

The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP): *Features and Benefits*

Introduction

While state and federal laws both require a needs assessment and an improvement plan, most current district plans are the work of a few individuals working in isolation. They generally do not address how the district intends to make/sustain improvement. Instead, they identify only what the district has done and explain how the district intends to expend funds. Most current district plans cannot provide meaningful data for helping service providers (e.g., ESCs) understand and respond to the needs of districts/schools.

The OIP requires districts, not the Ohio Department of Education, to use the Ohio Decision Framework (DF) to focus on critical needs and to determine strategies to address them to make real progress. It promotes a true state system of support by better targeting resources at the state, regional and local level to meet goals.

Why do Districts Need the Ohio Improvement Process?

The OIP is a clearly defined process with sophisticated tools that:

- Are aligned to each other;
- Will be connected to each other in a Web-based environment;
- Reduce the potential for error; and
- Allow districts and schools to plan the use of state and federal funds to implement a focused improvement plan.

The OIP aligns and connects significant pieces of work such as the Ohio Leadership Development Framework and the State Diagnostic Review process in tangible ways to focus on the improvement of instructional practice and student performance.

The state support system – State Support Teams (SSTs) and Educational Service Center (ESC) personnel – are being trained in the OIP process and on the use of tools so they can assist all districts and schools in the state.

What's Different about the Ohio Improvement Process?

The OIP uses a sound needs assessment to develop a focused plan that will be used across the district to drive its comprehensive continuous improvement effort by:

- Giving districts time to review their data and make informed decisions;
- Requiring a District Leadership Team (DLT) team and then Building Leadership Teams to participate in the process of improvement;
- Removing the requirement that districts spend their time in corrective action/restructuring activities that are not related to their problems;

- Requiring the major components of the district's comprehensive continuous improvement plan (CCIP) to be driven by the needs assessment and focusing on parallel goals and strategies specific to remedying the district's most pressing problems; and
- Ensuring that district/building plans are focused on a limited number of goals clearly identified from the data-driven needs assessment (one additional "operational" goal will be allowed that permits districts to legally expend state and federal funds in some secondary areas of need).

An Overview of the Ohio Decision Framework (DF)

The DF was created for districts and buildings because while many districts have lots of data, they have limited expertise in sorting or analyzing these data. Districts with experienced data managers rely on that person to analyze data, but there is seldom a shared understanding of what the data mean; data managers seldom connect the data they are seeing to behaviors and practices around curriculum, assessment, instructional practice, and professional development (PD).

Since the DF tool contains pre-populated data and "essential questions," districts can use the data to make more focused decisions and identify the root causes of defined problems. Almost all student performance data are three-year trend data for all students tested – by grade-level, building, and major disaggregated student groups. In addition to performance data, discipline, expulsion/suspension, drop-out, graduation rate, and attendance data are pre-populated.

The DF also uses essential questions to help the district use data to tie problems, such as lack of significant student progress to curriculum, local assessments, instructional practice and PD. The essential questions allow the district to make informed and intentional decisions using the data to discuss and determine the local assessments, instructional practice, PD, etc. This can include decisions about internal issues such as time, personnel and funding, as well as informing their community, parents and students about the decisions.

Using the DF analysis allows districts to focus on facts, not opinions or preferences about what is not working and the issues that need to be addressed, and to reach agreement about solutions.

Once the DF is fully implemented in a Web-based environment, districts and schools can retrieve and resort the data and customize their needs assessment to more effectively plan how to respond to their needs. Data can be used to look at needs on a state, regional (SST, ESC) or county (i.e., ESC) level.