

# 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 devel-

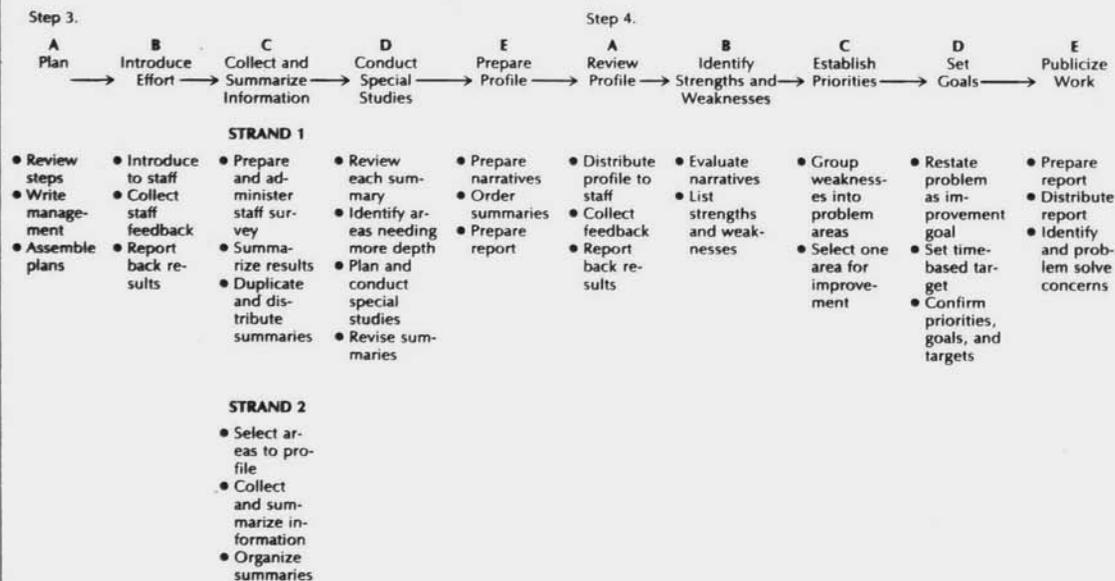
oped a process called *profiling* that is used to gather information about student performance. The resulting pro-

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file 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

Figure 1. Profiling Overview.



