

# UNIFIED PLANNING

## Matching the Consolidated Grant with Improvement Planning

### ***Integrated Improvement Planning: The Focus on Results***

The most effective strategies for getting to higher student achievement involve needs based, integrated improvement planning (Schmoker, 2006). Improvement planning occurs at two levels in school systems. The district improvement plan and the school improvement plan need to be both connected and comprehensive to be successful. Adding state and federal grant resources to district efforts will assist in making these plans successful, because the Consolidated grant and Schoolwide Title I grants also require similar improvement planning. While the improvement planning process begins with simple steps, the outcome is a combination of local, state and federal resources for a district wide focus on results. This idea of combining improvement efforts is not a new one; it has been around for more than a decade. Marzano (2006) notes that a few, clear plans with focused goals get the best results over time. When focused goals connect with planning, improvement can be rapid and powerful.

The following is a brief overview of historic improvement efforts in the state, and how they have impacted local districts. First, the Colorado General Assembly enacted standards based education in 1993, with the passage of *House Bill 93-1313* focusing on what is most important for students to know and be able to do. It required each school district in the state to adopt a standards implementation plan that drove a number of improvement processes including:

- aligning curriculum to standards
- implementing standards based assessments
- providing instructional interventions for special needs populations and
- aligning professional development to standards based instruction.

In 1996, the Colorado General Assembly passed *House Bill 98-1267*, which requires a school accreditation process; also focused on improving student achievement results. Each school district enters into an accreditation contract which defines standards, goals and requirements set by the district throughout the term of the contract. It also requires improvement planning with District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Planning tools. The goals of state accreditation are to:

- Promote accountability from public schools and school districts
- Promote a high level of achievement among public schools
- Develop and maintain a school/community partnerships for ongoing improvement of public education
- Emphasize standards based education, testing and basic skills
- Focus on student achievement using statewide and local standards based assessments
- Support local efforts at reforming and improving the system of public education

In 2002, the United States Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* as the “No Child Left Behind Act” (reauthorized again in 2007). The NCLB mandate continues to provide for greater program flexibility at the local level, with a focus on grants for schoolwide improvement available after comprehensive needs analysis of achievement gaps.

The Colorado Department of Education provides resources for school improvement through the NCLB Consolidated Federal Grant; which includes Title I grants for high poverty schools, Title II Class Size Reduction and Education Technology funds, Title III funds supporting English Language Learners, Title IV funds for Safe and Drug Free schools, and Title V for Innovative Education Strategies. These funds are applied for in a single, connected and comprehensive grant application written by local districts. Each grant application includes a needs assessment, a strategy for improvement, a Budget and an evaluation plan. (See examples in the Unified Planning Template).

### ***Thinking about District Improvement Resources***

The Consolidated Federal Programs Grant is designed to be a comprehensive set of resources to be utilized for two main purposes:

- Systemic instructional improvement strategies
- Instructional interventions that close the achievement gap

These purposes are closely aligned to the goals of Schoolwide Title I grant funds.

The application for these Consolidated Grant funds must be developed around the following four processes:

- District wide **needs assessments** identifying root causes of underachievement
- **Measurable goals and objectives** for higher student achievement based upon identifying the root causes of achievement gaps
- **Research based strategy** development directly connected to student, school and district needs assessments and **budget**
- Annual **evaluation plan** to document results of the grant

### ***Why do Uniform Planning?***

The purpose of the Consolidated Grant is to annually provide a uniform set of funding and applications for grant funding to every district in the state of Colorado choosing to apply. The Consolidated Grant serves as the “door” for districts to access grant funds in the various Title programs. The largest grant funds available are in Title I, Part A, which provides resources for high poverty, underperforming populations in the content areas of reading and math. These are the same content areas that are used to calculate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for schools.

The most flexible Title I funds available come through the *Schoolwide Program* status that schools achieve. Schools gain this status by annual comprehensive planning and collaboration across the school learning community. The annual processes for planning and applying for the Consolidated Grant and maintaining the status of the Title I Schoolwide program are very similar, and should occur almost simultaneously. The goal of consolidating planning and applications for grant funds is to make resources available to districts and schools as they implement research based strategies to improve student achievement and increase parent/community partnerships supporting public education efforts.

