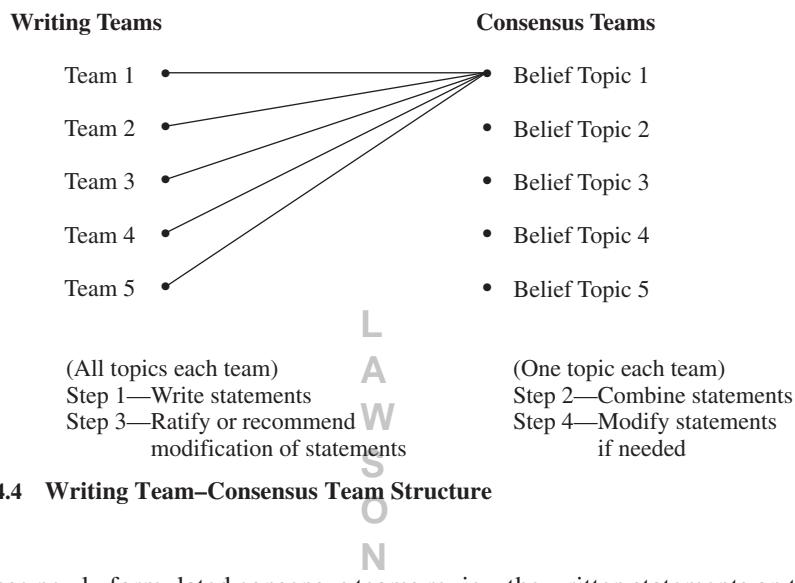


FIGURE 4.4 Writing Team-Consensus Team Structure

These newly formulated consensus teams review the written statements on the assigned topic from each of the writing teams and select, combine, and rewrite the submitted statements until they have developed a series of statements on the assigned topic that their group accepts. Each team representative then takes the newly combined set of statements on the team's topic back to his or her original writing team for discussion, additional modification, or ratification.

If the original writing team feels that the rewrite of the consensus team does not reflect the original team's beliefs, team members should modify the consensus team's work. The consensus team would then be reconvened to consider the recommended modifications. If necessary, the statements may go back and forth several times. The other consensus teams are carrying out the same procedures for their topics. An example of a final set of belief statements developed by a school using this process is shown in Figures 4.5 and 4.6.

FIGURE 4.5 Sample High School Vision and Mission Statement

### Vision

We believe that Manor High School is a unique educational environment. Its uniqueness is exemplified in certain aspects of its design. It is designed to meet the individual needs of a larger percentage of students than is possible in the traditional system; to avoid a mass-produced, molding effect; to provide a distinctly pleasant atmosphere for learning; to foster respectful relationships; and to serve the community.

We believe that all students have needs that must be fulfilled. We believe that all students are unique as individuals—that they develop at different rates and in different manners. We believe that students have a natural desire to learn independence, responsibility, self-assertion, democratic ideas, and the skills necessary to solve present and future problems.

We believe the role of the student is to involve himself or herself responsibly in the learning experience.

We believe that learning is evidenced by a behavioral change. It is a continuous process that takes place in the home, community, and school.

We believe that the role of the teacher is (1) to design learning opportunities and (2) to provide each student for whom he or she is responsible the freedom to learn what the student needs to take a productive and rewarding part in society. The teacher is an advisor and sharer.

We believe that teaching and learning can best be accomplished through interaction and involvement of students, staff, administration, and community.

We believe that the administration is responsible for supplying and maintaining all the physical accoutrements of the school. The principal is to be an instructional leader but shares with students, teachers, and community the task of facilitating and coordinating learning. His or her leadership should be participatory and not authoritarian.

### Mission

The mission of Manor High School is to establish a student and community learning center with high expectations for student performance designed to facilitate stimulating learning experiences and harmonious social interactions in which each individual has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential.

It is our endeavor to develop the following qualities to a high degree through conscientious and dedicated guidance and instruction. These qualities are:

1. The self-evaluative ability of the individual
2. The positive attitude of the individual toward himself or herself and others
3. The independence and responsibility in the individual
4. The creativity in the individual
5. The ability to be self-assertive
6. The acquiring of knowledge relative to both the mental and physical needs and abilities of the individual
7. The critical thinking and decision-making ability of the individual
8. The ability of the individual to contribute to and to make his or her way in our society

**FIGURE 4.6 Sample Elementary and Middle School Belief and Mission Statements**

#### Pi Beta Phi K-8 Belief Statements

- We believe the instruction of each child is the shared responsibility of the student, school, family, caregiver, and community.
- We believe school should be safe, nurturing, and accepting of all students to allow the opportunity for maximum growth.
- We believe that the school should be sensitive to the needs of all stakeholders in creating the learning environment and policies that support it.
- We believe that students should learn to understand and respect the rights and responsibilities of being an American citizen.
- We believe that appropriate assessments are necessary to meet the physical, emotional, academic, and social needs of every student.
- We believe that effective decision-making skills are essential for the lifelong well-being of all students.
- We believe each student is responsible for learning, attendance, and attitude and that this personal responsibility is the foundation for assuming the stewardship of our community and environment.