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 re-

search 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.**

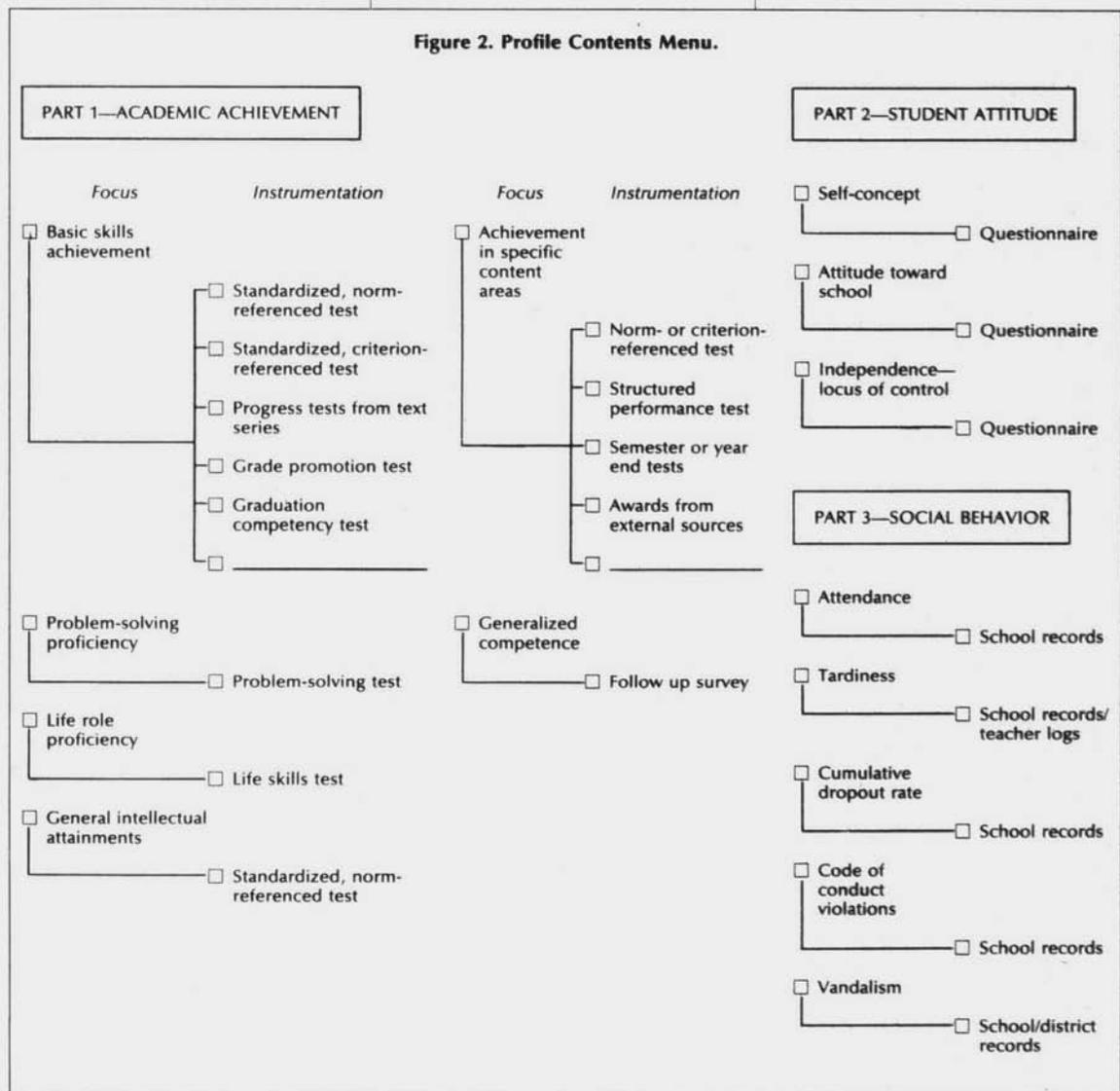
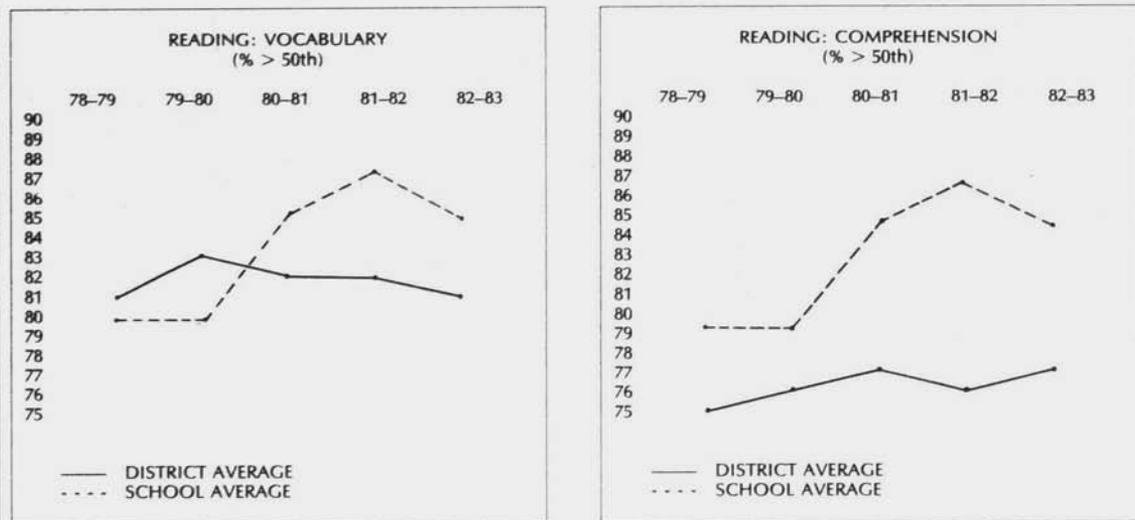


Figure 3. Achievement in Reading.



#### Narratives

1. The percentage of 7th grade students in the district scoring above the 50th percentile in reading/comprehension skills has increased by 2 percent since 1978-79; and the percentage of those students at this school has increased by 8 percent over the same time period.
2. The percentage of 7th grade students in the district scoring above the 50th percentile in reading/vocabulary skills increased from 1979-80 to 1978-79 by 2 percent and declined between 1979-80 and 1982-83 by 2 percent; the percentage of those students in this school increased overall by 5 percent between 1978-79 and 1982-83.
3. In both skill areas, there was a steady increase in the percentage of students scoring above the 50th percentile over a three-year period between 1979-80 and 1981-82; there was a decline in both skill areas in 1982-83.
4. The percentage of students scoring above the 50th percentile in both skill areas at this school is higher than that percentage in the district.

6. Develop a research-based prescription to meet the improvement goal.

7. Prepare for implementation.
8. Implement the prescription.
9. Monitor implementation.
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 cooperative, schoolwide efforts necessary to plan and implement lasting change. Local schools develop their own resources for improvement; and the process becomes an ongoing ap-

proach 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-

mation 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.

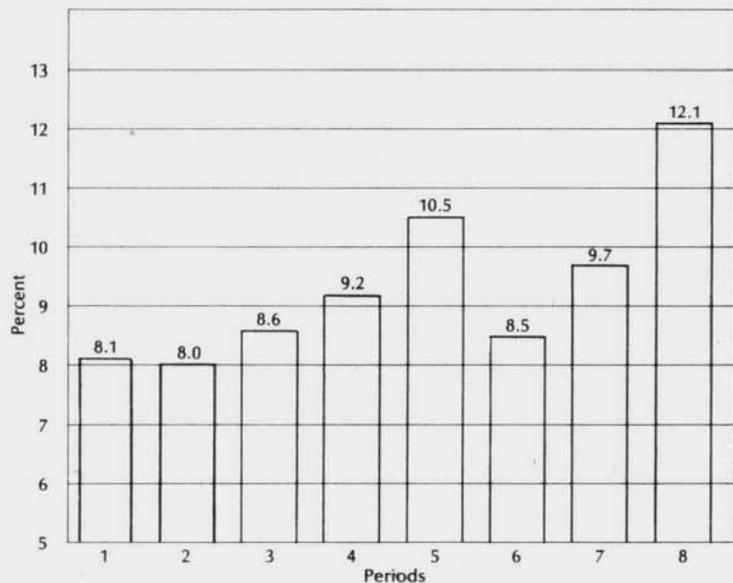
The profile evaluation process solicits feedback from all staff members. Staff members are asked to fill out individually the Profile Evaluation Worksheet (Figure 5) for compilation by team members as they prepare to set the school's improvement goal.

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,

**Figure 4. Example of a Data Summary.**

Attendance per Class Period Grading Period 3



### Narratives

1. The highest number of absentees occurs in the final class period of the day.
2. There is a higher percentage of absentees in periods directly before and after lunch than in morning class periods.
3. Overall, more students are absent in the afternoon than in the morning.

**Figure 5. Example of a Profile Evaluation Worksheet.**

AREA			NARRATIVE	Satisfaction Rating	Importance Rating	Acceptable Standard
Achievement	Behavior	Attitude				
			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.			

**Figure 6. Goal Setting Worksheet.**

AREA			Goal and Target	Current Results and Standard	PRIORITY			Short-Term Target
Achievement	Behavior	Attitude			High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority	
			Improve daily student attendance.	Currently, 91 percent of students attend all courses; the standard is 97 percent.				

nearly all students need improvement—to +5—very satisfied with result, nearly all students doing well in this area.

2. *Relative importance/priority for improvement* among areas with which staff members are dissatisfied, using a scale from 1, low priority, to 5, high priority.

3. *Acceptable standard of performance* in areas of least satisfaction, which would constitute "good" performance for students and result in a *high satisfaction* rating—a realistic, long-range standard to aim for in this area.

4. *A specific target for improvement*—staff members select from among all identified areas for im-

provement one or two short-term, time-based targets that are of *high priority*.

Using this feedback from the staff, the leadership team fills out a goal setting worksheet (Figure 6), restating narratives on problem areas as improvement goals and establishing standards of performance for those areas. After assessing priorities, the team selects one or two areas and sets a time-based target for improvement. They then report the improvement goals and targets to the staff, students, and community.

In this way, the profile becomes a tool for setting one or two improvement goals. The leadership team then works through the rest of the Onward to Excellence program to plan a pre-

scription for improvement, prepare for and implement the prescription, monitor implementation, and evaluate progress toward reaching improvement goals. Underlying all decisions is a firm knowledge of baseline data about current student performance in the school.

Once the cycle of improvement is completed, schools can again profile the school, use new data to target another improvement goal, and follow the process to plan for and monitor improvements. The cycle becomes a school-based method for managing improvements based on regular collection and analysis of data on student performance.

### 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:

- The profile describes student performance on a schoolwide basis.
- All students and all curriculum areas should be represented in the profile; the more comprehensive the profile, the more broad-based and complete school picture emerges.
- By creating a profile, it is possible to sharpen focus both on strengths and weaknesses in student performance.
- 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.

Above all, 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.

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