



*Improving Schools,
Engaging Students*

Guide for Practice . . .

**Enhancing Readiness, Commitment, and Engagement
for Transforming Learning Supports:
An Ongoing Process**

October, 2013

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Enhancing Readiness, Commitment, and Engagement for Transforming Learning Supports: An Ongoing Process

While creating stakeholder readiness and commitment is the first phase in a system change process, it needs to be an ongoing process. Eventually, the aim is to engage a clear majority of school and community stakeholders.

In general, readiness, commitment, and engagement among the leadership is related to their appreciation that the proposed transformation will make a *substantive* contribution to improving school outcomes. For most folks, however, readiness for system change first and foremost is related to how the individual understands the impact of the change on her/himself.

At the Onset

Initially, the objective is to identify subgroups who are essential to moving forward. Think in terms of:

- >*Key decision makers.* The first concern is to establish an influential cadre of key leaders whose support is essential to decision making, championing, and steering the initiative.
- >*Staff needed to help move the work forward.* The core here are those needed to be part of work groups to help design, plan, and implement the transformation.
- >*Individuals in positions to hinder progress.* It is essential to know who these stakeholders are and to understand their concerns so the matters can be addressed.

Strategically, the focus begins with these three groups.

The process uses social marketing-oriented ideas to introduce the bases and frameworks for understanding the nature, scope, and implications of a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports. Also highlighted is an overview of what will be involved in the systemic transformation (getting from here to there). The following strategies are recommended:

- >Use a memo from the Superintendent to announce the initiative ("Moving Forward with an Initiative to Transform Student and Learning Supports" or "Moving Forward in Unifying and Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports" or ?.) The memo should be an upbeat endorsement of the initiative, provide a brief rationale and description, and indicate that a series of presentation-discussions will be scheduled with subgroups by the person(s) designated to lead the initiative.
- >That leader(s) then follows-up with the first subgroups to arrange a time for the presentation-discussion to each.

Once a session with a subgroup is set, the following three step process is used:

(1) “Preheating”

- >An email is sent to the subgroup members with pre-session information about the objectives and the agenda for each audience.
- >Also included are 1-2 brief basic readings intended to prepare them for the discussion.
- >The agenda indicates the objectives (and hopes) for what the discussion will accomplish and the topics to be discussed (including an emphasis on what next steps are in the works). And they are invited to suggest additions to the agenda or to indicate anything they want to discuss.

(2) Facilitating the discussion session with a primary focus on enhancing readiness, commitment, and engagement.

- >Particular attention is paid to accounting for concerns and inviting involvement in ways that convey that the opportunity is to assume a leading role in the innovative system transformation of student and learning supports.
- >Presentation content is designed to provide sufficient information about why the transformation is imperative (i.e., it emphasizes how the changes address major problems and priorities confronting the schools, such as absences, addressing learning and behavior problems, closing the achievement gap, dropouts, teacher retention).

(3) Immediate follow-up:

- >A thank you memo is sent from the Superintendent and the initiative lead(s).
- >A Q and A handout is included to enhance understanding and address basic concerns.
- >A note also is included indicating opportunities to participate on the design and strategic planning groups and requesting a RSVP.*

Remember, the objective is to build a core of committed and engaged stakeholders – enough to create a critical mass for moving forward despite the reality that some colleagues may be reluctant and even resistant.

*Participants for all mechanisms designed to move the work forward (e.g., the Steering Group, the design and strategic planning groups, the implementation team, and various workgroups) can be drawn from those who volunteer, but final composition is crafted carefully by the initiative lead(s) in consultation with district leadership. That is, each subgroup must be established with a view to ensuring it will function well.

Spreading Readiness, Commitment, and Engagement

As the work gets underway:

- >ask those already engaged to reach out to inform and engage colleagues (e.g., principal-to-principal, unit director-to-unit director, student support staff to their colleagues)
- >identify other groups of stakeholders, arrange presentation-discussion sessions, and use the three step process described above.

Pay special attention to the concerns of administrators, teachers, student support staff, and others who are involved in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. As one strategy here, provide a set of handouts that underscores how the transformation will benefit those in their position and the students they serve and that also answers some of the predictable basic concerns about how it will affect their roles and functions.

Design every activity as another opportunity to enhance readiness, commitment, and engagement. For example:

- >In developing the design document, use the first draft as an opportunity to deepen the understanding of all stakeholders and invite their feedback.
- >Once the design document is finished and approved by the leadership, put it online and invite all stakeholders to ratify it.
- >As the design is rolled out, each facet of implementation requires and provides opportunities to continue enhancing readiness, commitment, and engagement.

Note: Many who have been reluctant or resistant will come around as the work proceeds. For principals who remain standoffish, it may help to identify the most pressing problem at the school and write up a brief description of how the initiative's intervention design would specifically address the problem.

Note: Some principals may want to follow their own sense of making changes. The strategy in such instances is to keep sharing what others are doing and check back after a while and see how the work is proceeding and share how aspects of the intervention design might be helpful.