EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning

A Handbook for School and Board Leaders

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Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning. *In this guide, you'll find detailed guidelines, tips and techniques for effectively and efficiently developing and implementing improvement plans at both the school and board levels.*

Purpose of this guide

This guide presents a framework for improvement planning. It
- outlines the characteristics of successful improvement planning;
- describes in detail a five-step planning process;
- provides suggestions and resources for effective data management and analysis and for planning and communication and
- includes an "Improvement Planning Toolkit" with practical resources and templates you can use during planning and implementation.

Who this guide is for

This guide is for professionals in the education field, in particular those who are responsible for, or involved in, the development of school and board improvement plans.

While this guide may be of interest and value to the non-professional reader, it assumes a working knowledge of Ontario's education system, student achievement indicators, school and board administrative practices, and the principles of effective teaching and assessment.

Making the most of this guide

We have provided useful information tools throughout the text:

TIPS to use in the planning process

BEST PRACTICES from schools and boards across Ontario

RESOURCES that supplement the information in this guide

We recommend that all school and board staff involved in the planning process be given a copy of the guide or access to it via the Web, and be encouraged to use it.

Help us improve this guide

Share your comments with us by using the reader response form on page 35.

Improvement planning: an overview

Research indicates that, while factors such as socio-economic status and preparedness to learn affect student achievement, schools have a significant influence on student growth.

Planning for improvement is a disciplined process through which school communities and boards reflect on relevant information about both context and achievement and design strategies for enhancing those areas that can be positively influenced.

The true measure of improvement planning effectiveness, of course, is the degree to which improvement planning, implementation and monitoring produce positive changes in student achievement and growth over time.

Roles and responsibilities

The improvement planning process is both a local and a province-wide initiative, involving education partners at every level of the education system:
- school teams, who develop school improvement plans in conjunction with parent councils;
- school boards, which develop board-wide plans;
- EQAO, which provides schools and boards with information about student achievement and makes recommendations to the education community for the improvement of teaching and learning and
- the Ministry of Education, which sets provincial policy and provides a range of supports to enhance teaching and learning.

TIP

Schools and boards do not operate in isolation. Improvement planning is most successful when
- school and classroom-based plans and initiatives are closely aligned with board-level plans and
- school and board plans are aligned with province-wide policies, initiatives and achievement targets.

The role of EQAO

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established in 1996 as an arm's-length agency of the provincial government to assist in improving the quality and accountability of Ontario's public education system by

- designing and implementing a comprehensive program of student assessment that addresses government-established curriculum expectations;
- using the results of province-wide assessments to measure the quality of education in Ontario;
- reporting to the Minister of Education, the education community and the general public;
- advising the Minister of Education on assessment policy;
- leading Ontario's participation in national and international assessments;
- promoting research on best practices in assessment and accountability and
- conducting quality reviews in consultation with school boards.

Assessment programs

The current assessment programs developed and administered by EQAO are

- the Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics;
- the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics and
- the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), which students are first eligible to take in Grade 10.

EQAO also leads Ontario's participation in national and international assessments.

Education Quality Indicators Framework

In addition to gathering data through these assessments, EQAO gathers data on contextual factors that research has demonstrated are related to student achievement. EQAO regularly gathers and reports on indicators at the elementary level and at the secondary level. For more information on the Education Quality Indicators Framework, visit the EQAO Web site, www.eqao.com.

Five steps to effective improvement planning

Improvement planning is a continuous and cyclical process of analysis, planning and implementation designed to enhance student achievement measurably over time. The planning process presented in this document provides schools and boards with a clear, straightforward and consistent model for approaching this process effectively and efficiently. Of course, you may wish to alter this model to suit local needs.

Step 1: Ownership

Step 5: Ongoing impact

Step 2: Understanding and focusing

Step 4: Planning for improvement

Step 3: Accountability

TIP While EQAO provides large-scale assessment data on student achievement, we encourage you to examine this data in the context of other data available to you, such as demographic information, classroom assessments, report card marks and results from attitude surveys, in order to identify areas for improvement.

The recommendations in the EQAO provincial reports may also be a valuable reference.

Step 1: Ownership

Step 1: Ownership
Step 2: Understanding and focusing
Step 3: Accountability
Step 4: Planning for improvement
Step 5: Ongoing impact

Seeking the engagement of education partners

Ensure representation from all parts of the system and community, including
• school council representatives;
• principals and vice-principals;
• teachers;
• parents;
• students;
• supervisory officers;
• centrally assigned resource staff and
• community members.

Shared responsibility and shared decision making are the cornerstones of successful planning.

When board and school staff develop improvement plans collaboratively with representatives of their school communities and school councils, they are more likely to engender a sense of shared responsibility and shared commitment to bringing about the required changes.

A culture of continuous improvement

Developing a culture of continuous improvement at both the school and board levels is critical. However, building this culture among a diverse group of representatives (from both the school and the board communities) requires skilled leadership.

Seeking participation

Each member of the household and the school community makes an important contribution to student learning. In fact, an effective planning process not only benefits from but requires their participation.

In seeking that participation, boards and schools should look for broad representation and willing support.

Managing time

Finding the time to engage meaningfully in the process of improvement planning may be challenging, especially at the school level.

Principals may want to discuss a variety of options with their school improvement team, including
• the use of supply teacher coverage;
• planning for the flexible or cross-grade grouping of students;
• creative use of staff or department/divisional meeting time;
• ad hoc working groups and
• breakfast and after-school meeting times.

Similarly, boards may consider arranging time for school teams to start this process in centralized sessions that may include training and support from central staff.

Step 2: Understanding and focusing

Gathering, evaluating and interpreting the data

- Examine provincial, school board and school results from EQAO assessments.
- Examine school-based data, such as board assessments and report card marks.
- Examine contextual information, such as that described in EQAO's Education Quality Indicators Framework.
- Develop school and board profiles.
- Relate EQAO assessment results to data from EQAO questionnaires and surveys, local research initiatives, and feedback from board staff, principals, teachers, school councils, parents and students.

