Missouri Special Education Improvement Planning Process

Training Manual 2011–2012

Missouri
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION™

Office of Special Education

MISSOURI SPECIAL EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PLANNING PROCESS TRAINING MANUAL 2011–12

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: MAKING THE CONNECTION……………………………………………2

SECTION 2: NEEDS ASSESSMENT………………………………………………4

SECTION 3: OBJECTIVES……………………………………………………….10

SECTION 4: STRATEGIES………………………………………………………..14

SECTION 5: IDENTIFYING AND USING RESOURCES…………………………25

SECTION 6: BUDGET PROCESS…………………………………………………32

SECTION 7: HELPFUL EXERCISES………………………………………………36

GLOSSARY……………………………………………………………………….40

APPENDIX A: MISSOURI CODES FOR EXPENDITURES.………………………43

1 Making the Connection

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with an overview of the local improvement planning process implemented in Missouri and how it relates to the provisions of IDEA 2004.

Outcomes

- Participants will understand the levels of accountability for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004.
- Participants will understand the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) requirements.
- Participants will be able to identify the specific components of the Missouri Improvement Plan

Content Summary

Levels of Accountability

There are **three levels of accountability** required to ensure children and youth with disabilities are receiving their entitlements provided by IDEA 2004. The **first level** is the role of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which is a division of the U.S. Department of Education. OSEP is responsible for developing policies and procedures to ensure that States are implementing federal laws as written.

The **second level** of accountability is the State's role. A growing emphasis on the performance of students with disabilities by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has made it necessary for States to "have in place a performance plan that evaluates the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of Part B of IDEA and describe how the State will improve such implementation" (NCLB, 2001). The State Performance Plan (SPP) is a six year plan that provides for rigorous and measurable targets for each year from 2005 to 2011. The targets can be read in complete detail in the resources section of this manual. IDEA 2004 requires States to report to OSEP through an Annual Performance Report (APR). In the same way that OSEP monitors States, States are responsible for monitoring Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

The **third level** of accountability is at the local level. LEAs make decisions about how students with disabilities' needs are met. These decisions carry out federal and State policies and affect students with disabilities' performance on State level assessments, such as the Missouri Assessment Program

(MAP) and the Missouri Assessment Program - Alternate (MAP-A). The performance results at the local level generate the data the States analyze to determine if the SPP targets are being met and whether districts should receive assistance from the Office of Special Education to improve students' performance. Before SPP targets were implemented, issues such as graduation rates, dropout rates, and transition were a concern for special educators. Now, under IDEA 2004, accountability for results is explicit and interdependent. States must report progress on meeting targets to the federal level and LEAs must report progress on meeting targets to the States. Both state and local data are also publicly reported, which increases accountability at all levels.

Improvement Planning

The Improvement planning process was developed as a way to assist Districts that were not meeting State Performance Plan (SPP) targets. The Improvement planning process can be used by Districts to apply for funding, as part of the monitoring process, as a voluntary self-assessment or as some combination of the three. The Improvement Planning process includes several steps. The first step is to complete a data-based needs assessment. While completing the needs assessment, participants must identify areas that need improvement by analyzing data, develop a hypothesis about the root causes for the area in need of improvement, and lastly, prioritize the District's needs based upon the hypothesized root causes. Districts must include the use of a stakeholder group that is representative of the school district and the community. The stakeholder group should include special education and general educators, administration, community members, and parents.

Once a thorough needs assessment has been conducted, the second step is to determine what objectives would be important for the District to address based upon the identified needs. Participants must give careful consideration to how progress toward reaching the objectives will be monitored, and data must be collected and reviewed to assess this progress. After the objectives are written, strategies are chosen to meet the objectives as written. The strategies selected must be evidence based and they must be appropriate to use with the types of students in the District and the problems being addressed. After strategies are chosen, impact measures must be put in place to evaluate if the strategies are resulting in improved outcomes and if the strategy is being implemented with fidelity. Along the way, the data collected should be analyzed to determine whether or not the strategy is improving student learning or whether changes should be made to the strategy implementation. If the Improvement Plan serves as a grant application, participants must next identify budget needs for the implementation of the strategies. A thorough idea of the costs to fully implement the strategies with fidelity must be provided. This portion of the plan is not required for Districts using the planning process only as their self-assessment.

2 Needs Assessment

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with information and strategies that will lead to the development of a needs assessment statement.

Outcomes

- Participants will understand the use of a data analysis methodology and drilldown process.
- Participants will learn to identify areas of improvement through data and systems analysis strategies.
- Participants will learn how to develop hypotheses and identify potential root causes.
- Participants will learn to prioritize areas of need for the District as part of the improvement planning process.

Stakeholder Groups: The Importance of Involving Stakeholders

Stakeholder involvement is a critical part of the development of the SPP and should be reflected at the local District level as well. The credibility of an improvement plan can often be greatly enhanced by evidence that shows that a diverse range of stakeholders have been involved in the planning process. The main idea is that improvement activities identified by only one or two special education staff will not be perceived as reflective of the needs of the District.

Identifying Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders should reflect the demographic characteristics of the District while providing a diverse range of views. For example, special educators should encourage general educators to be involved in the planning process. Similarly, gaining administrative support is vital to ensuring that an improvement plan can be implemented as planned. Finally, District teams should not forget to include the perspective of families, including parents of children and youth with disabilities and those who serve in an advocacy role through a local or regional Parent Training and Information (PTI) organization. A more diverse range of stakeholders will contribute toward the development of a strong needs assessment.

Methodology and Drilldown

Why Do a Needs Assessment?

Conducting a needs assessment is an important first step in creating an improvement plan. By conducting a thorough review of the District's data and including other information sources, such as stakeholder input, the team will be better able to determine where the District should focus its improvement efforts. There is no "magic formula" for a needs assessment. Instead, the team should apply all of the tools and strategies at their disposal in order to best determine the areas in the District where the team should concentrate energies and resources.

The Needs Assessment

- ✓ Describes the stakeholder group including how all required stakeholders – administrators, parents, general education, special education and community--are involved in the analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation process.
- ✓ Methodology of drilldown process and data sources used are appropriate and described in sufficient detail.
- ✓ Hypothesized root causes in needed areas of improvement are identified through data analysis.
- ✓ The needs of the District are identified and prioritized (if multiple needs are listed) through data analysis.
- ✓ Hypothesized root causes in needed areas of improvement are identified through data analysis.

