**Montgomery County Council
of
Parent Teacher Associations**

Parents, PTAs, and the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

Handbook

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What is a School Improvement Plan?

All MCPS schools are required to develop a plan to guide instruction and school leadership during the school year. This plan is called the School Improvement Plan (SIP). MSDE has a template for SIPs which MCPS builds on with the Baldrige Process. This template is available at http://www.mdk12.org/process/10steps/.

The Principal's Handbook outlines processes for school improvement planning, incorporating Baldrige Categories for Performance Excellence and Core Values/Best Practices which MCPS states adds rigor to the school improvement planning process. (http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/baldrige/leadership/handbook.shtm)

MCPS urges schools to analyze and prioritize what the school needs to work on first and foremost. An SIP is a work in progress. Schools are required to have four reviews of their SIP per year although most schools' instructional leadership teams discuss and adjust the plans at other points in the year. Parents should be involved in the four reviews. Most schools have a full day or two day SIP review in July and then three additional SIP meetings during the school year. Students should be involved in the review of SIPs at the secondary level.

A school's SIP should be available to parents, either on display at the school, posted on the school's web site, sent home to parents, or presented to parents (at a PTA meeting perhaps).

Parents (and students) are not just observers at SIP meetings. They are an integral part of the planning process. Unfortunately, while principals are told to have parents involved in the SIP, there is no explicit guidance on how to get parents involved. From the MCPS website: "Principals understand that they cannot meet the demands for school reform alone. Because such responsibilities require the commitment and energy beyond what any one leader or principal can accomplish alone, **it is incumbent upon the principal to develop a leadership system by empowering administration, staff, parents, and students**. The task, therefore, has become one of developing skill among staff members and other stakeholders for shared leadership, decision-making and accountability in facing the critical issues of the school and the reform movement, a challenge for which the Baldrige model is well suited."
(http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/baldrige/leadership/culture/shared.shtm)

Parents should have input into the goals and action steps in the SIP. The MCPS website states that parents are key to school improvement. Parent input can:

- Incorporate the expectations that parents have of their school into school improvement planning
- Understand the needs of students from the parents' perspectives
- Solicit parent expertise in problem-solving
- Focus contributions of time from volunteers to support goals/objectives

- Collaborate with parent organizations (e.g. PTA) so their efforts can support the goals/objectives of the school
  (http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/baldrige/paretns/role.shtm#action)

MCPS uses a flow chart, called the linkages chart as a template. Find this at the end of this handbook. The main areas which the school plans to work on during the year will be contained in the box called Process Management. Accompanying the linkages chart may be a table with three columns labeled: 1) What are we doing? –this will list the specific actions the school will take in each area contained in the process management box. 2) What resources do we need?—will describe what the school will need to take the actions. The resources could include training, staff, instructional materials, assemblies, programs, committees, texts and any thing else the school will need. 3) How will we monitor this?—describes what type of information to collect and analyze over the course of the year to be able to evaluate progress toward the goals. This could be test data, grades, observations, logs, committee reports, surveys, discipline referrals, among other things.

All schools are required to have at least one goal that addresses pupil services which will be implemented with the help of the counselor. Some areas that might be addressed by this goal are: character education, peer mediation, bullying programs, school climate, team building, etc.

Over the course of the year, parents should expect SIP reviews to examine and discuss the information listed in the monitoring column as well as to review the goals and actions.

What Can You and/or Your PTA do to Ensure Meaningful Parent Involvement?

The following is a check list developed by Joyce Wootten and Brenda Martin. As a first step, you or your PTA can go through this list and evaluate where you stand.

1. Is your PTA board aware that the school has a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and do they know what it says?
2. Has your PTA obtained the most recent copy of the SIP?
3. Is the PTA executive board familiar with the SIP and Baldrige terminology, such as "leadership," "student and stakeholder focus," "strategic planning," "performance results," "process management," information and anaylsis," and "human resources"? If not, request administrators to do a presentation.
4. How many PTA leaders are involved in the July formulation of the SIP and its periodic updates?
5. Are PTA representatives such as the ESOL, Special Needs, GT, NAACP chairs part of the SIP process?
6. Are the PTA representatives committed to the ongoing process of SIP review?
7. Is the PTA monitoring specific action plans, based on the SIP, for completion on a regular basis?

