
School Improvement Plans
At Portland Public Schools

A report by the District Performance Auditor
February 2013

**PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PORTLAND, OREGON**



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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District Performance Auditor

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Education

From: Richard C. Tracy, District Performance Auditor

Date: February 2013

Re: **School Improvement Plans-Performance Audit**

Attached is my audit report on School Improvement Plans at the Portland Public School district. I performed this audit in response to the 2012-13 Performance Audit Plan approved by the School Board.

I would like to thank the District management and staff for their assistance and cooperation in conducting this audit.

I look forward to meeting with you at upcoming Board and committee meetings to more fully discuss the report's findings and recommendations. Thank you for your ongoing support of performance auditing.

cc:
Carole Smith
Jollee Patterson

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SUMMARY

State and federal regulations require school districts and individual schools to prepare a variety of school improvement plans (SIP). Federal regulations require certain schools that receive special funding or that fail to achieve desired levels of academic performance to produce plans for spending federal funds and for improving academic performance. Oregon state laws and rules also require Oregon districts and individual schools to establish goals and develop school improvement plans that are prepared in coordination with the community. Academic research supports the value of school improvement planning in helping public schools achieve academic and other goals.

Over the past several years, every school in the Portland Public School district has produced a SIP. While the content and length of the plans has varied over the years, most every school has complied with district requirements and filed a plan for public review at the central district offices. However, based on my review of SIPs and my discussions with PPS management and school principals, support for the SIP process is mixed and many principals do not view SIPs as integral to school management and academic improvement. Specifically:

- Plans are highly valued by top management but many school principals view the process as a compliance exercise.
- Some principals believe the SIP provides benefit but most principals I interviewed do not use the SIP to guide and lead instruction
- While regional managers stressed the importance of the SIP process, principals said management provides little review or feedback on their development.
- Management does not consistently review SIPs to evaluate accomplishments or to provide accountability for stated goals.
- Some believe that the SIP has become a “catchall” for district and state initiatives rather than a document focused on academic improvement.

As a consequence, the district may be missing the benefits that academic research finds can result from well-prepared school improvement plans -- namely, a tool for identifying instructional problems, devising strategies to correct weaknesses, establishing measurable goals, and assessing success. The potential for SIPs to help schools concentrate school efforts on desired milestones and achievement targets is not fully realized at PPS.

Based on my review, I believe there are several factors contributing to the inability of the SIP process at PPS to fulfill its potential.

- First, the multiple, evolving requirements of federal and state mandates for school improvement planning adds uncertainty and complexity to the preparation of school SIPs.
- Second, the current PPS template for the SIP may be too prescriptive and lengthy. A template that is focused primarily on academic improvement might help concentrate efforts. Changing the timing and frequency of the process should also reduce effort and increase value.
- Third, the district lacks a defined process for reviewing, approving, monitoring, and assessing school improvement plans. Consistent and rigorous oversight by management might ensure SIPs are a more effective tool for improvement.

If the district takes action to revise the current SIP process, it should consider the Oregon Department of Education's new planning approach for Title One schools and Oregon school districts. This new approach uses an automated tool called the Customized Planning Process Tool (CPPT) that offers some advantages over the existing planning methods. However, the tool as currently designed may prove impractical for general school improvement planning due to its length, complexity, and technical demands.

I make a number of recommendations on page 19 to help address conditions highlighted in this report.

INTRODUCTION

School improvement plans (SIPs) are intended to help schools increase academic performance by identifying instructional weaknesses, selecting new educational strategies, setting achievement goals, and assessing results. SIPs are often required as a part of federal funding and by state oversight of local district service delivery. The development of SIPs is widely supported by academic research and is an element of the school reform movement. Portland public schools have developed school improvement plans for a number of years both in response to federal and state requirements but also as a tool to improve school management and accountability. This report evaluates the development and use of school improvement plans at PPS and assesses opportunities to streamline the SIP process and improve their value to the district.

Requirements for preparing school improvement plans (SIPs)

The requirements for preparing school improvement plans stem from both state and federal laws and regulations. As laws and regulations have changed, the timing, nature, and contents of the plans have evolved. Currently, the two major forces that impact districts are the *Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century* and the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* as amended and modified. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is responsible for ensuring that state and federal laws are administered and carried-out in Oregon.

State requirements

ORS 329.095 stipulates that Oregon districts and schools conduct self-evaluations and prepare continuous improvement plans (CIPs) on a biennial basis. These efforts should involve the community in setting local goals. The law also requires districts to annually review and report on the plans to the community and to maintain the plans as a public record. Districts must also submit CIPs to ODE when requested.

Current state law and regulations require district continuous improvement plans to contain 1) goals to implement a rigorous curriculum aligned with state standards, high-quality instructional programs, professional development plans, plans for family and community engagement, staff leadership and development plans, and several other elements; 2) a review of demographics, student performance, staff characteristics, and student access to educational opportunities; and 3) district efforts to achieve

local efficiencies and efforts to make better use of resources. The content and format of individual school improvement plans is less specific and the state generally does not review these plans.

In February 2011, ODE suspended the submission of electronic continuous improvement plans (eCIPs) by Oregon school districts pending the development of a revised tool. Districts were required to continue reviewing and revising existing plans but were not required to submit plans to ODE. On December 12, 2012, ODE announced the development of a new tool to be used by districts when submitting a continuous improvement plan. The revised instrument called the Customized Planning Process Tool (CPPT) is to be used by all districts submitting CIPs. (See Appendix B for an overview of the CPPT process.) Half of Oregon districts will submit plans using the revised tool on June 30, 2014 and the other half will submit CIPs by June 30, 2015. PPS will submit their CIP by June 30, 2015.

Federal requirements

Under the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), states and school districts that receive federal funds under various federal titles must produce a range of different plans and reports. Following are some of the requirements relating to school improvement plans.

Title One. Districts and schools that receive Title One funding for low-income students must produce plans for expenditure of these and other available resources. For those schools that fail to meet certain levels of academic performance, additional information on actions planned to correct weaknesses is required. In accordance with the recent federal waiver of certain NCLB requirements, Oregon has developed a new approach for identifying those Title One schools that must undergo more rigorous evaluation and planning. These schools must develop a Comprehensive Achievement Plan (CAP) employing the new the Customized Planning Process Tool. ODE indicates that all Title One schools may be required to use the CPPT in the future.

Priority and Focus Schools. The Oregon waiver of certain provisions of the federal ESEA resulted in a new way in assessing and reporting on school performance. Those Title One eligible schools with the lowest performance scores were designated as Priority and Focus schools. Schools in the lowest 5 percent are Priority schools and schools in the next lowest 10 percent are Focus schools. The 12 PPS schools designated as Priority or Focus schools must prepare comprehensive plans using the Customized Planning Process Tool (CPPT). *

* Ockley Green School, Rosa Parks Elementary, Woodlawn Elementary, César Chavez K-8 School, Jefferson HS, Lane MS, Rigler Elementary, Scott Elementary, Sitton Elementary, Vernon Elementary, Whitman Elementary, and Woodmere Elementary

School Improvement Grants. Schools that received a special School Improvement Grant through Title One of the federal ESEA also must produce continuous improvement plans using the CPPT tool. Three schools at PPS have received SIG funding - Roosevelt High School, Madison High School, and King School.