*(continued)*

**FIGURE 4.6 Sample Elementary and Middle School Belief and Mission Statements (*continued*)****Inskip Elementary School Belief Statements**

- Student learning is the chief priority of the school.
- All students can learn.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs and should be provided with a variety of instructional approaches.
- A student's self-esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students and staff.
- A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- A variety of methods should be used to allow students to demonstrate their understanding of essential skills.
- Teachers, administrators, parents, and the community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

**Lonsdale Elementary School Mission Statement**

We endeavor to give all students the opportunity for a quality education that develops content knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to meet their maximum potential in a structured, safe environment. We prepare our students to become independent, lifelong learners and productive, responsible citizens.

**Glen Lake Elementary School Mission Statement**

The mission of the Glen Lake School community is to inspire in all learners the motivation and confidence to reach their highest potential by providing challenging and meaningful learning experiences in a safe, caring, and respectful environment.

**West Valley Middle School Mission Statement**

The mission of the West Valley Middle School community is to Inspire students to be Resourceful, Respectful, and Responsible citizens by providing a challenging and safe learning environment.

## Clarifying Expectations for Student Learning

**ISLLC 4**

What should be the expected outcomes for students? Has your school adopted the Common Core Standards? Is there a state timeline for adoption? How do we integrate or use Common Core Standards or other state standards in the process? The goal of this phase of the school improvement process is to gain clarification through the development of a shared set of expectations for student learning and achievement. Most important is the need for all those who have a stake in the success of the school to agree on the broad areas of knowledge, skill, and abilities that students should be able to demonstrate when they exit from the highest grade in the school. This shared consensus of student-desired outcomes can provide the stakeholders of the school—students, parents, staff, and community—with a clear sense of direction and purpose for the education of children in the school. Student performance is the real purpose for efforts at improvement and the reason behind any school improvement planning process.

## Shared Vision Process

Once again, the process of developing a shared vision of student expectations is critical to the success of any plan developed. A committee process with all stakeholder groups participating is extremely important. A shared vision is the desired outcome. In this day and age of mandated state standards and state-required achievement and end-of-course tests, the expected outcomes are often very prescribed. However, the path to reach the goals can take many routes so it is important to have understanding and agreement among all stakeholders.

The process of developing a shared vision should begin with a review of the documents previously developed as part of the improvement planning. These include the beliefs (vision) and goals (mission) statement and a review of the data gathered for the school profile. Analysis of these documents will help to identify stakeholder expectations, and the assessment and evaluation results will help identify current learning levels. The statements of expectations for student learning to be developed should reflect, when finished, the beliefs and goals identified in the vision and mission statement.

### ISLLC 1

The next step by the student outcomes committee should consist of two reviews of current practice and thought. The first should be a review of current research and theory of instruction methods and learning. Chapter 7 provides a basis for this type review. The second review should be of current school, district, state, and national standards for student learning. Several different frameworks or approaches to curriculum design are discussed in Chapter 6. Most states have adopted the Common Core Standards for Math and Language Arts. Many states have adopted standards for other subjects from the national curriculum organizations (e.g., National Council for Social Studies and National Science Teachers Association have published goals and standards in their respective program areas). Based on the reviews of vision and mission, the previously developed school profile, and current practices in learning and standards for curriculum, the next step is to develop statements of desired results for student learning. The statements should include the desired knowledge, skills, and abilities that a well-educated child should be able to demonstrate. They should be stated clearly to show what the student should know or be able to do. In most cases, these statements can be drawn directly from the state or national standards adopted by your school.

If these tasks of identifying desired results of student learning are done thoroughly for all curriculum areas, the project becomes a huge task of curriculum mapping. In fact, it becomes a major component of the curriculum audit process. The entire process must be seen as a multiyear, multicycle process and part of a larger five-year strategic plan for the school, with only small parts of the entire process becoming the focus each year. For this reason, only a manageable number of schoolwide goals should be identified for immediate attention each year.

### ISLLC 3

A review of student learning needs should become the basis for the identification of goals to be initially targeted for action. Once again, a review of the data gathered in the school profile, along with the desired outcomes for the students, should be the basis for the needs assessment. Be careful to base the assessment on a broad review of student achievement. Do not get caught in the trap of looking at standardized achievement data because those data are easiest to use or because others are emphasizing those data. Rather, make an effort to look at a broad base of student performance data. For example, portfolios of student work, essays or writing projects, oral presentations, group projects, open-ended problem-solving situations, self-assessment, peer assessment, term projects or research projects, and performance activities often are more valid measures of student performance.