About Methodology and Drilldown

Data analysis methodology does not always have to involve the use of complicated statistics. Often, useful data analysis can be conducted by simply taking a careful look at data that have been summarized to identify relationships and trends. In many cases, all that is needed is examining frequencies and percentages and "breaking out" the data through drilldown. When preparing the needs assessment, a District team can conduct a drilldown by looking at local data in various ways — for example, based on age, race, disability, and gender.

Scanning the Data

In most cases, District teams will want to start with data that has already been summarized instead of trying to generate data themselves. A lot of work can be saved by using data that has already been summarized by District or State personnel. First, the data source used should be scanned for accuracy. That is, it should be checked for "outliers" — data that seem unusual or "out of the ordinary." Sometimes outliers can be mistakes — an error in data entry, for example. On the other hand, if accurate, outliers can serve as important clues or "red flags" signalling a need for attention. Once the accuracy of the data has been confirmed, and cannot be explained by human error, District teams will need to incorporate that knowledge in the improvement planning process.

Making Comparisons

One of the key ideas in data analysis methodology is taking into consideration the question, "Compared to what?" To analyze is to compare. The team may not know if it sees something "out of the ordinary" until they have some idea of what is "ordinary." One way of determining this is for a

District to compare its data with SPP targets established by the State. For example, let's consider graduation rates. A District team may find its graduation rate may be higher (or lower) than the State SPP target and/or other state-wide rates. If the rate is lower, then targeting graduation rates may be an objective chosen as part of the improvement planning process. Other comparisons can be made as well. For example, a District team may want to compare its data to other Districts with similar demographic size and/or with surrounding Districts.

Disaggregating Data

Disaggregating data is a form of drilldown. It simply refers to taking summary data and breaking it down into smaller groups. For example, if a district team wants to learn about who their dropouts are, it may choose to disaggregate on the basis of age, race, disability, or gender to identify unique dropout characteristics. Disaggregating data looks beyond the total number or percentage to determine critical factors that tend to be related or "go along" with students with disabilities that have dropped out of school. Disaggregating data will generally yield results that can supplement the information obtained from making comparisons. In developing a needs assessment, disaggregation can be based on age, race, disability, and gender — or combinations thereof. Remember, however, that when more "cuts" are made, the size of the groups will be reduced, which could present a problem of small cell size.

Considerations When Analyzing Data

- **Maintain a Focus on Essential Questions** — Concentrate on priorities, don't waste time on issues that are beyond the control of the District team or not directly relevant to addressing the SPP indicator. Assign a team leader to keep the planning group on-task.

- **Resist Asking Too Many "What If" Questions** — Many decisions must be made with limited information. Don't ruminate over scenarios that may occur because the team does not have "all" of the information. Remember, you will never have the perfect amount of information to ensure that your team will make the "right" decision.

- **Recognize Differences Within Special Education Populations** — Always be aware that the population of children and youth with disabilities is not homogeneous and these differences will be reflected in the data. For example, the population of students receiving Speech and Language services tends to decrease at the secondary level. The team should take this — and similar factors — into consideration when looking at the data.

- **Consider Cell Size** — While disaggregating data is helpful in identifying areas for improvement, remember that "slicing and dicing" too many ways can lead to very small cell sizes. This is particularly problematic when percentages are used. For example, the team does not want to identify a problem area when only a few students are involved and the percentage is vastly inflated. Always look at the total frequency when disaggregating.

- Also, keep in mind that analyzing data is a learned skill that needs to be practiced. The more the team utilizes the improvement planning procedures, the easier the process will become.

Data Sources

What Data Are Available?

At a minimum, a district team should have access to information compiled by the state from information provided by the district, the current “District Profile.” This information is essential to addressing many of the indicators on the SPP/APR. If the team believes that data does not reflect what is actually occurring in the district, the team should review its data collection methods to ensure that the data sent to the State is reliable and valid. Other important data sources that may be relevant to your data drilldown process are given in the resource section at the back of this manual. The team needs to determine which data sources are available and relevant.

Reliability and Validity

The terms reliability and validity are terms that are often mentioned in discussions involving measurement issues. Simply put, reliability refers to the consistency of the measurement, while validity gets at integrity — how well did the measure succeed in doing what it was supposed to do? When applied to data being analyzed by district teams, reliability represents the extent to which data can be compared from one point to another — did something occur from one point to another to make us think the results cannot be relied upon? For example, using data that were collected under two different criteria of Specific Learning Disabilities would not be reliable. Similarly, using poor assessment practices might lead to invalid conclusions about the numbers of children and youth placed in a certain disability category.

Generating Hypotheses

Once the data drilldown is complete, the team will develop a hypothesis about the root causes that are contributing to the low level of progress of students in the specific problem areas. A hypothesis can be generated in two ways. First, the team may establish a “formal hypothesis” which is subjected to a statistical test of one type or another. Teams must follow some strict rules when doing this and in most cases, some degree of expertise will be required. Most District teams will likely opt to use a more informal method — that of establishing a “working hypothesis.” Used judiciously, both methods — formal and informal — can be effective in identifying relationships used for targeting improvement efforts.

A Working Hypothesis

Essentially, a working hypothesis is an assertion or "educated guess" that posits a relationship of some type that exists between two or more phenomena. For example, after looking at the data, a district team may hypothesize that dropout rates might be related to a lack of school-wide discipline policies in a certain high school. In this case, the district team may choose to look at dropout rate data from district or neighbouring high schools that have established such policies. From this the team might learn substantive information to confirm or dispel their working hypothesis. This type of hypothesis does not require any type of statistical test — basically, conclusions are usually drawn from team consensus. One thing to keep in mind is that no data set will ever be "perfect." The challenge of data analysis is to make the best decision based on the available data. It is at this point that District teams are strongly encouraged to involve their stakeholders. Getting support from stakeholders will clearly strengthen efforts to develop and assert working hypotheses that serve as the foundation for improvement efforts.

Prioritizing Needs

Once the root causes are identified, the team must determine the district's needs to address the root causes.

Considerations When Prioritizing Needs

What should District teams consider when prioritizing needs? Below are some suggestions that teams can use in the needs assessment process to identify where resources should be invested to address improvement issues.

1. **What do others have to say?** What input have others had into this decision-making process — has the team involved key stakeholders in setting priorities?
2. **What has been the pattern in the past?** Does the district have trend data over several years that may indicate an improvement over time, a worsening in outcomes over time, no change, or simply an erratic pattern over time showing both improvement and a worsening of the problem?
3. **Are there extenuating circumstances?** For example, if the district implemented a new truancy prevention program in the past several years, it may now be seeing improved outcomes in terms of improved graduation and dropout rates. Identify any unusual events or outliers that might help to account for unexpected results.
4. **What are available resources?** Given a limited amount of resources and competing priorities, where should the team plan to make the "investment" that will lead to improvement? Focus available resources on priorities.

