Managing Improvement By Profiling

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A collaboratively developed school profile aids staff members in targeting needed changes in student achievement, attitude, and behavior.

School improvements should be aimed directly at improvement of student performance—academic achievement, social behavior, and attitude—or they may miss the mark. The Goal Based Education Program at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) has developed a process called profiling that is used to gather information about student performance. The resulting profile can then be used as the basis for planning and implementing improvements.

Profiling is part of an overall school improvement program called Onward to Excellence. Schools in the Onward to Excellence program contract for training and technical assistance for a
year to learn and implement an improvement process based on the results of effective schools research as synthesized by NWREL staff. The program provides a ten-step process whereby schools collegially use data to set goals for improvement.

1. Introduce the program to all school staff members, form a leadership team (the school principal, staff teachers, and a central office representative) to head efforts, and set the stage for improvements.
2. Study the effective schools research base and findings.
3. Profile current levels of student performance (academic achievement, social behavior, and attitude).
4. Set a goal for improvement.
5. Check current instructional practices.

Figure 2. Profile Contents Menu.

PART 1—ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Focus
- Basic skills achievement
- Problem-solving proficiency
- Life role proficiency
- General intellectual attainments

Instrumentation
- Standardized, norm-referenced test
- Standardized, criterion-referenced test
- Progress tests from text series
- Grade promotion test
- Graduation competency test

PART 2—STUDENT ATTITUDE

Focus
- Achievement in specific content areas
- Generalized competence

Instrumentation
- Norm- or criterion-referenced test
- Structured performance test
- Semester or year end tests
- Awards from external sources

Focus
- Self-concept
- Attitude toward school
- Independence—locus of control

Instrumentation
- Questionnaire
- Questionnaire
- Questionnaire

PART 3—SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Focus
- Generalized competence
- Follow up survey

Instrumentation
- Attendance
- Tardiness
- Cumulative dropout rate
- Code of conduct violations
- Vandalism

Instrumentation
- School records
- School records
- School records
- School records
- School/district records
6. Develop a research-based prescription to meet the improvement goal.
7. Prepare for implementation.
8. Implement the prescription.
10. Evaluate progress and renew efforts.

All improvement efforts in the Onward to Excellence program focus on student performance: the indicators of school improvement are changes in student achievement levels, behavior, and attitude. NWREL's experience has shown that team-based improvements are effective in achieving the cooperation, schoolwide efforts necessary to plan and implement lasting change. Local schools develop their own resources for improvement, and the process becomes an ongoing approach for managing local school improvement efforts.

**Profiling a School**

Profiling takes place in steps three and four of the process. In step three, school teams plan for profiling, introduce the process to staff, collect and summarize schoolwide data, and prepare a written report, or profile, of the school. In step four, the school reviews the profile to identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance; set priorities for improvements; establish goals; and describe profile results and goals to the school community. Planning and implementation of improvements are then based on profiling results. (See Figure 1 for an overview of the profiling process.)

Profile preparation involves the two major tasks of collecting and summarizing information and preparing a written version of the findings. Both tasks involve a number of steps that should be managed through planning and assigning specific tasks to team members. In addition, it is crucial that all staff members be informed of the profiling effort and that information collection be focused on creating a picture of the school as a whole. Schoolwide data are needed, not to monitor individual teacher or student performance, but to bring about schoolwide improvement.

**Collecting and Summarizing Information**

After the leadership team is formed and has become familiar with the overall thrust of the improvement program, they begin planning to collect current data on the school. Using a Profile Contents Menu (Figure 2), team members discuss types of infor-
information they will collect. The menu has three sections, each dealing with one area of student performance: academic achievement, student attitude, and social behavior. To achieve an overall view of students in the school, teams should collect at least one group of data in each of the three sections.

Using the Menu as a worksheet, teams check off data sources already available to them. Results of achievement tests, attendance records, and student attitude surveys, for example, are readily available in many schools. Team members then note areas where additional data would be useful. Using group decision-making techniques, the team considers available and desirable data and creates a firm list of items to collect for the profile. Team members are then assigned specific tasks for data collection, creating a plan for managing the profiling effort.

With the management plan and selected data sources in hand, the team presents the improvement program, the profiling process, and the profiling areas to the entire staff. This action both introduces the effort to the staff and provides a means to collect staff feedback on the profiling process. Following the management plan, the team collects and summarizes data in the selected profiling areas.

Preparing the Profile

Team members next make decisions about the appropriate display of data and who among them will complete individual displays. Each type of information is to be displayed on a single sheet of paper that can be used as a quick reference.

Once data have been summarized and displayed appropriately, team members prepare narrative descriptions of each summary, listing indicators of student performance represented by the data. Narratives are simple, declarative statements in plain language and avoid educational or testing jargon. Narratives describe but do not evaluate information contained in the data displayed and focus on key summary results, highlighting the most important aspects of student performance data. Team members write only a few statements that may be revised before the team finally settles on the exact wording. Data summaries may take one of several forms, including charts, graphs, and tables. Figure 3 is an example of data showing achievement in reading, and Figure 4 shows school attendance fluctuations.

Team members collect and organize these one-page data summaries into a single document, prepare a cover and an introduction, and print and distribute copies of the profile to all staff members for discussion. By covering several key areas, the team draws a current picture of student performance on a schoolwide basis.

Using Data for Goal Setting

The completed profile becomes a tool for setting schoolwide improvement goals, as the leadership team directly involves the whole staff in generating a school improvement goal from the data already collected and compiled. The leadership team distributes copies of the profile to all staff members for consideration and evaluation in a final survey before making improvement goal decisions.

The profile evaluation process solicits feedback from all staff members. Staff members are asked to fill out individually the Profile Evaluation Worksheet (Figure 5) for compilation by team members as they prepare to set the school's improvement goal.

Staff members rate each narrative statement in all profile summaries on four bases:

1. Degree of relative satisfaction with the current picture of student performance, using a 10-point scale, from -5—very dissatisfied with result,
Overall, 9 percent of students are absent from one class period each day.
The highest number of absentees occurs in the final class period of the day.
There is a higher percentage of absentees directly before and after lunch than in morning class periods.
Overall, more students are absent in the afternoon than in the morning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>SATISFACTION RATING</th>
<th>IMPORTANCE RATING</th>
<th>ACCEPTABLE STANDARD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Behavior</td>
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Profile Checklist

The school profile provides baseline data about student performance against which effects of school improvements can be measured. This information becomes a primary tool in planning and managing targeted school improvement efforts.

There are several important factors to consider when creating a school profile:

1. The profile describes student performance on a schoolwide basis.
2. The profile is a snapshot of the school. It can become the first in a series that can be followed, perhaps annually, with updating and new improvement decisions.
3. The profile is a decision-making aid. Knowing specific information about student performance facilitates targeting goals and planning for improvements in student achievement, behavior, and attitude.

To learn more about the Onward to Excellence Program, call (503) 248-6800 or write to Robert E. Blum, Director, Goal Based Education Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 300 S.W. Sixth Ave., Portland, OR 97204.