

## Common Mistakes in Planning, Implementation, & Monitoring

- **EXAMINING PARTS BUT NOT THE WHOLE:** School personnel attempt to make sense of the data by proscribing their data analysis to only that which is produced by students (e.g., scores on tests, grades in class, measures of attendance and behavior, etc.). Missing from the analysis is an examination of what influenced those results, the corollary adult actions, structures, behaviors, and strategies.
- **DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS ARE AWASH IN DATA:** School districts fail to dramatically reduce the data on which they are focusing to the essential data.
- **INEFFECTIVE GOALS:** The goals contained within improvement planning documents tend to be vaguely written and only marginally realistic.
- **JUMPING TO SOLUTIONS:** Leadership teams tend to prematurely jump to identifying solutions before clearly prioritizing their needs.
- **BITING OFF MORE THAN ONE CAN CHEW:** Most plans contain more action strategies than districts/schools could possibly begin to implement to high levels let alone monitor.
- **IMPLEMENTATION BY ANNOUNCEMENT:** Many accomplished educators operate on the notion that implementation is training or a singular seminar. Implementation by announcement occurs when teams assume a common understanding exists that has yet to be established.
- **MONITORING ONLY HALF THE DATA:** Typically, improvement plans call for practitioners to monitor how well students perform on large-scale tests (e.g., state-wide assessments, quarterly benchmark assessments); however, how well the adults are implementing hypothesized action steps are often absent from the plan.
- **TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE:** The mistake of monitoring only how well students are performing (Mistake #7) is further compounded by the fact that many improvement plans reflect steps that have practitioners monitor the impact of their efforts on student achievement too infrequently (quarterly, bi-annually, annually) and with accountability tests (e.g., traditional standardized achievement tests), which do not yield results that accurately detect the quality of real-time instruction (Popham, 2008).
- **CHECKING FOR COMPLIANCE:** Educators often monitor professional development by attendance at events or completed evaluation forms rather than any substantive application of the professional development. Monitoring quality over time ratchets up the expectation for fidelity of implementation as the year ensues.
- **REPORTING AS AN END:** Reeves (2006) introduces his readers to the term "documentarianism" (p. 61), which he describes as, a "new religion" to which school systems and state departments of education seem to be subscribing. Essentially, adherents believe that "with just the right school improvement plan, or the right format, or with all the boxes completed in all the right places, the deity to whom they pray will grant educational miracles (p. 61). Many evaluation efforts look very much like "documentarianism" where districts and schools simply report what happened in terms of achievement results, and then view that report as synonymous with evaluation.