5. **What is reasonable improvement?** What is a realistic pattern or "slope of improvement" in relation to the State SPP target for the indicator? Does the team expect to see immediate and constant improvement or stepwise change with levelling off at certain intervals?
6. **What constitutes a realistic timeframe for improvement?** For example, if the District has just recently implemented an intensive reading program, is there likely to be a lag in achievement scores before improvement is seen?

Using a Consensus Building Process

Establishing priorities can sometimes be a difficult process. What may be a priority to one person may not be to another. Because there are limited resources that can be devoted to improvement efforts, District teams will find it helpful to establish some type of consensus building process. Whether this involves a majority vote or a ranking system, it is important to obtain some type of group consensus to focus improvement efforts. For example, a consensus can be achieved by simply asking members to rank each priority and asking those that don't agree with the outcome if they "can live with it." In most cases, this will be sufficient for most team members, although occasionally more negotiation and deliberation will be necessary for the District team. Once again, it is critical to recognize the important role that broad stakeholder involvement can play in this process. Good practice would be to avoid having one or two people identifying improvement priorities for the entire District.

Training Activity: Drafting a Needs Assessment

Examine the Special Education District Profile provided in the resource section of the manual. Using this broad picture of a district, look for potential relationships between the data and identify at least three possible improvement areas for this district.

Consider the following questions:

- What are some additional questions that you have, now that you have looked at the District data? Are there areas where you would like to have more information?

- What other data sources are available in your District that could help the team in your district better understand areas in need of improvement? (District level data, professional practice knowledge)

Based on the areas for improvement that you have identified, what are some hypotheses of root causes for this sample District? For example, if you have identified graduation rates as an area for improvement in the District, what are some of your possible hypothesized root causes?

3 Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with strategies that will enable them to write measurable improvement objectives aligned with SPP indicators and can be continuously evaluated and monitored.

Outcomes

Participants will:

- Learn to write improvement objectives which are specific and measurable.
- Understand how to relate objectives to SPP Indicators.
- Learn to develop quantifiable benchmarks and targets.
- Learn the components of effective evaluation and progress monitoring.

Understanding Objectives

Specific and Measurable Objectives

The term “measurable” objective is frequently used synonymously with “quantifiable” objective because numbers (e.g., counts, average, or percentages) are used to demonstrate whether a certain criterion has been met. The Improvement Planning scoring guide requires that all objectives be written as “SMART” goals, or that they be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented, and Time-Bound. For example, after identifying “graduation rates” as an area in need of improvement, a District team may develop an objective that states “By the end of the 2007 academic year, our district will increase graduation rates for students with disabilities by 10%.” The objective does not indicate how this will happen, it merely states in a specific and measurable way, what will occur once improvement strategies have been implemented. In most cases, District teams will want to align the objectives to meet the targets the State has set in its SPP. However, the targets also need to be achievable, yet challenging.

About Objectives

- ✓ Objective is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented and Time-bound (SMART goal).
- ✓ The SPP Indicators that the objective will address are specified.
- ✓ Intermediate and final targets are specified and dates by which they will be achieved are specified.
- ✓ Evaluation procedures align directly to the objective.
- ✓ It is clearly stated when reports, with respect to outcomes, will be made and to whom.
- ✓ Evaluation procedures for objective occur with sufficient frequency.

With regard to “specific,” the District needs to clearly define exactly what improvement need will be addressed and answer the question — what will be achieved? As explained earlier, to make sure the objectives are measurable, measurable means that others can clearly see that the District has — or has not — accomplished the objective.

Setting Relevant, But Challenging Objectives

Objectives set by District teams can be directly written based on the SPP indicators, although this is not required. The objectives should be realistic, but also provide a challenge to District teams — ambitious, but manageable. Objectives should not simply be a “wish list” of what should be accomplished under ideal circumstances. As such, the District needs to understand the importance of keeping objectives reasonable. All too often, a group of stakeholders may become overly ambitious in their objective setting, suggesting perhaps “There should only be a 100% target for graduation of students with disabilities.” While that is something everyone would like to see, it’s simply not realistic for most districts. Setting unrealistic objectives only sets up failure and lacks credibility.

Basic Rules for Developing Objectives

1. **Objectives** should be realistic — Set intermediate and final targets that the team knows can be reached. The objective must be based on improvement activities that can actually take place. Objectives should be ambitious, but manageable. Always look at your capacity to manage the activities associated with the improvement objective. Try to find the right “balance” to setting objectives that are both challenging, but achievable. Being achievable suggests that whatever objective is set, team members and stakeholders agree that it can be achieved. For example, setting a 100% graduation target may simply be too high for most districts.
2. Objectives should be time-bound — The objective must have some time-related element to it. There must be some type of “end point”, or a specific date by which the final target will be achieved, indicated so that the team can evaluate whether the objective has been achieved.
3. Objectives should be relevant to the Stakeholder Group — Stakeholders are the District’s strongest allies in terms of gathering support for improvement efforts. Make sure the team works with stakeholders to help them understand the implications of target setting and the development of objectives.
4. Objectives should be relevant to Missouri State improvement goals — Determine objectives and set targets by looking at local baseline performance in relation to annual State targets on the SPP.
5. Objectives should be relevant to the prioritized needs from the Needs Assessment.

Developing Intermediate and Final Targets

An important step when developing objectives is to use baseline data, which is a "line in the sand" that can be used to measure change in performance on an objective. This is where the district is relative to the objective. The baseline data will guide the Stakeholder Group to determine appropriate targets. For example, if the district has a baseline of 53% graduation rate and they set their target at 82% by the year 2010, the target is 82%. The difference between the baseline (53%) and the target (82%) could be divided into increments that represent yearly intermediate targets. However, it may be more appropriate to have smaller expectations of increase during the first year or two of the implementation of any new strategy to improve student outcomes. Most of the difference may come after the strategy is well established. The difference between the baseline and the target should guide the district in determining what the scheduled intermediate target should be. All targets should be quantifiable.

