

Critical Components of Plans

State statute specifically designates the components that must be addressed in district and campus plans. It also states that district and campus plans must be mutually supportive to accomplish the identified objectives and that all pertinent federal planning requirements must be addressed through the district and campus level planning process (TEC §11.251). It is essential for every district level planning and decision making committee to be aware of the critical planning components that are identified by law. For campus and district plans to be mutually supportive, campus level committees must be aware of the components of the district plan so that the campus plans may be designed to assist in accomplishing the district performance objectives through consistent strategies and coordinated resource and staff allocations.

The following critical components of district and campus improvement plans may be included. Components should be appropriate for ages, grade levels, and specific characteristics of the students served within the districts' and campuses' educational programs.

Mission Statement

Each school district and campus usually develops its own unique mission statement that focuses on the shared beliefs of the educational staff, parents, and community members. A mission statement typically is a concise statement of purpose and function of the organization that can be easily understood and adopted by all students, parents, educational staff, and community members. It is intended to set a broad standard by which the activities of the district or school may be consistently guided over time. It usually contains or is followed by statements of generally held beliefs that fortify the mission.

While a mission statement is not specifically required under state law, it is required that district and campus plans, at a minimum, support the goals and objectives in state law [TEC §11.251(a)(2)].

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Prior to setting long-range goals or measurable district or campus performance objectives, effective district and campus planning and decision-making teams *should* review the most current, accurate needs assessment information available. Teams use this review to determine the effectiveness of educational programs for each and every student population served. State statute regarding district planning specifically calls for a comprehensive needs assessment addressing student performance on academic excellence indicators and other appropriate measures of performance. The results must be disaggregated with respect to the performance of all student groups served, including categories of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and populations served by special programs, including students in special education programs under Subchapter A, Chapter 29 (TEC §11.252). State law indicates that campus-level committees must assess the academic achievement for each student in the school using the academic excellence indicator system (TEC §11.253).

Sections 11.252 and 11.253 of the TEC were amended by the 76th Legislature to ensure the inclusion of students in special education programs as defined under Subchapter A, Chapter 29.

According to TEC §29.003 (b), a student is eligible to participate in a school district's special education program if the student:

- (1) Is not more than 21 years of age and has a visual or auditory impairment that prevents the student from being adequately or safely educated in public school without the provision of special services; or
- (2) Is at least three but not more than 21 years of age and has one or more of the following disabilities that prevents the student from being adequately or safely educated in public school without the provision of special services:
 - (A) physical disability;
 - (B) mental retardation;
 - (C) emotional disturbance;
 - (D) learning disability;
 - (E) autism;
 - (F) speech disability; or
 - (G) traumatic brain injury.

The needs assessment may involve reviewing and analyzing multiple types of data. The needs assessment may include, and extend beyond, the following:

- Student performance on the academic excellence indicators, disaggregated by grade level, subject, classroom, gender, ethnicity, economic status, language differences, and qualification for participation in special programs;
- Other current, quantitative measures of program outcomes, such as the results of norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests selected and administered locally;
- Locally developed measures of student performance, such as teacher-made assessments of essential curriculum outcomes or student behavior;
- Indicators of expected and actual outcomes for students in special programs that are typically exempt from measures used in the academic excellence indicators (e.g., students in early childhood, special education, migrant programs, kindergarten through second grade, and programs for those who are limited English proficient);
- Surveys or group evaluations indicating the perceptions of staff, parents, community members, and students regarding the effectiveness of school programs and services;
- Description of organizational, physical, equipment, staff, materials, and other resource needs available to support improvement initiatives; and
- Predicted needs based on projected enrollment, demographic trends, legislative impact, and state and community political and economic events.

A needs assessment does not rest with simply gathering information. An analysis of the patterns and trends within and across multiple sources of data must be conducted by a team of knowledgeable practitioners. These practitioners represent the various areas of expertise

needed to dissect and reconstruct all the pieces of the complex puzzle that work together to comprise the operational instructional delivery system.

An effective needs assessment entails one more step, a process that is the critical linkage between examination of data and development of effective strategies. It is suggested that the planning team decipher probable *causal factors*. These factors may be contributing to low performance in particular subject areas, low attendance rates, or high dropout rates for specific student populations. Although this is not mentioned under statute, it is considered to be good practice to conduct a determination of causal factors.

