

Exemplary Schools Organization



Building World Class Schools

Dr. Vincent F. Cotter, Ed. D.
610-656-8762
Email: vinnysup355@gmail.com

School Turnaround Services

Background

Exemplary Schools Organization was founded to assist schools and/or school districts with their efforts to improve student achievement and to create high performing schools. We are dedicated to improving school achievement through leadership which is visionary and strategic by providing an array of support services to schools that are “persistently low performing” or identified as requiring “turnaround” services. We assist in the development of a comprehensive improvement plan which embeds the mentoring of leaders and strategic support as critical strategies for success in this process. We have documented success through the application of practical strategies and proven solutions that focus on excellence, equity and higher school district performance.

Philosophy

We believe that leaders are key in improving schools identified as “persistently low performing” or for “turnaround” services. By working with leaders and defining their interactions with stakeholders, schools and school districts have the ability to progress in developing a coherent and transparent plan that will dramatically improve student achievement. It is through a collaborative in-depth examination of several key essential elements and sub-sections of those elements that disconnections and obstacles to the learning process are discovered. With this data, a substantive and targeted design and planning process begins that is individualized for each school or district. An essential component that occurs simultaneously is building the internal capacity of the leadership team and staff.

Process

While each school is unique with its own set of challenges and internal dynamics, our process recognizes the importance of acquiring, analyzing and collaborating in the prioritization of data before any planning can begin. Not only does this process recognize past efforts to rectify poor student achievement, it provides an opportunity to collaborate and build a sense of urgency. Without focusing clearly on the issues as a group, any subsequent action planning is wasted energy that erodes the trust in the process.

Step One

Depending on the size of the school and the timeline for improvement, the following survey instruments are distributed to stakeholders which assists in the identification of the learning disconnections and any associated structures and practices:

- *School Systems Cross Check (full or abbreviated instruments);*
- *Hierarchy of School Development*

The Schools Systems Cross Check analyzes over 150 factors that contribute to the leadership and learning process. Most of these factors are related to Alignment, Atmosphere, Accountability and Leadership but sub-sections of each element correlate with teaching and learning practices.

Simultaneously, we provide training to the leadership team with specific strategies for execution while creating an atmosphere more conducive to improvement.

Upon analyzing the data from the surveys, our team meets with members of the organization to clarify and verify the results. This collaborative process builds the foundation from which an individualized plan is developed.

At the same time, we examine all practices, documents and policies as they relate to the desired goals, aspirations and outcomes along with all standardized and internal achievement data.

Step Two

Following the acquisition, verification and analysis of data, we, collaboratively meet with the leadership team and key faculty leaders to begin the prioritization process. Feedback and input are critical because it is imperative to build a consensus of action, ownership and synergy.

Meeting as a combined group, the leadership team and key faculty partners conduct an “*Appreciative Inquiry*” into the past. We recognize those accomplishments and efforts that successfully contributed to the school’s progress and pledge to maintain those efforts that have been effective.

Utilizing a “Pareto Method” of prioritization, the group proceeds to prioritize the disconnections and obstacles. Further analysis requires that the group determine which identified disconnections have the greatest impact on the school. Most identified priorities are generally complex and require further dissection and possibly reclassification. The goal is to clearly define these priorities so that the leadership team and key faculty leaders can create concrete, actionable and measurable plans for improvement that immediately impact student learning.

Finally, the results of the analysis, verification, and prioritization are discussed with larger groups of faculty members for more generalized internal ownership.

Step Three

Having reviewed the priorities with the general membership of the school, key members of the leadership team and key faculty members begin developing a plan which will guide the improvement process.

Even though all district resources are available for supporting the developed plan, the responsibility for its execution rests exclusively with those who wrote it. In other words, the actionable steps cannot be delegated to staff members beyond those within the “turnaround” school and its designated improvement team.

Prior to finalization, the plan is reviewed by the Exemplary Schools “point of contact,” the superintendent and appropriate district office curriculum staff to determine if the budgetary and curriculum supervisory resources are appropriately allocated to accomplish the outcomes of the plan.

Once the plan receives the district’s approval, the contents of it are communicated to the board and the community at large.

Step Four

From our perspective, developing a plan and commencing its execution is just the beginning. We will assist with on-going measurement and monitoring of the plan by meeting with the leadership team and key faculty leaders on a regular basis. We will be available to problem solve, refine and to guarantee success. We are interested in both short and long-term progress because we recognize that sustainability and instructional stability will result in the greatest gains.

