

OVERVIEW: THE SCHOOL PORTFOLIO

The school portfolio is a comprehensive framework for school improvement, a self-assessment tool, a process, and a communication product. A school portfolio describes efforts to engender and maintain systemic and continuous schoolwide improvement and documents a schools’ goals, vision, plans, and progress. School portfolios evolve, grow, improve, and enable schools to make better decisions.

The school portfolio provides a uniquely appropriate and effective framework for describing current processes, and for planning, monitoring, and evaluating schoolwide improvement efforts. It guides the improvement of what is most important to the school and is able to reflect the multidimensionality of each unique school organization. It simplifies the evaluation of schools—which are by nature complex organizations—by offering a means to monitor the parts and their interrelationships as they compose the whole.

This framework is designed to work for accreditations, compliance reviews, schoolwide and program evaluations, and grant proposals. If kept up-to-date, schools will be ready for regulatory audits

and can therefore continue their important continuous improvement work to meet the academic needs of students.

What Makes the School Portfolio So Effective?

In an effort to design an evaluation that would help make schools better, the *Education for the Future Initiative* worked with schools to understand the depth of change in their schools and to determine how it could be measured.

With adaptations of the Malcolm Baldrige Award Program for Quality Business Management, measurement rubrics named

What gets measured gets done.

Tom Peters

the *Education for the Future* Continuous Improvement Continuums resulted to form the basis of the school portfolio. These rubrics identify outcome expectations and provide an authentic means for ongoing self-assessment by the school in seven interrelated areas crucial to systemic schoolwide change, defined as follows.

Information and Analysis is a critical element in planning for change, and in supporting continual schoolwide improvement. Schools must analyze existing data and collect additional information to understand how to meet the needs of their clients, to understand the root causes of problems, to assess growth, and to predict the types of educational programs that will be needed in the future. The intent of this continuum is to establish systematic and rigorous reliance on hard data for decision making in all parts of the organization.

Student Achievement describes processes for increasing student achievement—the school’s “Constancy of Purpose.” The intent of this component is to support schools in moving from a fire-fighting approach to one of systemic *prevention* of student failure; from teachers who provide information to researchers who understand and can predict the impact of their actions on student achievement; and students from recipients of knowledge delivery to goal-setting self-assessors who produce independent, quality work.

Quality Planning by schools must be strategic or change efforts will not be implemented. A well-defined and well-executed schoolwide improvement effort is based on a strategic plan that provides a logical direction for change, and lays out

the action to the vision. This continuum assists schools in developing the elements of a strategic plan, including a mission that describes the purpose of the school; a vision that represents the long-range goals of the school; goals that promote the mission; an action plan—procedural steps needed to implement the goals, including timelines and accountability; outcome measures; and a plan for continuous improvement and evaluation.

Professional Development helps staff members, teachers, and principals change the manner in which they work—how they make decisions; gather, analyze, and utilize data; plan, teach, and monitor achievement; evaluate personnel; and assess the impact of new approaches to instruction and assessment on students. Professional development provides individuals with opportunities to improve their personal performance on a continuous basis and to learn new skills for working with each other in reforming their culture and workplace.

Leadership focuses on creating a learning environment that encourages everyone to contribute to making school have a cumulative, purposeful effect on all student learning. A quality leadership infrastructure emphasizes the prevention of problems—such as student failure—as opposed to short-term solving or covering

up of problems, and makes the schoolwide change effort conceivable in a school. This continuum assists schools in thinking through shared decision making and leadership structures that will work with their specific population, climate, and vision, and leaders who understand their job is to help everyone in the organization implement the vision.

Partnership Development with the school's community must benefit all partners. This continuum assists schools in understanding the purposes of, approaches to, and planning for educational partnerships with business and community groups, parents, other educational professionals, and students.

Continuous Improvement and Evaluation of all operations of the school is essential to schools seeking improvement in the manner in which they do business. This continuum assists schools in further understanding the interrelationships of the components of continuous improvement and in improving their processes and products on an ongoing basis.