The team should identify the probable causes and, if possible, verify that, in fact, they are clear antecedents to the specific areas of need identified. Without completing this important step, the team may discover that the solutions (or strategies for improvement) may be misguided and ineffective. The accumulated summary of patterns of information and the clear isolation of probable contributing factors will provide a useful background for developing feasible improvement activities and making effective decisions during the implementation phase of the improvement plan.

A Title I schoolwide program should include a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school that is based on information on the performance of children in relation to the state content standards and student performance standards.

For secondary campuses, the state's educational accountability system is designed to ensure that schools are not rewarded for high TAKS performance at the expense of losing an inordinately high number of students as dropouts. If a middle school or high school demonstrates high TAKS performance, yet also allows many at-risk students (usually minority and/or economically disadvantaged) to leave the educational system, a resulting high annual and cumulative dropout rate will indicate the failure of the system to achieve both equity and excellence.

It is important for districts and district communities to conduct a thorough needs assessment with respect to the dropout rate. Such a needs assessment may include the following:

- Analysis of the dropout rate for different student populations, e.g. by gender, number of years overage, ethnicity, special program assignment, language difference, economic status, involvement (or lack thereof) in extracurricular activities, and/or whether students are pregnant or parents;
- Analysis of specific characteristics of at-risk populations on the campus that may be related to causal factors impacting the dropout rate (e.g., repeated course failures, evidence of abuse or neglect, evidence of association with drug or alcohol abuse, repeated absences due to chronic health problems, etc.);
- Analysis of program or instructional factors that may inadvertently contribute to the dropout rate;
- A summary of the analysis of characteristics of students who actually dropped out in the past 1-3 years from the specific campus, reasons cited for dropping out, follow-up recovery efforts made, and identification of successful recovery strategies; and

- Analyses of disciplinary incidences for disaggregated populations; placements in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) or juvenile justice alternative education programs (JJAEPs); suspensions and expulsions; and their impacts on school leavers.

When conducting needs assessments, all student populations including students in special education programs must be considered. Districts are reminded of the increased focus of the state on students in special education programs. New legislation (HB 2172) passed during the 76th Legislative Session and effective as of September 1, 1999, amended TEC § 39.073 Determining Accreditation Status to include Subsection (e). This inclusion states that the agency shall consider the district's current special education compliance status with the agency in determining a district's accreditation rating. Section 39.072 was also amended by HB 2172 to state that the special education compliance status and the academic excellence indicators adopted under Sections 39.051(b)(1) through (6) shall be the main considerations of the agency in the rating of the district under the section on accreditation standards. (TEC § 39.072 contains two passages identified as (b). Please refer to Chapter 39, Subchapter D in its entirety for assistance in determining accreditation status.)

Long-Range Goals

Long-range goals are broad statements of expected outcomes that are consistent with the belief statements, vision, or philosophy of the organization and the stated mission. The state's public education goals are for students in the public education system to demonstrate exemplary performance in reading and writing the English language and understanding mathematics, science, and social studies.

District and campus long-range educational goals typically are focused on desired outcomes for students and are usually projected for a three- to five-year period. They may, at a minimum, address the state standards for the academic excellence indicators and may include other local priorities as well. They are usually reviewed and, if needed, revised annually, based on the most current, accurate needs assessment data of the local district or campus. Long-range goals typically are both strategic in nature and limited in number to provide direction and focus. New provisions in state statute (TEC §11.253) require campus goals to address violence prevention and intervention on campus and programs to encourage parental involvement.

Strategies

Strategies are statements that indicate how available resources will be used to accomplish identified long-range goals and annual performance objectives. Strategies may address the use of organizational, physical plant, spatial, material, political, human, fiscal, technological, and/or informational resources. Strategies should link the selected measurable performance objectives to accomplish the desired district or campus long-range goals. Effective strategies are characterized by the following:

- Strategies address broad improvement initiatives by outlining changes in district and campus operations and support activities that are expected to result in significantly improved outcomes for specifically targeted populations.
- Strategies include sequential activities or tasks that will result in specifically identified changes in knowledge, skills, or attitudes of educators, parents, community members, and, either directly or indirectly, of students.

- Strategies include, where appropriate, use of available community, regional, state, or federal options for effective support of local flexibility (e.g., waivers from state laws, coordination of regional health services, support from local community service providers).

At the campus level, strategies must address methods for violence prevention and intervention on campus. Campus strategies must also address a program to encourage parental involvement [TEC §11.253(d)]. Strategies within effective district plans address the areas required in state law. These include instructional methods for addressing the needs of student groups not achieving to their full potential. They also include methods for addressing the needs of students in special programs, such as suicide prevention, conflict resolution, violence prevention, or dyslexia treatment programs (TEC §11.252).