8. Is the PTA getting updated revisions of the SIP on a regular basis, i.e., monthly, quarterly, etc.?
9. Are parents informed about the SIP and is it readily available for them to review at the school?
10. Is the particular data (i.e. attendance, grades, demographics, MCPS climate surveys, forums, % in GT/honors/AP classes, % with 504s/IEPs, MSAs, HSAs, SATs, GPAs, Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), suspension/referral reports, etc.?), on which specific SIP goals should be driven, available for parents to review? If so, where?
11. Are parents familiar with the importance of, and data included in, the two MCSP climate surveys, MCPS PARENT SURVEY OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT (academic environment, school atmosphere & communication, social environment, guidance, citizenry, school safety & discipline, physical environment, parent satisfaction, and partnerships) and MCPS PARENT SURVEY OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES (transportation, food & nutrition, facilities—custodial, safety & security, and technology). Are there SIP goals based on these surveys, as well as other forms of input? (These surveys are available on the MCPS web site. Go to http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/ and click on the specific school. The next page will have a link to that school's survey results.)
12. Is there a feeling of enthusiasm that the SIP process with be productive? If not, why?

The details in each question should lead you to your next steps as all of the things listed above are components of meaningful parental input.

Suggestions If You Don't Have Meaningful Parental Involvement

If you find that many of the items in the check list could be answered with "no," then your PTA should take steps to improve parental involvement in the SIP process.

The first point of contact should generally be the principal. Schedule a meeting and come prepared to discuss the specific shortcomings from the list above or others specific to your school. Together the principal and the PTA can take steps to increase parent awareness of the plan, the data and surveys, and to promote parent participation from across your parent community. Principals know that parents are supposed to be involved in the SIP process and also that all parents should have access to the plan, so most will welcome the PTA's interest in improving these things.

PTAs can recruit parents to attend these meetings. Find out the dates for the school year and recruit people for the committee through your volunteer survey or in your newsletter. Ask parents to make the commitment to attend all four meetings and send them reminders. Personal invitations and letting people know that this is how they can help the school and the PTA for the year can work.

If your principal is not open to increased parental involvement, there are a few other ways you can jump start a dialog on the SIP.

- You can ask the principal to present the SIP at a PTA meeting. If the principal declines this offer in a one on one meeting, arrange to have another parent ask the principal to do this during a PTA meeting in front of other parents. If the principal agrees to do this, you can bring copies of the relevant data to the meeting.
- If there are extreme violations of the intent of MCPS, such as no parents involved in SIP reviews, or parents allowed at reviews only as observers, and you can not solve this directly with the principal, the next step is to go to the community superintendent with this information.
- You may want to initiate a cluster wide discussion on the SIP process at a cluster meeting. Community superintendents and/or performance directors usually attend cluster meetings. A discussion at a cluster meeting will allow parents from all schools to share information and to bring issues to the attention of the community superintendent in an indirect way.

Model for Cluster-wide Discussion

This process was used by one cluster's schools in 2003-04 to initiate a discussion of SIP plans within the cluster. The cluster (cluster coordinators, cluster representatives, and PTA presidents) agreed that there was widespread variation in the level of parental involvement in the SIP process across the cluster. In the fall, they decided to discuss the SIP process in February. Each cluster representative was tasked with doing some SIP research before the meeting and then come with the answers to these questions and copies of their own school's SIP to distribute at the meeting.

Their instructions were:

Please be prepared to describe how parents are involved in your school's SIP process at the February cluster meeting. The questions listed below are intended to be a guide as to the kind of information we would like to share among our schools. You may not be able to gather all this information, but we suggest talking with your principal, a teacher or two, your PTA president, and some parents. The goal of this is to hear some success stories that will improve involvement at all schools.

- How do parents get involved in the process? For example, does your school post a sign up sheet, are they solicited in the newsletter, on the list serve, does the principal invite individuals to attend the meetings?
- Approximately how many parents attended the SIP reviews in the past two years?
- How have the parents participated in these meetings?
- Do any parents attend follow up staff meetings to discuss the developed plan and how are these parents selected or invited?
- Are there other committees (for example, guidance advisory, principal's council, parent involvement committee, instructional leadership team) during the year where parents can give input or feedback on the school plan?