Prognosis

The duration of our involvement is contingent upon the complexity and depth of the achievement issue and the size of the school due to the additional time for data analysis and the number of team meetings. Most school/district achievement issues involve three years to resolve given that the initial 6 months is dedicated to focusing on data acquisition, analysis, interpretation, prioritization and remedial planning.

Contractual Guarantee

We guarantee that if significant student progress is not made after Year Two, the district will not be charged the consultant’s hourly rate for Year Three. The contract costs include travel expenses in the total cost. Initial travel costs can be mitigated through an on-line analysis of data and documents.

We also recognize the uniqueness of each district and will customize a design that addresses your specific needs. Beyond the initial stages of analysis and engagement, meetings and contact can vary from monthly “face to face” interactions to the minimally recommended quarterly reviews.

The commencement of the contract can begin at any time.

The total cost of the contract is contingent on enrollment size of the targeted school.

Research

As evidence of our focus on student achievement and improvement, the following publications highlight our research and experience in the field:

Publications

- *“Igniting School Performance: A Pathway from Academic Paralysis to Excellence.”* Author: Cotter, Publisher: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.
- *“Performance is Key: Connecting the Links to Leadership and Excellence.”* Authors: Cotter and Hassler, Publisher: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

Articles/Blogs

- *“Rebooting America’s Schools: Now and After the Pandemic.”* Author: Cotter, website: www.smerconish.com
- *“Money Probably Isn’t Holding You Back from the Changes You Keep Talking About,”* Author: Cotter, website: Expert Insight) <https://blog.edthena.com/expert-insight>
- *“It Takes a Team!”* website: www.ExemplarySchools.org
- *“Does Achievement Still Matter,”* website: www.ExemplarySchools.org, 2018.
- *“Using Curriculum Mapping and Assessment Data to Improve Learning,”* Bena Kallick and Jeff Colosimo, page 75-78, [highlights the process utilized by Vince Cotter in Colonial’s dramatic “turnaround” involving student achievement.
- *“Question: How Do You Transform Learning? How Do You Motivate a Generation? CDW-G,* [interview with Dr. Vince Cotter, Superintendent and Andrew Boegly, CIO, upon receiving a Classrooms of the Future Grant.]

Assessment Instruments

- *“Schools Systems Cross Check”* (Audit of Key System Elements)
- *“Hierarchy of School Development”*

Leadership Support Tools

- *Leadership Activities Guide*
- *Leadership Institute*
- *Mentoring and Coaching*
- *Strategic/District and Building Goal Development*
- *Alignment Strategies*

Experience

District-Building-Classroom-Consultant

- ☐ Co-founder: Exemplary Schools Organization
- ☐ College Consultant for Special Projects, Adjunct Professor, Course Developer
- ☐ Superintendent of Schools
- ☐ High School Principal
- ☐ Middle School Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Curriculum Coordinator
- ☐ Special Education Department Head
- ☐ Teacher

National Presentations

- ☐ Keystone Alliance Penn State University, October 2015.
- ☐ American Society for Quality (ASQ), Houston, TX, 2015.
- ☐ American Association of School Administrators, Phoenix, AZ, 2016.
- ☐ National School Boards Association, Boston, MA, 2016.
- ☐ Learning Forward Conference, St. Louis, MO, 2019.

Recognition

- ☐ International Juran Medal (ASQ), Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, 2010.
- ☐ Pennsylvania Legislative Service Award, Harrisburg, PA, 2011.
- ☐ National School Public Relations Association's Bob Grossman Award, Washington, D.C., 2009.
- ☐ Philadelphia Magazine Superintendent of the Year, Philadelphia, PA, 2009.
- ☐ Philadelphia School District Lindenbaum Teacher of the Year Nominee,
- ☐ Vocational Technical School Service Award.

Scholarships Awarded

- ☐ North Penn H.S. "Reaching High for Success Award" (20 years)
- ☐ "Reaching Above and Beyond" Award (Middle School)

Documented Success

- **Increased Student Achievement over 50%**
- **All Students Scored in the 80th to 90th Percentile**
- **Increased Student Proficiency for 11 consecutive years**
- **Increased SAT results by 150 points**
- **Increased Achievement in all sub-groups by 40%**
- **Increased Advanced Placement Enrollment by 200%**