Phase I: Data gathering

Schools and boards have—and should use— many types of data to support the improvement planning process.

School and board data: These may include report card information, attendance and suspension data, behaviour incident data and other relevant information. School-level data (such as homework completion or the number of books read) can also be gathered by school staff to support the planning process.

Achievement information: In addition to school-based data, schools and boards have access to achievement information from EQAO assessments. Achievement in the language and mathematics curricula is measured by EQAO assessments.

Contextual information: Gathering contextual information is an important element in understanding and interpretating assessment results. The contextual framework is often referred to as a school or board "profile." The EIC publication *The Road Ahead IV* outlines a school and board profile process.

Many factors influence student learning, some of which are beyond the school's control. Student achievement is influenced, for example, by students' linguistic background and community socio-economic factors. Significant influences like these must not only be identified and measured but addressed through educational programs designed to maximize or mitigate their influence.

To understand the distinctive character of a school or board, it is necessary to understand its unique features and the characteristics of the community it serves. The analysis of multiple components is necessary to assess the education system in context and determine the policies and programs needed to improve student learning.

School and board profiles developed using an appropriate model (such as EQAO's Education Quality Indicators Framework) are an effective means of organizing these components.

The Education Quality Indicators Framework

EQAO's Education Quality Indicators Framework can be used to explore the factors in a school or board setting that influence and reflect student learning, including
- **context:** external elements, such as demographic, social and economic trends;
- **inputs:** support for education, such as funding; community and family involvement; school characteristics, such as facilities, equipment and personnel; and the school environment;
- **processes:** how things are done within the education system, for example, teaching and assessment practices; and
- **results:** outcomes of the education system, such as student achievement results, student attitudes and graduation rates.

TIP

Data sources at a glance

Research has shown that there is a correlation between factors such as those in the Education Quality Indicators Framework and student achievement. Explore all factors (context, inputs, processes and results) rather than focusing on any single factor as you develop a school or board profile. The following is a list of education indicators and potential sources of information.

Context

Data type	Potential sources
Enrolment	Ministry of Education Board database Student Information System
Socio-economic status	Statistics Canada EQAO (being developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education)
Country of birth and language background	Ministry of Education Board database Student Information System
Categories of special needs	Ministry of Education Board database Student Information System
Student mobility	Board database Student Information System
Preschool experience	Board database
Readiness-to-learn scale	Board database

Inputs

Data type	Potential sources
Student attendance	Board database Student Information System
Support personnel	Ministry of Education Board database EQAO Principal Questionnaire
Types of special education programs	Ministry of Education Board database
Class size and organization	Ministry of Education Board database
Teachers' qualifications and experience	Ministry of Education Board database EQAO Teacher Questionnaire
Accessibility and use of instructional materials	Board surveys EQAO Teacher Questionnaire
Accessibility and use of assessment materials	Board surveys EQAO Teacher Questionnaire
Use of computers	Ministry of Education Board database EQAO Student Questionnaire EQAO Teacher Questionnaire
Community-school relationships	Board surveys
Education funding	Ministry of Education
Physical facilities	Ministry of Education
	Board database

Processes

Data type	Potential sources
Teachers' professional development, planning and collaboration	Board surveys EQAO Teacher Questionnaire
Teaching and assessment strategies	Classroom observation
School leadership, planning and decision-making climate	Board surveys
School climate and safety	Board surveys
Parental involvement	Board surveys

Results

Data type	Potential sources
Commercial standardized assessments	School or board reports on results
Classroom assessments	School and classroom reports, qualitative and quantitative
Report card mark distribution	Board or school database, data management tools (such as Fathom)
Provincial achievement results	EQAO Grades 3 and 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics EQAO Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics EQAO OSSLT
National and international achievement results: School Achievement Indicators Program, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, Programme for International Student Assessment	EQAO Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Suspensions	Board or school database
General public's, parents', students' and teachers' perception of and satisfaction with education	OISE biennial survey Ministry of Education Board surveys
Student attitudes	EQAO Student Questionnaire Other student questionnaires
School leavers' destinations	Board database Ministry of Education
Rate of high-school completion	Ministry of Education Statistics Canada Board database
Rate of credit accumulation	Ministry of Education Board database

Phase II: Data review

Following the data gathering phase, data should be evaluated and reviewed to identify relevant patterns, trends and areas for improvement.

Contextual data should be thoroughly explored through a series of questions such as the following:
- Is there anything in the contextual data that you do not understand? If so, what do you need to clarify?
- What patterns are evident in the school or board data? For example, are the board's data for certain indicators or factors particularly high or low relative to provincial data?
- How do the current data compare with data from previous years (student enrolment or information on students with special needs, for example)? Do there appear to be any trends in the data?
- How do current data relate to previous contextual data for the same cohort of students?
- Is there anything about the information that you find surprising? If there are inconsistencies in the data, how can they be explained?
- Considering the relationship between each of the indicators or factors and student achievement, is there anything that concerns you? What does the literature say about the relationship between this indicator and student achievement?
- How closely do the contextual data match the other school-based or board profile data you have accumulated?

- Do any of the data point to a need to review or re-evaluate decisions, policies or procedures?
- On the basis of the contextual data, which two or three elements of the board or school profile should be considered most carefully in developing the improvement plan?

Achievement data should be evaluated on the class, school, system and provincial (EQAO) levels.

Data analysis

BEST PRACTICES

The Improvement Planning Toolkit (starting on page 23) includes sample data sets to clarify the process of data analysis further.