### ***Continuous Improvement: Thinking Systemically-Acting Systematically***

Education systems work best when the processes of accountability, improvement and acquiring resources work together seamlessly. Systems succeed when the “long lever of leadership” is applied at key points in improvement planning (Fullan, 2006). Once district planning systems are aligned, then schools begin to systematically implement improvements as well. Successful leaders at both district and school levels make sense of these systems by delivering instruction and curriculum assuring all students achieve and achievement gaps between groups disappear. In every district, the processes of accountability (school improvement and district improvement planning outlined in **blue** on the Unified Planning

Template) drive the work of teachers and instructional leaders. These are resource hungry processes. The Consolidated Grant and Schoolwide programs are federal grants intended to support local improvement efforts (outlined in **green** on The Unified Planning template).

Leaders know that systems must work together on a select few, focused goals to achieve success. Federal grant dollars are tightly focused on closing the achievement gap, and planning for acquiring these funds must be tightly coupled with accountability and accreditation goals. Coordination of federal, state and local resources reduces fragmentation of services and improves instruction by promoting a schoolwide focus on student achievement. In the process of Consolidated Grant planning, schoolwide planning and school improvement planning, there are common leadership themes:

- Increasing the quality and quantity of instruction
- Reduction in fragmented planning and services
- Collaboration across programs and strategies
- Cohesive, whole school focus on student achievement results
- Intensive, sustained professional development
- Data driven decisions to close achievement gaps

In conclusion, both federal grant planning processes and state/local accountability planning have the same goals. The systematic coordination of federal, state and local resources lies at the district level. The Unified Planning Template shows four distinct planning processes that can easily be merged as school districts seek continuous improvement. The Needs Assessment model shows four ways that data in schools and districts can be gathered and analyzed for better improvement planning.

The challenge for districts and schools is to understand that improvement is a connected and comprehensive process. Plans with a few clear and focused goals will make the difference. Research based instructional strategies connected to needs and the root causes of underachievement power learning. A direct connection between program goals and budget expenditures provides accountability. And finally, these goals must come from the data analysis districts create. (Bernhardt, 2004). Leaders that succeed at continuous improvement work at two levels: first, systems improvement strategies occurring at the district level, where resources, efforts and programs are coordinated. Second, systematic improvement strategies occur at the school level, where resources, quality teachers and instructional interventions are coordinated. The results of systems thinking at these two aligned levels are *schools of excellence*, where all students achieve at the highest levels.

**UNIFIED DISTRICT PLANNING TEMPLATE**  
*Connecting State and Federal Resources to Local Improvement*

**District Improvement Plan**

Objectives	Assessments	Actions Steps				Results
		What Done?	By Whom?	When?	Resources?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific</li> <li>• Required</li> <li>• Measurable Results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How objectives will be measured</li> </ul>	•				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of Accomplishments</li> </ul>
		•				
		•				
		•				

**District Consolidated Grant Resources Plan**

Needs Assessment	Goals/Objectives	Research Based Strategies tied to Budget	Program Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Achievement Data</li> <li>• Parent/Community Input</li> <li>• Teacher/Principal Input</li> <li>• District Resource Needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMART Goals</li> <li>• Continuous Improvement focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One year Budget focused on for District Improvement Strategies</li> <li>• Programs and fiscal expenditures directly related</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on Results</li> </ul>



**School Improvement Plan**

Needs Analysis	Goals / Indicators	Strategies Aligned to Needs	Targets & Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Root Causes of Academic Failure</li> <li>• Demographics/Achievement Trends</li> <li>• School Resource Needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientifically Based Interventions</li> <li>• Focus on Professional Development and Teacher Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research based instructional program focused on School Instructional Improvement Strategies</li> <li>• Needs analysis dictated Instructional strategies</li> <li>• Data drives instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on Eliminating Achievement Gaps</li> </ul>

**Schoolwide Plan**

Needs Analysis	Goals	Budget Aligned to Needs	Annual Evaluation
School/Parent Data	Measurable Outcomes	Spend down focused on Instructional Model	Results Data on Proficiency