A tentative list of 5 to 10 goals should be identified for initial consideration, with 2 or 3 goals becoming the major focus. Others can be added later when success is observed with the first set. If too many goals are initiated, focus is lost and positive results are harder to achieve. Be sure to continue to review all goals, recommendations, and decisions with the stakeholder committee for its consideration and acceptance.

## Analysis of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the quality of the school's efforts on behalf of student learning. If schools look only at the desired results of student learning and pay no attention to the processes whereby the learning can take place, little will be accomplished.

A dual focus on the quality of the work of students and on the quality of the work of the school is required for school improvement to take place. The school's strengths and weaknesses should be identified. This can be done through a review of the literature on school organization as well as by observing quality practices in other schools throughout the nation.

### ISLLC 3

Think of the school structural framework as an integrated system with each of the several organizational components closely related to one another. Systems theory requires that specific thought be given to each of several organizational components of the program: (1) curricular organization, (2) instructional processes, (3) student grouping practices, (4) staff organization, (5) the scheduling of learning time, and (6) facility utilization and design. Although the six components can be separated for discussion purposes, the program that results for any particular school must give detailed attention both to the contribution that each component makes to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the school and the development of each component in such a way that it is compatible with the other five components. It is like a six-piece jigsaw puzzle with each component represented by one piece. Any of the pieces may be reshaped but anytime this is done adjacent pieces must also be modified for the puzzle to once again fit together. For example, a belief statement may speak to the importance of meeting the individual needs of each child. From this belief statement a goal of individualizing instruction might be selected. This instructional format must then be supported with a student grouping plan, staffing plan, and schedule. In turn, if the staffing selection proposes assignment to a learning community, the facility utilization design should provide appropriate work spaces for that community. The organizational components are not equally important and should not be considered as equals, nor are they independent entities. Decisions regarding the organization of the curriculum and instructional program are generally of a higher order and should be made first. These must logically be based on the beliefs and goals for the school. The other four components serve the first two.

The first step should be the review of *best practices* for effective schools as described in current educational research. Chapters 6, 7, 11, and 12 provide reviews of current literature and ideas on each of these instructional organization components designed to bring about maximum student achievement and learning. Review in conjunction with the vision, beliefs, mission, and goal process started earlier in the improvement process.<sup>27</sup>

Several other areas should be considered in the review of organizational effectiveness. These are less directly connected to the instructional systems but are nevertheless critical to the overall effectiveness of the school:

- *Practices of Leadership in the School.* Do the leaders support teaching and learning, develop schoolwide plans for improvement, make decisions that are research based, make decisions using collaborative techniques, monitor instruction, and manage the organization for safe operation and an efficient learning environment?
- *Learning Community Building.* Is there evidence of a good working climate in the school, with the staff functioning as an energized supporting learning organization? Is there a good working relationship in the school that engages parents and families as partners in the learning process? Is there a collaborative network with community members and groups, youth-serving agencies, clergy and government leaders, and leaders in higher education and business?
- *Use of Technology.* Is there evidence that newer technologies of modern communication and computing are being integrated into the management of the school and the instructional programs of the school, providing students with a variety of skills and opportunities for expanded learning?

Documenting current practice in the school is the second step in the process of investigating the instructional and organizational effectiveness. This should be done using several approaches:

- *Document Review.* Instructional organization in schools is supposed to be well documented. Curriculum frameworks, lesson plans, teacher assignments, student schedules, minutes from faculty meetings and team meetings, and daily bulletins all provide insight into the reality of how instruction is currently organized and managed. These documents should provide a basis for analysis. On the other hand, if these documents do not exist or are very sketchy in the information they provide, the message may be a lack of instructional organization.
- *Faculty Survey.* Survey the faculty regarding instructional practices currently being used. The School Excellence Inventory shown in Figure 4.2 focuses on instructional practices. The AdvancED faculty survey instruments cover many of the identified topics, but the principal may wish to develop his or her own instrument tailored to specific questions and needs.
- *Observation and Interview.* An interview and observation schedule may be developed to gather information about instructional and organizational practices in the school. Although these data are often more difficult to summarize and illustrate in graphic form, they offer an opportunity for greater depth of analysis with reasons why certain things are as they are.

Summarize the findings of the investigation into instructional and organizational practices in the school and compare them to what was found in the literature regarding “best practices.” From this analysis, identify school priorities for building and strengthening the instructional and organizational program of the school. Be sure to remember the “systems” nature of many of these organizational structures (the jigsaw puzzle) and that they need to be considered collectively when contemplating change.

Finally, return to the stakeholders, particularly the school faculty, for consensus. Select, with faculty involvement, from the priority list those instructional and organizational components

that best support desired learning goals from the earlier analysis that clarified expectations for student learning and set priorities and targets for improvement.