Relating Objectives to Indicators

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires States to address various types of performance indicators based on priorities established by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Every State is required to report on the performance of each of its Locals Education Agencies (LEAs) with regard to the following indicators : (1) Graduation, (2) Dropout, (3) Assessment, (4) Discipline, (5) Placements, (6) ECSE Educational Environments, (7) Early Childhood Outcomes, (8) Parent Involvement, (9 & 10) Disproportionality, (11) Evaluation Timelines, (12) Part C to Part B Transition, (13) Transition Plans, and (14) Postsecondary Outcomes. Objectives can be "linked" with various indicators. To ensure fidelity with State SPP indicators, it is necessary to relate each objective with its relevant indicator(s). For example, if the district team decides to address dropout prevention, the related objective would clearly be SPP indicator 2 — Dropout. However, establishing other types of relationships may be less clear. For example, instituting an objective involving school-wide behavioral supports may have an impact on more than one area. For example, such indicators as 4 — Discipline, 5 — Placements, and 9 and 10 — Disproportionality may also be impacted. The team will need to decide which indicators will likely be impacted.

Thinking About Evaluation

Monitoring Objectives

District teams need to monitor their progress in meeting improvement objectives identified as part of the needs assessment process. Periodic reviews are necessary, but the frequency of the review — weekly, monthly, or quarterly or yearly — depend upon the objective(s) selected. For example, new data on graduation rates are available only once a year and therefore this objective would be reviewed at that time. However, data for other objectives may be available on a more frequent basis and progress toward completion of these goals would be reviewed as necessary. Reviewing new data collected is necessary if the team wishes to determine whether objectives are being met and improvement activities are being implemented as intended. The progress measure(s) selected should allow the team to see the impact program changes made on the objective(s). As part of this process, the team will need to decide how to address such questions, as (1) how will progress be evaluated?, (2) what if progress is not made as expected — what happens next?, and (3) how will our team demonstrate accountability?

Components of Evaluation

In evaluating progress of an improvement objective, the district team may decide that (1) better than expected progress is being made, (2) satisfactory progress is being made, or (3) less than satisfactory progress is being made. In the case of the first — better than expected progress — the stakeholder group may want to consider whether the progress being made in this improvement objective is indicative of setting an objective that was simply too easy to reach — perhaps it needs to be more challenging. With regard to the second finding — satisfactory progress is being made — the group is likely to conclude ongoing monitoring will be sufficient to track progress. In the event that less than satisfactory progress is being made, the group should discuss possible reasons why progress is below expectations. Stakeholder group members might consider reassessing the types of resources being dedicated to implement the objective or they may want to review action steps and improvement activities incorporated in the improvement plan. In some cases, the district might decide to take another look at the objective itself and additional analyses and drilldown might be necessary to modify or adjust aspects of the improvement plan that serve as barriers to progress.

Data Use for Monitoring Objectives

In most cases, the data sources needed to monitor procedures can be determined by the types of questions being asked. For example, if the primary question of the objective focuses on impact of the target audience (i.e., students with a potential to drop-out) the district would review the yearly drop-out rate data. Once the data sources have been identified, the type of analysis that should be conducted needs to be specified. It is important to remember to refer back to the original questions being asked when conducting the data analysis. The stakeholder group should set specific timelines for reporting progress in meeting outcomes. The team needs to identify when reports will be generated as well as with whom the reports will be shared (e.g., Superintendent, Board, or District patrons).

4 Strategies

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with information that will lead to the identification and implementation of effective evidence-based strategies.

Outcomes

- Participants will be able to identify evidence-based strategies to address determined objectives.
- Participants will be able to identify appropriate personnel to implement strategy.
- Participants will be able to write a rationale for proposed strategy.
- Participants will be able to develop action steps linked to strategy.
- Participants will be able to develop impact measures for the strategy.

Evidence-Based Strategies

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has provided a list of resources for evidence-based strategies for Districts to use when completing improvement plans. It is strongly suggested that Districts use these resources when writing plans as grant applications. However, many Districts will be submitting plans as a self-study. Whether the improvement plan is a grant application or a self-assessment, if a District has a different strategy it would prefer to implement and can justify the strategy is evidence based for use with the District's student population, then consideration will be given to approving the strategy. A resource list for identifying evidence-based practices in elementary achievement and post-secondary is included in the resources section of this manual.

About Strategies

- ✓ The strategy is evidence based and is aligned with the objective.
- ✓ District personnel responsible for supervision of strategy are clearly identified by role and name.
- ✓ The rationale describes how the strategy matches District prioritized needs and is linked to hypothesized root causes.
- ✓ The rationale describes the level of staff buy-in (ownership) for implementation of the strategy was achieved and at what level
- ✓ Strategy includes ongoing high-quality professional development

What is Scientifically-Based Research?

The IDEA 2004 Regulations, released in August 2006, references the definition of scientifically based research from section 9101 (37) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (p. 46576). The definition of scientifically-based research "means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education strategies and programs." The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (**http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/**) and NCLB employ similar definitions. Under

NCLB, educators are expected to consider the results of relevant scientifically based research, whenever such information is available, in making instructional decisions.

Identifying Evidence-Based Strategies

As the District team begins to search for strategies to address the District's improvement priorities, they will find that there are many strategies (interventions) proposed as a method for school improvement in any given area. However, it is critical for the success of the improvement plan that the team selects a strategy that is supported with scientifically-based research, is appropriate to meet improvement needs, District demographics, and has been field-tested for effectiveness, in other words, an evidence-based strategy.

Current Limitations on Evidence-Based Interventions

While best practices would suggest that an evidence-based intervention should be selected for strategies to meet objectives, in reality strategies that meet this rigorous standard are difficult to find in the current research literature. However, many strategies are available that meet the criteria of being an evidence-based intervention- in other words, an intervention that is supported by scientifically-based research and has had sufficient research conducted with the intervention to suggest that it would make a significant difference toward achieving the District's objective(s). Therefore, if an evidence-based intervention that meets the full criteria is not available or feasible, then care should be taken to select a "promising practice" that would make an appropriate strategy. A "promising practice" is defined as an intervention that is based on theory and/or research but insufficient data is present to determine the effectiveness of the intervention with a specific population.

There are many sources of information on evidence-based strategies or interventions. These include national professional organizations (i.e., National Association of State Directors of Special Education), U.S. Department of Education funded sources (i.e. What Works Clearinghouse). Other sources include research databases, such as Wilson Web or the Educational Research Center (ERIC). Even Google has a research database for educational materials. However, the team must ensure that the research is from a reliable, valid source and not based upon personal opinion papers from persons trying to sell products or services. It would be best to get information from professional peer-reviewed journals or sites.

High Quality Professional Development

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) both have specific requirements for professional development strategies. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) defines High Quality Professional Development (HQPD) as professional development that is research based, data driven, collaborative.

(**http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm**). These requirements indicate that training should be continuous and be an integral part of the educational program and all school initiatives. In order to ensure that the intervention is understood, follow-up training and consultation services by the coach will be important. The strategy training should be incorporated as part of the District professional development plan developed each year to address the needs of the all staff members.

