

EXHIBIT # 4

DATA-DRIVEN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS THAT FOCUS ON RESULTS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Good data-driven decision making extends beyond testing students for achievement and reporting discrete numbers and grades as indicators of success. Data-driven school improvement encompasses many qualitative and quantitative measures which are gathered and analyzed within a culture that embraces, respects, celebrates, and expects continuous improvement and learning for adults and students alike – a true professional learning community.

Where are we? What are our indicators of success? Where do we want to be? What would our school look like if it worked for everyone, students and adults? How do we get there? Effective use of data means asking these questions and **focusing** to create clarity of thought, direction and purpose. Data-driven school improvement starts with identifying organizational purpose, vision, and values. Educators then align their improvement efforts with standards and measurable, targeted goals. Jim Collins in *Good to Great* told organizations that the first step to improvement is to face their brutal realities. Schmoker in *Results Now* says that in schools one brutal fact is that most instruction is mediocre or worse. In workshops over the *past years he has found educators in overwhelming majorities agreeing that there is a “yawning gap between the most well-known, incontestably essential practices and the reality of most classrooms.”* (p. 2) He says that teaching need not be exceptional to have a profound effect. The evidence is indisputable that continuous commonsense efforts to even roughly conform to effective practice and essential standards will make a life changing difference for students across all socioeconomic levels. Teaching has 6 to 10 times as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined.(p 9) To focus on the importance of instruction in improving student achievement, schools must have serious staff development that is job-embedded. Teachers must regularly discuss and plan quality instruction, draw on one another’s expertise, look at student work, and build common practices. This **focused collaboration** ensures **reflection** (Where are we now? What are we learning?) . It tells teachers about the impact of their teaching and goes beyond hunches or guesses about what works and what doesn’t. These meetings are results –oriented. The assessment piece becomes the basis for further adjustment or improvement. These meetings honor and empower teachers and their intelligence, capturing the vast reserves of expertise in any team or school. A viable, guaranteed curriculum becomes a reality because the meetings reinforce a focus on essential common standards aligned with state assessments.

Mike Schmoker shares two other brutal facts supported by research: 1) In general, there is very little oversight of instruction that affects its quality. Administrators do not have any common, formal mechanisms to accurately gauge the content teachers are actually teaching or how effectively they are teaching. 2) In spite of nearly universal agreement on the importance of teaming, teachers don’t work in teams. They do not prepare lessons and assessments together, and they don’t test and refine their lessons regularly on the basis of assessment results. **To address oversight of instruction principals and/or teacher leaders must meet with teacher teams by month or quarter to review and discuss evidence (student work, student learning) of what is actually being taught. This provides

another opportunity for teachers to reflect on results, discuss problems and ask for support. **To get teachers working in teams schools can stop looking for the right training or the best program because the experts are among the faculties. “Any staff could begin improving student performance tomorrow morning, if they never attended another workshop in their lives. They would improve, inexorably, simply by deciding on what they wanted students to learn and then working together to prepare, test, and refine lessons and strategies-continuously, toward better results.” (p. 114)

Periodic, systematic use of data to shape direction is the best kind of planning to improve student learning. Student achievement data, educational program data, demographic data, and perception data all need to be discussed. Collecting, organizing, sorting, and analyzing to examine patterns and set cutoff levels and then looking for meaning in the patterns by formulating hypotheses needs to be done by key stakeholders. Sometimes in schools that are not ready for school wide goals, this begins with grade level or departmental level teams who have the ability to connect with the larger district context of improvement. To be most effective, every stakeholder in the school or district should help to set goals for which he or she will be responsible. *A caution here about some kinds of planning that can be a substitute for action. Strategic planning for school improvement does not necessarily work. In fact such plans can ensure that organizations become scattered and diffused, diverted from their core purposes and doomed to pursue many things at the same time. Schmoker cites research that such plans with needs assessments, surveys, programs, workshops and conference attendance, staff development days, book studies and action steps that fill the columns and boxes of volumes of pages can bring lots of change without much improvement. These plans take so much time that the idea of continuous improvement and the momentum to monitoring progress of student learning is lost.