By this time, the School Improvement Committee and school stakeholders have completed a school profile with a heavy emphasis on data; constructed a vision, mission, beliefs, objectives document with the involvement of each stakeholder group; identified appropriate learner outcomes for the school with targeted areas for improvement; and completed an analysis of the instructional and organizational structures of the school with priorities identified that complement those selected in the learner outcome section. The next task will be to build a plan of action.

## Action Planning/Project Management

ISLLC 3, 4, 8

Action planning is what professional planners label *programming an objective*, and that label is descriptive. The action plan contains the following elements:

- A description of the several activities necessary to achieve an objective
- The relationship of these activities to each other
- The assignment of specific responsibilities to individuals who will see to the implementation of the activities
- A time frame and chronology of activities and events
- An evaluation process

There are no guarantees that the plan will succeed in solving the existing problem; that is why the last element of the plan provides for an evaluation. The activities in the plan may be best thought of as “hypotheses”—more than a hunch, perhaps; certainly more than a hope; nevertheless, not certainties. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the efficacy carefully, not only of the total project but also of the specific activities composing the project.

Once the action plan is developed, project management is in great part a monitoring process. The project manager may be the principal but not necessarily so. Any person on the staff with good administrative skills and an interest in the project may be a likely candidate to become the manager.

This gives the principal an excellent way to develop and capitalize on the leadership skills of staff members, including assistant principals, faculty, and resource or support personnel. Adequate resources must be provided to the person put in charge of managing a project; these may include released time and secretarial service as well as a budget.

### Analyzing the Problem

Always take care that the presumed problem is adequately analyzed before moving into an elaborate action plan. It is at the problem analysis point that a force field analysis proves helpful.

**Force Field Analysis.** Kurt Lewin,<sup>28</sup> applying certain physical laws to the organizational setting, concluded that things stay the way they are in organizations because a field of opposing forces is in balance. One way to think about a problem situation is to regard the situation as being as it is because of positive (“driving”) and negative (“restraining”) forces that are

equal in strength. The driving forces are current conditions and actions present in the organizational environment (or in the community, or even in society as a whole) such that change is encouraged. Restraining forces are conditions or actions, which are such that change is discouraged or inhibited. These can be thought of as negative, or “minus,” forces in the developing equation.

The force field concept issues from the physical law that a body at rest (in equilibrium) will remain at rest when the sum of all the forces operating on it is equal to zero. The body will move only when the sum is not zero, *and it will move only in the direction of the unbalancing force.*

It is not difficult to observe this phenomenon in organizations. The productivity of a school staff, the state of the school/community relations program, the success level of the intramural program, among any number of other observable situations, are all subject to explanation (and change) by force field analysis. A thing is where it is because the sum of the *power* of the counterbalancing plus and minus forces is equal to zero—and the situation is “frozen.”

*Power* is a key word here because equilibrium is not achieved by a simple equal *number* of forces. It is the strength of the force that is important. One overwhelming positive force (e.g., the infusion of huge amounts of federal or state dollars) may be quite sufficient to change dramatically the nature of a science program that had suffered from lack of equipment, inadequately prepared teachers, and lack of community concern. Similarly, a large, vocal, and interested religious group might impact mightily on the nature of a science curriculum in any particular community, despite research evidence about inquiry methods, adequate budget, well-trained teachers, or bright students, among any number of other forces that would otherwise be generative of good programming.

Movement (i.e., change) will take place only when an imbalance is created. An imbalance will occur by eliminating forces, by developing new forces, or by affecting the power of existing forces. The imbalance “unfreezes” the current situation, the situation will change, and a new state of equilibrium will be achieved. To recapitulate, an imbalance may be created in several ways:

- Addition of a new force(s)
- Deletion of a force(s)
- Change in the magnitude or strength of any of the forces

Any plan developed after force field analysis is conducted will probably make use of all three ways of creating an imbalance.

There is evidence, however, that attempting to increase only positive forces creates much tension in the system, and often the intensity of the restraining forces correspondingly increases. This leaves the organization no better off, and sometimes worse off, because of new tensions. The best results occur when the first effort is directed to reducing the intensity of the restraining forces. Also, there may be little or nothing that can be done about some of the forces—a few may be imponderables, others simply may be outside the control of organization members.

Engaging in force field analysis focuses thinking and may result in a restatement of the problem. Often, what appeared to be the problem is really a symptom; one of the identified “restraining forces” is actually the problem that requires attention. Thus, a principal, project manager, and staff must have open minds at the early stages so that energies are ultimately focused on the right issues and not dissipated on things that are only symptomatic.

## CASE STUDY

You are the principal of a middle school with an enrollment of 800 students. The composition of the student body is racially and ethnically heterogeneous, with perhaps few more children from families at the lower end of the community's economic continuum.