Rationale for Strategy Selection

There are three key components to consider regarding various strategies for implementation in your district:

1. **Pay Attention to What the Data "Says"** — It is critical that the strategies selected are effective with the objectives identified during your data drilldown procedure. For example, if the data indicates that drop-out prevention is an area of critical need, then the strategies under consideration should be focused on the population of students at risk of dropping out.
2. **Make a Connection to the Research** — Another consideration of any strategy is that it is grounded and based in research. Not every strategy that the team identifies will have a research base, as defined on the previous page. However, any strategy selected should be tested and evaluated in a setting that is as similar as possible to the characteristics of the District population.
3. **Multi-faceted Objectives May Require Multiple Strategies** — Many of the objectives identified through data analysis may require multiple strategies be implemented over the course of the improvement period in order to see meaningful improvement. As the team conceptualizes the improvement plan, keep in mind that there may not be a single "magic" strategy that will best address the needs identified for the District. Instead, the improvement plan may contain multiple, complimentary strategies, that address different facets of the objective.

Tools for Selecting Strategies

The *Evidence-Based Strategy Checklist*, located in the resources section of this manual, was designed to facilitate the selection of a strategy by district teams. There are no "right or wrong answers." Each item is simply a key point to keep in mind as the team judges the quality and relevance of possible intervention strategies. However, as the team is asked to explain the choice of strategy in the improvement plan application, this checklist may also be useful in explaining the team's process of selection of strategy. Once the team has identified what is considered to be an evidence- based strategy, the next question is "Is this strategy appropriate to the school district's identified improvement needs?" Stakeholder teams need to determine whether the intervention being considered is appropriate for their unique context and set of circumstances.

Describing the Strategy Selection Process

As stated above, if the District chooses to use a strategy that is not located in the suggested resources of evidence-based practices, the team will be required to provide justification that describes the research base and the effectiveness for the particular purpose and target population. This discussion should include:

1. A description of the intervention strategy, including as necessary, information about its creators, publishers (if it is published), and a brief overview of what the strategy entails.
2. A summary of the theory and research identified that supports the use of the strategy. This does not need to be a lengthy or in-depth description; it simply needs to be clear that the team has examined the evidence base to support the use of the intervention strategy.
3. Provide a summary of why the selected strategy was the most appropriate for the specific circumstances that the District is facing. Make sure that the proposed strategy is linked to both prioritized District needs and to the root causes of the area of need.

Developing Action Steps

The next step in developing the plan with the selected strategy is to begin to delineate the "action steps" required to successfully implement it in the school District. In some cases, the strategy will provide basic guidelines for implementation. For example, if the strategy is implementation of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) principles, then the PBS guidelines will help determine what steps are necessary to ensure full program implementation. In other cases the team will have to create the action steps from scratch. Regardless, keep in mind that action steps should be specific, closed-ended, and as detailed as possible. All action steps should include the following information:

About Action Steps

- ✓ The action steps provide a logical sequence from planning to implementation and evaluation of the strategy and are specific enough to ensure effective implementation of the strategy.
- ✓ The projected starting dates for the action steps are identified.
- ✓ Action steps include communication with and/or outcomes of the strategy.
- ✓ Action steps include a determination of whether the strategy is implemented as intended (i.e., strategy fidelity/program integrity)
- ✓ Action steps include objective, quantifiable and/or qualitative data and are sufficiently sensitive to detect small increments of change in student progress.

Action Step — This is what you actually intend to do. Please don't say "Implement the intervention" — that is far too broad and difficult to measure. Instead, break the intervention into its component parts-identify staff, train staff on intervention, implement in one classroom, implement in a second classroom, gather evaluation data, etc. The team can always combine action steps if they feel they have too many, but it is generally easier to combine them than it is to break them apart.

Brief Description — This includes details beyond the action step itself. For example, if the action step is to train staff on the intervention, the description might include who the trainer is, how many sessions are needed, and which staff are participating in the training.

Projected Start Date/End Date — Providing a detailed timeline at the outset will help to keep the District on track in the implementation of the intervention. Keep in mind time for training, data collection, staff recruitment, and other strategies, as well as the actual implementation of the strategy.

Person/Role Responsible — Who is responsible for the implementation of this particular action step? It may be several people- for example, the project supervisor and several classroom teachers, or the project evaluator and the project supervisor. Be as specific as possible, although in some cases there may not be an individual identified for the role yet, because they need to be hired or trained. In this case, identify the role and specify that name is not yet available.

Determining Key Personnel

In conceptualizing the implementation of the selected strategy, it is important to consider who in the District or school building will actually be responsible for the work. Key questions to address:

1. **Who will be the person responsible for the supervision of this strategy?** Who will be responsible for the implementation of the strategy? (These may be different people, or they may be the same).
2. **How much time will each person need to devote to the strategy?** Will this time be above and beyond their typical job duties or is it part of what they are already doing? Has enough staff time been allocated to successfully implement the strategy?
3. **Who will be supervising implementation?** Is the person supervising the implementation of the strategy in the same building as the people implementing the strategy? How will their presence/absence change the implementation of the strategy?
4. **What are the special skills and training needed for personnel to implement the strategy?** Do the key personnel need additional training or support in order to implement the strategy? How will they get this?

Developing Impact Measures

Impact measures are used to evaluate the impact of the strategy on student performance or the overall system. Impact measures help to assess the extent to which the strategy has caused a change in the target population. (These impact measures are entered in the action steps portion of the plan.) The question arises, of course, “What is an effective measure of impact?” Some measures are obvious while others might be more subtle. For example, if the intervention is aimed at decreasing dropout rates, measures used might be student attendance, participation or engagement in classes, disciplinary actions, or other measures of student engagement and participation in school. The point is that "impact" is often very hard to demonstrate and often one must resort to using "proxy" measures (indirect measures of strategy progress) to approximate something that is very hard to measure. Here is where it is important to get stakeholder involvement to support the selection of such measures. Along with selecting the measures, it is important to describe how the team will monitor progress. For example, the team should address such issues as how frequently data will be measured, decide on a start-end date, and find a way of ensuring that the measures will actually be taken — "Who will be responsible?" It is important to stress that the measure ultimately selected be "sensitive" enough to detect changes.