Schools committed to the school portfolio approach and to schoolwide improvement assess their progress on each of these continuums two times each year and then chart the progress made in their School Portfolios. This assessment process

brings the staff together to shape and maintain their shared vision and provides motivation for the continuous improvement of all elements of the school.

With the Continuous Improvement Continuums as a base, the school portfolio has all of the characteristics common to measurements used to create successful business organizations as defined by Tom Peters in *Thriving on Chaos* (1987):

- ◆ *a simple presentation*—easy to read and understand text, graphs, and charts, available for viewing by interested parties at any time
- ◆ *visible measurements*—located in the portfolio, developed, or adopted by staff
- ◆ *everyone's involvement*—in the design and development, in activities described within, and in keeping it current
- ◆ *an undistorted collection of primary information*—such as historical student achievement and student work data
- ◆ *a straightforward measurement approach*—using a combination of criteria and outcomes that explicitly describe what is important to and what is to be measured by school staff

- ◆ *an overall feel of urgency and perpetual improvement*—which results from the discrepancy between where the school is and where the school wants to be, and from a sense of accountability on the part of the staff to move the school to where it wants to be (to show academic improvement) with all children

Summary

Because school improvement is an on-going, complex and multifaceted process, the school portfolio is the most appropriate and authentic means to chronicle the multidimensionality of schoolwide improvement and its development over time. Schools that use a school portfolio benefit immensely from ownership and a shared meaning of

the improvement process and its results. A school portfolio, combined with assessment criteria, allows for a deep understanding of:

- ◆ the elements and processes of a school
- ◆ what needs to be improved and why
- ◆ how the school plans to carry out the improvement efforts
- ◆ the expected outcomes of the approach to improvement
- ◆ the efforts to implement the plan
- ◆ the results of the effort

A school portfolio provides a view of the big picture of all the elements and shows how they interrelate to make a whole. With a school portfolio, it is easy to see what needs to be altered to keep the efforts progressing.

The *Education for the Future Initiative* Continuous Improvement Continuums and *The School Portfolio* are described in *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*, Second Edition, published by Eye on Education, 6 Depot Way West, Suite 106, Larchmont, NY 10538, Telephone: (914) 833-0551.

PURPOSES AND USES OF A SCHOOL PORTFOLIO

- ◆ **Establish one document that describes an overall school plan, and the school's mission, vision, beliefs, and rationale for improvement.**
Too often schools wrestle with many different school plans, each designed to meet the requirements of a particular regulatory agency, program, or grant. Until these plans are coalesced into one plan—understood and supported by staff—the school's vision will not be achievable. A school portfolio helps maintain one overall schoolwide plan congruent with the schoolwide vision and outcomes.
- ◆ **Document efforts on a number of elements important to schoolwide improvement.**
A school portfolio is a flexible, physical entity which documents the depth, breadth, and growth of a comprehensive schoolwide improvement effort, allowing schools and programs to concentrate on important areas at different times as necessary, while still keeping the schoolwide picture visible.
- ◆ **Understand the complexities of the school organization.**
As they identify and document change related to the elements and processes of their school, school staff begin to understand the complex elements that make up the school and the interrelationships of the elements. This understanding is necessary to uncover root causes of problems, discover solutions, and to ensure the congruence of all the elements within the whole.
- ◆ **Provide readily accessible and necessary information for data-based decision making.**
A comprehensive school portfolio includes data about the school—its population, facilities, resources, test scores, and self-assessment results—as well as the school's vision for the future. These data establish a context for all aspects of the schoolwide improvement effort.
- ◆ **Reflect on progress and purpose.**
One element important to the motivation of staff is a periodic review of the progress they have made. A school portfolio allows staff to see what they have achieved, illustrates the benefits of their hard work, reminds them of where they were when they started, and why they are making the changes they are working so hard to make.
- ◆ **Trouble-shoot the continuous improvement efforts of the school.**
The school portfolio visually chronicles the progress (or lack of progress) made in each element of the schoolwide improvement process in text, graphs, charts, and pictures. This information helps a school staff decide where to focus efforts needed to increase the effectiveness of their actions. Additionally, the school portfolio can be used to identify elements incongruent with the school's vision, mission, outcomes, and plans which deter the progress of the school's improvement efforts.