During the gathering of data for your School Improvement Plan, you become aware that all might not be well with the reading program in your school. The students in grades 7 and 8 do not seem to be reading as well as might be expected. There are a number troubling indicators.

As you review scores on standardized tests, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills among these, you observe that your students, in the main, are well below norms for the system as a whole and for the nation. Several of your teachers have also expressed concern about the reading skills of their students. The librarian has commented about a low circulation rate even among the usually more popular children's books. Senior high school principal colleagues have remarked to you that the incoming students from your school seem to have less well-developed reading skills.

As you examine the situation, you reach the conclusion that something is functionally wrong with the reading program, and the anticipated outcome—adequately skilled readers—is not being realized. You decide your reading program should become one of the targeted areas for your School Improvement Plan.

An example of a partial force field analysis of this problem appears in Figure 4.7. In any given real situation, many forces beyond those suggested in the example could exist. When conducting such an analysis, it is important to focus only on *what is*, not on *what might be* or on what one wishes were so. The purpose of the force field analysis is to get the problem under an analytical lens, so that a feasible solution (action plan) can be developed either to solve or ameliorate the problem.

**FIGURE 4.7 Example of a Force Field Analysis**

**Problem: The pupils in Hughes Middle School are not developing good reading skills.**

FACILITATING FORCES (+)	RESTRAINING FORCES (-)
Instructional Materials Center	Student transiency (over district average)
Full-time librarian	Bilingual population
Budgeted for three aides	Bimodal distribution of teacher's experience (many first year)
Funded ESL program	New reading series program; no in-service
New reading series	Parental involvement in school activities slight
Assistant principal is a reading specialist	Little study room in homes—high number of apartment and project dwellers
State-mandated and -funded tutorial program	Teacher turnover above district average
Most children walk to school (no bus students)	Single-parent and two-wage earner homes (people not readily available)
Expressed teacher concerns	No role models
Flexible schedule	Staff overload

## Generating Action Plans

### ISLLC 8, 11

Once the force field analysis has been completed, it is time to generate ideas for activities that, if accomplished, could be assumed to help solve the problem. "Creative thought is what is sought." To do this, a principal could lead the staff in any of the three techniques for "unstructured" problem solving described in Chapter 3. Brainstorming or the nominal group techniques most easily lend themselves to this. There is one caveat: If the solutions generated do not relate in any way to the pluses and minuses in the force field analysis, they probably should be discarded. Unless the activity is such that it would seem to reduce a negative or strengthen a positive, that activity cannot be expected to help solve the problem.

The Indiana Principal's Leadership Academy has developed a good model for goal action plans. The plan begins with the identification of the vision and goal and then leads the user through a planning and documentation process. The Indiana Goal Action Plan (GAP) is shown in Figure 4.8 along with instructions for completing each category. This GAP works extremely well for small but important tasks or as a subset of the planning documents needed for larger more complex projects, such as those covered later in this chapter. It also makes good use of force field analysis data, such as the data shown in Figure 4.7.

**FIGURE 4.8 Goal Action Plan**

#### Goal Action Plan

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Group # \_\_\_\_\_

GAP # and Name of GAP \_\_\_\_\_

1. **VISION:** For the particular problem being addressed create a vision of the best that you can imagine having happened as this problem is corrected. Write the vision statement as if the improvement already exists.
2. **GOAL(S):** There may be a number of worthy goals that apply to your vision. For this plan select only one goal and write it as an outcome statement that is measurable. Other goals for your vision will require other action plans.
3. **PLAN:** Mentally, walk through and outline the methods, strategies, people, and resources, which can be used to guarantee the attainment of the goal.
4. **TIMELINE:** List specific tasks to be done, determine how to get needed resources, and set appropriate dates by which each step will be completed.
5. **ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** List things that are potential obstacles, such as resistant people, personal shortcomings, etc.
6. **PREVENTIONS:** Develop strategies to either prevent or remove barriers. Begin to list resources for assistance.
7. **BASELINE:** This is to be an observable indication of how you or your school performs now in the goal area of your Goal Action Plan.
8. **EXPECTATIONS: MINIMUM**—The smallest measure of improvement you will accept.  
**SATISFACTORY**—An average acceptable measure of improvement.  
**EXCELLENCE**—Evidence of great achievement or level of improvement.
9. **PROOF:** The demonstration or documentation that will prove to others that you successfully met your challenge and achieved your goal(s).
10. **CELEBRATION:** Celebrate success! Choose the most pleasurable and appropriate way to enjoy your achievement.

*Source:* Goal Action Plan, Indiana Principal's Leadership Academy, Indiana Department of Education.