When developing impact measures, measures must be selected to monitor the progress of student learning and also to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the strategy itself. It is important to ensure that the strategy is implemented as planned or it may have little success in increasing student learning. Measures of student learning are often quantitative in nature (MAP scores, drop-out rates, etc.), or provide numbers that can be graphed and evaluated. However, fidelity of implementation measures are often more qualitative in nature (observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys) and may require personnel from outside the classroom to collect. Both types of measures must be included in the improvement plan.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Quantitative Data

The collection of quantitative data involves numbers of some sort. The most useful for this purpose will be standard scores, such as frequencies, percentages, or percentile ranks. This would include the data compiled by the State from information provided by the Districts (usually provided yearly) and data compiled by the Districts from their own assessments (information collected more frequently, such as rating scales, reading assessments, curriculum-based measurement, Diagnostic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores, etc.). The team must have baseline data collected prior to implementation of the strategy and the District must be sure to collect the same data throughout the implementation period, so the data can be compared. Quantitative data tells whether or not the objective is being met. It allows the team to determine if the strategy being used should be altered.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data does not usually involve numbers and is usually collected either one-on-one or in small groups. Qualitative data collection methods include questionnaires, interviews, observations, and focus groups. Qualitative data can be converted to quantitative data by assigning the information a number through the use of a coding system. While quantitative data tells if progress is being made with student learning using the strategy, qualitative information tells *why* student learning is or is not making progress with the strategy. It allows the team to examine the integrity with which the strategy is implemented, pinpoint problem areas in implementation, and determine if revisions should be made without waiting until the end of the year. The use of quantitative and qualitative data together gives a complete picture of the progress of the District towards meeting the objective through the strategy selected and ensuring that the strategy has the maximum intended impact.

How to Think About Impact

If a proposed strategy includes teacher training, the proposal must include measures that evaluate the impact of this training on teachers and students. If a proposed strategy focuses only on students, a measure of the impact on students must be included — not just whether it helps a District meet a targeted objective.

Evaluation strategies focusing on teachers should include measures of what they learned from the training, as well as how they are implementing the strategy. Let's take the example of training relating to the objective of increasing graduation rates. A District might propose training its teachers on how to implement Effective Transition Planning. In this case, measures of *both* what teachers learned during each training (i.e., how much and what do they know about effective transition planning) *and* how effectively these teachers implement the program (i.e., process measures) should be included. Evaluation strategies focusing on students must assess the direct impact of the strategy on students, not just on whether the associated objective is attained.

Implementation Fidelity

Implementation fidelity is the degree to which planned strategies are implemented as designed. This is critical to ensure that the strategy selected will have the most impact and work as intended. When planning how the strategy will be implemented, the team must build in ways to measure the integrity with which the components are correctly administered. There are several ways to do this:
When selecting strategies, choose ones that have a high probability of success and that focus on keystone behaviours — those that are pivotal, or if changed will give the largest "bang for your buck". Choose strategies that are shown through research to be effective

Select strategies that are acceptable to the persons implementing the strategy and that are easy to implement, positive, have perceived effectiveness, and match the characteristics of the instructional environment. This is where it is important to involve stakeholders in the selection of strategies to meet the objectives in order to get feedback on which strategies would be most acceptable and able to be implemented correctly in your system.

When planning the implementation of the strategy, ways to build in elements to enhance fidelity include:

- Use high-quality professional development and not just one-time only trainings.
- Assign someone in the District as the “coach” or strategy coordinator to ensure the strategy is implemented correctly and to be available for solving problems that may arise.
- Have the coach provide guided practice and feedback if needed.
- Incorporate fidelity checks or strategy monitoring devices that can be utilized at set points. Self-reports from teachers or students can be used, but are not always accurate. Therefore, objective observations are also important. The coach would be an excellent resource to conduct observations.
- As data is collected during the year about the strategy, build in points at which the data will be analyzed by the coach and stakeholder groups to look at progress toward the objective.

Sensitivity of Measurement

Strategy-impact measures should be sufficiently sensitive to detect increments of change. Highly sensitive measures can detect even small units of change. Selecting sensitive measures will ensure that the team is able to discern the impact of the strategy from other external factors as well as provide information as to whether changes need to be made in the design or management of the intervention strategy. As such, carefully selected strategy impact measures should also provide valuable information regarding whether or not the strategy is being implemented as intended. Such information can be critical in making mid-intervention adjustments. In some cases, it will be very difficult to select measures that signal very small increments of change. This is typically only possible with measures that can be easily collected and with high frequency, such as curriculum-based measures (CBM) to monitor progress of a reading intervention. The main point, however, is to think about and use measures that will be able to provide some information regarding how effective the intervention strategy has been.

Objective and Quantifiable Data

Objective data are those in which someone who does not know anything about the District can look at the data and make an impartial judgement about the effectiveness of an improvement strategy. So, if good objective data were being used, the data can be given to multiple “blind” judges and they would all likely come to the same conclusion. The “flip side” of objective data, of course, are data that are subjective. In this case, multiple judges would likely yield conflicting views about the effectiveness of an improvement strategy. In short, subjective data can lead to opinion and conjecture — effectiveness is simply judged by who is asked. With increased emphasis on outcomes measures (proof that strategies actually worked), it is clear that there will be a growing demand to demonstrate that objective data is available for decision-making.

Reliable and Valid Measures

Data needs to be consistent across time in order to be comparable. The team must consider whether the data has "changed" as a result of different collection methods and the criteria used for collecting the data. For example, the team can't fairly compare "percent of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma compared to percent of all youth" if the LEA included youth with disabilities that earned GEDs and forms of "non-regular diplomas" (special education diplomas, vocational education diplomas, etc.). The notion of "comparability" is behind the idea of reliability — as the saying goes, making sure you are comparing "apples with apples."

Measures from which data are obtained also need to be valid — that is, does it faithfully measure what it is supposed to measure? For example, consider "percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement." How does one know, for example, that the survey used to obtain this information actually measures how parents really feel with regard to how well schools facilitated parent involvement? Maybe the survey was just a measure of "satisfaction," and actually offers little information about how well schools facilitated parent involvement. Certainly, the two might be related, but still constitute two related, but fundamentally different ideas or "constructs" (i.e., program satisfaction vs. effective parent involvement). Validity is difficult to determine. In truth, sometimes the team will not know how valid a measurement is. But with instruments that have been validated in the field and have received genuine input from stakeholders, in this case, parents, it is well within the reach of Districts to demonstrate that measures are valid.

Determining Timelines for Strategy Implementation

A key component to implementing a successful intervention strategy is establishing realistic timelines. Taking the time to develop a timeline will ensure that the strategy is being conducted in an efficient way. As the District team outlines the strategies that are necessary to meet the objective, it is important to develop a timeline that is thorough. It should include information regarding the initial steps for implementation, data collection strategies necessary to evaluate the impact of the strategy, as well as identification of key personnel responsible for the carrying out the necessary tasks in the timeline.