- ◆ **Assess and guide the school's unique approach to continuous improvement.**

Using this approach, staff can monitor the improvement process against established criteria. These criteria are useful for self-assessment and as guides for determining next steps toward the outcome. The portfolio and use of criteria provide for the assessment of progress on the individual elements that make up a comprehensive schoolwide improvement plan. The assessment is multidimensional—like schools—flexible and, therefore, more extensive, relevant, and consequently more useful than relying solely on unidimensional product assessments such as test scores.

- ◆ **Be accountable.**

A comprehensive school portfolio documents action plans, efforts, and products which are assessed on a regular basis, demanding a high level of accountability.

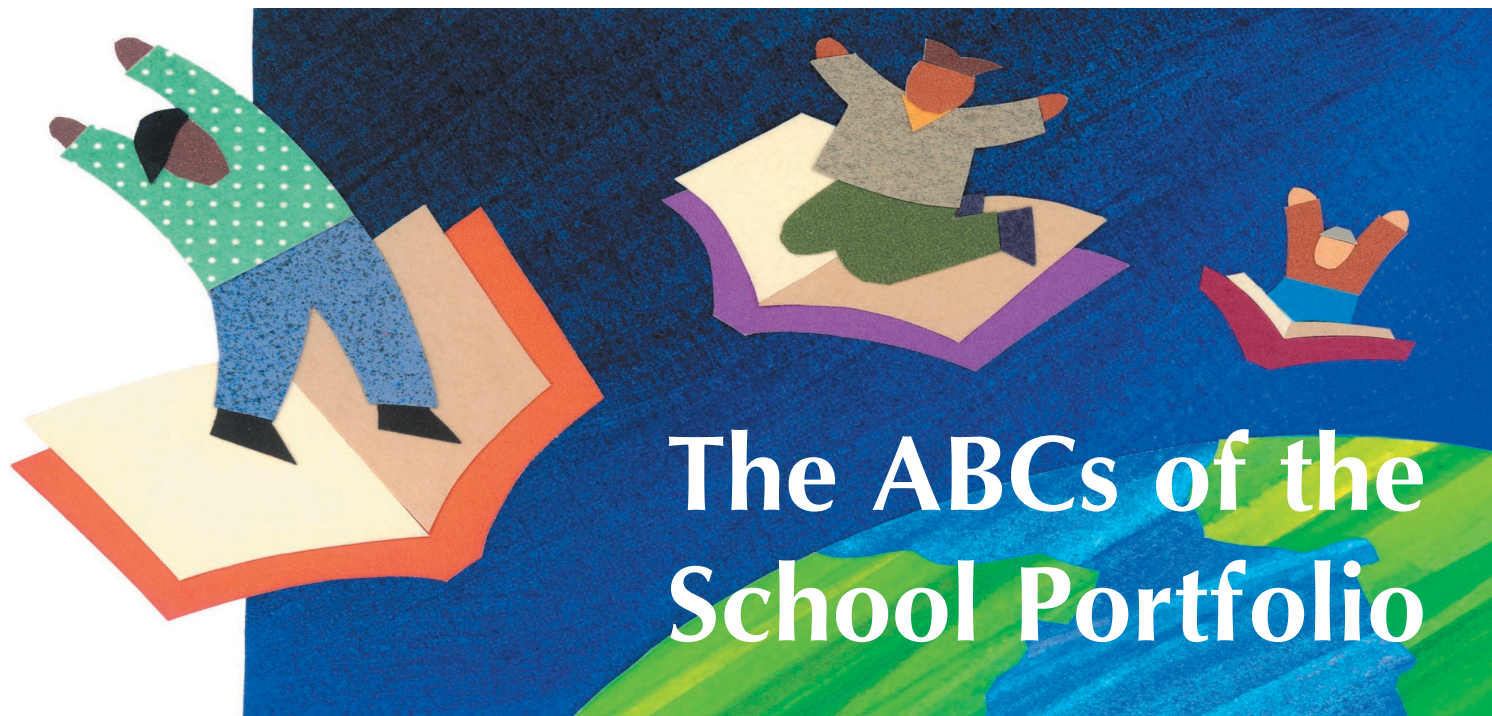
- ◆ **Communicate.**

A comprehensive school portfolio effectively serves as a public record to communicate important information about the school—its purpose, mission, and vision; the values and beliefs held by staff; its plans for improvement; the reasons particular approaches have been chosen; and the results of the schoolwide improvement efforts. The portfolio is an effective way to keep school district officials informed of schoolwide improvement efforts and progress, and helps to maintain

district support. The school portfolio also effectively communicates to potential partners basic information about the school, the steps in the schoolwide improvement process, and the way potential partners can contribute to the effort.

- ◆ **Replace a local, state, or regional accreditation process.**

Because school portfolios are comprehensive and focus on an inclusive plan for schoolwide improvement, they are being used successfully in place of traditional evaluation and accreditation processes. Accrediting agencies and state departments of education acknowledge that working with discrete elements of a school plan in program reviews can actually keep schools from making progress toward their vision. Alternatively, a school focused on implementing one schoolwide vision, along with one comprehensive school plan congruent with that vision, is poised to achieve its vision.



The ABCs of the School Portfolio

Start where you are and with what you have.

Create a sense of urgency for improvement.

Help everyone understand where your school is with respect to continuous improvement by assessing on the Continuous Improvement Continuums.

Observe what you have as evidence to support your continuum ratings.

Organize your evidence in a 3-ring binder, divided into the seven sections of the school portfolio framework.

Learn what you need to do differently to move up on the Continuums ratings.

Perceptions are very important for understanding how to improve the learning environment for students. Gather and use student, parent, and staff perceptions annually.