The planning team can use a series of questions to focus their exploration of the data:
- Is there anything in the data you do not understand? What do you need to clarify?
- What is the relationship between the class-based report card and the EQAO data? Are they similar or different? How do you explain any differences?
- Is there anything about the information you find surprising? Is there anything that concerns you?
- How do the data align with your impression of how the students at this school or in this board are doing?
- Are the students doing as well as you expected?

Phase III: Relating contextual and achievement data

Having examined the data in isolation, the planning team is now ready to probe the relationship between the contextual profile and the achievement data, and to identify strengths and weaknesses as it begins priority setting.

Assessment results can be related to contextual data with reference to information and data from
- EQAO's Education Quality Indicators Framework data;
- national and international assessments;
- board assessments;
- local research initiatives;
- educational research literature;
- Statistics Canada data and
- feedback from the board and school community: principals, teachers, school councils, parents and students.

School and board results might also be compared with those of other schools and boards that have similar demographics and other factors in common.

Consider the following questions as you explore the relationship between contextual and achievement data:
- How do the board's or school's profile data and other contextual information relate to its EQAO assessment results?
- How might the board's or school's assessment results have been influenced by
  - board policies;
  - improvement plans;
  - program emphases;
  - staff development programs;
  - resources and
  - staff allocation?
- How do strengths and weaknesses in the assessment results relate to the various contextual factors identified above?
- Considering the relationship between each of the indicators or factors and student achievement, is there anything that concerns you? What does the literature say about the relationship between this indicator and student achievement?
- How will the school and board plans affect teachers and parents?

Accumulating relevant data is the beginning of an effective planning process. Data can be used to paint a picture that tells the story of the board, the school and its students.

Developing a thorough understanding of the data is the next critical step.

The EIC publication *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers and School Councils* outlines a process that planning teams can use to develop an understanding of all data types that might be considered. In addition, data management tools such as Fathom or Excel software can help you organize data to make it easier to analyze and interpret.

BEST PRACTICES

An exemplary plan will analyze provincial, board and school assessment results for both the elementary and secondary levels and interpret data
- according to local context (based on demographics such as English as a second language and socio-economic status);
- focusing on the relationship between target and results and
- considering year-to-year trends.

TIP   **Training and resources**

Training in data interpretation and strategic planning is recommended.

Who should be trained:
- board staff
- principals
- school teams and teachers
- parents

What skills should be developed:
- interpretation of data
- reporting on assessment results
- developing the school plan
- communicating the plan to parents and the public

Step 3: Accountability

Sharing results with the community

- Review results in light of previous school or board improvement plans.
- Share information and results with the community and within the system.
- Set a context and invite conversation about analysis, interpretation and next steps.

Effective communication with parents and other members of the community is a critical component of school and board improvement planning, and a demonstration of school and board accountability. Likewise, effective communication within the board will ensure that board staff are aware of and understand the planning process.

The goal of external communications should be to communicate appropriately and clearly how students are performing, and how student achievement relates to school and board improvement planning.

Internal communications should focus on providing direction and conveying expectations to teachers and administrators to guide the implementation of school plans.

Communicating EQAO results

EQAO results are released annually in the form of individual, school, board and provincial reports.

Assisting parents in understanding these results and their implications is an important step in building effective partnerships between the community and its board and schools.

Boards should include the following in their communications:
- background information on the role of EQAO and its assessments;
- the rationale for these assessments in Ontario;
- the importance of using more than one source of achievement data and
- the board's belief statement regarding the improvement of student achievement.

Informing the community of the board's mission and vision statements sets a context for the release of assessment results. Communicating information about EQAO and other assessment results allows the board to tell the story of its students and support the story with evidence. It also enables the board to point out challenges it may have encountered over the past year (extreme population growth, for example) and highlight opportunities for future achievements.

Schools must also release their EQAO results to a broad variety of audiences, including
• students;
• parents;
• school staff;
• trustees;
• school councils;
• community members and
• board leaders.

An exemplary plan will outline a communications strategy and demonstrate that a variety of communications tools will be used, such as
• newsletters;
• telephone calls to parents;
• Web sites;
• school council minutes;
• presentations to staff and school councils;
• media information;
• brochures or flyers enclosed with report cards and
• parent workshops or curriculum nights.

Engaging the community

Once the board and school have informed community partners of the EQAO results and other information included in the profile, parents should be invited to participate in the development of improvement plans.

Involving parents in the critical analysis of data provides them with the information required to offer valued input for the improvement plan.

Likewise, it is vital that the entire school community be informed when the improvement plan is complete and that communication of the plan and about the initiatives arising from it continue throughout the school year.

Preparing effective communication

• Present information in a simple and easy-to-understand manner.
• Avoid initialisms and technical language.
• Use a variety of presentation methods, including charts, graphs and diagrams.
• Display several years of data to demonstrate trends over time.
• Be sure to point out any cautions that should be observed in interpreting data.
• Relate the data to your goals and strategies for improvement.

Step 4: Planning for Improvement

Step 1: Ownership
Step 2: Understanding and focusing
Step 3: Accountability
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Step 5: Ongoing impact

Creating and updating the improvement plan

- Create or update the improvement plan based on analysis and interpretation of the data.

- Report improvement plans to the community.

Once the review of school and board profiles and relevant EQAO data is complete, the school or board must determine the priorities it will focus on for improvement planning. The EIC publication *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers and School Councils* suggests that three critical planning areas be addressed:
- curriculum delivery
- school environment
- parental and community involvement

Many boards have also developed their own processes for setting goals and objectives and creating improvement plans. To be effective, improvement plans should
- clearly state goals that relate current levels of student achievement to expected achievement levels and
- specify measurable changes to the current teaching and learning environment that will be necessary to foster increased learning.

A school's EQAO results may indicate, for example, that the number of students achieving Levels 3 and 4 on the mathematics component of the Grades 3 and 6 assessments is low in comparison with board and provincial data. In that case, it would be appropriate to include plans to ensure that teachers are well-trained, that adequate classroom resources and instructional time are available and that adequate parent or home support is provided.

