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Best Practices/Tom W. Many, Ed.D.

More Than Wishful Thinking: Using **100 Day Plans** to Achieve School Goals

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

-Antonie de Saint Exupery

The beginning of the year is a great time to think about goals for the upcoming year but setting goals is not the most important thing. In fact, setting goals without careful planning is just wishful thinking. The most successful principals set goals, make a plan to achieve their goal and stick with it despite lots of distractions. A well-crafted plan keeps schools heading in the right direction long after the excitement of the first day of school has passed.

“Before beginning, plan carefully.”

-Cicero

What ever you're doing right now, today, will affect your school in one hundred days. It's true. It takes about a hundred days for the impact of your actions to become clear.

So, before the school year begins, the most effective principals design specific plans that support achievement of their school's improvement goals. These short cycle plans—referred to as Hundred Day plans—describe the desired outcomes, identify the necessary resources and assign key responsibilities over a specified period of time.

Principals seek out feedback on their plan and carefully script a concise narrative that explains in vivid detail why the proposed initiative is so important. They describe the changes that will occur in teachers' practice, language and relationships as a result of the plan using the most energizing words they can to engage the faculty. The best Hundred Day plans keep the number of goals limited and utilize the SMART goal format to maximize the plan's potential impact.

As principals prepare to share their ideas with everyone who might contribute to the success of the plan, they identify at least three opportunities to intentionally, consciously and purposefully communicate the narrative within the first 10 days of the new school year. They clearly identify who, what, when and how they will deliver details of their plan to the stakeholders in their school.

“The beginning is the most important part of the work.”

-Plato

Within the first two weeks, principals enlist the faculty in a process to look at data and assess the school's strengths and weaknesses from an internal as well as external perspective. Principals meet individually with each department or grade level team and review their goals for the upcoming year. The purpose of these meetings is to determine what each team is committed to do in support of the plan.

At the same time, principals set up a work session with the school's guiding coalition to confront brutal facts and confirm the school's current reality. A block of time for



concentrated work helps leverage the best thinking of the team and principals should not overlook the potential need to listen to parents and students.

Well-written Hundred Day plans call for some short-term wins early in the school year. With the help of the guiding coalition, principals identify manageable tasks or attainable assignments that can be completed almost immediately. They also plan for ways to publicly celebrate the faculty's success and demonstrate that the school has an action orientation.

The first 30 days of the new school year concludes with a progress check. Principals can design a walk through to gather data, collect student achievement results, or review the products each team has developed as evidence of progress. Results of this progress check are shared and celebrated with the entire faculty.

“Think ahead. Don’t let day-to-day operations drive out planning.”

-Rumsfeld

The second 30 days of a Hundred Day plan focuses on learning. Principals turn their attention to building the capacity of teams and delivering the kind of professional development teachers need to be successful. It is important that whatever training is offered be within the context of a specific task teams must complete or a product they must produce.

This is also the time when delays, disruptions and diversions creep onto a principal's to-do list. Frequently referred to as 'fire drills', these distractions often represent urgent but unimportant tasks reflecting the priorities of others. Instead of becoming distracted from their goals, the most effective principals recommit to monitoring teams, anticipating needs and identifying the specific changes in teacher behavior that are necessary to drive the new initiatives forward.

If principals focus on working with teams to improve teaching and learning and spend at least two hours a day engaged with students and staff, they will see dramatic results. On the other hand, if principals become preoccupied with 'fire drills' and spend their time and energy on the paperwork and minutia that has little to do with teaching and learning they will become frustrated in a hundred days when their plan does not generate the kinds of results they expect.

“Always be planning something.”

-Schindler

During the final 30 days of a Hundred Day plan the priority shifts from delivering training to providing time for teachers to work on refining and reframing their practice. To realize the full benefit of this process, teams must have access to data and information while they are engaged in their work. Principals actively assess the effectiveness of the new initiative on the basis of results and search for tangible evidence that teachers are acquiring the new skills that will help students learn.

This is a good time to conduct one more progress check and schedule another working session with the school's guiding coalition. Principals need to be prepared to respond to resisters and confront toxic behavior by teams or individuals. The key is to differentiate the training, vary the amount of support and concentrate available resources on the teams who are struggling the most.

The planning process never really ends and principals can reinforce the importance of reflection and continuous improvement by ending each Hundred Day cycle with a review of the plan and its impact on teaching and learning. Teams of teachers work to publicly prioritize next steps according to what is most important and identify what needs to be reexamined, reconsidered or redone.

“Long-range planning works best in the short term.”

-Doug Evelyn

The beginning of the school year is the most important time for initiating change. By the end of the first hundred days everyone will have finished sizing up the new school year and the faculty will either be on a new trajectory or settled back into their familiar routines.

Principals can set the tone by using Hundred Day plans to jump-start the improvement process. These principals understand that if they can “hit the ground running” and create some initial enthusiasm on the part of the faculty, a little early momentum can go a long way. ■



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100-DAY PLAN

For Improving PLC Practices

School _____ Principal _____

Part I: Identify the Greatest Area of Need

Section 1.1 Potential Goal or Area of Improvement – Maximum of three

Using your best professional judgment and understanding of your school's culture, identify three (3) areas where improvement in the policies, practices, and procedures would lead to higher levels of learning for all students.

Potential Goal or Area of Improvement: Evidence or observation that this is an area of need.

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Section 1.2 Greatest Area of Need – Rationale for choosing of this as the school's GAN

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Section 1.3 Theory of Action: Write a Theory of Action to address the Greatest Area of Need.

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Section 1.4 Write a S.M.A.R.T. Goal: Write a SMART goal that supports the Theory of Action.

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Part II: Designing Action Plans

2.1 Action Plan: List expectations for the faculty regarding implementation.

Faculty Expectations	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline



2.2 Action Plan: List expectations for the administration regarding implementation.

Administrative Expectations	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline



Part III: Preparing the Message

3.1 Purpose (Why)

Explain why this initiative matters, why is it important, and specifically why the school or team should engage in this work. Why is the implementation of this plan necessary?

3.2 Empowering descriptors (How)

Create an inspiring, positive description of the actions that you, the team, and the school will engage in during this initiative. How will you accomplish this goal?

3.3 Vision (What)

Describe in vivid detail what you envision your school/team will look like when this plan is completed. What changes do you expect? This description should be energizing!

3.4 Purposeful plan for communicating (Who, When, and Where)

No plan has ever improved anything. It is the people who put the plan in motion that make the difference. Design a conscious, detailed, intentional communication plan.

