Step Two Research to Practice Brief: USE DATA TO CREATE MULTI-TIERED FSCP ACTION PLANS (More About How)

System Reform
Data-Based Action Planning
Problem Solving Process
Challenges and Solutions

Data are necessary to calibrate perception…The collection, examination and interpretation of data inform continual improvement efforts.
Wellman & Lipton, 2004

Each individual and team in a school community can strategically embed family-school partnering into typical role and responsibilities (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011), relating to what is current practice. Assessing everyday actions, strengths, resources, and needs can help in action planning and implementation. Several basic principles supporting sustainable system change can be strategically applied and tailored to specific situations.

System Reform

Family-school partnering can be conceptualized as systemic educational reform. For many educators and families, shifting from a more traditional parent involvement model to one which focuses on shared responsibility between home and school is a significant change in practice. Implementing new initiatives is challenging and certain actions support successful shifts. Frameworks for system change vary, but recent work by Curtis, Castillo, and Cohen (2008) emphasize a typical problem-solving model that involves "switching the direction" to goal setting for desired outcomes by asking questions: What is the current status? Why is it this way? What should be done about it? Did it work? Focusing on data use, measurable outcomes, evidence-based processes/actions, and formative evaluation are all key features of system change. Ervin & Schaughency (2008) summarize important change factors as being the following: motivation to change; perceived effectiveness and acceptability of the new practice; and knowledge, skill, and sense of efficacy regarding practice implementation. They point out that the closer a new behavior or skill is to perceived current and effective practices, the easier it is to accept. Integrating family-school partnering into current structures and practices helps in acceptability and familiarity.

Knoff (2008), in discussing system-wide behavioral support systems, points to the importance of having "blueprints" to guide efforts and informed facilitators who continually reinforce and educate stakeholders. Ongoing colleague support can provide the necessary new learning opportunities for educators (Knoff, 2008; Schmoker, 2006). Schmoker (2006) also stresses the importance of a results focus, regular follow-up, and adjustment according to data. Lasting change requires the integration of new practices into the existing culture and operational norms (Raines, 2008).

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Data-Based Action Planning

Using multiple data sources can provide valid input from various stakeholders and allow information access from different venues, from an individual teacher's classroom to a parent-teacher organization. Wellman and Lipton (2004) suggest that each of several dimensions of data adds unique information. Their descriptions provide a menu of options for family-school partnering planning: *quantitative* data are numerical*; qualitative* data are descriptive; *existing* data are demographic, performance or documents*; collected* data are gathered and include *monitoring* or *formative evaluation,* and are usually either perceptual, such as in surveys, or behavioral such as in frequency counts or percentages. It is always best practice, although not always possible, to triangulate data which is to use at least three different data sources, usually different types, as no one piece of data can provide a comprehensive picture of an issue (Raines, 2008; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). In a similar vein, disaggregating or breaking down data allows for looking at patterns and differential effects for subgroups. Another caveat about using data effectively is to provide visual displays whenever possible. Not only do visual displays have the power to improve performance (Miller & Kraft, 2008), but when examined together by partners or groups, such as families and educators, they allow for objective, shared decision-making where all parties have equal access to the same information (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Visual data are more easily understood and used effectively.

Family, School, and Community Partnering (FSCP) Action Planning

A critical dynamic underlying an effective FSCP framework is a strategic implementation process. Data, ongoing support, and linking to current initiatives are used to plan and monitor identified aspects of FSCP. As described earlier, there are several comprehensive system-wide family involvement formats in the literature, but implementing partnering initiatives has remained difficult and elusive for many school communities (Christenson, 2004). In striving for easy and effective FSCP implementation, the action planning process relates to data and already existing information and infrastructures. The process does not recommend or require development of a new team or organizational body. Instead FSCP action planning should be addressed within existing stakeholder groups and by individual partners. By continually evaluating efforts, revision can occur so that time is not wasted on ineffective practices. Also, by having established a common rationale and philosophy for the shift to family, school, and community partnering, schools can hopefully move in a focused direction to assess their current status and desired outcomes. Each stakeholder must understand his/her FSCP job responsibilities as well as how they are part of a larger effort. Ongoing support to both school staff and family members helps to ensure transition fidelity and system sustainability.