Integrate the improvement plan with current initiatives.

TIP

Consider current provincial, board-wide and school-based strategic plans and initiatives when selecting a focus. All boards and elementary schools, for example, are involved in the Ministry's literacy and numeracy initiatives. Accordingly, any elementary school or board plan will need to incorporate—and take advantage of—this initiative.

Planning for success

To be effective, improvement plans should incorporate the following key components:
- a review of previous improvement plans;
- strategies;
- indicators of success;
- timelines and milestones for status updates;
- resources required;
- roles and responsibilities and
- performance targets.

Let's look at each component in some detail.

Component 1: Reviewing previous plans

Before the creation of a new improvement plan, staff, school councils and parents should be given the opportunity to re-examine the data that have been gathered throughout the year and to discuss the effectiveness of the previous improvement plan.

In reviewing, ask the following questions:
• Have the improvement plan strategies made a difference in student achievement?
• If so, what has contributed to the success of these strategies?
• If not, why have these strategies not worked?
• What should we continue doing or begin to do to reach our targets?

Evaluating progress and changing strategies should be viewed as fine-tuning. It is essential that changes to the plan involve revising the strategies rather than altering the goals. A school or board plan is a living document. Accordingly, strategies should be adjusted along the way until the desired results have been achieved.

Component 2: Identifying strategies

Selecting the strategies that will make a difference to student achievement is a critical step.

Among the questions an improvement planning team might ask in developing appropriate strategies are the following:
• What does current research say about instruction that might be helpful to us?
• What teaching strategies must we focus on to improve student achievement?
• What actions should be taken to help us achieve our goal?
• What professional development is needed to assist teachers in the curriculum area?
• What teaching strategies have proven successful?
• What do we need to do in the classroom or at the system level that we are not doing now?

• What strategies will move our students currently achieving Level 2 to the provincial standard of Level 3? How can we move students from Level 1 to Level 2, from exempt to Level 1?
• What strategies have proven particularly successful with different groups of students?

BEST PRACTICES

An exemplary plan will provide information about progress on improvements and the implementation of past improvement plans.
• State results in relation to targets.
• Review the last plan, identifying strengths and concerns.
• Highlight programs and strategies that have resulted in improvement.
• Ensure that the expectation is success for all students, and include reference to comparative data.
• Include elementary and secondary partners.
• Recognize continuing implementation of earlier plans, and detail revisions of strategies.
• Report research undertaken to identify successful programs and strategies.

An exemplary plan will identify priorities and areas for improvement.
• Include elementary and secondary priorities and areas in need of improvement.
• Examine results, trends, contextual data and questionnaire data to determine areas of focus and set priorities.
• Identify intermediate- and long-term priorities.
• Articulate the specific results-focused priorities of the system.
• Identify the expected results and timelines.

Strategies for improvement must be specific and focused; they should prescribe actions in the school or at the board level that will make a substantial difference to student achievement.

Effective strategies must address the needs of students already scoring at acceptable and high levels and those who are achieving lower levels. In addition, an improvement planning team may want to consider whether a school- or board-wide strategy is needed to facilitate support and consistency.

Engaging parents: Strategies that engage parents as partners in implementing the improvement plan are essential. The Data-Based Decision Making resource developed by the U.S. educational organization AEL (www.ael.org/dbdm) suggests the following:
• Share school improvement goals with parents.
• Share school plans for achieving the goals.
• Suggest simple ways in which parents can help students work on interventions.
• Conduct regularly scheduled student demon- stration nights.
• Provide parents with training for teaching their children.

Engaging teachers: Strategies or plans for professional development and support staff should be included in the improvement plan. Focus on ensuring that staff are well prepared to use new methods of instruction and assess- ment and to incorporate new or existing resources into their teaching repertoires. The implementation of strategies will vary from awareness to application and skill development, depending on staff and their stage of preparedness. Rick Stiggins, director of the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, Oregon, has suggested a combination of development methods:
• 10% in a workshop (used to convey information and generate awareness and enthusiasm)
• 65% in individual study, action research and reflection
• 25% in learning teams, sharing lessons learned

TIP **Action research builds teacher involvement.**

Action research is highly effective in engag- ing teachers in change. Teachers or teams try innovative techniques and determine their practical usefulness, becoming researchers and innovators in their own schools, with their own students. If an innovation increases student achievement, the teacher can become a change advocate, encouraging other teachers to adopt the practice. It is important to keep in mind that peer teacher experience is usually more persuasive than expert theory.

An exemplary plan will identify and communicate procedures and strategies that are working well.

- The planning leader should ensure access to literature on best practices and provide guidance and support for conducting, documenting and communicating local investigations of best practices, such as action research. Examples of resources are
  - Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), at www.searcheric.org;
  - Action Research at Queen's University, at http://educ.queensu.ca/;
  - the Ontario Action Researcher, at www.nipissingu.ca/oar/;
  - Orbit magazine, at www.oise.utoronto.ca/; and
  - the Assessment Training Institute, at www.assessmentinst.com.
- Improvement processes should focus on teaching practices that have optimum measurable impact on student learning.
- The sharing of best practices by teacher mentors is one example of exemplary practice in this area.
- Action research results in excellent documentation and communication of successful practices.
- Board Web sites can link to research on best practices and highlight successful action research and classroom practices.
- Binders and CDs compiling best practices can be effective for disseminating information.
- Teaching practices in research literature may need to be validated in local contexts through assessment and the documentation of implementation and student results.

Component 3: Defining indicators of success

Indicators of success provide schools and boards with standards against which they can measure their progress toward a goal. They should be measurable, observable and performance based.