Obtain multiple measures of student achievement, disaggregated by different subgroups of students (i.e., gender, ethnicity, mobility) to ensure the success of every student.

Revisit the purpose, mission, and vision of the school. A shared vision is one that means the same thing to everyone in the school, and grows out of the values and beliefs of the staff.

Transform the shared vision into an action plan, complete with person responsible, timelines, budget requirements, and how the vision is communicated.

Focus on what to do differently in the classroom and schoolwide to get different results. If you want different results, you have to change the processes that create the results.

Open professional development opportunities to all staff members. Quality professional development will help every person on staff to understand how to implement the vision.

Look over your school portfolio; evaluate, and improve your processes on an ongoing basis.

Invoke discussions and encourage participation of parents, community, and business to assist in making sure the vision gets implemented and that students are meeting standards.

Own the overall successes by celebrating small successes along the way. Organize and support ongoing opportunities to celebrate successes with your district, your community, your parents and students.

Rubric: EDLD 8310/8316 Group Project: School Portfolio Toolkit

Group Members: _____

You are to use this rubric to develop your portfolio. Bernhardt uses Chapters 1-3 to give the reader an overview of the School Portfolio, Continuous School Improvement and the framework for school improvement. Chapter 3 offers suggestions on how to get started. Chapters 4-10 explain each of the seven main sections of the portfolio. This rubric outlines the areas which should be developed in your school portfolio. Your grade for the School Portfolio will be aligned with this rubric.

Part I Information and Analysis: The Data (Chapter 4)

Schools that utilize and analyze information about the school community make better decisions about what to change and how to institutionalize systemic change. Research shows that schools that understand the needs of their clientele are more successful in implementing change and remain more focused during implementation. Information and analysis works hand-in-glove with a comprehensive school wide improvement process, and is a critical element in planning for and determining the effectiveness of change. Types of information that assist with planning for and sustaining systemic school wide improvement include demographic data, perceptions, student achievement data, and school processes. Problem analyses are most effective when based on longitudinal data from all four categories. Begin with what you have, and plan to collect other items that are relevant to your school.