### Using the Project Planning Document

#### ISLLC 3

Complex problems require the use of a planning document. The resolution of simple problems may not require an involved procedure; nevertheless, the logic and steps in the project planning document are applicable and should at least be a mental process. The document is the project manager's guide and serves as a monitoring device.

Figure 4.9 illustrates a comprehensive problem resolution document. Using the previous case as an example, the project goal is stated, activities are delineated, target dates are established, and specific persons are identified who have assigned responsibilities for the implementation of the activities.

In many instances, a specific activity may be especially complex and composed of several components to be carried out before the activity is accomplished. The responsible person would develop a similar document for use with his or her team, and the project would be desegregated to another level. The point is, with such a document, tasks are clearly spelled out, and all are made aware of precisely what it is that is being attempted, how, who is responsible, when, and for what.

**FIGURE 4.9 Action Planning: The Problem Resolution Document**

**Project: Improving the reading skills of seventh- and eighth-grade students at Hughes Middle School**

Project Manager: Kay Weise, Assistant Principal  
 Completion Date: June 1\*  
 Start Date: August 15

ACTIONS	START/COMPLETE	RELATION TO FORCE FIELD (WHAT +/−)	COORDINATOR
Volunteers Program	10/1-cont.	#5(−)	Holland
After-school study program	11/1-cont.	3 #6(−)	Norris
“Why I Read” speakers	11/1–6/1	1 #9(−)	Carspecken
New teacher in-service program:	8/15–2/15	3 #6(+)	Craig
Reading in subject areas		8 #9(+) #3(−)	
Reader of the Month Award	9/15–6/1	TS #1(+) #2(+)	Tanner
“Here’s an Author”	2/1–3/1	S #9(−)	Strahan
Story-Telling Time	10/5–5/15	TS #2(+) #3(+) #10(+)	Miller

\*The first two actions continue beyond June.

## Putting the Plan into Operation

The project has now been separated into a series of activities. Complex activities have been subdivided into elements or events, the completion of which will conclude the activity; responsibilities have been assigned and accepted. Before proceeding, there is need to establish realistic target dates, develop the project calendar, and put into place a monitoring and evaluation process. Project planning computer software is of great assistance in organizing and managing large projects.<sup>29</sup> Each of the activities and documents listed in this section can be efficiently developed with a good software planning package.

### Establishing Target Dates

Establishing precise starting and completion times for the project as a whole, as well as for each of the separate project activities, is critical.<sup>30</sup> To establish realistic completion dates, those involved in the project must understand (1) the nuances of the problem; (2) certain organizational realities, including, for example, requisitioning and purchasing procedures and time lines; and (3) the capabilities of the staff. If these conditions are met, then it is possible to set realistic target dates. To do this, the project team raises two questions: If unanticipated problems arose—strikes, floods, a championship basketball team—what would be the most pessimistic date by which this project could be completed? Then this question is asked: If all went well—no one became ill, adequate resources were available, the purchasing department finally got its act together—what would be the most optimistic date by which this project could be completed? The realistic target date is a point midway between the pessimistic and optimistic dates.

### The Project Calendar: Gantt Charting

#### ISLLC 8

Once the activities and tasks have been delineated, the specific elements of the more complex activities detailed, and responsibilities assigned, the master schedule needs to be developed and posted. This is developed in the form of a *Gantt chart*. Figure 4.10 depicts a Gantt chart for the case study presented earlier. In the Gantt chart, each project activity is listed, along with the elements or tasks composing each activity and an indication of the targeted starting and completion dates of every entry.

### Preparing the Master Project Document

The preparation of a master project document is an important responsibility of the project manager. The document may simply be a loose-leaf binder within which is placed the comprehensive problem resolution document, key personnel checklist, Gantt chart, minutes of team meetings, and any diary entries or other notes that might help future project managers. Such a document is of great assistance in the monitoring and evaluation process.

### Monitoring and Evaluating the Project

The project manager's responsibility is to help the project team stay on schedule. This does not mean daily, or even weekly, supervision; it does mean frequent conversations with individual activity coordinators and regular team meetings for the purpose of information sharing and midpoint corrections.