To help determine indicators of success, a planning team might ask:
- How will we know when we have achieved our goal?
- What will be different for the students? What influence will our plan have had? What data do we have to support this notion?
- What evidence must we gather to determine our success in meeting the goal?

EQAO data, report card data and any other data available to the school or board will be useful in analyzing the success of a school or board plan. Formative assessment and summative evaluation can be used to observe and measure progress throughout the course of implementation.

Each strategy should be directly linked to indicators of success in order to determine whether or not its goal has been accomplished.

Component 4: Setting timelines

It is important to remember that change takes time. In fact, some plans may take more than one year to implement.

Timelines must allow for data collection and analysis, reflection, implementation, professional development, status updates and revisions.

Specific timelines allow staff to have an overview of the entire plan without feeling overloaded by too many strategies to implement at one time.

Timelines also enable community members to understand that improving student achievement is a multi-faceted task that takes time.

Timelines and planning cycles for other school and board initiatives may affect improvement planning timelines.

As well, provincial timelines for target setting, teacher performance appraisal and professional development for the Early Reading and Early Math strategies should be considered.

All planning team members and stakeholders need opportunities to review the status or progress of the various strategies in the plan. Stakeholders must have the opportunity to express their views and offer their opinions on progress. Status updates throughout the year allow the school and board to try new strategies and remain focused on student improvement.

An exemplary plan will include appropriate and realistic timelines and place them in a multi-year view.

- Include timelines for elementary and secondary schools.
- Include short- and long-term strategies and timelines.
- Plan for short-term improvement through shorter-term strategies, as a motivational tool.
- Include timelines and program review dates for each goal or strategy.
- Build ongoing updating and revision into the implementation process.

Component 5: Allocating resources

The resources required to meet improvement planning goals may have an impact on many decisions at both the school and board levels.

Both staff and community members need to understand the implications of improvement planning on budgets.

Improvement in an area of weakness, for example, might mean that additional resources are needed to implement appropriate strategies. This in turn may require that both staffing and budget issues be filtered through the school improvement plan to ensure that resources are allocated by the school and board in a focused and informed manner.

An exemplary plan will identify the human and material resources required for implementation.

- Include resources for elementary and secondary schools.
- Make the human and material resource support for the implementation of system plans a system priority.
- Indicate how resources will be deployed to support each strategy.
- List the responsibilities of system personnel in supporting the implementation of strategies.

An emphasis on augmenting school mathematics resources is an example of leadership in deploying resources differently to improve outcomes. Strategies for deploying resources differently may include the provision of outside expertise to schools.

Component 6: Assigning responsibilities

Clearly assigning responsibility will ensure that each strategy of the improvement plan has a "champion" to support its implementation.

Improvement plans should specify who will do what by when.

Assigning responsibility to broad staff categories such as "all teachers and principals" may not be specific enough for effective action.

All partners should see—and recognize the importance of—their roles in encouraging improvement. Staff members should be identified by name for each stage of the implementation. Likewise, the plan should articulate partners' responsibilities.

Component 7: Setting performance targets

Precise target-setting requires that the school and the board determine the level of student achievement expected following implementation.

Schools will need to analyze their EQAO results over a number of years to identify trends in student achievement and use this information with available classroom (cohort) and school data to set targets. Improved achievement according to multiple sources of data is the primary measure of the success of improvement efforts.

BEST PRACTICES An exemplary plan will identify who is responsible for implementing each of its phases.
- Include responsibilities for elementary and secondary schools.
- Detail what teachers, principals and curriculum staff will do for each priority, target or strategy.

Step 5: Ongoing Impact

Monitoring implementation of the plan

- Gather evidence from a variety of sources on how well the plan is working.
- Recognize and celebrate improvements.
- Refocus and refine strategies throughout the year and from year to year.

It is critical that, following plan development, a monitoring process be put in place to ensure that implementation is proceeding according to plan and that the strategies being implemented are having an impact on student achievement.

The following should be considered:
- Are teachers implementing new methods of teaching, learning and assessment as planned?
- Are new resources or learning materials being used?
- Does ongoing assessment indicate that students are progressing?
- Have professional development and follow-up been adequate?

Monitoring should also ensure that each step or strategy has taken place on schedule.

BEST PRACTICES

An exemplary plan will include mechanisms for sharing the implementation strategy and communicating widely with the school community.
- Use clear language and an accessible format.
- Post plans online and update them monthly.
- Include a process for public feedback.
- Ensure that communication is a focus of the system plan, especially broad communication of progress and success.
- Include a process for sharing plans with schools and communities.
- Use "Fast Facts" and "Q & A" sections to make information readily available in plain language.

Indicators of success

Collect data throughout implementation to measure progress. For example, indicators of success for an initiative to improve parental involvement could include
- an increased response rate to parental surveys;
- increased parental attendance of board functions;
- more hits on the board's parental information Web page;
- larger numbers of parent volunteers;
- more positive parental participation in home and school functions and
- fewer parental complaints logged at the board office.

Achievement indicators state what students will achieve in relation to priorities, strategies and performance targets, and how achievement will be assessed.

An exemplary plan will identify indicators of success with respect to the performance targets and expected results in the areas of focus.

- Include elementary and secondary indicators.
- Ensure indicators of success are measurable outcomes that can be communicated to others as evidence of progress.
- Use process indicators (such as the delivery of an inservice program) as indicators of implementation rather than of results.
- Consider using multiple sources of data (e.g., classroom, school, system and/or provincial assessment data) to monitor and evaluate progress.
- State strategies in terms of the student results they will achieve.

Consistent monitoring will ensure the early identification of shortcomings, so that strategies can be altered or eliminated if they are not proving effective.

Build frequent reflection points

Not all improvements will be immediately apparent in student provincial test scores or report card marks.

