
**SUCCESSFUL
TEXAS SCHOOLWIDE
PROGRAMS:**

**SUGGESTIONS FOR TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS**

**The Charles A. Dana Center
The University of Texas at Austin
2901 North IH-35, ECN 2.200
Austin, TX 78722-2348
(512) 475-9708
Fax: (512) 232-1853
<http://www.starcenter.org>**

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Kate Burgess Elementary School, Wichita Falls ISD, Gail Taylor, Principal
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Cisco Elementary School, Cisco ISD, Mary Schustereit, Principal
East Side Elementary School, San Felipe-Del Rio CISD, Roberto Zaragoza, Principal
El Magnet at Zavala Elementary, Ector County CISD, Marilee Holmes, Principal
A. G. Hilliard Elementary School, North Forest ISD, Rufus Allen, Principal
Hueco Elementary School, Socorro ISD, Elfida Gutierrez, Principal
R. L. Isaacs Elementary School, Houston ISD, Leon Pettis, Principal
Lamar Elementary School, Corpus Christi ISD, Yvonne Duran, Principal
Los Fresnos Intermediate School, Los Fresnos CISD, Myrna Brogdon, Principal
Leo Marcell Elementary School, Mission CISD, Aurora Delgado, Principal
Nixon-Smiley Middle School, Nixon-Smiley CISD, Gary Tausch, Principal
Lucille Pearson Elementary School, Mission CISD, Mona Parras, Principal
L. R. Pietzsch Elementary School, Beaumont ISD, Shirley Bonton, Principal
Sagamore Hill Elementary School, Fort Worth ISD, Sherry Breed, Principal
E. J. Scott Elementary School, Houston ISD, Artice D. Hedgemon, Principal
Annie Sims Elementary School, Mount Pleasant ISD, Judy Walker, Principal
Springlake Junior High, Springlake-Earth ISD, Bill Verden, Principal
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Primary Authors

Richard McClure
Joseph F. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.

Research Staff

Kim Anderson
Rose Asera, Ph.D.
Margery Ginsberg, Ph.D.
Veena Kaul
Dorothy Knight
Liz Lilliott
Mary Ragland
Sandra Okolica
Janine Saunders
Juanita García-Wagstaff, Ph.D.
Darlene Yanez

The Charles A. Dana Center
The University of Texas at Austin
Philip Uri Treisman, Ph.D., Executive Director
Joseph F. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D., Director of School Improvement Initiatives
Rose Asera, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation
Mary Ragland, Project Director

INTRODUCTION

Technical assistance providers have tremendous opportunities to influence the success of schools in high-poverty communities. Technical assistance provided by education service center personnel, school district leaders, school support team staff, or other entities can focus schools on issues that are critical to their growth and development. This document attempts to highlight issues that could be the focus of valuable technical assistance efforts. Based upon our research of high-achieving, high-poverty schools, we have identified a wide range of issues that might be the appropriate focus of professional development experiences.

We caution technical assistance providers that they are most likely to provide meaningful assistance when they have worked collaboratively with school personnel to identify the areas where assistance is needed. Some schools will need assistance in many areas. Others will need assistance in only a few. If school personnel (including teachers, principals, and support personnel) do not have a substantial involvement in identifying areas of focus, their commitment will be minimal and the impact may be negligible.

Once areas of focus are identified, technical assistance providers are encouraged to remember that professional development is most likely to be effective when it is ongoing (as opposed to one-shot fixes), when it is closely related to the daily experiences and work of practitioners (as opposed to abstract theories), and when it is reinforced through regular practice and feedback. Although workshops might be one strategy among several to assist educators in acquiring new skills, the topics listed in this guide should not be considered workshops. Instead, the topics should challenge technical assistance providers and school personnel to work collaboratively to identify ongoing, intensive techniques that integrate professional learning experiences with daily work experiences.

The following list of topics addresses the issues we found to be important in the success of high-achieving, high-poverty schools. The rationale listed with each topic explain why the topic might be of importance, based upon our research findings.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

Understanding the Concept of Schoolwide Programs

- Using the entire school to ensure student success
- Valuing diversity
- Using new approaches to meet the needs of special student populations

RATIONALE: In successful schools, everyone was involved in helping ensure the success of each child. The prevailing attitude was not one in which teachers thought in terms of “he’s my student, and that one is yours.” Instead, there was a shared responsibility for each student’s academic success. To support more inclusive approaches, schoolwide programs were used to move beyond traditional ways of classifying and serving students.

Creating Awareness of Similar Schools with High Academic Achievement

- Raising expectations
- Eliminating myths about the academic performance of students in high-poverty communities
- Developing commitment to improve performance

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools set high goals for student performance. They ignored conventional “wisdom” about the limitations of students and families from low-income situations. In several cases, school personnel were motivated by learning about the successes of schools with similar enrollments, resources, and ethnic and socio-economic compositions. By understanding that similar schools had achieved impressive results, educators were able to put aside their myths about the limitations of their students and their schools.