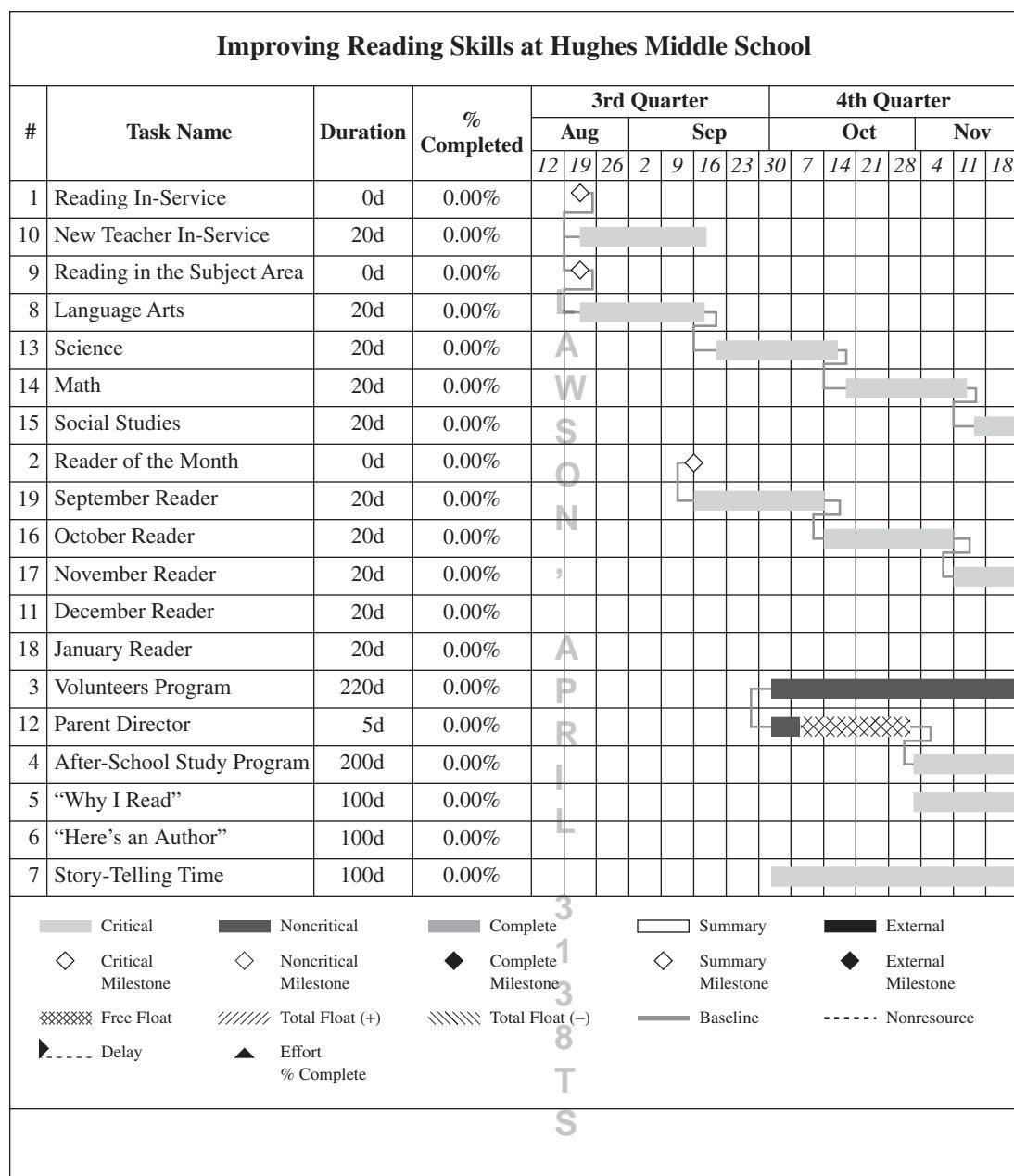


FIGURE 4.10 The Project Calendar: Task List and Gantt Chart

Other monitoring devices are available to the principal or project manager to help keep the project on target or to adapt to changes in the environment. Prominent posting of the Gantt chart will serve as both advertisement and stimulator.

### Conducting Summative Evaluation

If regular monitoring has been occurring, then formative evaluation has been taking place. What remains to be developed is the summative evaluation. That is, how will the principal know if the project resulted in the desired outcome? Are things better? What worked? What did not work? What should be continued? What should not be continued?

To lend specificity, clarity, and form to the evaluation process, think of the several activities as “hypotheses.” In the case study, it was believed that if certain activities were carried out, students would evidence better reading skills. These hypotheses must be tested, for it is pointless to engage in a series of activities if there are no provisions to determine whether the results were sufficient to justify continued expenditure of resources.

At the beginning of any project, it is important to state the indicators of achievement that the project staff is willing to accept as evidence of movement in the direction of the desired outcome. These indicators best come from restatements of the symptoms of the problem as originally stated. In the case study, some of the symptoms were these:

- Standardized test scores were below system norms.
- Circulation rates of library books were low.
- Caustic comments were received from senior high school principals.
- Teachers in the building expressed concerns.
- Teacher turnover is high.

Changes in these conditions provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the project. A review of test data, surveys of teachers and administrators, circulation rates, and formal and informal feedback from students and parents are all available tools for determining whether the project was successful. Moreover, it may be that certain of the activities were more productive than others. This, too, needs to be investigated and any changes made so that energies and other resources are focused for maximum benefit.