Group members successfully:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Used Bernhart's 4 types of data | 0 | 1 |
| Expressed root causes for the data | 0 | 1 |
| Explained the importance of intersecting data | 0 | 1 |
| Implemented the Problem Solving Cycle | 0 | 1 |
| Utilized multiple types of graphs and charts which include the following data: | 0 | 1 |

Community

•Location and history•Economic base•Population trends (ethnicity/socioeconomic, education) Employment status•Housing trends•Health issues•Crime data

School District

•Description and history•Number of schools, students, teachers, and administrators Support services for students & teachers
•Organizational structure•District financial data•Crime data•Prediction of changes
School•Description and history•Enrollment over time•Uniqueness and strengths•Awards (student, school)

•Costs per pupil•Physical plan•Safety/crime data•Image in the community

Student Demographics

•Gender•Race/ethnicity trends•Parent education backgrounds/occupations•Parent income levels/socioeconomic status•Health issues/handicaps•Number of years at the school•Home language•Public assistance data (AFDC %)•Free and reduced lunch•Dropout rates•Graduation rates•Retention rates•Discipline indicators(e.g., suspensions, referrals)•Attendance rates•Tardy rates•Mobility rates•Numbers of students transported

Staff

•Number of teachers and administrators•Years of experience, by grade level•Ethnicity/gender•Retirement projections•Types of certificates•Student-teacher ratios•Administrator-teacher ratios•Attendance rates of employees•Turnover rates of employees•Support staff

Other

•Questionnaires (parent/student/staff) to assess perceptions of the learning environment•Focus group follow-up to questionnaire results•Student achievement results•Rubric or other assessments of student achievement•School process analyses•Analysis of data included•Assessment on the Information and Analysis

Continuous Improvement Continuum

•Analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum•Analyses of root causes of problems•Goals for improvement•Photos

Total Points

____/5

Comments:

Part II Student Achievement: Creating a Vision (Chapter 5)

In schools where students and student learning are clearly the focus, student learning standards are known; teachers collaborate and are skilled in action research and in knowing, predicting, and acting on the impact of their actions to increase the academic achievement of all students. Until teachers are able to predict the impact of their actions on students, change their actions based on these predictions, corroborate the effect of their actions with students, and work with peers to build a comprehensive learning organization, any increases in student achievement and changes in the classroom will be temporary.

Group members successfully:

Presented Guiding Principles of the School which include:

- Values and beliefs
- Purpose of school
- Mission
- Vision
- Vision narrative

0 1

Documented Standards and Assessment to include:

- Standardized test scores over time, disaggregated by subgroup (i.e., ethnicity, gender, language proficiency, socioeconomic status, years at the school, comparisons to the district, state, and other schools, if appropriate) (might also appear in the Information and Analysis section)
- Other measures of student learning over time, disaggregated by subgroup (student achievement data might be placed in the Information and Analysis section)
- Analysis of student assessment results
- Gaps in learning/analysis of student learning needs
- Student learning standards and how they were determined

0 1

Student Support Systems

- Description of current non-instructional interventions and support systems (e.g., onsite childcare, health services, mentoring, etc.)
- Description of desired non-instructional interventions and support systems to meet the needs of all students (vision)
- Plan for implementation (might also be found in the Partnership Development section)

0 1

Teaching and Learning

- Description of current instructional and assessment strategies and programs
- Description of instructional and assessment strategies desired to meet the needs of all students (vision)
- Instructional implications for the student population
- Reasons teachers know these strategies will meet the needs of all students and prevent student failure
- Structure for grade level and cross-grade level communication
- Description of strategies to support implementation (e.g., action research, rubrics, and peer coaching) (might also appear in the Professional Development section)
- Evaluation of implementation and impact of strategies
- Results of assessment of vision tool implementation

0 1

Other

- Assessment on the Student Achievement Continuous Improvement Continuum
- Analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum
- Goals for improvement
- Exhibits of quality student work
- Photos