In addition, dropout reduction and prevention strategies must be addressed in district plans. Strategies and activities may be identified that have proved to be successful on specific campuses or that are indicated in research. New initiatives or activities may expand upon or provide alternative approaches to those already used to prevent and/or recover dropouts. It is suggested that improvement strategies for dropout prevention involve joint efforts from a variety of stakeholders who might include any or all of the following:

- members of the site-based decision-making team of each campus
- school counselor(s)
- school health professional(s)
- parents of students in at-risk situations
- students in at-risk situations
- specialists (e.g., vocational education, special education, bilingual education, and migrant teachers)
- community employers
- community service providers.

Other strategies that must be addressed in district plans include:

- the integration of technology in instructional and administrative programs
- provisions for the improvement of discipline management
- staff development for professional staff
- career education to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a broad range of career opportunities
- accelerated education (TEC §11.252)
- information on higher education admissions, financial aid opportunities, grant programs, and curriculum choice.

Resource Allocation

If plans are realistically conceived, the planning committee will give practical consideration to the resources needed to accomplish the stated objectives. This is particularly important if

resources are scarce and additional funds are needed from community, business, or state sources. When planning committees take time to estimate resource requirements and project related costs and benefits associated with objectives, often alternative solutions or sources of assistance can be identified. Another benefit of identifying needed resources is that different campuses may discover shared resource needs and thus may pool efforts to acquire such commonly desired resources.

Effective district and campus plans contain the following provisions with respect to resources:

- Appropriately certified and highly qualified trained staff members are assigned to accomplish the initiatives and strategies included in the plan.
- Clearly specified assessments of the costs for implementing new initiatives, and evidence indicates that the budget has been developed (or adjusted) to support the implementation of the plan.
- Priorities are identified for financial support, and alternative sources have been identified and accessed to address any shortfall in resources.
- Adequate and appropriate space, materials, and equipment are addressed within the plan to accomplish the specified strategies.
- The source of funds for each strategy is identified. Funds must be budgeted consistently with program legal fiscal requirements. With respect to the use of federal funds on schoolwide programs, the fund source would be identified as a combination of federal fund sources, as appropriate.
- Supplemental direct costs and personnel attributed to compensatory education and accelerated instruction are identified in accordance with 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §109.B.

Implementation

Provisions for implementation of the plan are clearly stated within the content of effective plans. Implementation components may include the following:

- Specific activities are listed sequentially under each strategy.
- For each activity, incremental timelines are provided by which accomplishment can be monitored on an ongoing basis throughout each month or instructional period.
- Assignments are clearly specified for individuals responsible for periodic evaluation of progress and for persons accountable for the accomplishment of each activity.
- Incremental progress reviews are scheduled for presentation to the planning and decision-making committees and the board.
- A specific expected result, measured in terms of student behaviors, attitudes, or skills, is targeted for each activity so it can be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Evaluation

Plans should be monitored frequently for several reasons. First, the planners, stakeholders (e.g., students and parents) and resource providers (e.g., taxpayers) will wish to know if the plan is being carried out as it was intended. Second, the implementers need to have some basis to determine if the plan is both realistic in its projected expectations and sufficiently supported. If not, corrective efforts may be introduced, if needed, at critical points in the implementation of the sequential activities for each objective. Third, implementers and stakeholders can celebrate successes and use evidence of completion of objectives to further refine goals and justify future support for resources. For all these reasons, it is important for plans to include well-conceived evaluation criteria for each activity listed under each measurable objective.

The evaluation phase of the planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation cycle has two basic components: formative and summative evaluation activities. The formative, or frequent, ongoing evaluation activities should be guided by expected results and incremental timelines associated with the activities developed to accomplish the performance objectives. The summative, or annual, evaluation is conducted to assess the degree to which the district or campus actually accomplished the school year's targeted performance objectives.

Formative Evaluation

The purpose of formative evaluation is to provide the opportunity and basis for corrective actions *during* the implementation phase. The evaluation should be tied to the initial assessment of student performance and should be based on the board-approved performance objectives. Evaluation measures assist in monitoring expected outcomes frequently and with specificity in the following ways:

- Measurable outcomes for each activity are identified with respect to expected knowledge, skills, or attitudes that students will acquire.

- Short-term outcomes (e.g., weekly, monthly, or by instructional periods) are included for each population for whom performance objectives have been identified.