### Summary

The subject of this chapter has been goal setting and systematic problem identification and resolution using the *school improvement process* as the vehicle for change. Schools exist in an environment of change. The productivity of any particular school organization will depend in great part on the ability of leaders to analyze current conditions and future challenges, develop goals, and implement strategies for attaining the goals.

Instituting a process for identifying needs and developing a plan to resolve these needs in a manner consistent with system needs are critical to effective building-level leadership. Action planning and project management are fundamental skills that must be employed to meet this challenge satisfactorily.

## A C T I V I T I E S

1. Review Case Studies 6, 25, 26, 29, and 36 found in Appendix A at the end of this book. Apply the goal-setting and strategic planning concepts expressed in this chapter. How might you proceed in addressing the problems cited in these cases? Set forth a strategy to overcome the problem.
2. Using the belief statements from your school, develop an survey instrument using an agree/disagree scale. Administer it to your faculty and score it. Share the results with your class.
3. Review the activities at the end of Chapters 9 and 14 for further planning activities.

## E N D N O T E S

1. Comments of the Cheshire cat to Alice (*Alice in Wonderland*) upon her request for directions after admitting she didn't know where she wanted to go.

2. G. Hall and S. Hord, *Change in Schools: Facilitating the Process* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), preface.

3. M. Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (4th ed.) (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2007).

4. Most school improvement plans follow a strategic planning model.

5. M. Fullan, B. Bennett, and C. Rolheiser-Bennett, "Linking Classroom and School Improvement," *Educational Leadership* 47, no. 8 (1990): 13–19.

6. K. S. Louis, K. Leithwood, K. Walstrom, and S. Anderson, Investigating the links to improved student learning Final report of research findings. Retrieved from Wallace Foundation website: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf>

7. *Good Schools: What Makes Them Work* (Washington, DC: National School Public Relations Association, 1980).

8. From the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), now AdvancED, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*.

9. Chapter 14 provides more detail regarding software for these data management tasks.

10. It is best if these data can be maintained in a database by child, along with achievement data and grades. The data can then be tallied for demographic descriptions but can also be used to divide students into demographic groups for achievement comparisons. For example: How do the grades of children who come from one-parent homes compare with those from two-parent homes?

11. Chapter 7 provides more detailed information on how assessment data might be used.

12. S. Gruenert and J. Valentine, *School Culture Survey* (Columbus, MO: Middle Level Leadership Center, 2008).

13. There are several popular climate instruments available. The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) was developed originally by Halpin and Croft in 1963. Both the revised version of the OCDQ and the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) are available at <http://www.waynekohy.com> under research instruments.

14. W. K. Hoy and D. J. Sabo, *Quality Middle Schools: Open and Healthy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1998).

15. M. Tschannen-Moran and A. Wollfolk Hoy, "Teacher Efficacy: Capturing an Elusive Construct," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 17 (2001): 783–805.

16. P. M. Short and J. S. Rinehart, "School Participant Empowerment Scale: Assessment of Level of Empowerment within the School Environment." *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 52 (1992): 951–960.

17. V. A. Anfaraq, Jr., K. Roney, C. Smarkola, J. DuCette, and S. Gross, *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal: A Leadership Model and Measurement Instrument* (Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association, 2006).

18. Copies of the various versions of the OCDQ as well as scoring instructions are available at <http://www.waynekohy.com/ocdq-re.html>

19. The OHI is also available at <http://www.waynekohy.com/ohi-e.html>

20. Correlates of Effective Schools, Association for Effective Schools, Inc., Michigan.

21. Eaton Elementary School, Loudon County Schools, Accreditation Report (February 2013), p. 5.

22. Eaton Elementary School, Loudon County Schools, Accreditation Report (February 2013), p. 6.

23. Eaton Elementary School, Loudon County Schools, Accreditation Report (February 2013), p. 7.

24. AdvancED, Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools (2013).

25. Correlates of Effective Schools, Association for Effective Schools.

26. The website for the Coalition of Essential Schools is <http://www.essentialschools.org>

27. Although the improvement planning process discussed in this chapter appears to be a step-by-step linear process, it is best done as an interactive process with each section influencing and being influenced by the other components. In other words, an idea discovered while developing this section of the analysis of instructional and organizational structure may cause a committee to modify a belief or change the wording in a vision statement or somewhere else in the plan.

28. Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflict* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1948), pp. 125–141.

29. The Gantt chart illustration (Figure 4.10) uses Project Scheduler 6 for Windows by Scitor Corporation. There are many other good planning programs on the market, such as Microsoft Office Project.

30. In not all cases will the completion of one activity, or one component, depend on another, but sometimes this will be so. Even when this is not so, it is vital that activities be completed on time. When a project is complex and has many interrelated parts, it may be necessary to institute the Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT). PERT will depict the order in which each of the activities and any sub-activities must occur, as well as the relationship of one activity, event, or element to another.

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