Problem Solving Process

A simple, action planning process using data in basic problem solving steps can result in a continuous improvement cycle and relate to familiar instructional models (Colorado Department of Education, 2009; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). Fidelity evaluation is a component of any such process (Burns, Wiley, & Viglietta, 2008). The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) or Response-to Intervention (RtI) problem-solving process (Colorado Department of Education, 2008a) of *define, analyze, implement,* and *evaluate* is one example of action planning, using existing and collected data and measurable goals. A similar simple, cyclical process can be

applied individually, with teams, or school-wide in planning family-school partnering efforts. There is a strong emphasis on flexibly utilizing diverse data types, which are either existing or collected.

The first two steps of the cycle are preparatory stages, DEFINE and ANALYZE, using data from multiple sources. The third step, IMPLEMENT, identifies prioritized specific goals, assignments, actions, and then objectively measures progress. Finally, that last step, EVALUATE, involves assessing effectiveness by reviewing and sharing data, discussing fidelity of plan implementation, and continuing with a revised plan. This cyclical process is an automatic, data-driven methodology useful to many aspects of school life, not just family-school partnering. The four steps are cyclical and continuous, so that ongoing adjustment of time and resources can occur as guided by data. The four steps are specifically described below.

DEFINE AND ANALYZE: Collect and Review Data

Diverse types of data from numerous sources, which can be triangulated and analyzed, provide planning guidance. In FSCP, all stakeholder data is tapped. Family participation percentages, disaggregated in the same way as student data, provide both a baseline and an ongoing measure of partnering during such activities as conferences, events, volunteering, visiting the school, returning surveys, and intervention teaming. At this stage, collecting opinions, beliefs, and needs and then openly conversing about possible FSCP challenges are strongly recommended so that solutions to address these can be included in planning. A status check of current tiered partnering practices/supports, areas of expertise, FSCP interests, and existing resources is helpful. A key to successful implementation is tapping and allocating current resources wisely. FSCP measures and data sources provide choices for school communities, depending on identified needs, resources, and goals. It is important to assess and summarize strengths and concerns so as to guide prioritizing of goals and actions.

IMPLEMENT: Prioritize Measurable Goals; Identify Action Steps; Assign Responsibilities, Resources, and Timelines; Choose Data Sources: THEN Follow Plan as Intended; Monitor Progress

Not all identified challenges or concerns can be effectively addressed. There must be prioritization and also, sometimes ranking of needs or issues to be addressed over time. The use of SMART goal setting is recommended for FSCP action planning as it acts as a simple acronym, which focuses on measurability and accuracy. SMART is a common term that has several variations, but the one we are recommending here is *specific, measurable, attainable, relevant,* and *time-based.* Strategies, actions, and interventions should be chosen because of their importance, acceptability, and availability. They should have evidence of relevance and success. They should be worded in specific, objective terminology. It is important that responsibilities, resources, and timelines are all realistic. Measurement of all plans should be objective, simple, and tied to both existing data and expected outcome levels.

Implementing specific actions, responsibilities, resources, and timelines should follow the plan or if revisions are made, these should be noted. It is important that those responsible for plan actions receive appropriate training, support, and recognition. Using appropriate data collection tools as defined in the plan will allow for credible decision-making at the next step, or sometimes during the implementation phase.

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EVALUATE: Assess Goal Attainment and Implementation; Share Results; Revise Plan; Continue

Success is evaluated. Ineffective actions need to be examined and revised according to data. Implementation fidelity needs to be assessed. A plan should be discontinued if formative data or stakeholder feedback provides evidence of ineffectiveness or harm. Results of an action plan need to be used in continued planning for the future. Visual data will help decision-makers understand information and use it to make decisions. Joint examination of data by a group, with discussion, will lead to more successful next steps and further FSCP improvements.

