



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 OPERATIONAL FLEXIBILITY

Building a Common Understanding

The district permits the shifting of resources, processes, and practices in response to the critical needs that have been identified. The district's ability to address the needs of all students is contingent upon allowing customized approaches, expedition of resources, and departures from standard practice when the need is substantiated.^{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/operational-flexibility/
- Printed charts for activities
- Paper and pens for note taking

STEP 1

Watch the *Expert video, Operational Flexibility*, featuring Dr. Mary Alice Deike, with your district or campus team. Before viewing, suggest that your team members watch for and take notes on the kinds of operational flexibility given to campus leaders to make decisions.

STEP 2

Discuss how operational flexibility is given to campus leaders in your district as compared to Dr. Deike's recommendations.

STEP 3

Discuss the following questions:

- Do the traditional ways of operating within your district meet the needs of the district's individual schools?
- How are the individual needs of campuses considered in the district's decision-making process?

STEP 4

Watch the Pace High School *From the Field* video, and then discuss the following questions:

- What changes were made to the school day and the way staff members interact with students?
- How did Pace High School alter the master schedule and reorganize the school day to effect positive change?
- How did the staff members embrace the challenges presented to them and change behaviors to meet the needs of students?

STEP 5

CALL TO ACTION: ASSESSING YOUR SITUATION

Think about the ways your school or district has traditionally operated. Identify areas that are currently within your district's control and thus difficult for your school to influence. Then list responses to the following questions and statements:

- What processes and procedures work really well to support student learning?
- Are there aspects of the school or district operations that serve as a barrier to achieving campus goals?
- What aspects of school or district operations that have gone unexamined in the past could be changed to better meet the academic needs of students?
- If operational flexibility were a reality, how specifically could it help your school achieve its goals?
- Suggest possible changes to specific regulations, procedures, or processes that currently work as barriers. Highlight those your team recommends.
- What rationale could you provide to support a request for operational flexibility?
- How could you collect and organize the data to support your request?

Use the following chart to list and analyze your current processes and procedures.

Current Process/ Procedure	Does It Support or Hinder Learning?	Why Do We Do It? (Cite the Regulation/ Rule)	Specific Request for Operational Flexibility	Evidence Needed to Support Request

For additional questions, reference the Data Analysis Guidance Document on pg. 22 found in the Data Analysis section of this website.

STEP 6

CALL TO ACTION: CLARIFY NEEDS FOR OPERATIONAL FLEXIBILITY

Identify a process or procedure from Step 5 for which you would like operational flexibility. Develop a specific request or proposal to provide that flexibility to meet the needs of your school and/or individual students. Use the Clarifying Theory protocol to develop your request/proposal. Samples suggesting typical campus and district responses are provided.

Sample Campus Clarifying Theory Process

If we ...	Then perhaps ...
changed the master schedule to include more time for teacher planning ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lessons will be more engaging teachers will better utilize the district curriculum students will show greater evidence of learning and be more successful on state assessments

Sample District Clarifying Theory Process

If we ...	Then perhaps ...
allow campuses to adjust how time is allocated to support collaborative planning ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> principals will better support embedded teacher learning teachers will investigate data together more effectively teachers will plan together more effectively teachers will be more effective and students will show greater evidence of learning

Now formulate your needs or suggestions for operational flexibility using the samples as guides.

If we ...	Then perhaps ...

STEP 7

CALL TO ACTION: ACTION PLANNING

Now create a specific plan to request operational flexibility and to implement the changes you recommend if your request is granted. The Continuous Improvement Planning Process outlined on taisresources.net can help you with this.

As you craft your request, consider whether the proposed changes are within the scope of responsibility for the school.

- If they are within the scope of responsibility for the school, answer each of the following:
 - Who must be involved to make the proposed changes?
 - What is the time line?
 - What might happen if the idea does not work?
 - How will success be measured?
- If the proposed changes are not within the scope of responsibility for the school, determine how your team will support the proposal and request permission by answering each of the following:
 - Who must be included in seeking permission to change?
 - What information might they need?
 - What concerns do you think will be raised?
 - What is the time line?
 - What might happen if the idea does not work?
 - How will success be measured?

NOTES

1. Gene Bottoms and Jon Schmidt-Davis, "The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership," *The Wallace Foundation*, last modified August 2010, <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Pages/Three-Essentials-to-Improving-Schools.aspx>.

2. Peter Senge and Michael Fullan, *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2010).

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Fullan, Michael. *What's Worth Fighting for In the Principalship?* New York: TeachersCollege Press, 1997.

Hall, Gene E., and Shirley M. Hord. *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principals, and Potholes*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000.

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