January 17, 2008

Winter Conference – NCLB Roundtable

Key Areas of Focus School and District Improvement Plans

Overview – School and district improvement plans should be reflective of the needs of the individual site and/or district in relation to what the data shows. Though the data may target specific subjects, grade levels, participation rate, and/or attendance, a comprehensive plan based on the data should be developed to show the greatest increase in achievement over the course of the school year. In writing the school and district plans, they should be specific to the school or district that is writing and implementing them, but at the same time understandable, well thought out and most importantly comprehensive so that an outsider picking it up knows exactly what should be happening at a school site or within a district to increase student achievement.

Instructional Strategies – are selected with students' learning in mind to provide access to the grade level knowledge and skills identified by the state standards. These strategies should directly effect the instruction students are receiving in the classroom. They should be evaluated based on formative assessments and other classroom data collected and used to improve the academic achievement of each student as well as changed if the data is not showing improvement.

Timeline – This should reflect the implementation of the plan throughout the school year. The indication of ongoing is well and good, but are there going to be evaluation points throughout the course of the year to determine if that part of the plan is working or if it needs to be revised somehow? Are SBAs the only assessments used to judge the effectiveness of the plan? Identify specific target times that the strategy will be utilized along with times that it will be evaluated. How can a teacher or school determine if what is being implemented is on target for the goal if there are not sufficient and frequent formative assessments being utilized to judge the effectiveness of the strategies implemented?

Professional Development – is focused, ongoing, sustained over time, of high quality and progressive in which to strengthen teacher knowledge of content and effective instructional practices in order to meet the learning needs of all students. The professional development identified in the SIP and/or DIP should be part of the professional development plan implemented throughout the year focusing on the academic needs of the students as shown by AYP results, formative assessments, and other selected data.

Parent Involvement Strategies – are utilized to increase the participation of parents in the academic lives of their children and, to the extent possible, in the school. The focus of these strategies is to encourage parents to participate in their child's education no matter their educational background and/or language, with the minimum amount of interaction between school and parent being at least two-way communication.

Parent Notification - must occur when a school is identified to be in improvement. This notification must be in a comprehensible format and language for the parents to understand. It must include an explanation of the identification, how the school compares to other schools in the district and state, reason for the identification of the school/district being in improvement, explanation of how parents can become involved in addressing the academic issues and School Choice at Level 2 or Supplemental Educational Services (SES) if School Choice not available, Choice and/or SES at Level 3 (this can be a separate notification for those eligible). Samples of letters may be found at: http://www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/SchoolImprovement.html.

District Goals and School Objectives – should be aligned to the greatest extent possible. The school should be focused on what the district goals are and reflective of implementing them through school objectives within the plan. Though there may be reasons why the district is not meeting AYP that are not appropriate to creating school objectives, the district should have goals that reflect the reason for not making AYP as well as increasing the academic achievement of all students. Thus if graduation rate is an area the district is not meeting AYP, there could be a goal that identifies it by itself, but include other goals that will be pertinent to other areas the district would like to improve.

Both district goals and school objectives should be measureable. How will the district or school know the goal is being met? To say the school will "show improvement" is too vague; a percentage or number should be used as a target to determine if the goal/objective was effective and the target was met.

Improvement goals:

- should be few….1-3 only
- must be data-based — come DIRECTLY from data observations
- must be student-centered
- must be measurable — should be attainable in one year
- be written for total staff ownership

Here is a template for writing a goal:

We will improve the _____(specific skills)_____ of ___(subgroups and grade levels of students)___ so that ____(percent of students)___ will demonstrate _____(level of performance)___ as measured by ____(name of assessment)___ by ____(month and year)____.

More information

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http://www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/SchoolImprovement.html