SUPPORT SYSTEMS
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.

Support Systems are the components represented by the second-most outer ring of the Texas Accountability and Intervention System (TAIS) process diagram, and consist of:

- Organizational Structure
- Processes and Procedures
- Communications
- Capacity and Resources

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 these Extended Learning Guides, each Support Systems 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* highlighting 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 Learning Guides to provide an ongoing learning experience for teams tasked with implementing continuous school improvement. The 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
- Info 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

SUPPORT
SYSTEMS
COMMUNICATION

Building a Common Understanding

A clearly defined process exists that ensures a consistent message is being sent, received, and acted upon using multiple, effective delivery systems. Proactive efforts are engaged by district and campus level staff to establish successful internal communication systems and transparent external communication practices. Communication is focused on a shared and clear vision for continuous improvement which streamlines collaborative efforts toward student success.[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/communications/
- Printed charts for activities

STEP 1

Watch the Expert video *"Communications,"* featuring Dr. Alan November, with a campus or district team.

STEP 2

Discuss strategic communication as defined by Dr. November.

- Dr. November proposes that schools and districts tailor their messages specifically for different audiences. Is this your current practice?
- He also suggests that we model the use of technology tools in communication. Is this your current practice?

STEP 3

Use the chart below to rate your school's or district's communication effectiveness based on Dr. November's criteria.

- Rate each statement from 1 to 5, where 1 means "never" and 5 means "always."
- Discuss your findings. For those items you rated 3 or below, brainstorm actions you could consider to strengthen communication. Record them in the column on the right.

Communication Component Questions	Rating 1 to 5	Possible Actions To Strengthen Communication
All of our messaging is tailored to the specific audience for whom it is meant.		
All our stakeholders are included in our communication loop.		
We communicate with business owners, senior citizens, and other community stakeholders, who have not traditionally been considered recipients for school communications.		
Our messaging consistently focuses on learning.		
Our teachers are celebrated in our messaging, including examples of teachers going above and beyond the call of duty.		
Our communication protocols demonstrate a culture of high expectations.		
Our leadership's messaging is consistent.		

STEP 4

As a group, discuss the following questions. As you discuss, keep in mind Dr. November's advice that consistent, positive communication has a strong impact on learning, while negative communication does little to improve outcomes.

- What overall message is your school or district sending?
- How could you model positive communication?
- Review the possible actions to improve communications that you listed in Step 3 and select the most powerful to implement.

STEP 5

STEP 6

STEP 7

Watch the Marble Falls High School *From the Field* video.

Discuss how Marble Falls High School used positive communication to propel action and change culture. Use the following questions to guide your conversation:

- What message did the school communicate?
- Why was that important?
- How did the school involve multiple stakeholders?
- How did the school's commitment to stay the course affect the outcomes?

Discuss purposeful communication. Focus on the vision of the school or district you strive to be. Consider all of the communication channels you use. Use the chart below to record your responses to the following questions:

- In what ways and how often is that vision communicated?
- How is it tailored to the needs of various groups?
- Does your school or district model the communication you wish to see between teachers and students?
- What are the defined processes for delivering various types of information (emergency, special announcement, periodic communications, etc.) to particular audiences?
- What technology is used and how?
- How do district and campus communication protocols demonstrate a district culture of high expectations?
- What two-way avenues exist for parents, community, and business leaders to dialogue with district and campus staff?
- How are all members of the organization, including the board of trustees, held accountable in their use of established communication protocols?
- What informal communication networks exist and how are they utilized productively?
- In the "Notes" column of the chart, list how you will:
  – Further develop or refine communication
  – Tell the story of your campus or district
  – Celebrate stories of success at the district and campus level

Communication Analysis Tool

Communication Tool/Value	How Often	Focused or Generic	Technology Used	Models of Excellent Communication	Notes

STEP 8

Using your findings from Step 7, develop or refine your communication plan to purposefully send a positive message and to tell the stories of your strongest teachers and best students. Celebrate success and build upon it.

For additional support in creating a strong plan, please see the *Continuous Improvement Process* at www.taisresource.net.

NOTES

1. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 358.

2. 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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