



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 DISTRICT-WIDE OWNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Building a Common Understanding

The district leadership recognizes and accepts responsibility for all current levels of performance and transparently interacts with stakeholders to plan and implement improvement initiatives. The district is engaged in continuous review of systemic, district-wide practices to ensure effective impact on critical need areas, such as low-performing campuses.^{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 www.taisresources.net/district-wide-ownership-and-accountability/
- Printed charts for activities
- Pen and paper, or white board and markers

STEP 1

Watch the *Expert video*, "District Wide Ownership and Accountability," featuring Dr. Sheila Bethel with your district team.

STEP 2

Discuss Dr. Bethel’s message, using the following questions to guide your dialogue:

- According to Dr. Bethel, what are the important dimensions of leadership?
- How do you measure your accountability to those who depend upon you?
 - How do they gauge your decisions?
 - What actions are visible to the people who depend upon you?
 - Are there any corrections your team might want to make so that stakeholders better understand your reasoning?

After discussing Dr. Bethel’s ideas and your own practice, rate the performance of your leadership team along the spectrum between Reactive to Proactive.

STEP 3

| Reactive 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Proactive 5 |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Our team reacts to crises daily. | Our team reacts to crises often. | Our team reacts to crises occasionally. | Our team has proactive plans to deal with most crises that may come up. | Our team has proactive plans to deal with every crisis that may come up. |
| Our team has no time to plan ahead. | Our team has a plan, but it is sorely lacking. | Our team has a plan that is pretty good, overall. | Our team has a plan to guide improvement and build systems to implement the plan. | Our team has a strong plan in place to guide improvement and systems are in place to implement the plan. |
| We often tell stakeholders what to do and they have no input on our plans. | Stakeholders may understand our plans, but may not be aware of the rationale behind them. | Our stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback regarding our plans. | Our plans may be adjusted somewhat based on our stakeholders’ feedback. | Many stakeholders helped formulate our plans and all stakeholders know and understand them. |
| There are lots of surprised and disappointed reactions to our attempts to implement our plans. | Under our plans people frequently don’t know what to do and must turn to us for guidance. | We try to get our people to “buy in” to our plans ahead of time. | Our teams are involved in creating our plans and some of their ideas are included. | Our thinking is public and many voices are reflected in all of our plans. |

STEP 4

Watch the From the Field videos of Lee High School, then discuss the following questions:

- What key challenges did the staff of Lee High School face?
- What organizational changes have they made to address these challenges?

STEP 5

Think about the challenges your district faces, particularly with regard to under-performing departments or campuses. Use the following questions to determine whether district-wide ownership and accountability is present in your district:

- How are district staff supporting improvement efforts?
- What mechanisms do campuses have to provide feedback about the accountability/responsibility of the district for supporting their schools?
- Are district efforts coordinated or do they feel splintered?
- Are district decisions largely proactive or reactive?
- What standards do district leaders use to measure their accountability with regard to under-performing departments or campuses?
- What small, manageable steps would help these departments or campuses?
- How might we build momentum and commitment to a common cause?

STEP 6

Think about how the district coordinates support for individual campuses, departments or leaders in your district. List ways the support is differentiated for each campus, department or leader based on their targeted needs.

Do this for as many schools, departments or leaders as needed using the chart below to record your thoughts. Then answer the following questions:

- Did any patterns emerge?
- Are the neediest entities receiving the greatest level of support?
- Are all treated in the same manner?
- Is the treatment equitable?
- Based on your findings, what changes, if any, might your team consider?

| Entity (Campuses, Departments, or Leaders) | Needs | How is Support Differentiated to Meet This Need? |
|--|-------|--|
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| | | |

For additional questions reference the Data Analysis Guidance found in the Data Analysis section of www.taisresources.net

STEP 7

Since it is in the best interest of any working group to direct its energies to things that its members can control, this exercise will help identify which challenges your district can directly control and which it can merely influence. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper, or on a whiteboard. Label the left side “Control,” and the right side “Influence.” Refer back to the challenges your team identified in Step 5. As a group, place each challenge on its appropriate side of the Control/Influence line.

STEP 8

From Step 7, select one of the challenges that your team identified as being something that your district can directly control. Develop a specific, coordinated district plan to build visible support for an under-performing department or school faced with this challenge. Be sure your plan provides answers to these questions:

- Who will provide the support?
- How will it be coordinated?
- How will it be communicated?
- How will it be monitored?

For additional support in creating a strong plan please see the Continuous Improvement Process components at <http://www.taisresources.net>.

NOTES

1. Heather Zavadsky, “Scaling Turnaround: A District-Improvement Approach,” *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*, no.3 (April 2013), http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/-scaling-turnaround-a-districtimprovement-approach_160718533629.pdf

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

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Conzemius, Anne E., and Jan O'Neill. *The Handbook for SMART School Teams: Revitalizing Best Practices for Collaboration*. 2nd Ed. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2014.

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