Promoting and Marketing the School Plan

- Soliciting and analyzing feedback
- Creating a sense of community and parental involvement
- Developing strategies for communication

RATIONALE: In successful schools, all members of the school community had a high level of ownership in the school plan. The mission was shared and understood by all staff members, parents, and students. School staff actively solicited input from students, parents, and the community and included their feedback in instructional goal setting and planning. Educators used a variety of techniques to communicate the school mission, goals, and activities.

Establishing Commitment

- Defining commitment
- Clarifying the relevance of commitment to school planning activities
- Modeling methods for maintaining commitment

RATIONALE: In successful schools, staff accepted no excuses for poor performance. As barriers to improvement were encountered, educators worked together to overcome those barriers. No matter how high the level of achievement, schools continued to focus on learning, growing, and improving.

Conducting Comprehensive Assessments

- Implementing a variety of assessment strategies
- Identifying strengths as well as areas of need
- Selecting appropriate techniques

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools had in-depth knowledge of strengths and needs related to their academic achievement goals. There were ongoing efforts to understand what worked and what did not work to improve the achievement of their students. This assessment information was used to help them improve instructional strategies or approaches; the organization of the school day; the use of equipment, facilities, or other resources; as well as address other factors that influenced the achievement of students.

Strategic Planning

- Visioning
- Establishing planning processes
- Evaluating and measuring performance

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools had a clear vision of where they were going and how they were going to get there. This vision evolved through the collaboration of many teachers, support personnel, and parents. Also, successful schools had systems for monitoring their progress toward their vision. These systems were used to help them refine their efforts in ways that improved academic achievement.

Selecting New Employees

- Determining expectations
- Determining selection and review processes
- Supporting new employees

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel set high standards for the selection of new personnel. Each staff vacancy was valued as a critical opportunity for improving the school. Often, there was broad staff and parent involvement in the selection process. Interview questions were structured in ways to determine if candidates held the same beliefs and were committed to the same mission as the school. Once teachers and other staff were employed, a variety of supports was provided to further develop their commitment to the mission of the school.

Promoting a Culture of Professional Development

- Determining professional development needs
- Creating professional development plans
- Measuring program effectiveness

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools maintained high expectations for the performance of all school personnel. Professional development was not an event in these schools; it was a way of life. Teachers, administrators, and other staff were always engaged in activities that allowed them to better understand the effectiveness of their current practices. Such activities provided them varied opportunities to expand their repertoire of skills in ways that resulted in improved teaching and learning. Professional development was inextricably linked to the performance of students and the goals of the school.

Team Building Strategies and Techniques

- Defining the team concept
- Building trust and support
- Mentoring

RATIONALE: In successful schools, school personnel valued each other and each other's ideas. People had the freedom to disagree, discuss their disagreements, and learn from each other. The schools were characterized by a strong sense of respect for all members of the school community. Diversity was not a problem; it was an asset that promoted a shared belief that every staff member made a meaningful contribution to the success of the school. School personnel were given varied opportunities to observe practices modeled by fellow colleagues and mentors. The school calendar was structured in a way to provide regular opportunities for school personnel to work together, plan together, and learn together.

Making High-Quality Decisions

- Using the school mission to drive decision making
- Using performance data to drive decision making
- Involving those affected by decisions in the decision making process

RATIONALE: Successful schools based decisions on what they determined was best for improving the academic achievement of their children. "What's best for kids?" was heard repeatedly as teachers and other personnel discussed options for improving curriculum, instructional strategies, or the organization of the school. To determine what might best influence achievement, educators used data from a variety of sources. Decisions to adopt programs or practices were influenced by the process of collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing data. Decisions were rarely made unilaterally. The input of all who might be affected by those decisions was carefully considered. Thus, there was broad commitment to the successful implementation of most decisions.

Managing Conflict

- Maintaining a focus on the school's mission

- Dealing with disagreements effectively
- Solving problems effectively and efficiently

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel had disagreements and conflicts, just as any other school. However, in these schools conflicts were resolved quickly, without distracting focus from the mission of the school. School personnel were able to openly discuss their concerns without personalizing disagreements. Even in their conflicts, they demonstrated respect for each other.

Managing Change

- Promoting leadership
- Facilitating the change process
- Encouraging adaptability

RATIONALE: In successful schools, all personnel were allowed the space in which to experiment, fail, and try again. Experimentation flourished as individual teachers, grade-level teams, site-based decision making teams, and entire school staffs considered new ways to stimulate the achievement of students. Teachers, counselors, and other school staff were comfortable in assuming leadership roles in facilitating change processes. Students were not expected to adapt to the instructional styles of their teachers; instead, educators adapted to the strengths and needs of students.