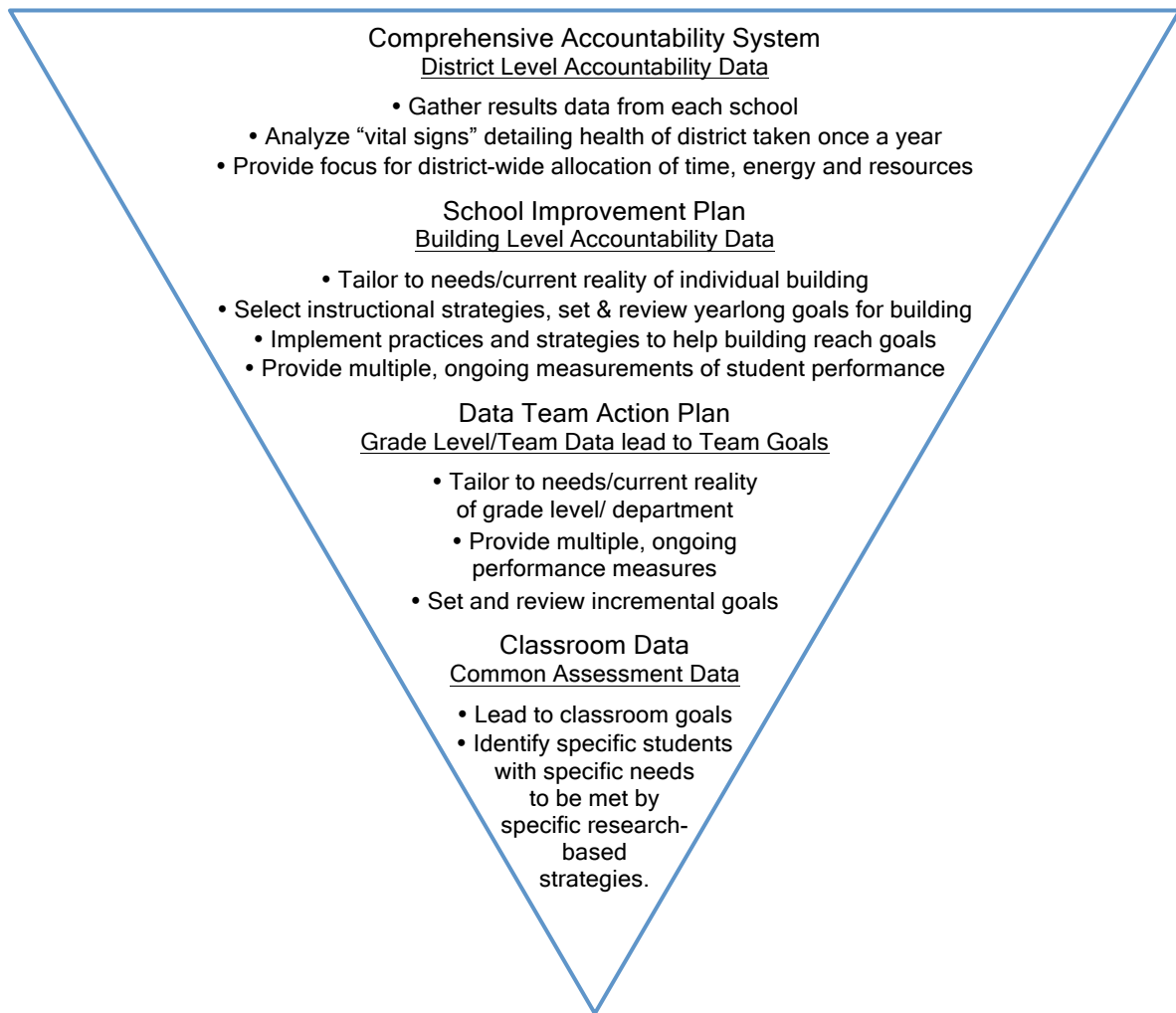
In addition to the above, other programs must produce separate reports and plans in accordance with established federal law and regulations -- for example, programs for Special Education, English Language Learners, and Talented and Gifted students. According to ODE, the new planning approach will attempt to consolidate and integrate federal requirements and state initiatives in order to reduce planning duplication and reduce unnecessary administrative burden.

Research supporting the preparation of school improvement plans

In addition to the requirements of state and federal government regulations, the academic research on school reform encourages the development and implementation of school improvement plans. Individual SIPs are part of the larger school district improvement process and one important element of a comprehensive accountability system. Writings by Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Michael Schmoker, Douglas Reeves, and others point to the importance of well-implemented school improvement plans.

SIPs can be viewed as an element of a comprehensive accountability system. As shown in Figure 1 below, school improvement plans are part of an accountability pyramid from the classroom level up to the district level. Data are used at each level to address individual student needs in classrooms, to address grade and department level goals, to select strategies and teaching practices at school buildings, and to assess district-wide performance and to allocate time and resources.

Figure 1 **Accountability pyramid**



Source: Adapted from presentation by Michael Schmoker

According to William H. Parrett and Robert Barr from Boise State University’s Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies, schools should employ a proven process for improvement. While an improvement plan is only one element of an overall approach to increasing student achievement, a plan of action is a fundamental starting point to guide improvement.

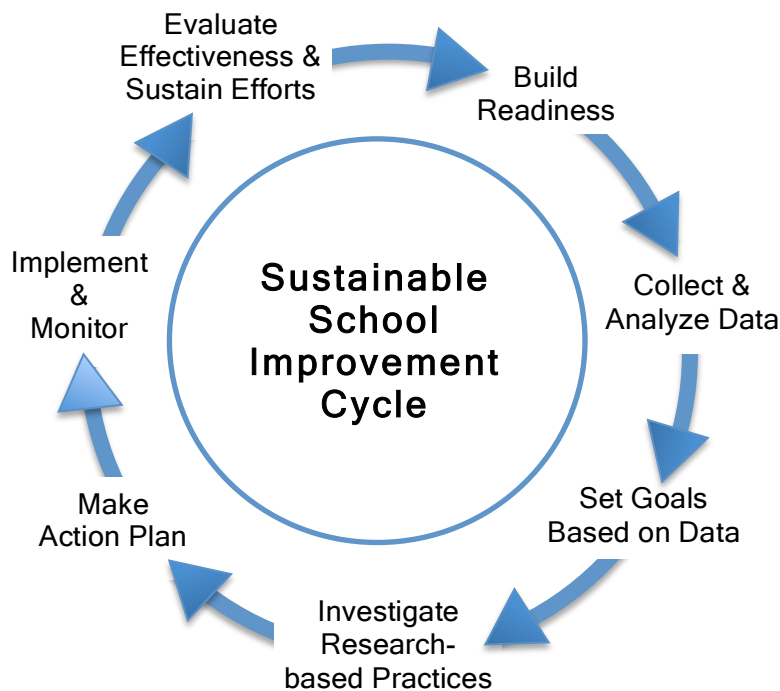
“If schools use data, establish goals, monitor progress, meet regularly to collaborate, and conducts audits and corrections, immediate and dramatic gains can be expected.”

