



DISTRICT COMMITMENTS

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

OVERVIEW

This Extended Learning Guide is designed for your team to use in conjunction with the videos on taisresources.net to review current practices, establish baseline information, and plan for continuous improvement. Each guide includes suggestions for discussion, protocols for investigation, and one or more Call to Action activities.

District Commitments are the components on the outer ring of the Texas Accountability and Intervention System (TAIS) framework and consist of:

- Operational Flexibility
- Clear Vision and Focus
- Sense of Urgency
- High Expectations
- District-Wide Ownership and Accountability

Note that the components of the TAIS framework don't function in isolation. Your team should consider reviewing each component, beginning with the ones that seem most relevant to your current situation.

ORGANIZATION

In addition to the Extended Learning Guides, each District Commitments component on taisresources.net features an *Expert video* in which a professional with expertise in the subject offers important points to remember and tips for success.

Each component also offers one or more *From the Field videos*, featuring Texas schools that have used the component effectively in their continuous improvement process. These videos will help your team see and discuss what the component looks and sounds like in action.

USING THIS GUIDE

As a principal, superintendent, district leader, teacher leader, or Professional Service Provider, you can use the videos and Extended Learning Guide to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional learning for teams tasked with implementing continuous school improvement. The Extended Learning Guides provide a framework for using the online videos to promote discussion and improvement.

EACH GUIDE INCLUDES

- A component definition, called “Build a Common Understanding”
- Discussion questions covering the *Expert* and *From the Field* videos
- Suggested activities to promote reflection, deep thought, discussion, and action planning
- Information about the target audience, time required, and needed materials
- One or more Calls to Action to help the group move from “knowing” to “doing”
- References for further study

DISTRICT COMMITMENTS CLEAR VISION AND FOCUS

Building a Common Understanding

The district strongly articulates a focus on student achievement as its primary work. Clear plans and systems, aligned to that vision, are developed to address increasing performance for all students within the district. The vision is integral and embedded in daily practice and is the driver of improvement by all staff members.^{1,2}

Target Audience

Campus or District Leadership Team

Time Needed

90 minutes is recommended. (The module can be broken into two sessions if needed.)

Materials Needed

- Videos at taisresources.net/clear-vision-and-focus/
- Printed charts for activities
- Sticky notes in two colors

STEP 1

Watch the *Expert video, Clear Vision and Focus*, featuring Dr. Todd Whitaker, with your campus or district team.

STEP 2

Discuss, as a group, Dr. Whitaker's thoughts on vision and focus, specifically how clear vision and focus not only articulate our primary educational mission but also guide adult interactions.

STEP 3

Watch the Lee High School and George I. Sanchez High School *From the Field* videos.

Part A

Discuss how Lee High School established new practices and procedures to achieve its vision of preparing students for graduation and college entrance. Use the following questions to guide the discussion and the chart below to record your thoughts:

- What are examples of things that the Lee High School team members did differently as they strived to achieve their vision?
- How did adult behavior at the school change to meet student needs?

Processes and Procedures Implemented at Lee High School to Prepare Students For Graduation and College and Career Readiness: <i>List Examples From the Video.</i>	How Does This Align with Their Vision and Focus?	Why Do You Think This Process or Procedure was Put Into Place?

Part B

Think about the challenging needs of students at George I. Sanchez High School. What measures did the school’s team members take to achieve their vision of creating a supportive environment where students are ready to learn?

Measures Taken at George I. Sanchez High School to Achieve Their Vision: <i>List Examples From the Video.</i>	How Does This Align with Their Vision and Focus?	Why Do You Think This Process or Procedure was Put Into Place?

STEP 4

Discuss vision and focus as it currently exists in your district or on your campus. Consider and discuss the following questions first:

- When was the vision created?
- How was the vision communicated?

Next, use the chart below to guide further discussion.

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is weakest; 10 is strongest), rank the strength of your school's or district's vision and focus based on the five components listed.
- Have each member report his or her rating for each component.
- Determine where the group agrees and disagrees.
- Determine a group rating for each component by averaging or by reaching a consensus.

Vision and Focus	Your Rating	Group Rating
Is our vision clearly established?		
Is our vision still applicable today?		
Is our vision and focus explained to new members of the organization?		
Is our vision and focus communicated regularly and are they visible?		
Can members of the organization articulate the vision?		
Is the vision the guiding force for day-to-day interaction with students?		
Is the vision the guiding force for day-to-day interactions with staff?		
Is the vision the guiding force behind all decisions made?		

STEP 5

CALL TO ACTION: ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR VISION AND FOCUS

Identify actions your district or campus team would like to consider to address the need for clear vision and focus. To identify the actions that will have the greatest impact in the shortest amount of time, consider how vision is currently used to guide day-to-day decisions. List examples using the chart below.

Vision: Write The School or District Vision Here	
List Some Recent Decisions:	Explain Why the Decision Reflects the School or District Vision or, Why It Does Not:

STEP 6

In light of your findings from Steps 4 and 5, choose the statement below that best represents your campus's or district's current commitment to vision and focus.

Vision Statement Rubric

1	2	3	4
The words used in our Vision are mostly unclear and/or vague, and the Vision is not regularly used.	Some of the words used in our Vision are unclear and/or vague, and it is seldom used to inform decisions.	The words used in our Vision are concrete, easily understood, and easily remembered, and could be used to guide our organization.	The words used in our Vision are concrete, easily understood, and easily remembered. They paint a clear picture of optimism and greatness and are there to guide our organization.

STEP 7

Discuss how your district or campus vision and focus could be institutionalized throughout the organization so that they are known and understood by all. Throughout this exercise, ignore any lack of resources or willingness within your organization that might hinder the institutionalization process.

Part A

- Give each team member three sticky notes. Each member should list three areas of concern regarding institutionalizing your district or campus vision.
- Review the list. Is there consensus?
- As a group, determine one area of need to work on now.

Part B

- Give each member additional sticky notes. You may wish to use different colors.
- Each member should list the adult behaviors that would change if the district or campus were to address the area of concern selected in Part A.

If desired, repeat this activity for additional areas of need that were identified.

APPENDIX GUIDELINES FOR CRAFTING A VISION STATEMENT

After this exercise, you may be inspired to help your campus or district create a new vision statement or refine your existing one. Use these guidelines to assist your team in that effort.

To strengthen an existing vision statement, make sure it:

- Expresses the community's highest dreams for its children.
- Calls staff, students, and the community to action.
- Can be articulated as a short slogan.
- Can be displayed in prominent places.
- Can be used in conversations and presentations.
- Guides the work of everyone within the campus or district.

To create a new vision statement:

- Use the statements above with groups of people in the school or district to begin the process.
- Once a list is compiled from Step 7 (Part A and B) assemble a smaller group to create a draft vision.

- Circulate the draft to many audiences and take feedback, again using the questions above.
- Ask a small group of no more than three to refine the vision.
- Bring the final draft back to the large group members to be sure it represents their thoughts. Again, use the statements above to guide discussion.

The process outlined above could be completed in no more than one semester. The benefit will be enormous, as everyone in the organization would now have a clear understanding of what is done as a group and why.

For additional support in creating a strong plan, please see the *Continuous Improvement Process Guidance Document* on this website.

NOTES

1. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 130-156.

2. Andy Hargreaves, interview by Ruth Nelson, "Professor Andy Hargreaves Shares Impactful Information on Sustainability," *Hope Foundation*, 2013, <http://www.hopefoundation.org/professor-andy-hargreaves-shares-impactful-information-on-sustainability/>.

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