



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 SENSE OF URGENCY

Building a Common Understanding

The district, compelled by an intolerance of failure and dissatisfaction with deficits of the current state, set a priority and pressed for rapid action to change ineffective practices and processes that impede student success.^{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/sense-of-urgency/
- Printed charts for activities

STEP 1

Watch the *Expert video, Sense of Urgency*, featuring Jamie Vollmer, with a district or campus team.

STEP 2

As a group, discuss Vollmer's thoughts on sense of urgency, using the following questions as a guide.

- What was provocative about Vollmer's message?
- What was surprising?
- What does "intolerance of failure" mean?

STEP 3

Watch the Wanke Elementary School and Lopez High School From the Field videos.

STEP 4

Discuss how each of these schools addressed significant challenges, using the following questions as a guide:

- How did each school address poor attendance and/or a low graduation rate?
- How did Lopez High School face the need to change school processes and procedures?
- How did Wanke Elementary change the way it schedules classes to accommodate its students with the greatest needs?

STEP 5

Discuss how challenges in a district or at campus can affect adult behavior.

- Discuss the sense of urgency in your district or on your campus and the level of need to address this commitment.
- What are actions that your district or campus could take to become more proactive in creating a sense of urgency?

NOTE

A sense of urgency must be tied to a problem for which dramatic improvement is needed or a challenge that will require significant change and effort to meet.

If you feel that your campus or district faces an issue for which dramatic improvement is needed, do Step 5A, and then go to Step 6.

If you feel that your campus or district does not face an issue for which dramatic improvement is needed, do Step 5B, and then go to Step 6.

STEP 5A

In this step, you will develop a problem statement identifying an issue for which dramatic improvement is needed at your school or in your district.

A problem statement is a concise, factual statement derived from data, and identifying a single, manageable issue that needs to be addressed. The problem identified reveals the gap between what the data reveals about the current reality and what the desired outcome should be.

Use multiple sources of data to develop a problem statement that will lead to a specific plan, to develop a sense of urgency to support dramatic school or district improvement. For your problem statement to be valid, make sure all of the following conditions are true:

1. The problem affects student achievement and/or the vision, mission, or goals of the campus or district.
2. The problem encompasses a single, manageable issue.
3. The problem is broad enough that solving it will make a significant positive impact and propel further action.
4. There is shareable data that reveals the problem; the problem is not based on assumption, biases, or inferences.
5. The stakeholders agree that there is a problem.
6. The statement is written concisely and the problem portrayed objectively, using only facts.
7. The problem statement says who is affected, and how and when they are affected.
8. The problem statement does not stray from the issue identified by the data.
9. The problem statement does not suggest solutions.

Write a problem statement that, if addressed, would propel a sense of urgency in your school or district.

Problem Statement:

Critique your problem statement using this rubric.

Criteria Guidelines	Yes/No
Substantiated by facts	
Written objectively	
Uses concise language	
Includes specific details (who, what, when, where)	
Focuses on a single, manageable issue	
Has relevance to our campus/district	
Avoids causation or assigning solutions	
(Add locally developed criteria)	

Rewrite or revise your problem statement, if needed, after critiquing.

Revised Problem Statement:

STEP 5B

Since your district or campus is functioning well, in this step you will discuss what would need to happen if your district or school accepted Vollmer's challenge to "prepare all students the way we have previously prepared the top 25%." Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- What would have to change in your district or on your campus? In what ways?
- What would you need to implement these changes?
- Who should be involved?

STEP 6

In this step, create a target plan to develop a sense of urgency around the problem identified in Step 5A or Vollmer's challenge considered in Step 5B. Make sure your plan addresses these questions:

- What internal and external barriers are there to establishing a greater sense of urgency in your school or district?
- What must happen with the staff and faculty to change the current reality?
- How will you motivate the faculty and staff to want to make a change and embrace a sense of urgency?
- What must happen for students to foster greater success for all students?
- What must happen to include and involve the community in the solutions?
- When communicating the need for a sense of urgency, how would you distinguish it from a sense of panic?
- In what ways might you "connect the dots" between a sense of urgency and specific actions to mobilize people and propel action?
- How would mind-sets need to change?
- How would you instill courage among your staff to collaborate to effect lasting change?

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

NOTES

1. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012), 268.

2. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2007), 287.

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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