School goals are a way to provide intermittent reinforcement for your improvement efforts. They identify priorities and establish a timeline for your process of change. Goals also establish accountability for stakeholders, to ensure that what needs to happen actually does happen. They break up the long journey of school improvement into manageable, measurable steps that can help schools celebrate short-term successes, stay focused, and be motivated. To set goals, begin with a discussion about what needs to be improved. If possible, teachers should reflect on student learning data that show key gaps school wide. If teachers aren't ready to plan school wide, they can set goals that focus on learning in their particular area. Goals should be informed by data but not constrained by data about how students currently perform. Understanding SMART goals helps schools take action that brings results.

SMART Goals are... (p. 91 – Failure Is Not An Option)

Specific and Strategic – In this sense specific relates to clarity and strategic relates to alignment with mission and vision.

Measurable – In most cases this means quantifiable. There is a clear idea of the measures needed to assess.

Attainable – The goal is ambitious enough to cause new actions but people believe, based on past data and current capabilities, that success is realistic, possible.

Results-Oriented – This means focusing on the outcome, not the process for getting there. This refers to the desired end result versus inputs to the process – evidence of student learning.

Time-Bound – What is the timeline for tracking progress? When will the goal be accomplished?

An improvement plan template based on SMART goals could include the following: (also note the attached EXAMPLE by Blankstein to begin discussion about **data**...)

IMPROVEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Improvement Goal (Where do we want to go?)

Data Sources (Multiple Sources / Where are we now?)

Specific Strategies (How will we get there?)

Action

Timeline

Persons Responsible

EVALUATION
(How will we know when we get there?)

How will we sustain the effort?

The goal setting process begins with an understanding of both the starting place, (our reality based on all the current, pertinent data we have, to identify what needs to be improved), and a measurable understanding of the preferred ending place. Change, NOT JUST FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE, but for the sake of students' achievement is energizing and empowering. In a culture where folks learn together, expecting continuous improvement, respecting and not blaming, but also accepting individual and collective responsibility without excuses, goal setting is a hopeful, rewarding process.

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ADDENDUM TO EXHIBIT #4

Some "ideas" for collecting and using data in your school:

Data Sources/Find It -

1. Develop a list of the types of data you want to use. There's program and structure data, family and community data, professional practices data, and most importantly STUDENT DATA. Examples of student data include demographic and behavior data,(3rd Friday pupil count, enrollment data from SIMS, free or reduced cost lunch numbers, discipline referrals, truancy reports, suspensions, expulsions, FAY – full academic enrollments/student moves, climate surveys from WINSS, any asset work from SEARCH, etc.); and student achievement data sources that include state, district, and school assessments, report card grades, writing assessments, teachers' individual assessments, etc.
2. Answer these questions – “What data have we or could we collect as indicators of the effectiveness of our school?” “Do we want to categorize or disaggregate the data by grade level, or classroom, or gender?” “Do we have data from previous years so we can see trends?”

Data Analysis/Use the data

**Answer these questions:*

1. What does the data tell you? What is the prevalence and proportions of minority, poverty, disability, ELL, open enrollment, transfers, mobility?
2. How do our students perform on the state assessments?
3. What percent of our students perform at proficient or above levels?
4. What patterns do we see in the data? By subject? Over time? Which students?
5. In which areas have improvements been made?

**Document your work:*

Create graphs or other graphic organizers to get the best pictures. Record observations.

**Draw conclusions.*

Where are the gaps? What explanations or theories might we have about this data?

What are the most important concerns that came from our student data?

Refine/Reflect

1. Review the findings. Go back over the observations and clarify findings. Prioritize concerns. What is urgent, or important, on a scale from 1 to 5.

2. List several facts that are new or stand out more clearly than before. What are the greatest causes for celebration?

Move forward to develop SMART goals and action plans.

Note: Many districts and individual schools across the nation have had teams participate in data retreats to develop a shared understanding of how to use data. Large data collection and assessment systems, such as SchoolStat, mCLASS, Achieve Data Solutions, and others can help districts become data-driven as long as they align with district and classroom assessments as well as state tests.

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Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results Now*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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