- How does your principal share the SIP with the entire school? For example, at a PTA meeting, in the newsletter, at back to school night?
- Do your parents feel represented in this process?
- Do teachers feel the parents' input is valuable?
- Is your principal satisfied with the level of parental involvement?
- Has your school or PTA tried anything to get more people involved in this process? If so, what worked and what didn't seem to have much impact?

At the February meeting, cluster reps took turns sharing what they had found out at their own schools. They found it was easier to discuss the questions with the principal because they could say they were assigned to find out this information by the cluster. Often, just asking these questions was enough to start a dialog at their own school and led to changes. Having a community superintendent and/or performance director at the meeting meant that it was possible to verify which local school practices were encouraged by MCPS and which were not consistent with recommended practices.

Based on the discussion at the February cluster meeting a summary of "best practices" or tips was prepared and distributed to cluster PTAs and principals. This list included:

- All parents should be invited to attend SIP meetings, but personal invitations may be needed also to ensure broad and diverse participation.
- Parent input is more meaningful (and has a stronger voice) if there are 6-10 parents involved as opposed to 1 or 2.
- The meeting times should be varied, or convenient to parents as well as staff.
- Parents should be part of the SIP team and attend all four SIP meetings each year.
- The members of the SIP team should be listed in the school directory or newsletter so the entire community knows who they are.
- The SIP plan should be disseminated to the school community, either in the school or principal's newsletter as well as presented at a PTA meeting or at back to school night.
- Parents should not be viewed as interlopers or guests at these meetings. Parent involvement is a valuable and meaningful part of the process (or should be!)

Linkages Charts

- Linkage Chart Essentials
- Linkage Chart "How's"
- Linkage Chart "What's"
- Faculty Focu
- Leadership
- Measurement
- Planning
- Process
- Results
- Student Focu

Glossary of MCPS SIP Terms

http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/baldrige/glossary.shtm

Action Plans: refer to outlines of specific actions that are defined, designed and deployed to meet strategic goals/ objectives or other processes that require specific follow-through. A consistent format and expectations for all action planning in the school can be designed at the school level and should include the following components or combination of components:

   a. Goal and objective that the action plan is addressing
   b. Actions/timeline
   c. Person(s) Responsible
   d. Resources Needed to Complete the Task
   e. Evidence of Implementation
   f. Monitoring: Date and by whom
   g. Results (indicators based on the identified evidence of implementation)

Alignment: consistency or congruency between and among the school's vision, mission, and expectations; formative and summative data analyses; processes; resource allocations; training plans; and strategic goals and objectives. Effective alignment requires a common understanding of the key goals and objectives, measures, and those key processes that will support attainment of the goals and objectives at all levels of the organization (county, school, classroom, & individual levels).

Baldrige: a systematic process for making systemic changes.

Benchmark: processes and results that represent best practices and performance for similar activities inside or outside the school. Benchmarking is the process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from organizations anywhere in the world to help an organization improve its performance (APQC)

Concerns-based Adoption Model (CBAM): a model for identifying and assessing seven stages of concern individual experience when going through a change process

Formative Assessment: frequent or ongoing evaluation during course, programs, or learning experiences that gives an early indication of what students are learning, including an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses.

Goals: a future condition or performance level that one intends to attain. Goals can be both short term and longer term. Goals are ends that guide actions. Quantitative goals, frequently referred to as "targets," include a numerical point or range. Targets might be projections based on comparative and/or competitive date. The term "**stretch goals**" refers to desired major or breakthrough improvements, usually in areas most critical to the school's success.

Integration: the harmonization of plans, processes, information, resource decisions, action, results, and analysis to support key organization-wide goals. Effective integration goes beyond alignment and is achieved when there is evidence showing the interdependency and interrelationships of people and processes in achieving an organization's goals.

Linkages Chart: demonstrate visually the alignment and integration of the Baldrige Categories. It can be used by any organization as a tool for defining, designing, and deploying plans that include processes and systems to sustain each category. By using the "systems checks," the linkages chart helps organize the requirements of each Category and reinforces the interrelationships among Categories. (Note arrows on the linkages chart.)