The FSCP action planning process, using problem solving steps, occurs at each tier, for groups and/or individuals. The process can be used with currently functioning teams, organizations, and meetings. Examples of school and family working groups who can use the action cycle are administrative teams, grade level teams, academic departments, parent-teacher organizations, safety and crisis teams, problem-solving teams, special education staffing teams, professional learning communities, community outreach groups as well as individual family members or educators. The action plan can be used in performance appraisals, professional growth plans, and to review current efforts. For example, instructional teams or departments may decide on how they want to consistently implement homework completion plans. Parent-teacher organizations can discuss partnering roles as far as supporting family-to-family outreach or family centers. Communication about such planning can occur during faculty meetings and be announced in newsletters, websites, emails, texts, or tweets. Individual families or educators can use the FSCP action planning process to support shifts in practice or to develop confidence or identified partnering skills.

Challenges and Solutions

With such a clear rationale, based in the law and research, why are many educators and families hesitant to engage with each other in genuine, ongoing, meaningful partnerships? Numerous researchers have identified barriers to implementing family-school partnering (Esler, Godber, and Christenson, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010).

The term "hurdles", in place of barriers or challenges, allows for action planning in overcoming such blocks and achieving intended goals. Ellis and Hughes (2002) explain as follows:

> Sprinters take off from the blocks and run straight ahead, trying to reach the finish line before the other runners. Any obstacle that gets in their way will keep them from reaching their goal in a timely manner, and, at times, may keep them from finishing the race. Hurdlers, on the other hand, know that there will be several obstacles placed between them and their goal. They look at these obstacles as a way to sharpen their techniques and increase their skills. They plan ahead as to how to overcome these obstacles in a way that will enhance their ability to reach their goal. Part of putting together a workable partnership plan is to forewarn of possible "hurdles" along the way and formulate responses to them (p. 37).

Christenson (2004) describes structural barriers and psychological barriers for both educators and families. Structural implies such concrete factors as lack of time, funding, communication systems, transportation, and training. Psychological is used to describe barriers which are attitudinal in nature such as self-efficacy, role confusion, linguistic and cultural differences, fears of conflict, and ambiguity about family-school partnering. Esler, Godber, and

Christenson (2008) stress the importance of openly identifying and addressing the most prevalent barriers for school communities, individual teachers, and family members. System and personal open reflection around challenges leads to productive insight, discussion and potential solutions.

Research to Practice Application: Data-Based, Tiered Action Planning Checklist

Evidence, rational and quantifiable and transparent, is the truth the hand can touch. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003)

1. Know the Problem Solving Process Steps: DEFINE, ANALYZE, IMPLEMENT, EVALUATE
2. Use Data to Assess What You Know and Don't Know; Include Challenges, Personal, and System Measures in Universal and Upper Tiers
3. Collect Any Additional Needed Information
4. Summarize Data and Identify Strengths and Concerns
5. Set One or Two Prioritized SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Based) Goal(s), aligned with one or more of the *National Standards for Family-School Partnerships* (PTA, 2008).
6. Write Data-Based, Doable Action Steps with Specific Responsibilities, Resources, Timeline, and Data Source
7. Implement as Planned
8. Evaluate with Data; Review Implementation; Share Results; Decide on Next Steps

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Please Note: The information in this research brief for the Colorado Department of Education *MTSS FSCP Implementation Guide* is from an unpublished CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit document, *Effective Family-School Partnering for Students with Disabilities: Research Review,* July 30, 2011. Sections of this review were taken from Lines, C., Miller, G.L., & Arthur-Stanley, A. (2011). *The power of family-school partnering (FSP): A practical guide for school mental health professionals and educators.* New York: Routledge.

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