Formative evaluation may take many forms. Some examples follow. They may or may not be appropriate to the needs of your school or district. If the local needs assessment and performance objectives address these areas, they may be pertinent examples.

- quarterly summary reports on academic excellence indicators that are measurable at frequent intervals, e.g., attendance rates and dropout rates disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, economic status, special program assignment, and courses or classes
- results on locally-developed performance measures for special needs populations acquired during each grading period
- interim survey response summaries of the perceptions of program and service recipients (e.g., students or parents in pilot programs)
- frequency counts of different types of disciplinary incidents within a specific period desegregated by gender, ethnicity, economic status, special program assignment, and courses or classes
- disaggregated patterns of placements in disciplinary AEPs or JJAEPs, suspensions and expulsions
- participation rates of students in different types of extracurricular activities desegregated by gender, ethnicity, economic status, and special program assignment
- samples of portfolio entries for targeted students in pilot projects initiated as a result of the planning and decision-making process
- video or other media presentations of events that have occurred as a result of the completion of activities within the plan.

Formative evaluation measures are intended to allow for ongoing feedback to educational staff so they may determine if the day-by-day instructional strategies deliver the intended results. This feedback provides an opportunity for modifications, if needed, in a timely manner.

Summative Evaluation

The results of annual summaries of district and campus accomplishments may be used both to note accomplishments and to define and initiate needed areas for change. The annual performance report is one example of a summative evaluation report. Student performance on the academic excellence indicators is included in the annual evaluation.

Other examples of annual measures of performance are provided below. They are cited as possible measures that may be considered. However, they are not necessarily appropriate to all educational programs. Many annual evaluative measures may be chosen, depending on the district or campus needs assessment and identified performance objectives. Examples of summative evaluative measures are the:

- percent of students at each grade level (Grades 7-12), by gender, ethnicity, economic status, and program assignment, who dropped out of school during the school year for a period of time sufficient to prohibit passing courses or being promoted to the next grade
- percent of students served in early childhood programs who exited the programs at an assessed readiness level sufficient to participate successfully with age-level peers in the regular educational program
- principal or other professional staff appraisals tied to the accomplishment of campus performance objectives
- perceptions of business representatives concerning the readiness of exiting graduates for the workplace
- number or percent of the graduating class that obtained scholarships for enrollment in institutes of higher learning
- percent of students at each grade level, by gender, ethnicity, economic status, and program assignment, who were passed to the next grade
- percent of students with disabilities who were dismissed from special education programs based on evidence that they are functioning successfully on or above grade level in non-special education programs
- district's current special education compliance status with the agency
- percent of students involved in disciplinary incidents disaggregated by types of offenses, frequency of offenses, ethnicity, gender, economic status, program assignment, and grade level.

Summative evaluation measures are intended to summarize the cumulative results for the year. They will typically provide a basis for, or augment the annual needs assessment to guide revisions to the planning and strategies for the coming year.

Requirements for District Plans

In accordance with TEC §11.252, each district improvement plan **must** include provisions for:

1. a comprehensive needs assessment addressing district student performance on the academic excellence indicators, and other appropriate measures of performance, that are disaggregated by all student groups served by the district, including categories of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sex, and populations served by special programs, including students in special education programs under Subchapter A, Chapter 29;
2. measurable district performance objectives for all appropriate academic excellence indicators for all student populations, including students in special education programs under Subchapter A, Chapter 29, and other measures of student performance that may be identified through the comprehensive needs assessment;
3. strategies for improvement of student performance that include:

- instructional methods for addressing the needs of student groups not achieving to their full potential;
 - methods for addressing the needs of students for special programs, such as suicide prevention, conflict resolution, violence prevention, or dyslexia treatment programs;
 - dropout reduction;
 - integration of technology in instructional and administrative programs;
 - discipline management;
 - staff development for professional staff of the district;
 - career education to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a broad range of career opportunities; and
 - accelerated education.
4. strategies for providing to middle school, junior high school, and high school students, those students' teachers and counselors, and those students' parents information about:
 - higher education admissions and financial aid opportunities;
 - the TEXAS grant program and the Teach for Texas grant program established under Subchapter M, Chapter 56;
 - the need for students to make informed curriculum choices to be prepared for success beyond high school; and
 - sources of information on higher education admissions and financial aid;
 5. resources needed to implement identified strategies;
 6. staff responsible for ensuring the accomplishment of each strategy;
 7. timelines for ongoing monitoring of implementation of each improvement strategy; and
 8. formative evaluation criteria for determining periodically whether strategies are resulting in intended improvement of student performance.