Issues to Consider When Developing Timelines

- The timeline provides a logical sequence of steps from planning to implementation and evaluation.
- The timeline includes multiple data collection points with strategy-impact measures collected frequently enough to evaluate short-term and ongoing progress.
- The timeline is realistic given the resources available for implementation.
- The timeline includes required activity reports to DESE.

More specifically, the timeline needs to include multiple data collection points to ensure that impact data is collected in a timely manner. The data collection points should be frequent enough for the team to evaluate the impact of the strategy and provide guidance about whether mid-strategy changes might be necessary. Some questions to consider when developing the strategy implementation timeline include:

- What steps are needed to complete the strategy?
- How long will each step take?
- Who will be responsible for each step in the timeline?
- What data collection steps need to be built into the timeline to ensure that impact is occurring?
- When should reports be generated and who should they be provided to?

The timeline can serve as an additional management tool for implementing the intervention strategy and assessing its impact, as well as serving as a mechanism for ensuring that the strategy is on track. The most important aspect of developing a quality timeline is ensuring that it is realistic given the resources that the District has available. If the timeline is too ambitious it may be too difficult to meet.

Example

A school District has determined that Literacy Program ABC is their best choice for improving reading outcomes for 3rd graders in their elementary buildings. Literacy Program ABC is a curriculum that requires teachers to go through trainings twice a year, as well as a beginning of the year training. It is evidence-based, and has been implemented in similar settings. The question arises: “How would you determine the action steps needed to implement the program in your District?” The steps below illustrate how one might develop action steps, along with sample descriptions of what “typical” strategies might involve.

1. **Break the strategy down into its component parts.**
   - A. “Provide beginning of the year training on Literacy Program ABC for all 3rd grade teachers.”
   - B. “All 3rd grade teachers in elementary buildings attend Literacy Program ABC trainings twice a year.”
   - C. “Monitor implementation of curriculum during the year.”

2. **Provide a description in each action step.**
   A. "The beginning of the year training will be held on the Monday and Tuesday before classes start. The training will be provided by personnel brought in by the District who are experts in Literacy Program ABC."

   B. "The trainings will be held in November and February. They will each last one half day. The District will provide substitutes so teachers can attend. The first training will cover Topic X, the second training will cover Topic Y."

   C. "Implementation will be monitored through the weekly reading quizzes that are part of the curriculum as well as monthly, two-hour-long classroom observations by trained staff."

3. **Provide a projected start/end date for each of the action steps.**
   A. The start and end dates should be logical and written as MM/DD/YY.

4. **Identify the person responsible and their role.**

It is preferable that the team identify the person responsible by name and role (ex.: Mae West, Reading Coordinator), but if this is unknown at the time of the submission of the improvement plan or if multiple people with the same title in different buildings are responsible, identify the role and indicate that the name is not available.

In reviewing the above examples, ask "What other steps should we include? At each step, the idea is to provide a level of detail that helps to create a "road map" for the implementation of the strategy or objective. Remember that it is not only for the team, but it is also the improvement plan that you can submit to DESE to clearly show what the District is doing to improve student learning. In doing so, be realistic but optimistic as the team thinks through the options. The end result will be a "record" of efforts from the point of planning to implementation, including articulation of actions, timeline, and identifying those responsible.

5 Identifying and Using Resources

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with information and strategies that will lead to the identification of the resources needed to successfully implement specific school improvement plans and the delineation of those resources that are currently available and those that need to be developed/generated.

Outcomes

- Participants will demonstrate the ability to identify the resources necessary to effectively implement proposed district improvement activities.
- Participants will be able to identify currently available resources that are necessary to implement proposed improvement activities.

Identifying Resources

Resource Overview

This section provides a general process that can be used to help local school districts develop improvement plans; determine the resources they will need to successfully implement a plan; identify those resources that are currently accessible through the district and those that will need to be developed or generated; acquire these additional resources; monitor resource use as improvement plans are implemented; and ensure that sufficient resources are available to sustain successful improvement efforts on a long-term basis. A set of strategies is then proposed for utilizing the information generated through the resource identification and development process to generate cost-effective budgets for improvement plans.

Strategies for Identifying Resources

There are a number of steps to the identification of resources necessary to effectively carry out any project, including school improvement plans. Following these steps will not only increase the likelihood that sufficient resources are available to initiate the implementation of a program, but allow for additional resources to be generated over time to ensure long-term sustainability. The proposed resource identification and development process has five steps, each of which is linked with a step in the generation of a formal budget for the improvement plan.

Steps to resource identification and development include:

- Improvement Plan Resource Investigation
- Development of Resource Requirement Definitions
- Resource and Budget Design
- Resource Monitoring
- Ensuring Sustainability

Initial Resource Investigation

Following the development of an action plan, the first step in determining resources needed for implementation entails an initial investigation or estimation of necessary assets. Resources for improvement activities can be thought of as falling into one of several broad categories, each of which should be considered:

- Purchased Services
- Stipends
- Supplies and Material Resources

In conducting an initial resource investigation, an improvement planning team needs to carefully consider each of the major activities that will be undertaken as part of the improvement plan and develop a rough estimate of the resources within each of the above areas that will be necessary to successfully implement and evaluate the program.

Resource Requirement Definitions

A second step in the resource identification process involves the further specification of those resources identified in initial resource investigation as required for a proposed improvement activity. During this step, the improvement planning team will need to take a careful look to determine if all critical resources have been identified and add specific details to each resource necessary to effectively carry out each aspect of the action plan/improvement activity.

Purchased Services (Consultants)

Professional and technical services refer to those supports which can be performed only by persons with specialized skills and knowledge. Included are the services of other school districts, as well as non- LEA consultants. For the most part, resources in this area will be necessary for the provision of training and technical assistance to one or more groups of stakeholders. Determination of the extent to which professional and technical services are needed will depend on the specific nature and scope of improvement activities, as well as the in-house resources LEAs have available. Factors to consider when reflecting on the need for professional and technical resources include the:

- Specific type, nature, and amount of training and technical assistance necessary to implement the improvement activity;
- Need for on-going, periodic, or single session training; and
- Number and types of stakeholder groups that need to be trained (e.g., supervisory and direct service personnel; parents, other volunteers etc.).

