



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 HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Building a Common Understanding

Explicit, rigorous standards are in place for student learning with all stakeholders confident that success is attainable. These expectations are pervasively evident and understood by all with a commitment to provide a timely response and/or adjustment when goals are not met.^{1,2,3}

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 www.taisresources.net/high-expectations/
- Printed charts for activities
- Sticky notes

STEP 1

Watch the *Expert video, High Expectations*, featuring Dr. Steven Peters, with your campus or district team. Before viewing, suggest that your team members watch for the role that purpose plays in setting high expectations.

STEP 2

After viewing the video:

- Ask each team member to list his or her thoughts on the role that purpose plays in setting high expectations, using a sticky note to list each thought.
- Have team members post their thoughts where everyone can see them.
- Assign one or two members to group the ideas into any categories that emerge.

STEP 3

As a group, discuss the role of purpose in setting high expectations.

STEP 4

Discuss how applying high expectations creates conditions in which young people are more likely to experience success.

STEP 5

Watch the Lanier High School and Belton New Tech *From the Field* videos.

STEP 6

As a group, consider and discuss the following questions:

- How did Lanier High School remake its culture to address its challenges and create the conditions for success?
- What important elements of the new culture at Belton New Tech communicate high expectations?
- What purposeful decisions did these schools make and what procedures did they put in place to communicate high expectations?

STEP 7

CALL TO ACTION: DEFINING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

- Have each team member complete the following sentences, using one sticky note per response:
 - “To me, high expectations look like . . .”
 - “To me, high expectations sound like . . .”
- Discuss the responses as a group. Consider using these responses to begin crafting a definition of high expectations for your campus or district.

STEP 8

CALL TO ACTION: CRITICAL THINKING

Challenge yourselves to think critically about procedures and routines in your school or district. Using the template provided, fill out a three-column list. On the left, list the daily, weekly, and yearly processes and procedures that are part of your students’ (or campus’s) experiences; in the center column, list what each process and procedure might communicate. (Leave the right column blank for now.) Examples suggesting typical school and district responses are shown.

- At the campus level, think about hallway procedures, tardy policies, class meetings, beginning and end of day procedures, distribution of grades, etc.
- At the district level, think about meeting times and structures, central staff organization, resource allocation, how business is conducted, etc.

Based on the previous exercise defining how high expectations look and sound, discuss the following:

- Do our processes and procedures assume the best of all students (or schools) and communicate high expectations? Or are they designed simply to control those who are less compliant (or less successful)?
- Do you think some staff members have different expectations for different groups of students (or schools)?
- What core message underlies our processes and procedures? Challenge one another to think deeply about this.
- Is the intended message crystal clear? If not, what corrective actions should be taken?

Sample School Process/Communication Analysis

Processes and Procedures	What Might This Communicate?	
Tardy students sent to a holding room and not allowed in class.	Punctuality is important. OR Students can avoid learning by being late.	
Late work will not be accepted.	Timeliness is important. OR Students can avoid learning by being late.	
Grades are fixed and will not be changed.	Responsibility is important. Students must learn to do things right the first time. OR If students do not learn as quickly as others, they will be penalized; therefore, it is not the learning that matters but how fast one learns.	

Sample School Process/Communication Analysis

Processes and Procedures	What Might This Communicate?	
Resources are allocated in the same manner to every school.	<p>All schools get equal portions. We want to be fair.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>If some schools have greater need, they are just going to have to figure it out. Parents in our more affluent schools would complain if they did not get the same resources.</p>	
Principals are frequently called to district meetings with little notice.	<p>We value our principals and want to include them in decisions.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>We have little regard for the work of our principals, guiding instruction on their campuses, and we believe they should attend meetings whenever their supervisors need them.</p>	
Grades are fixed and will not be changed.	<p>That is how it has always been done. Our board is not ready for a conversation about learning.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>We have learned that grades measure many things besides learning and we need to discuss the implications.</p>	

Use the printable template in this module to conduct your own analysis. For each process and procedure, challenge one another to consider whether it exists for the convenience of the adults or because it best supports student learning.

Team Process/Communication Analysis Template

Processes and Procedures	What Might This Communicate?	

STEP 9

CALL TO ACTION: REFRAMING THE MESSAGE

Determine if the processes and procedures you listed in the left column reveal unintended messages of distrust or deficit thinking, as listed in the center column. If so, in the right column list the group's ideas for how each could be reframed to create conditions under which students (or campuses) are more likely to make wise choices that support learning.

STEP 10

CALL TO ACTION: CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Develop a specific action plan to change just one aspect of your school or district. Challenge yourselves to make high expectations evident in the actions of the adults so that they are not just slogans, but a way of being.

For additional support in creating a strong plan, please see the *Continuous Improvement* components on the TAIS website.

NOTES

1. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012), 6.
2. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 292.
3. Richard Dufour and Robert J. Marzano, *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement* (Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2011).

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