Valuing Diverse Populations

- Respecting cultural and linguistic differences
- Respecting the abilities of students with special needs
- Respecting the situations and contributions of parents and families

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel found many ways to demonstrate their respect for each student, each student's family, and each group of students. This respect was demonstrated not just for one week a year, but was an integral part of how members of the school community (teachers, students, administrators, parents, volunteers, support staff) interacted with each other and with students. Labeling was avoided as educators focused more on student strengths. Similarly, school personnel empathized with the difficult situations in which families sometimes lived. They respected the strengths of parents and found ways to maximize the use of those strengths in support of students.

Determining Student Performance Standards

- Using formative assessments
- Establishing challenging student performance goals
- Establishing standards for student performance after the transition to the next grade level or school (vertical planning)

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools set high goals for student performance. The high goals were based on student performance related to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), as well as other measures of student success. Regular assessments were used to provide teachers with formative information that allowed them to improve instruction and monitor

their progress toward their instructional goals. Teachers were focused not only on getting students to perform well in the current year or grade, but were also concerned about ensuring high levels of student achievement in succeeding years.

Creating a Supportive Environment

- Fostering and nurturing a sense of family
- Promoting mutual respect
- Nurturing persistence and resiliency

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel found many ways to support and nurture each other. Often, this support enabled them to withstand and overcome difficult situations as they sometimes worked against formidable odds. Despite the difficulties, staff enjoyed working in these schools, in part because of the supportive environment. Turnover was low and educators came to work each day with optimism and anticipation of success. The actions and attitudes of administrators and other school personnel were critical in creating an environment in which educators felt that their personal well-being and professional success were supported.

Adapting Instruction

- Focusing on strategies that build upon student strengths
- Focusing on strategies that build upon the strengths of parents, families, and community members
- Focusing on strategies that build upon teacher strengths

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools continuously worked to identify the strengths of students; parents, families, and community members; and school personnel. They then used those strengths to modify their practice. For instance, when students appeared to learn best through a particular strategy, instructional approaches were modified to emphasize that strategy. Strategies chosen are those most likely to result in high levels of student achievement. Similarly, when school personnel identified the strengths of parents, families, or community members, school personnel found ways to use those strengths. School personnel employed programs or strategies that involved the home and the community in the learning of the student. Just as well, when school personnel identified strengths in each other, they used a variety of teaming approaches that allowed them to utilize and build upon each others' strengths.

Enhancing Accountability

- Creating a shared sense of accountability
- Avoiding blame
- Avoiding excuses

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel created and maintained a strong sense of accountability for the academic success of each student. Because they firmly believed that every student could be academically successful, they refused to be satisfied with less than excellent progress toward the goal of outstanding achievement for each student. When progress was insufficient, educators

expressed concern and worked together to find solutions. However, it is important to note that educators did not cast blame toward themselves, students, parents, or other parties. They attempted to understand the reasons for student performance in ways that involved everyone in constructive solutions. Similarly, educators did not defend low performances with excuses. Excuses were viewed simply as barriers that would be overcome.

Integrating Technology

- Purchasing technology that supports instructional goals
- Determining effective ways to use technology to support learning
- Providing support that promotes continued improvement in the effective uses of technology

RATIONALE: Successful schools often used technology to support their instructional goals. However, computers were not purchased simply to have technology, but were valued as a tool to help students learn. Schools recognized that technology was not a substitute for instructional personnel. Instead, they made sure that instructional personnel had adequate professional development to assist them in their efforts to provide high-quality instruction with the aid of computer technology.

Integrating the Delivery of Services

- Involving the community
- Transcending traditional roles
- Creating efficient and effective safety nets

RATIONALE: Successful schools involved the entire community in ensuring that the needs of students were adequately addressed. Educators assumed the role of advocates when their students presented needs that might interfere with their learning or well-being. They identified agencies with potential to assist their students and helped make the connections that led to the delivery of services. When services were not adequately available in the community, educators were willing to go beyond their traditional roles and do “whatever it takes” to ensure that the needs of students were met.

Identifying and Using Resources and Services

- Finding new sources for funds and services
- Using existing resources and services in new and better ways

RATIONALE: Successful schools were creative in finding needed resources. Schools worked with businesses, local agencies, and adopters to acquire resources and services. Similarly, schools were aggressive in seeking out new sources of funds from their school districts, the state, foundations, and the federal government. A lack of resources was never an excuse to stop trying. Schools were equally persistent in finding new ways to make use of existing resources. Priorities were identified based upon their potential to improve the achievement of students. Lower priorities were sometimes eliminated to make room for higher new priorities.

Promoting Continuous Learning

- Building passion for learning among school staff
- Building passion for learning among parents and families
- Building passion for learning among students

RATIONALE: Successful schools never stopped learning and growing. Educators were always engaged in the search for better strategies, approaches, and programs. Educators were always willing and eager to learn how to improve their practice. Even when achievement results were high, educators searched for ways to improve, ways to reach more students, ways to attain higher levels of achievement. This passion for learning was contagious. It was transmitted to parents and other family members in ways that motivated them to greater involvement in the education of their children. It was transmitted to students who found that learning was exciting and worthwhile.