For example, improvement in school facilities or school safety or the acquisition of new learning materials, while potentially influential over the long term, may not be reflected immediately in test results. Capturing and reporting measurable improvements, such as

lower student mobility and fewer suspensions or expulsions, is important, since these changes will result in enhanced student achievement over the long term.

To enable evaluation and revision, build frequent reflection points into the time frame and initiate a formal process for gathering feedback and adjusting the plan.

Equally important, ongoing monitoring will ensure that there are opportunities to reinforce the board or school focus on improvement goals, and to identify and celebrate successes!

An exemplary plan will describe how implementation will be regularly monitored and how the plan will be revised if necessary.

- Review the plan frequently and revise it as issues arise.
- Identify system as well as school personnel who are responsible for monitoring.
- Include a monitoring and evaluation process for each target in the plan.
- Include details on the monitoring process itself.
- Consider the development of the staff's capacity to monitor and assess student achievement as an important system focus.

The improvement planning toolkit

This collection of resources provides a more detailed look at selected aspects of the improvement planning process and some practical tools to assist you in effective improvement planning.

References and resources

The following books and articles were used in the creation of this document. You may be interested in exploring these resources to enhance your knowledge and understanding of the improvement planning process.

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Data analysis: a sample process

The following sample illustrates a process that improvement planning teams might use to analyze and interpret both contextual and achievement data.
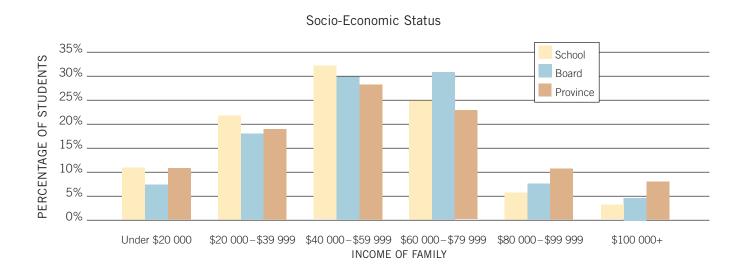
- The school profile is based on the Education Quality Indicators Framework.
- Student achievement data is based on report card and EQAO data.
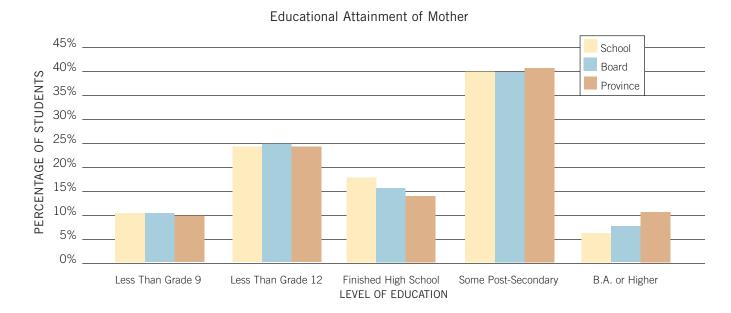
The data are drawn from a secondary school and reflect the minimum amount of data that will be available to a planning team at the school level. While this sample uses data from a secondary school, the planning process and data sources for an elementary school are similar. Likewise, a comparable profile of data will be available to all school districts in the province, and the process used for district planning is similar.

Interpreting contextual data

The graphs below illustrate the profile of this secondary school, using the following indicators: socio-economic status, educational attainment and language background.

Socio-Economic Status

Educational Attainment of Mother

Language Background

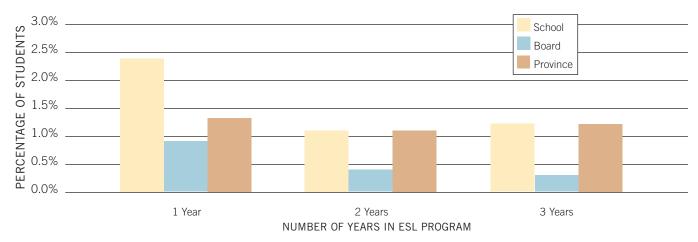

Use questions such as the following to focus group discussion about the data:

Is there anything in the data we do not understand? If so, what do we need to clarify?

Clarifying the data will promote a common understanding. Without this discussion, individual team members may draw different conclusions.

For each indicator, how do the school's and the board's data compare with provincial data? Is there anything about the information we find surprising?

These questions begin the process of building the "story" from the data.

The socio-economic data indicate that this school has a larger proportion of students at lower socio-economic levels than the board or province. Also, while educational attainment is consistent with board and provincial data, the school appears to have a disproportionate number of students classified as ESL/ELD learners compared to the board. This might serve as a focus for the planning process. Alternatively, as the team builds a greater understanding of the data, it might choose to focus on other issues that arise and are viewed as more critical.

A broad-based approach to school planning in which all system partners are involved enhances the possibility that the team will plan from locally generated data, which is important in the context of school improvement.

Is there additional information we need in order to complete the school profile? Considering the relationship between each of the indicators and student achievement, is there anything that concerns us? What does the literature say about the relationship between the indicator data and their connection to student achievement?

These questions begin to focus the school planning process. In examining the data, the school may generate additional questions to support this process.

For example, if the school has a large proportion of students from lower income homes, the following questions might be considered:
• How many students are working at jobs outside school?
• On average, how much time are students working?

Some research indicates that secondary school students who work more than 20 hours a week are more likely to leave college or university without a degree or diploma than those who work fewer hours.

Research on post-secondary school participation and teachers' and parents' expectations might be critical where there is a significant population of students from lower income homes.

How do the data fit with the other school profile data accumulated? Which two or three elements of the profile are important to consider in developing the school or board plan?

Schools might look at the data from several different perspectives: for instance, comparing provincial data with school profile data and focusing on the issues raised. If the planning process is to be effective in enhancing student achievement, the planning team must prioritize the issues and develop a focus for action.

Interpreting achievement data

Schools have many sources of achievement data. The most widely available are report cards and EQAO assessment reports.