0 1

Total Points

___/5

Comments:

Part III: Quality Planning: Planning to Accomplish the Vision (Chapter 6)

All organizations need a vision. All organizations must plan for the vision, or the vision will never be realized. A well-defined and well-executed school wide improvement effort begins with a comprehensive school wide strategic plan that provides a logical framework for clarifying and achieving the vision. The school wide plan includes the following:

- an *assessment* of where the school is today and the factors that can be expected to influence it in the future
- a *mission statement* describing the school's purpose and function
- a *vision* that reflects the *values and beliefs* of the individuals who make up the organization
- *Long-range goals* that capture the intentions of the mission and vision
- an identification of *objectives* that make each goal tangible
- an *action plan* that identifies the procedural steps needed to implement the goals and objectives, including strategies, timelines, responsibilities, and accountability
- an estimation of *resources* needed, based on the action plan
- a *leadership structure* to implement the vision, along with clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the members of the organization
- a description of *professional development* needed to equip all staff to implement the vision
- a plan for *evaluating* the implementation of the action plan and the continuous improvement of the entire learning organization

With only one comprehensive school plan, priorities can be determined, elements can be leveraged, and a vision can be accomplished.

Group members successfully:

| | | |
|--|-------|---|
| Communicated the school's purpose, mission, vision, values and beliefs and then described how the vision will meet the needs of all students | 0 | 1 |
| Created an analysis of what needs to change (gap analysis) | 0 | 1 |
| Described the school goals and objectives, how the school wide plan was developed and how it is used. (Be sure to include a description of the level of commitment from the faculty and staff) | 0 | 1 |
| Action plan (one single plan) and a budget plan that aligns to the action plan | 0 | 1 |
| Assessment on the Quality Planning Continuous Improvement Continuum and an analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum (include goals for next year in the area of planning) | 0 | 1 |
| Total Points | ___/5 | |

Comments:

Part IV Professional Development: Implementing the Vision (Chapter 7)

Schools committed to improvement must reculture themselves for change. They must establish new systems for teamwork, communication, and collaboration; create new norms of behavior; become readers of research; creators, innovators, implementers, and coaches; and develop leadership and continuous improvement skills in all employees (as well as all students). Schools working to improve ask staff to change significantly the manner in which they work — how they make decisions, analyze and use data, plan for change, teach, monitor student achievement, evaluate and train personnel, and assess the impact of new approaches to instruction and student assessment. Improving schools also ask staff to significantly change how they think about their work — to replace assumptions and hunches, especially about students and their learning, with facts; to open up their classroom doors and work with colleagues in teams; and to consider every action in terms of its impact on others and the learning organization. Ongoing professional development activities that are planned in congruence with the school vision provide staff with the opportunities to improve professional performance and to learn the new skills they need to reform the school culture and support the development of a true learning organization.

Group members successfully:

Created a professional development plan which enhances student performance and is closely tied to the vision.

This might include:

- Description of the current approach to professional development, including implementation components
- Plan for professional development, including teacher outcomes
- How the professional development plan was determined and how it will assist school wide change

0 1

Clearly show that the purpose of professional development is to enhance student learning

0 1

Demonstrated numerous powerful professional development designs.

This might include:

- Types of professional development needed to implement the school wide plan, tied to the mission and vision, and taking into account teachers' individual goals

0 1

Used formative and summative assessments for evaluation of professional development training

0 1

Demonstrated through evaluation of the professional development plan that student learning is improving.