Leadership System: how leadership is exercised, formally and informally, throughout the organization — the basis for and the way that key decisions are made, communicated, and carried out. It includes structures and mechanisms for decision making; selection and development of senior leaders, administrators, department heads, staff leaders as well as parents and students when possible; and reinforcement of values, directions, and performance expectations.

Mission: the overall function of an organization. The mission answers the question, "What is this school attempting to accomplish?" The mission might define students and stakeholders served; distinctive competencies; or technologies used.

Performance Excellence: the result of a pragmatic system of continual improvement driven by student needs, expectations, and requirements.

PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act): a four-step improvement cycle for organizing and managing change and continuous improvement. The cycle is used for incremental improvements as opposed to benchmarking when radical changes are called for (Conyers and Ewy, p. 62). This cycle was developed by Dr. Walter Shewhart in the 1920s and put into business practice in Japan and the United States by W. Edwards Deming. (Embedded in the PDSA cycle are quality tools to facilitate the process.)

The four steps are defined, as follows:

- In the **Plan** phase, the specific change or problem is defined through root-cause analysis and a plan is designed to address the problem or desired change.
- In the **Do** phase, the improvements to be made are deployed through the development of action plans. Frequent monitoring allows for rapid response to change the course, if needed.
- In the **Study** phase, formative data measures are monitored and analyzed to see if the improvement is producing the desired change.
- In the **Act** phase, a decision is made as to whether the results have created the desired change for standardization or if more improvement is needed, in which case, the PDSA cycle starts all over again.

Process: value-added actions or tasks linked together with the purpose of supporting the school's goals. Generally, processes involve people, strategies, and resources in a defined series of steps and actions.

Quality tools are visual organizers that help students with planning, decision-making, and problem solving in many situations : on the job, at school, during meetings, in the classroom, and at home.

Results: outcomes when addressing the requirements of the Baldrige Criteria. Results are measured in the areas of student achievement, student, staff, and stakeholder satisfaction/dissatisfaction, staff development, leadership system, and process management.

Root-cause Analysis: a "drilling-down" process to analyze the root-cause for a specific question or issue related to student achievement and a relevant set of data to facilitate data-driven decision-making. This process enables schools to solve the cause of problems rather than solving the symptoms of a problem.

Stakeholders: all groups that are affected by the school's actions and success (e.g., parents, staff, community, other schools). Although students are commonly thought of as stakeholders, for purposes of emphasis and clarity, the Baldrige Criteria refer to students and stakeholders separately.

Strategic Objectives: a school's response to address priority areas for improvement. They set a school's longer-term directions and guide resource allocation through action planning.

Summative Assessment: longitudinal analysis of student learning by comparing baseline with end-of-year levels of achievement to determine gains and evaluate connections between teaching and learning. Summative assessments tend to be formal and comprehensive and are conducted at the conclusion of a unit, course or program.

System: a set of well-defined, well-designed, well-deployed processes that work together for meeting the school's performance requirements.

Systematic: processes that are repeatable and predictable. Approaches are systematic if they build in the opportunity for evaluation, improvement, and sharing.

Systemic: the inter-relatedness and interdependency of processes and people within a system. Continuous improvement requires a balance of both systematic actions and systemic thinking.

Trends: numerical information that shows the direction and rate of change for schools' results. They provide a time sequence of organizational performance. A minimum of three data points generally is needed to begin to ascertain a trend.

Value: the perceived worth or benefit of a program, service, or processes to determine the benefits of various options relative to their costs. Schools need to understand what different student and stakeholder groups value and then deliver that value to each group.

Value Creation: a program, service, or process that produces benefit for students and stakeholders and for the school.

Values (Core Values/Best Practices): the guiding principles and behaviors that embody how the school and its staff are expected to operate. They reflect the desired culture of an organization. They guide decision making of all staff, helping the school to accomplish its mission and attain its vision in an appropriate manner.

Vertical Articulation: a process that supports student achievement as students progress through grade levels. Vertical articulation is a process designed to promote a pre-K–Grade 12 professional learning community to build instructional capacity and foster high expectations for staff and students.

Vertical Team: a group of educators from different grade levels or schools that works cooperatively to analyze students' needs and expectations and to develop and implement programs aimed at helping students to acquire those skills and strategies necessary for achieving success.

Vision: the desired future state of the school. It describes where the organization is headed, what it intends to be, and how it wishes to be perceived in the future.