The school team: understanding data

The job of the school improvement team is to lead in the development of a plan that addresses the school's needs, to monitor the implementation of the plan and to revise it when appropriate.

Examining and understanding the school information is a critical first step. The following is a recommended process that will ensure both that all relevant data are collected and that the data are thoroughly explored and understood by the team prior to the planning process.

Phase I: Team orientation

In preparing for data gathering and analysis, the team may want to work through *The Road Ahead IV—A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability* and *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers and School Councils*, both available on the Ministry's Web site.

Phase II: Data gathering

A range of data is available to schools for inclusion in the analysis, including
• results of EQAO assessments in Grades 3, 6 and 9 and the OSSLT;
• classroom assessments;
• report card marks;
• results of board- and/or school-administered standardized tests;
• demographic information, such as gender, ESL/ELD and special needs status and student mobility, which is available from EQAO for selected grades;
• student attendance, behaviour incident reports and information on suspensions, rate of homework completion and number of books read and
• results of student attitude surveys completed as part of EQAO assessments.

Phase III: Questioning the data

The task facing the school improvement team is to answer the question "What do all of these data mean?"

While this may initially seem like an overwhelming task, the following questions will help the team work though the process and ensure that the data have been viewed from a variety of perspectives.

It is important to remember that the "numbers," whether results of a test or descriptions of a population of students, are the "beginning" not the whole story. The task is to use these numbers to develop an understanding.

Do we have the complete picture?

Keep in mind that EQAO results are a snapshot of student performance at one point in time. It is important to complement the findings from EQAO assessments with information about student achievement throughout the school year, including classroom assignments and report card marks.

Are the results from different sources of information consistent?

It is important to determine whether the results of EQAO assessments are consistent with ongoing classroom assessment of students' achievement.

Do the students who perform well on a daily basis also perform well on EQAO assessments?

You can also explore whether those students who perform poorly on EQAO assessments also have difficulty acquiring knowledge and skills in the classroom.

Are the EQAO results consistent with your expectations based on classroom assessment?

If there are surprises, the team needs to ask why. For example, did anything happen during the EQAO assessments that might have had an impact on results? Or do teachers need to revisit their understanding of expectations, and therefore their judgment of the adequacy of student work?

Phase IV: Comparing data

Information is often more meaningful when a point of comparison exists. For example, comparisons can be made
• with other schools in the board and across the province;
• within the school, across a series of years, or
• with schools that have a similar demographic profile.

The team needs to ask:
• How do the school's results this year compare with those of the board?
• How do the results compare with the province's?
• How do the results compare with those of earlier years?
• What trends can we identify in the school, compared with trends in the board or across the province?
• How do the school's results compare with schools with similar demographics?

If the team finds significant differences in student achievement, then it needs to ask how the school's student population compares to that of the board or the province, for example, in terms or socio-economic or ESL/ELD status or student mobility.

If the school's demographic profile is similar to that of the board or the province, yet the results are different, then the team needs to ask about critical areas such as
• program delivery in the school;
• teacher qualifications;
• available resources and
• professional development.

On the other hand, if the school's demographic profile is different from that of the board or the province, the team may need to dig deeper.

Phase V: digging deeper

Often, further understanding of results arises from "disaggregation" of the data, that is, through examining the performance of various subgroups of students. This examination might consider factors such as gender, length of time in Canada, attendance and attitude.

• Are there differences in the performances of boys and girls? Is the extent of the difference similar to differences at the board or provincial level?
• Are there differences in the performance of ESL/ELD students according to the length of time they have been in Canada? How does this compare to the board?
• Who are the low-achieving students? What are their characteristics? What supports are in place? Who are the high-achieving students? What are their characteristics? What is working for them?
• Do students in the school who are absent more than average attain different achievement levels?
• What are the achievement levels of students with positive and negative attitudes in each subject area?
• What is the pattern of exemptions? Is the number of students exempted fairly stable from year to year?

Some final tips

In making comparisons, keep in mind that the EQAO data the team should be using are the overall scores for each subject, as they are equated from year to year. Be cautious about attributing meaning to "significant" changes from one year to the next if the number of students is small, or if the demographic profile for one year is different from that of the previous year.

Analyzing your data is about asking questions. Working toward an understanding of the school's achievement means asking questions about the data from a variety of perspectives.

Self-evaluation: a best-practices checklist

Use this self-evaluation checklist to evaluate your school or board plan and identify areas for improvement. It covers all the key success factors in improvement planning.

1. **We involve education partners, including parents and school councils, in multi-year improvement planning.**

☐ Excellent: Participation of education partners, including their roles in all phases of planning, is well described in the plan.

☐ Fair: Participation of education partners is included in the plan, but insufficient information is provided about who was involved and how they were involved, or involvement occurs only in some phases of planning.

☐ Poor: Participation of education partners is not included or is mentioned but not supported by details.

2. **We provide information about progress in the implementation of past improvement plans and in the improvement of student results.**

☐ Excellent: The plan provides sufficient information about progress in student achievement and implementation of past improvement plans.

☐ Fair: The plan provides some information about improvement initiatives that are in place and/or achievement results. However, there is insufficient information about progress toward improvement and implementation of past improvement plans.

☐ Poor: There is no information regarding progress toward improvement or implementation of past improvement plans.

3. **We analyze provincial and board EQAO assessment results and other data and interpret data according to local context.**

☐ Excellent: The plan indicates that the results have been analyzed and data have been interpreted according to local context.

☐ Fair: The plan indicates that the results have been analyzed and interpreted. However, more or better analysis and interpretation is required.

☐ Poor: There is evidence that the results have been analyzed and interpreted. However, no supporting data are presented in the plan.

4. **We identify best practices: procedures and strategies that are working well and producing improved student results.**

☐ Excellent: The plan identifies best practices and describes how they have been and are being communicated.