This might include:

- Assessment tool and results for implementing professional development related to the vision
- Assessment on the Professional Development Continuous Improvement Continuum
- Analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum
- Plans for improvement
- Photos of staff supporting each other in implementing new ways of doing business

0 1

Total Points

___/5

Comments:

Part V Leadership: Building a Leadership structure to implement the five fundamental practices. (Chapter 8)

Peter Senge defines a learning organization as "...an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future." In order for schools to become true learning organizations, they must put into place a formal leadership infrastructure that allows necessary improvements to be made from within the organization and to be supported outside of the organization. A quality leadership infrastructure emphasizes the prevention of problems (such as student failure) as opposed to short-term fixes or the cover-up of problems, and focuses on the creation of a learning organization that encourages everyone to contribute to making school have a cumulative, purposeful effect on student learning. Systemic school improvement requires understanding and implementing many new and interrelated components at the same time. Shared decision making and site-based management are structural approaches to school leadership that when used together, allow individuals within the organization to create and maintain an effective learning organization. The roles of the school leaders and teams that evolve are extremely important in developing and maintaining a leadership infrastructure that will ensure the comprehensive implementation of the school vision.

Group members successfully:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Described the school's processes related to leadership | 0 | 1 |
|--|---|---|

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Diagrammed and described the shared decision-making structures and processes | 0 | 1 |
|--|---|---|

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Identified types of decisions made at the school and provided an analysis of who makes the decisions | 0 | 1 |
|--|---|---|

Roles and responsibilities of:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action Teams• Staff• Principal• Leader/coordinator• Superintendent | 0 | 1 |
|--|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment on the Leadership Continuous Improvement Continuum and goals for improvement | 0 | 1 |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|--------------|-------|--|
| Total Points | ___/5 | |
|--------------|-------|--|

Comments:

Part VI Partnership Development: Involving partners to implement the vision. (Chapter 9)

Schools that seek to prepare students to live and work in the information age would do well to establish partnerships with businesses, the community, the district, university teacher and administration preparation programs, and parents. These partnerships can make instructional programs exciting and relevant to the purpose of developing all students into successful citizens and quality workers. Partnerships help to reinforce learning at home and may provide solutions to some of the problems teachers face when trying to teach children who are not prepared to learn in school. To create and maintain successful partnerships, schools must be clear about why they want the partnerships, what they want the partners to accomplish, and what the partners will get out of the partnership. Answers to these questions are needed in order to construct effective, win-win partnerships.

Group members successfully:

Created a partnership plan

This might include

- Descriptions of desired parent, community, and business involvement with the school
- Description of why your school wants partnerships and what partners will get out of the relationship
- Descriptions of current parent, community, and business involvement with the school

0 1

Matrix of student-learning standards and how business, parents, and community can help the school and students meet these standards

0 1

Evidence AND Evaluation of partnerships' impact

This might include partners impact on:

- increasing student learning
- improving attendance
- decreasing dropout rates, etc.

0 1

Assessment on Partnership Development Continuous Improvement Continuum 0 1

Analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum

This might include:

- How the partnerships can be improved
- Photographs of partners working and celebrating together
- Newspaper clippings

0 1

Total Points ____/5

Comments:

Part VII Continuous Improvement and Evaluation (Chapter 10)

The key to successful application of continuous improvement to the school improvement process is the active use of data. Measuring the school's progress against identified criteria — such as the *Education for the Future* Continuous Improvement Continuums — provides a benchmark that schools can use to see if their actions have created the intended results. These measures are supported by analyzing data gathered from interviews with clients of the school; questionnaires; observations of the learning environment; and assessments of student learning. When these measures are taken on a regular basis, the data clearly documents trends and provides information that assist schools in deciding next steps for improvement.

Continuous improvement is a never-ending cycle of planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving, using the school's guiding principles — purpose, mission, vision, and student learning standards — as the core of the effort.

Group members successfully:

| | | |
|--|-------|---|
| Completed Summary assessments on all Continuous Improvement Continuums | 0 | 1 |
| Explained plans for continuous improvement and evaluation | 0 | 1 |
| This might include: | | |
| • Accomplishments for the year | | |
| • Analysis of progress toward the vision | | |
| Articulated Plans for improvement | 0 | 1 |
| Assessment on the Continuous Improvement and Evaluation Continuous Improvement Continuum | 0 | 1 |
| Analysis of what needs to happen to move ahead on the continuum | 0 | 1 |
| Total Points | ___/5 | |

Comments: