

## Continuous Improvement Planning as a Value-Adding Mechanism

by Jim Lloyd



The *Navigator's* theme throughout the school year has been centered on the concept of *adding value*. In the last issue, there were a number of articles devoted to how to begin to adopt a value-added frame of mind. As building and central office administrators, it will be

important for us to continue to talk about the impact that the Educational Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) will have on our state, regions, districts, schools, classrooms, and students. While the existence of an EVAAS may very well leverage many things, its mere creation will not, by default, make us better. EVAAS isn't about proving, it's about improving through the use of data to drive instruction and increase student achievement.

At the district level, the primary mechanism to organize the system is through the strategic planning or continuous improvement planning process. These terms are used synonymously. While the idea of school improvement is tightly coupled in a normative sense, it is loosely coupled in the way in which it is carried out (Sergiovanni, 1994). Typically the district's strategic plan is created to identify needs, cre-

ate goals, develop performance indicators to evaluate goal progress and measure the initiatives as the district moves forward. At the building level, it is through the school improvement process that this occurs as well.

Building plans are then developed by building level teams to incorporate the ideas that were generated at the district level, but are meant to consider the specific needs of the building and offer a degree of autonomy. Rick DuFour and his colleagues refer to this concept as *tight and loose leadership* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004). It is important for a synergy to exist between not only the documents, but also the way in which they were created for the objective of strategic planning is not simply to create a plan, but to engage in a process with the different stakeholders in the school organization for the purpose of creating a set of common values and beliefs that when fully articulated, assimilated, and realized, shape the culture of district and school so that we can best facilitate the achievement of children.


In order for EVAAS to realize its potential and assist in moving us forward, it is critical that the strategic and continuous improvement planning process be more than an event that is checked off of a list. Indeed, both in process and form, it should be a common thread that is woven into the fabric of the district. It should serve as a series of deeply embedded statements that help define the culture of the



district and building. In order for strategic planning to really have meaning, the plan itself must be dynamic in scope and continuously evaluated as new data are gathered. Given Ohio's recent *data renaissance*, now more than ever our improvement planning needs to be...well...continuous.

At present our state has a number of very important data driven initiatives that are occurring—D<sup>3</sup>A<sup>2</sup> and EVAAS to name a few. These initiatives have such potential, and the professional development implications that they have will make a profound impact on teaching and learning in Ohio's future. There has been a long fundamental debate in education using the economic model of inputs (money) versus outputs (achievement/accountability) without a due consideration of process. We've argued about the amount of money needed to provide for an adequate education, and we've struggled with increased accountability at the output level. It is only recently that educators have begun to debate the contents of the black box (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2004). When taken seriously and conducted in a genuine manner, engaging in continuous strategic planning can serve as an investment in human relations. An investment such as this adds value to the organization for it serves to bring us together for a com-

mon purpose. It makes us feel part of something bigger.

As you look at your district and building level strategic plans, ask yourself whether or not your plan is flexible enough to incorporate these and other initiatives. Teachers add value as do administrators. The strategic plans that are developed by teachers, administrators, parents, and students articulate the commonly held beliefs and values of the entire organization. They serve as the foundation and put us in a position of being able to add considerable value. 

#### References

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