☐ Fair: The plan identifies improvement procedures and strategies, but more information is needed about how the information is communicated.

☐ Poor: The plan provides insufficient information about successful improvement procedures and strategies and the accompanying communications strategy.

5. **We describe mechanisms for sharing the improvement plan and results and communicating widely with the school community.**

☐ Excellent: The plan provides sufficient information about the process for sharing the improvement plans and communicating widely with the school community.

☐ Fair: The plan indicates that improvement plans are shared and communicated, but the process for doing so is not elaborated.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little information to suggest that improvement plans are communicated widely with the school community and about how this is accomplished.

6. **We identify areas for new or continuing areas of focus and determine priorities from among these.**

☐ Excellent: The plan identifies appropriate areas for improvement and determines priorities for the primary, junior, intermediate and secondary divisions, as well as for the administration (as required).

☐ Fair: The plan identifies areas for improvement and determines priorities at some but not all levels or divisions.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about priorities and areas for improvement at the board level.

7. **We specify goals and performance targets (expected results) for each high-priority area of focus.**

☐ Excellent: The plan lists specific goals and measurable performance targets for each high-priority area of focus.

☐ Fair: The plan lists some precisely stated and measurable goals and performance targets. However, others are more generally stated.

☐ Poor: The plans lists only generally stated goals and performance targets.

8. **We describe specific actions and strategies to improve student learning and achievement results.**

☐ Excellent: The plan lists specific, appropriate actions and strategies for improvement, for each of the goals.

☐ Fair: The plan lists specific, appropriate actions and strategies for improvement with respect to some of the goals. However, there are some goals for which specific actions and strategies are missing.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about specific, appropriate actions and strategies for improvement. In some cases, it lists only general guidelines.

9. **We identify the human and material resources required to implement each improvement strategy.**

☐ Excellent: The plan identifies the human and material resources required for implementation.

☐ Fair: The plan provides some of these elements.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about the human and material resources required for implementation.

10. **We identify who will be responsible for implementing each action or strategy in the improvement plan.**

☐ Excellent: The plan identifies either the specific individuals or the roles of individuals (teachers, principals) responsible for implementing each action or strategy.

☐ Fair: The plan identifies who will be responsible for implementing each action or strategy. However, further details are required to specify each person or group's particular responsibility for each action or strategy.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about who will be responsible for implementing each action or strategy.

11. **We provide appropriate and realistic timelines for each strategy and place them in a multi-year view.**

☐ Excellent: The plan provides appropriate and realistic timelines and places them in a multi-year view.

☐ Fair: The plan provides appropriate and realistic timelines. However, they are not placed in a multi-year view.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about timelines and does not place them in a multi-year view.

12. **We identify indicators of success for each performance target in the priority areas of focus.**

☐ Excellent: The plan identifies appropriate indicators of success for the performance targets and expected results in the priority areas of focus.

☐ Fair: The plan identifies indicators of success for the performance targets and expected results in the priority areas of focus. However, the indicators of success are not performance-based or measurable.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about indicators of success for the performance targets and expected results.

13. **We describe how the implementation of actions and strategies will be regularly monitored and how the plan will be revised if necessary.**

☐ Excellent: The plan provides sufficient information about how its implementation will be regularly monitored and, if necessary, revised.

☐ Fair: The plan indicates that its implementation will be regularly monitored and that it will be revised if necessary. However, there is little or no information about how and when this will be done.

☐ Poor: The plan provides little or no information about implementation monitoring.
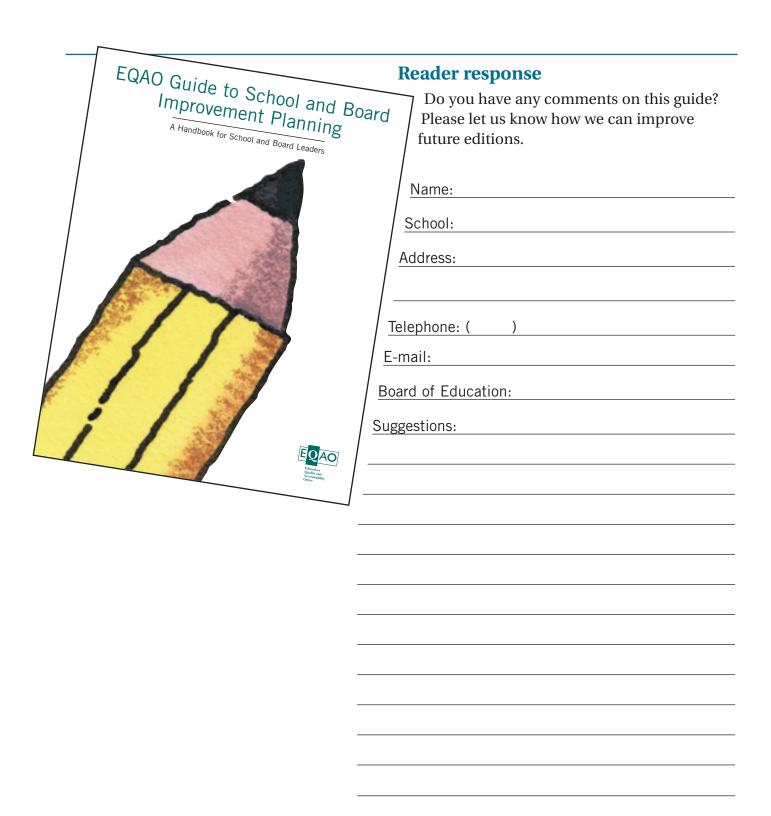
Improvement planning template

Date:

Area of Emphasis:

Performance Target or Goal:

Indicators of Success	Strategies	Responsibilities	Resources	Timelines	Progress Notes

EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning
A Handbook for School and Board Leaders

EQAO
Education Quality and Accountability Office

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