Richard and Rebecca DuFour in their writings about Professional Learning Communities also describe an improvement process as part of building shared knowledge as a team. For example, all teachers at a school need to:

- build knowledge about students should learn
- analyze data to make decisions
- clarify essential common outcomes by course and content area
- develop common assessments
- establish specific measurable goals
- analyze results
- identify and implement improvement strategies

According to the Oregon Department of Education, education research indicates that the most effective change is accomplished through a pattern of steps. Schools that have successfully raised student achievement have generally included seven steps, shown below.

Figure 2 Sustainable School Improvement Cycle



Plans prepared by Portland Public Schools

In response to state and federal requirements, PPS has prepared district improvement plans and school improvement plans. The most recent SIPs for all PPS schools are for school year 2011-12. My review of records at the central district offices indicates that all schools have either prepared a School Improvement Plan consistent with the process and templates contained in the administrators connection website or have prepared more expansive improvement plans required by the state using the CPPT tool discussed earlier.

The structure and format of the current SIP process used by PPS schools is based on a publication entitled *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide for Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning*. The Data Wise process is organized around eight specific steps that focus on using data more effectively to improve teaching and learning. PPS has provided varying levels of training to school leaders on how to employ the Data Wise process. The graphic below shows each of these specific steps. See Appendix C for the complete SIP template.

Figure 3 Data Wise Improvement Process



Source: Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results To Improve Teaching and Learning

The 2011-12 SIP template used by PPS schools contains six parts as follows:

- I. Organization for Collaborative Work: Narrative description of how the school has selected and prepared the Data Team, how communication between the team and stakeholders is structured and supported, and how diverse views and multiple perspectives are embraced and reflected in the plan.
- II. Data Interpretation Leading to Areas for Improvement: A review of various assessment data 1) to learn about achievement results and to assess trends overtime, 2) to determine how well sub-groups are doing in academic content areas and in behavior, and 3) to identify what causes contribute to outcomes identified (problems in practice).
- III. Academic Action Plan for Whole School Improvement: Development of action plans for academic achievement, closing achievement gaps, and for improving school climate or behavior. The action plans should 1) identify specific goals for student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and improving behaviors, 2) analyze how goals align with district Milestones, 3) determine what students are struggling to learn or to do (“learner-centered problem”), 4) identify the elements of instruction that need to be improved to address the learner-centered problems, and 5) describe the instructional frameworks that will be employed to improve instruction. Each action plan contains a table that lists implementation steps, persons responsible, timelines, evidence of implementation, and progress assessment.

Beginning in 2011-12, the SIP template included a new section in III - the *Equity Action Plan*. This plan requires schools to describe where the school is on the continuum of the Courageous Conversations process and steps that will be taken to promote racial and achievement equity.
- IV. Parent and Family Improvement Plan: A description of how and when the school will communicate with parents and families on the plans to address academic achievement, achievement gaps, and behavior improvement. SIPs contain a schedule of family and community involvement that lists activities, rationale for the activity, the type of engagement, date, grade level or target audience, and lead and support persons.
- V. Professional Development Plan: A listing of staff meetings and professional development events scheduled for the school year.
- VI. Additional Title I School-Wide Plan Components: For Title I schools only, schools must address various compliance requirements including the quality and experience of teaching staff, methods for communicating with and involving Title I eligible families, and transition plans for various grade levels, ELL, SPED, and TAG students. Schools also articulate how federal and other resources support instructional strategies, family engagement, and professional development.

Audit objectives, scope, and methods

This audit had one primary objective: to evaluate the school improvement plan process at PPS in order identify opportunities to streamline and improve its value. To conduct this evaluation I pursued four sub-objectives:

- to determine current federal and state requirements for preparing school improvement plans
- to determine how well PPS meets these requirements
- to obtain management and school principal views on the importance and value of preparing SIPs
- to identify opportunities to improve the SIP process at PPS to add more value and benefit

To address these objectives, I interviewed PPS executive management, managers, and building administrators. I also interviewed ODE officials responsible for school improvement planning and former ODE officials. I reviewed various studies and reports on the topic of school improvement planning and evaluated various examples of school improvement plans from other school districts. I evaluated state and federal laws and regulations relating to school improvement plans and PPS policies and procedures for preparing school improvement plans.

I performed this audit in accordance with the 2012-13 Audit Plan approved by the PPS School Board. I performed fieldwork from September through December 2012. Report writing and processing was performed in January and February of 2013.

I conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for findings and conclusions based on audit objectives. I believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. I have implemented an internal quality control process to ensure standards are met but have not undergone an external quality review as required by standards.

AUDIT RESULTS

The Portland Public School district has produced school improvement plans (SIPs) as required by federal and state laws. While the content and nature of these plans has varied over time, the plans contain information on student achievement, goals to improve school performance, and strategies to address problems in teaching practice. While the process for preparing school improvement plans has strong support from upper and mid-management at PPS, many building administrators believe the plans are largely a compliance exercise that holds limited value in improving student achievement at their schools. In addition, management does not routinely monitor or assess SIPs to determine success in meeting school goals or to ensure schools are accountable for planned results. Several opportunities exist to improve the value of the SIP process at PPS by clarifying the primary purpose for the plans, simplifying the SIP template and submission requirements, and implementing more effective monitoring and review practices. Before initiating changes to the SIP process, PPS should consider the various revisions in the state's continuous improvement plan process that are currently being implemented by the Oregon Department of Education.

Mixed support for the preparation of school improvement plans

My interviews with PPS management officials and school principals indicates mixed support for the preparation of school improvement plans. Executive management stated that the SIPs should be an important accountability tool for the district. When complete, the plans should provide a direct line from high-level district goals, such as Milestones, to the individual plans prepared by schools. Accordingly, the SIPs should drive the culture of the school and be a living document that is reflective and open to change. Top managers hope that the SIP process evokes a thorough and complex evaluation of each school that leads to improved teaching and learning.

Regional administrators also believe that the SIP should play an important role in assessing the direction of the school, engaging the community, and setting professional development. The plan should describe the work that is planned to address the major issues that each school is facing. Principals should describe the most important strategies and activities of the school. While the SIP has become leaner and more focused on data in the past year, regional administrators said that it has not been a stable process due to various changes in the length, content, and timing of completion.

Regional administrators also expressed concern that the SIP may be trying to do too many things: accountability, achievement improvement, communication, family engagement, professional

development, and equity issues. While SIPs appear to be more focused on data than in the past, the quality of SIP can vary considerably based on the experience of principals and staff with assessment tools and data analysis. One administrator stated that the big issue for the SIP process was what the district does with SIPs after they are prepared. How should plans be monitored? How should plans be used for evaluation of principals and teachers? How are plans used to hold the district and schools accountable for results? Connecting SIPs more directly to district Milestones is still a work in progress.

The school principals I talked to were supportive of the concept of school improvement plans but find the current process too driven by compliance requirements. The SIP template includes various elements that are prescribed by top management that may not be reflective of the particular and specific needs of the school. For example, the requirement in past years to present writing improvement as the central goal of each SIP negates the value of evaluating data to identify the actual weaknesses of the school and the problems in practice contributing to the weaknesses. In addition, while improving educator skills and increasing family engagement are important, requiring lengthy schedules and calendars of professional development and community engagement events may dilute the central focus of the SIPs to improve student achievement or to close the achievement gap. For some principals, the SIP has evolved into a “catchall” for various district initiatives and state compliance requirements

Principals do not view plans as integral to school management and improvement

P rincipals I met with do not think that the SIP is an integral part of school management and improvement. While some principals believe the SIP helps focus school efforts, most believe that the SIP is not a living document that guides the school and staff. The primary weaknesses in the SIP process according to principals are: lack of clear purpose, superfluous content, poor timing, and inadequate format. The following discusses these concerns.

Purpose of the SIP. The purpose of the SIP has evolved over the years. Once a process to ensure parents and the community were involved in school planning, it has changed to address a variety of other purposes including documentation of compliance with various rules and requirements, planning for professional development, and communication with management and the community.

Most principals believe that the SIP should have one central purpose: improving teaching and learning at schools. The plan should focus on improving academic achievement and closing the achievement gap. While the Data Wise model places major emphasis on using data to help identify student learning problems and the instructional practices that lead to these problems, principals and teachers did not all receive training on how to use the tool and implementation of the Data Wise principles is not uniform.

Content. Principals stated that the size of the current SIP can be reduced by eliminating several sections and focusing on the most important issues related to improving teaching and learning. The

primary elements of the SIP should be an assessment of current academic and behavioral performance at the school, identification of specific problems or practices that contribute to weaknesses, strategies to address problems, and on-going monitoring and an evaluation of the achievement of goals. Much of the information in the current SIP is viewed as redundant and is available in other documents and data bases. For example, family engagement plan and the professional development plan may not have to be presented in the SIP.

Timing. A common complaint by principals was the timing of the development of the plan. Finalizing the SIP early in the school year (September/October) is difficult because assessment data is not always available until the end of the school year and staff and parents are not always available during the summer to evaluate assessments and to identify problems in practices and strategies to address problems. Moreover, the start of school is a busy time and school improvement planning requires more reflection than time allows at this time of year. Mid-year completion was viewed as a better time for completing the SIP.

In addition, changing the SIP from a one-year plan to a two-year plan in 2012 was a very positive improvement in the SIP process. Principals said they have more time to implement strategies and to assess change and improvement. Some principals believe a three-year plan might be possible if defined updates and progress reviews were implemented in the off-years.

Format. Several principals advocated for a more streamlined and shorter template for the SIP. A common suggestion was for a standard two to four-page document that would prioritize the most important goals of the school and the strategies to improve the problems in teaching practice. While the evaluation of data and student assessment would be a fundamental requirement of the preparing the plan, the SIP would not have to include pages of data or analysis, just the conclusions from the analysis. Attachments or references would serve to document conditions. In addition, the Family Engagement Plan and the Professional Development Plan could be provided to management outside of the SIP process. The additional requirements for Title I schools could be provided as a part of the SIP or as part of a separate submittal in a format required by ODE. The comparison in Figure 4 of the current elements of the SIP template to a more streamlined template illustrates the potential changes suggested by principals.

The streamlined SIP format would require documentation of compliance requirements to occur outside of the SIP process. While this may require separate processes and forms, it would also clarify and focus the SIP process on addressing problems in teaching practice and setting goals and strategies to address the problems. The purpose of the SIP would be solely on improving academic achievement and closing achievement gaps.

The figure below compares the current elements of the SIP to a more streamline version. The *Data Analysis* section of the streamlined format would continue to require an evaluation of assessment results to identify achievement by sub-groups and to highlight the degree of achievement gap within these subgroups. In addition, the Data Analysis should assess how achievement at the school

contributes to or inhibits the achievement of district Milestones. The *Major Problems in Practice* should identify the major causes that contribute to the outcomes and results found in the Data Analysis and the specific areas that students are struggling to learn or perform, with particular attention to racial equity and achievement gaps. The *Academic Action Plans* should identify the elements of instruction that need to be improved and educational framework that will be employed to improve instruction. Action Plans should identify the goals to be pursued, the action steps to achieve the goals, and timelines for accomplishing the goals. The *Dates to Review Results and Update Plans* should establish a specific two-year timetable for formal review and monitoring events, and for periodic updates to established goals and plans.

Figure 4 Current versus streamlined SIP format

Current SIP Elements	Suggested streamlined SIP format
I. Organization for Collaborative Work	I. Data Analysis and Data Team and Parent Contributors
II. Data Interpretation Leading to Areas of Improvement	II. Major Problems in Practice
III. Academic Action Plans and Equity Plan	III. Academic Action Plans
IV. Parent and Family Engagement Plan	IV. Dates to Review Results and Update Plans
V. Professional Development Plan	
VI. Title I School-Wide Plan Components	

Limited SIP review and monitoring

The transition to a two-year or longer SIP plan will require a more deliberate and defined review and update process. While regional administrators told me that they comment on the plans before finalization, and review the plan accomplishments at year-end, many principals I spoke with indicated that management input and review was limited and sometimes not provided. I did not find any written procedures on when draft SIPs were reviewed, the nature of the review, or how plan results were evaluated and updated. The section below shows some suggested points of supervisory review of school improvement plans.

Elements of Management Review of SIPs:

- Written feedback on draft SIP
- Final written approval of final SIP
- Periodic review and update of SIP - every 6 months
- Approve changes and modifications to SIP
- Reporting and assessment of results
- Initiate new cycle

Performance evaluation. The SIP could also serve as a primary source document in the annual performance evaluation and goal-setting session between regional administrators and building administrators. The success of the school in meeting goals, implementing action plans, and improving teaching practices should be factors in the overall performance evaluation of principals. Using the SIP in annual goal setting sessions establishes an accountability link and ensures that the SIP is a meaningful, living document. While the failure to meet SIP goals does not necessarily lead to low evaluation scores, it is one element to consider when judging the performance of school administrators.

Changing state and federal requirements add uncertainty

The federal government approval of the State of Oregon request to waive certain elements of the NCLB provisions has contributed to several changes in how Oregon school districts will assess and report on achievement, and how districts will prepare school improvement plans. While the Oregon state laws (ORS 329.095) for district and school reporting remain in place, the new tool for self-assessment and improvement planning currently being used by Title One Priority and Focus schools will be required for all Oregon districts in submitting their biennial electronic Continuous Improvement Plans (eCIP). Individual schools in the state may use the CPPT at their option but there are no current requirements for the CPPT to be used for schools other than for Title One schools and the District eCIP.

According to ODE officials, the state hopes to incorporate other required plans into the CPPT process. For example, the state hopes that professional development, ELL, and TAG planning will be part of the plan developed with the CPPT process. In addition, the state officials indicate that the indicators developed as a part of the Oregon Achievement Compacts will also be incorporated and aligned with the CPPT process. These efforts are intended to reduce the number of separate planning efforts and simplify and align the various plans required under state and federal law.

The ODE has also revised elements of the CPPT based on feedback from districts that have used the instrument. Specifically, ODE has reduced the number of indicators to be assessed from almost 200 to 34 in order to reduce the time and effort required to identify objectives and produce action plans. ODE also plans to post revised requirements on how districts will complete their eCIPS using the CPPT tool but at the time of the completion of this audit guidelines have not been posted on the ODE web site.

The adoption of the CPPT process for Title One schools and for Oregon districts adds a degree of uncertainty to the development and improvement of the current SIP template used by PPS. Should most PPS schools continue to use the current SIP template while PPS Title One schools and the district as a whole employ an entirely different method for school improvement planning? Should the district require all schools to adopt the CPPT tool that is still under review and modification by ODE? Although the district has not yet made a decision about how to change or revise school SIPs, adoption of the CPPT has several advantages and disadvantages as follows.

ADVANTAGES:

- Web- based, on-line electronic system adds structure, support, and standardization. Planning efforts are retained and archived electronically permitting on-going updates and standardized reporting and electronic comparisons with other schools and districts.
- Creates one process that can incorporate other planning requirements (TAG, ELL, etc.) and address key areas of educational effectiveness identified in the Oregon waiver of NCLB requirements

- State training and support may be available to ease adoption and learning curve
- Best-practice based indicators used in the CPPT are derived from research on what works in schools

DISADVANTAGES:

- Initial version of CPPT was complicated and difficult to use due to the number of best practice indicators to be considered
- Funding and consulting support was provided to help Priority, Focus, and SIG schools implement CPPT but this support may not be available to all schools
- CPPT process may not explicitly address some policies that are important to PPS such as Equity plans or clearly align with outcome-based measurement indicators
- CPPT process may be time-consuming and technically challenging for individual PPS schools

PPS decisions about how to change the existing school improvement processes is somewhat dependent on ODE decisions regarding the implementation of new accountability practices. It is not yet clear how the CPPT tool will be applied to non-Title One schools, if at all, and how this new tool will be used by all districts and individual schools in the future. While it may make sense to migrate to a new planning process using the CPPT tool, experience to date indicates that the new tool will take time and effort to implement. On the other hand, simply revising the current SIP template for PPS schools would be simpler to implement but would result in Title One schools and the district using planning process that is different from what other PPS schools are using.

There may be several options available to PPS in moving forward to improve the existing SIP process. Some of these options include:

1. Revise and simplify the current SIP template on an interim basis awaiting final decisions regarding the final CPPT process adopted by ODE.
2. Retain the current SIP template and assess the practicality of moving to the CPPT tool for all schools in future years.
3. Adopt the CPPT tool as soon as practical and begin training and planning for implementation in school year 2014-15 .

Missed potential to guide actions and concentrate efforts

Improving the current school improvement planning process may help address the concerns of building administrators, fulfill the hopes of PPS management, and meet the compliance and accountability needs of state and local government officials:

- School administrators support a more streamlined, useful, and focused school planning tool that deemphasizes compliance requirements but highlights the importance of improving teaching practices that lead to better academic achievement.
- PPS managers share many of the goals of building administrators but also want to see a more coherent connection between district milestones and school-based activities and a clearer process for assessing and documenting school and district accountability.
- Federal and state officials want to create a new model of accountability that provides more flexibility, reduces excessive duplication and administrative burden, and focuses on improving educational outcomes, particularly those schools most in need of better achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the School Improvement Plan process at PPS, the Superintendent should take the following actions:

1. Evaluate options for improving the current School Improvement Plan process.

The Chief Academic Officer may wish to form a committee of regional and school administrators to study options for improving the SIP. Options to consider could include:

- a. Revise and simplify the current SIP template. Considering deleting or shortening the following features: i) how the school organized itself for collaborative work, ii) schedules of family engagement activities, and iii) lists of staff meeting and training events scheduled for the year.
- b. Retain the current SIP template for the next two years while determining if it is practical to adopt the ODE CPPT tool. Pilot test the revised CPPT with a handful of non-Title One schools to determine the level of effort required, the user-friendliness of the tool, and the capacity of the school to administer and use the tool with existing resources. Conduct a survey of Priority and Focus schools at PPS that have used the CPPT tool to obtain insights on the advantages and disadvantages of using the tool, and suggestions for making the tool easier to use.
- c. Adopt the CPPT tool for the 2014-15 school year. Consider developing an internal coaching and support group within PPS to help schools use the CPPT. Work with ODE to determine if a simplified version of CPPT could be developed for schools not in Priority or Focus status. Phase the implementation of the CPPT over one or two years.

2. Change the timeframes for preparing, submitting, and updating school SIPs.

Regardless of the option selected to improve the SIP process, the district should change the preparation and submittal dates of school SIPs from early in the year to mid-year. During the two-year period of the SIP, initiate at least two formal assessments to review school progress in implementing action plans, addressing problems in practice, and meeting achievement goals.

These SIP progress assessments could be held one-third and two-thirds through the two-year SIP period. The findings of the progress assessments could be used to update the goals of the SIP, adjust action plans, and to inform the next two-year SIP.

3. Establish written guidelines for supervisory review, approval, and monitoring of school SIPs. Regardless of the SIP improvement option selected, the Chief Academic Officer should develop written guidelines on how regional administrators will review and approve SIPs submitted by school administrators. The regional administrators should ensure that school SIPs have clearly identified the learner-centered problems at the school, the elements of instruction that need to be improved to address the problems, and the specific goals and objectives the school will pursue to address problem areas. The Chief Academic Officer should also establish clear expectations for how regional administrators will monitor the implementation of SIPs and conduct periodic progress assessments.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Carole Smith
Superintendent

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

March 11, 2013

Richard C. Tracy, District Performance Auditor
Portland Public Schools Board of Education
501 N. Dixon Street
Portland, OR 97227

Dear Mr. Tracy,

Thank you for your work reviewing the efficacy of School Improvement Plans at Portland Public Schools. You makes several useful observations and recommendations that will help our District create a more streamlined and effective School Improvement Planning process.

As you note, PPS produces School Improvement Plans (SIPs) as required by federal and state laws. The current plans contain information on student achievement, goals to improve school performance, and strategies to address problems in teaching practice. They are valued by central office staff as a tool to provide greater visibility into the operations of individual schools. Yet, as you also note, for many of our principals, School Improvement Plans are often more compliance oriented rather than a tool to guide and lead improved instruction. Supervisors provides too little review or feedback on the development of SIPs, and do not consistently review them to evaluate accomplishments or to provide accountability for stated goals. Lastly, you note that the SIP has become a “catchall” for district and state initiatives rather than a document focused on academic improvement.

You make three recommendations to improve SIPs.

1. Evaluate options for improving the current School Improvement Plan process, with potential options including:
 - a. Revise and simplify the current SIP template.
 - b. Retain the current SIP template for the next two years while determining if it is practical to adopt the ODE CPPT tool system-wide.
 - c. Adopt the CPPT tool for the 2014-15 school year.
2. Change the timeframes for preparing, submitting, and updating school SIPs from early in the year to mid-year and change the submission cycle from every year to every two years.
3. Establish written guidelines for supervisory review, approval, and monitoring of School-based SIPs.

I appreciate your observations and recommendations, and believe they will be helpful as we seek to improve our current SIP process. I believe that the SIP has the potential to be a powerful lever to drive student achievement, but agree that in the current state, it is not yet serving that purpose for many schools.

Regarding your first recommendation, in an ideal scenario, all of our schools would be ready to adopt the CPPT tool for the 2014-15 school year. As you state, focus, priority and SIG schools will be required to use the CPPT tool next year and all Title I schools will be required to do so at some point in the future. We are reviewing the relative advantages of using a common tool for the sake of system cohesion. We are also pleased that the indicators within the CPPT tool, used to assess Oregon's priority, focus and model schools, aligns very closely with the Successful Schools Framework of "non-negotiables" that the Office of Schools, under the leadership of CAO Sue Ann Higgens, is drafting. The framework outlines the essential components every school must have and is aligned to the state's school improvement model.

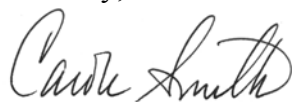
This spring, we will assess how well the CPPT (Customized Planning Process Tool) can effectively serve all district schools. We hope that the tool can be customized to better align with our strategic priorities around racial educational equity and our key performance indicators. We also want to ensure that the CPPT supports the needs of non-Title schools as well as those schools going from "good to great." We look forward to implementing CPPT at all of our schools, assuming the tool can be customized to meet our needs. If for whatever reason, the tool is not yet ready to meet our needs, we will need to explore other options.

Your second recommendation to change the timeframes for preparing, submitting, and updating school SIPs from early in the year to mid-year, is also something we are willing to explore. We believe that we need to align the due date of our SIP process with the arrival of our most critical assessment data (both formative and summative). Also, our belief is that the SIP should promote continuous improvement and guide teaching and learning over the course of a school year. While the official timeline for preparing, submitting and updating SIPs may occur on a specific date once a year or once every other year, we want to be confident that schools are continuously monitoring their plans and adapting their teaching and learning practices accordingly. One of the advantages of the CPPT tool is that it is a web-based, on-line electronic system in which on-going updates are possible. The CPPT tool, with its ability to track both formative and summative assessment data, supports the continuous improvement process that an effective SIP requires.

We are in the process of establishing written guidelines for Regional Administrators regarding supervisory review, approval, and monitoring of school SIPs. This process is already underway and aligns with your third recommendation. We believe it is critical to the future success of the SIP process. The CAO will define a consistent set of expectations with regard to how Regional Administrators assist in the development, review and approval of SIPs. This will include a schedule of periodic reviews of SIPS as part of the regular school visits with principals that Regional Administrators perform. We agree that aligning the SIP with principal evaluations is another step that should be incorporated into the SIP process. This too is already underway with our Human Resources department and our principals' association leadership.

I anticipate that we will be able to implement a number of your recommendations to improve our School Improvement Planning process. School Improvement Plans should serve as a valuable tool to guide teaching and learning in all of our schools. A focus on improving School Improvement Plans will move us one step closer toward our mission of ensuring that *every student succeeds, regardless of race or class*. Thank you for your review and recommendations on this tool for us.

Sincerely,



Carole Smith

APPENDIX A

School Improvement Plan Literature and Research

A Performance Measurement Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improvement. National Performance Management Advisory Commission, 2010.

School Improvement Handbook. Oregon Department of Education, 2007.

Professional Learning Communities at Work. Power Point presentation - Dr. Richard and Rebecca DuFour, 2006.

Standards Alignment - Tools and Processes. Power Point Presentation - Douglas Reeves, Center for Performance Assessment.

School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils. Education Improvement Commission, November 2000.

Data Wise - A step-by-step for using assessment results to improve teaching and learning. Edited by Boudett, City, and Murnane, Harvard Education Press, 2008.

WISE Ways to Improve Your System. Mary Beth Flachbart and Steve Underwood, Idaho Department of Education.

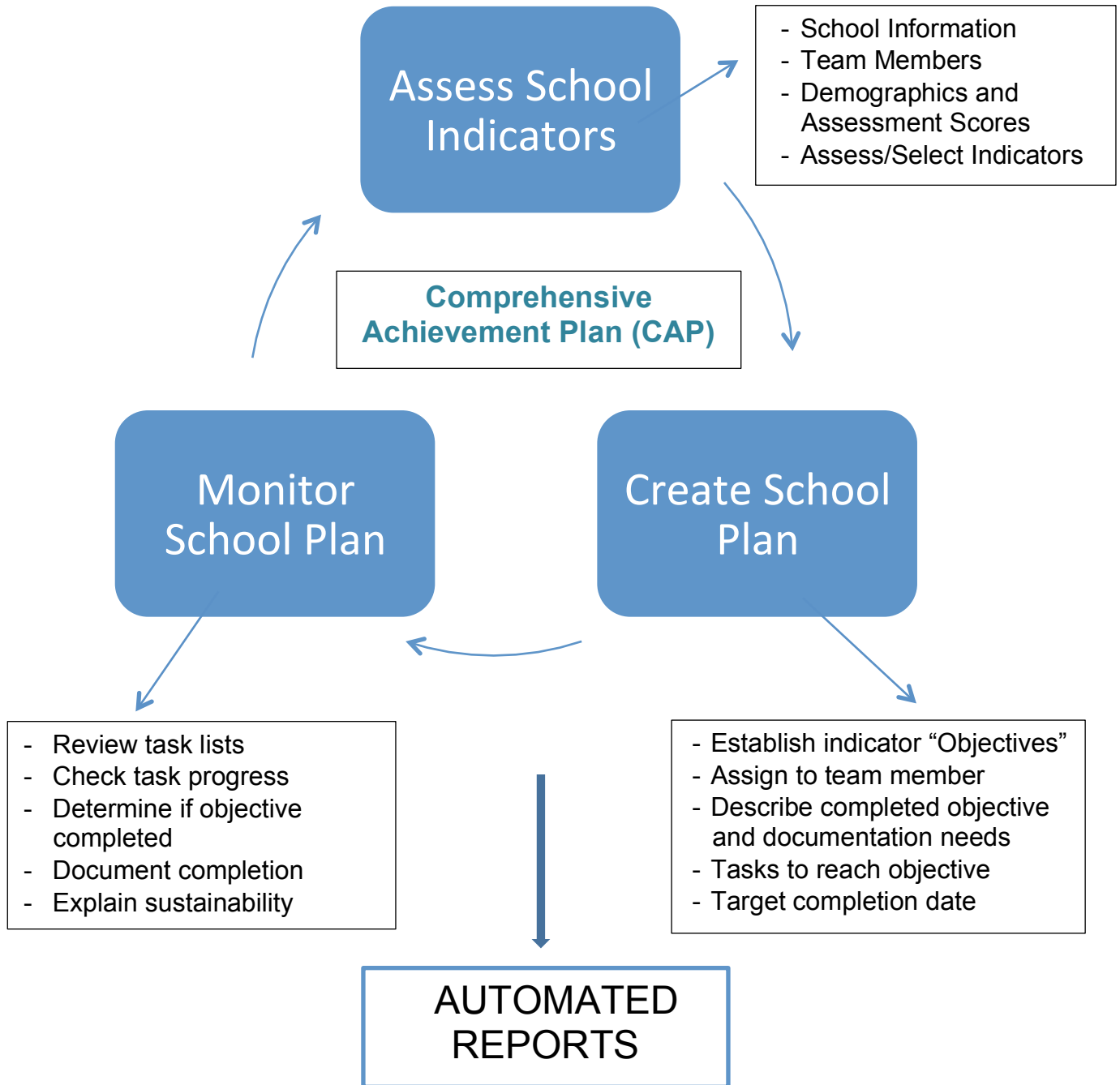
Guide to Writing a Continuous Improvement Plan. Oregon Department of Education, 2005.

Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement. Center on Innovation and Improvement, 2007.

Indistar - Lighting our path to stellar learning. Center on Innovation and Improvement, Academic Development Institute, 2009.

APPENDIX B

Overview of the ODE Customized Planning Process Tool



APPENDIX C

PPS School Improvement Plan Template

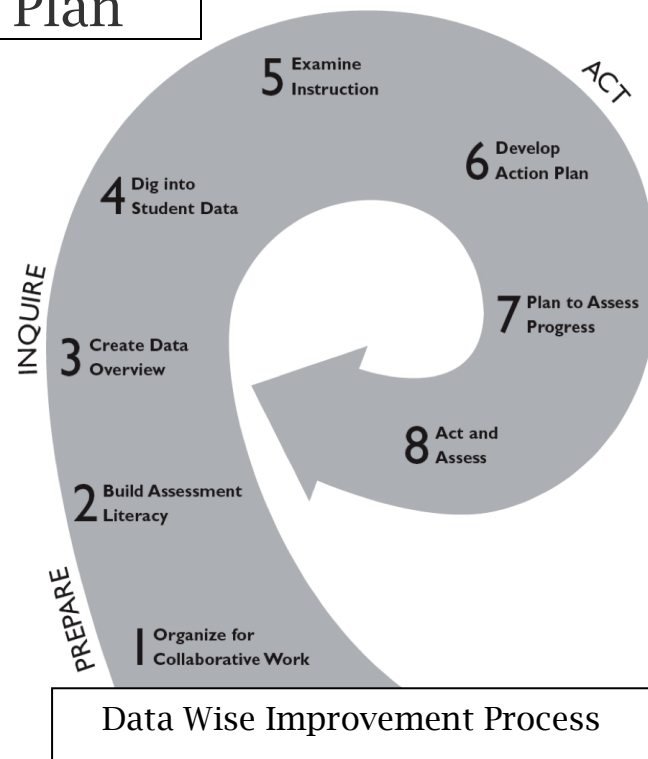


2011-2012 School Improvement Plan

SCHOOL:

PRINCIPAL:

REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR:



SITE COUNCIL TEAM MEMBERS		
Name	Signature	Position

SIP DATA TEAM MEMBERS (If applicable)	
Name	Position

I. Organization for Collaborative Work

1. How have team members been prepared for the work of the Data Team? Describe how members were selected, the experiences and perspectives they bring and training they have had individually or as a group to prepare them for the examination of data, racial equity and special populations in the building.
2. How is communication between the team and stakeholder groups (teachers, classified staff, parents and community members) structured and supported? This can be described through narrative or demonstrated through the school calendar (attach).
3. What diverse views and multiple perspectives are present in your school community? How are these reflected in and embraced by the work and recommendations of the Data Team?

II. Data Interpretation Leading to Areas for Improvement

1. Looking at all the assessment data available at your school (more than just OAKS data), what do you know about your student achievement results? What trends are evident within the academic year and as students progress through grade-levels. How has the program served groups of students over time?
2. Which groups of students at your school are doing well and in what content area(s) (e.g., reading, writing, math) or behavior(s) (e.g., attendance, discipline)? Which group(s) of students, isolating race, language and special population, are your lowest-performing students and how does their performance compare to other students' achievement or behaviors in and across subgroups?
3. What causes (your problem(s) of practice) contribute to these outcomes? Which of these have you identified as your highest leverage points and why?

Equity Action Plan

Describe where school staff is along the continuum of the Courageous Conversations process. What steps will the school staff commit to in order to promote racial and achievement equity for all students in the building during the 2011-12 school year.

Move the check to where your school is on the continuum



Leadership is trained	Equity team is formed and clear responsibilities are established, e.g.: -Engage in structured dialogue about race to build racial awareness -Review data on achievement, gaps and behavior/climate -Conduct action research on culturally congruent practice	Equity team engages in an examination of critical race theory, such as Courageous Conversations, examination of practice and assessment of impact	Equity team presents nature and outcomes of the work of the equity team to whole staff, and to select parent or community groups within the school	Staff engages in work of Equity team (structured dialogue, discussion, racial autobiography, book study, action research)	Students, families and community are included in equity work, discussion and celebrations			
What steps were taken last year?								
September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May/June
What will administration and staff do to move along the continuum during the next school year?								
September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May/June
What data will the school collect to evaluate the impact of the equity plan and actions?								

III a. Academic Action Plan for Whole School Improvement

<p>STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOAL (SMART GOAL):</p> <p>Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely</p>
<p>MILESTONE:</p> <p><i>Schools should be considering all milestones across grade-spans as part of their goal setting. For instance, a K-5 elementary schools should still be considering whether their students are on track to meet 7th grade writing and 8th grade algebra milestones.</i></p>
<p>LEARNER-CENTERED PROBLEM (What are your students struggling to learn or to be able to do?):</p>
<p>PROBLEM OF PRACTICE (What elements of instruction need to be improved in order to address the learner-centered problem?):</p>
<p>Content Area And/Or Instructional Framework:</p> <p>*2011-12 All schools are required to identify a content area and adopt an instructional framework to guide teacher practice. 2012-13 All schools identify a research-based instructional framework to support content area focus (foci). PPS supported Instructional Frameworks include Sheltered Instruction, Differentiation, Assessment for Learning, Writing and /or reading across contents areas, Classroom Strategies that Work, and SIM; Safe and Civil Schools, PBIS</p>

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS FOR STAFF	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION	ASSESS PROGRESS
<i>What administration and staff is going to do to address the Problem of Practice. Include specific instructional strategies tied to your problem of practice.</i>	<i>Who will provide the professional development to support the implementation steps? Who will provide the oversight for implementation and evaluation of the instructional strategy?</i>	<i>When will this implementation happen? (Provide start and end dates) When will you expect to see results?</i>	<i>What visual and physical evidence (e.g., classroom learning walks, grade level discussions, lesson plan review) will administration and staff use to determine the level of strategy implementation?</i>	<i>What will students know or be able to do as a result of this strategy implementation? List specific assessments, assignments and other indicators of student success (formative and summative). What results do you expect to see if the action plan is fully implemented</i>

III b. Academic Action Plan for Closing Achievement Gaps

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOAL (SMART GOAL):
Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely
MILESTONE:
<i>Schools should be considering all milestones across grade-spans as part of their goal setting. For instance, a K-5 elementary schools should still be considering whether their students are on track to meet 7th grade writing and 8th grade algebra milestones</i>
LEARNER-CENTERED PROBLEM (What are your students struggling to learn or to be able to do?):
PROBLEM OF PRACTICE (What elements of instruction need to be improved in order to address the learner-centered problem?):
Content Area And/Or Instructional Framework:
<p>*2011-12 All schools are required to identify a content area and adopt an instructional framework to guide teacher practice.</p> <p>2012-13 All schools identify a research-based instructional framework to support content area focus (foci).</p> <p>PPS supported Instructional Frameworks include Sheltered Instruction, Differentiation, Assessment for Learning, Writing and /or reading across contents areas, Classroom Strategies that Work, and SIM; Safe and Civil Schools, PBIS</p>

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS FOR STAFF	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION	ASSESS PROGRESS
<i>What administration and staff is going to do to address the Problem of Practice. Include specific instructional strategies tied to your problem of practice.</i>	<i>Who will provide the professional development to support the implementation steps? Who will provide the oversight for implementation and evaluation of the instructional strategy?</i>	<i>When will this implementation happen? (Provide start and end dates) When will you expect to see results?</i>	<i>What visual and physical evidence (e.g., classroom learning walks, grade level discussions, lesson plan review) will administration and staff use to determine the level of strategy implementation?</i>	<i>What will students know or be able to do as a result of this strategy implementation? List specific assessments, assignments and other indicators of student success (formative and summative). What results do you expect to see if the action plan is fully implemented</i>

III c. Academic Action Plan (Optional)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT/SCHOOL CLIMATE OR BEHAVIOR GOAL (SMART GOAL):
Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely
MILESTONE:
<i>Schools should be considering all milestones across grade-spans as part of their goal setting. For instance, a K-5 elementary schools should still be considering whether their students are on track to meet 7th grade writing and 8th grade algebra milestones</i>
LEARNER-CENTERED PROBLEM (What are your students struggling to learn or to be able to do?):
PROBLEM OF PRACTICE (What elements of instruction need to be improved in order to address the learner-centered problem?):
Content Area And/Or Instructional Framework:
<p>*2011-12 All schools are required to identify a content area and adopt an instructional framework to guide teacher practice.</p> <p>2012-13 All schools identify a research-based instructional framework to support content area focus (foci).</p> <p>PPS supported Instructional Frameworks include Sheltered Instruction, Differentiation, Assessment for Learning, Writing and /or reading across contents areas, Classroom Strategies that Work, and SIM; Safe and Civil Schools, PBIS</p>

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS FOR STAFF	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION	ASSESS PROGRESS
<i>What administration and staff is going to do to address the Problem of Practice. Include specific instructional strategies tied to your problem of practice.</i>	<i>Who will provide the professional development to support the implementation steps? Who will provide the oversight for implementation and evaluation of the instructional strategy?</i>	<i>When will this implementation happen? (Provide start and end dates) When will you expect to see results?</i>	<i>What visual and physical evidence (e.g., classroom learning walks, grade level discussions, lesson plan review) will administration and staff use to determine the level of strategy implementation?</i>	<i>What will students know or be able to do as a result of this strategy implementation? List specific assessments, assignments and other indicators of student success (formative and summative). What results do you expect to see if the action plan is fully implemented</i>

IV. Parent and Family Involvement Plan

In accordance with PPS policy directive 7.10.041-AD on Parental and Family Involvement in Support of Academic Achievement:

- Our plan for family involvement will be reviewed at least annually by a representative group of parents and community members, including families from under-represented groups such as parents of students with disabilities, migrant-eligible families and language minority families.

Review Date(s): _____

To be reviewed by: _____
(Groups) _____

- Meetings to discuss family and parent involvement will be held in accessible meeting rooms and will be advertised broadly in a variety of formats and languages as needed to accommodate our families.

To be translated: _____ By: _____ Into: _____
(Documents) _____ (Name) _____ (Language) _____

- Key communications regarding our academic program, School Improvement Plan, and student achievement will be provided in all major languages of our school to the extent possible.
- We will have strategies for assisting parents in understanding our program and how to help their children achieve.
- A meeting will be held with parents of TAG students explaining the services that their students are receiving including how and when students can access accelerated curriculum options within your school.
Date of meeting: _____
- A meeting will be held with parents of ESL students to explain the services that their students are receiving and how to access interpretation and translation services. Date of meeting: _____

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN: Types of Family Engagement, based on the work of Joyce Epstein are: (1) **Parenting** or assisting families with child-rearing skills that support children as students, (2) **Communicating** with families about school programs and student progress, (3) **Volunteering** including recruiting, training and scheduling families as volunteers, (4) **Learning at Home** or helping families with learning/curriculum related activities that can be done at home, (5) **Decision-making** like parent advisory groups or advocacy, and (6) **Collaborating with the Community** to provide resources and services to families or to provide services back to the community.

Schedule of family and community involvement activities to support goals.

ACTIVITIES	RATIONALE	TYPE (1-6)	DATE	GRADE LEVEL/ TARGET AUDIENCE	LEAD PERSON AND SUPPORTS
III a. Student Achievement Goal for Whole School Improvement:					
III b. Student Achievement Goal for Closing Achievement Gaps:					
III c. Student Achievement/School Climate or Behavior Goal (Optional):					

V. Professional Development Plan

Please describe briefly how school meeting time will be organized for the year.

VI. ADDITIONAL TITLE I SCHOOLWIDE PLAN COMPONENTS

A. STAFF	
What number of classes are being taught by teachers who are not Highly Qualified as defined by No Child Left Behind?	
What number of teachers in the building have three or fewer years of experience in the profession?	
What building based supports are in place for teachers new to the profession?	

Portland Public Schools ensures that highly qualified teachers are recruited and retained through networking with local universities, colleges and alumni associations, the Oregon Professional Educator Fair, and through postings on various websites. Staffing specialists from the district's Human Resources Department are assigned to work with schools in order to ensure that staff are highly qualified for their assignment(s), or to assist in the development of a highly qualified plan. Teachers are supported in this process through tuition reimbursement for coursework and professional development funds to cover the cost of subject area assessments. Our school works closely with the district to provide the best possible instruction for our students.

Because our school receives Title I, Part A funding, we will hold an annual meeting where parents will:

- 1.) learn about our Title I services,
- 2.) assist in the review of the Title I Parent-School Compact, and
- 3.) advise the school on uses for family involvement funds that would best serve their needs.

This meeting will be communicated to and open for all Title I-eligible families.

Annual Meeting Date: _____ (may correspond with another scheduled meeting)

B. TRANSITION PLAN				
LEVEL	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE PERSON/TEAM	KEY DATES	Costs/ Sources
Preschool to Kindergarten				
Elementary to middle (Grade 5-Grade 6)				
Middle to high school (Grade 8 - Grade 9)				
Students with disabilities				
Students receiving ESL services				
TAG-identified students				

C. IMPLEMENTATION STEP, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR PARENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY	FUNDING SOURCE (DISTRICT, CONSOLIDATED, TITLE I OR OTHER GRANT, PARTNERSHIP) <i>What are your funding sources? What district-level support for professional development (coaching, materials and visitations) will you access? What other partnerships and supports does the school benefit from and how do they align to school improvement objectives?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How will you align your resources to accomplish your goal?</i>	GOAL <i>Reference goals by section number (III a., III b. or III c.).</i>	ESTIMATED COST (UNLESS IN-KIND)