Stipends

In determining the personnel necessary to implement improvement activities, planning teams should ask the question, “What human resources/personnel will be necessary to implement and evaluate the improvement plan and activities?” As this resource is being considered, teams may find it advantageous to adopt a broad definition of the term human resources, taking into consideration both supervisory and front line personnel from the LEA, individuals who are not employed by the LEA (e.g., RPDC staff), as well as non- professionals (e.g., community volunteers, parents).

The important questions to answer are:

- Who are the individuals necessary to carry out each component of an improvement activity?
- How many hours will be necessary to carry out these tasks?
- When will each person’s efforts be needed?

Supplies and Materials

Although it may be nearly impossible to determine the exact nature of supplies and materials that will be critical to carrying out an improvement plan, planning teams can develop general estimates of the resources that will be needed in this area, taking into consideration the scope and nature of the proposed improvement activities. Some activities may target large numbers of students, parents, and/or educational staff. Others will focus on much smaller numbers. A single set of materials (e.g., a new reading curriculum) may be proposed to achieve an objective or many materials may be put forward as necessary to reach it (e.g., a new curriculum, a supplemental instructional DVD to reinforce classroom learning, and a training manual for teachers, etc). In general, resources in this area that will need to be considered include: curricula, training materials for staff, substitutes, supplemental classroom materials (e.g., software) and impact measure materials.

Identification of Currently Available Resources

To this point, the focus of this resource development process has centered on identifying the resources planning teams view as necessary to implement proposed improvement activities. No distinction has been made between resources that are currently available within the LEA and those that will need to be purchased or have a cost attached to them. At this juncture in the resource design process, the planning team will need to undertake some research to determine whether necessary resources are: (a) currently available for improvement activities with no additional costs associated with them; or (b) not available within the LEA and/or only available at additional cost.

Some resources, such as trainers who have the experience and expertise necessary to conduct large scale in-service instruction on a new reading curriculum or drop-out prevention program, may not be available at all within the LEA. Other necessary supports may be available, but not to the extent necessary for the effective implementation of improvement activities. The additional time needed will then have a cost associated with its use.

At this point in the resource planning process, the planning team should review the resource requirements that have been developed for improvement activities making sure that they have been sufficiently specified. The type and amount of resources that are currently available to be used for improvement efforts, both within and outside of the LEA, should be noted along with the specific resource category into which they fall (i.e., human resources/personnel; supplies and materials; personnel; professional and technical services; other resources). Resources of both a formal (i.e., professional staff) and informal (e.g., volunteers) nature should be included. Teams should be as specific as possible in outlining not just the source and type of available support, but also the amount of the resource that will be available (e.g., number of hours/week that a staff person will be assigned to improvement efforts).

The final steps in this phase of the planning process entail identification of critical resources that are currently unavailable and must therefore be acquired, and a review of proposed improvement activities to reassess their feasibility. In conducting this review the planning team will need to carefully consider the extent to which the LEA is likely to be able to acquire necessary, but currently unavailable resources. At this point, the team may find it useful to assign monetary estimates to each unavailable resource viewed as critical to program implementation. This will provide information that will be useful in potential revisions to proposed activities. If access to currently unavailable resources is unlikely, the planning process will need to return to the activity development phase and plans simplified, scaled down, or revised in other ways that reduce the need for resources.

Acquiring Necessary Resources

Although LEAs may have many of the resources necessary to effectively implement school improvement plans, it is unlikely that ALL critical resources will be available in the amount needed. It therefore makes sense to develop a plan to obtain the resources needed for activity implementation as part of the overall resource planning process.There are a number of ways that additional resources can be accessed to support improvement activities. These include:

- State improvement grant funding
- Local foundation funding
- Parent volunteers
- Student volunteers
- Community volunteers

The improvement planning process contained in this manual will allow eligible LEAs to apply for state improvement grants through the Missouri DESE. State funding, however, is not the only option that LEAs have available. Private foundations, especially those that are local, often have significant funding available that can be accessed for activities that have the potential to enhance quality of life within the community. Efforts to improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities easily fall within this funding area. While each foundation is likely to have a somewhat different process that must be followed to apply for funding, the information pulled together by LEAs as part of the DESE School Improvement Planning Process can provide the basis for a request for funding from these organizations.

Improvement planning teams should also consider the extent to which “informal” resources in the form of parent, student, and community volunteers are available to support improvement activities. All of these groups are likely to be supportive of improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities and provide a tremendous resource that often goes untapped. One strategy that will dramatically increase the likelihood of being able to successfully access these informal resources is to include these stakeholder groups at all stages of the improvement planning process.

Sustainability

Improvement activities that cannot be sustained over a significant period will have little long-term impact on student achievement or outcomes. Planning teams therefore will need to consider how they will continue strategies that prove to be effective once initial funding and support is no longer available to the LEA. Two important processes that should be considered in order to increase the probability of sustainability are: (1) effective resource monitoring and (2) building into improvement efforts the extensive use of informal or already available resources.

Resource Monitoring and Replenishment

Improvement planning teams need to put into place strategies to effectively monitor the expenditure of resources so that they can be replenished when needed. Resources of a fiscal nature are relatively easy to monitor. Most LEAs undertake this task on an ongoing basis. The key for improvement planning teams is to:

- Use established LEA procedures to monitor fiscal expenditures;
- Develop ways to monitor resources of the non-fiscal type (e.g., the use of parent volunteers);
- Establish tolerance parameters or “red flags” at which point improvement strategies will be re-examined; and
- Generate ways to ensure that resources are available on a long-term basis to sustain successful improvement efforts including the use of already available resources.

Resource planning is an inexact science. No matter how careful the process, the need for some resources will be underestimated and others overestimated. It will therefore be necessary for planning teams to develop ways through which they can use established procedures within the LEA to monitor, on an ongoing basis, fiscal expenditures associated with improvement activities.

LEAs should also put into place strategies for monitoring resources of a non-fiscal type. Parent volunteers, for example, can become burned-out if the same individuals are called time-after-time to support school initiatives. The same holds for student volunteers, as well as individuals and organizations within the community. Although not as formal a process as monitoring fiscal expenditures, carefully tracking the degree to which informal resources are used and who provides the resource increases the likelihood that improvement efforts will be sustainable.

One way to ensure that resources are effectively managed is to establish tolerance parameters or “red flags” at which point resources, expenditures, and improvement strategies will be re-examined. This will ensure the LEA is meeting State and Federal accountability requirements, make it possible for funding to be reallocated from one resource area to another when that is necessary, serve as a signal that some activities might need to be reduced in scope, or that additional funding is necessary. The development of strategies to ensure that the resources necessary to sustain improvement activities are available should begin, not when the “resource account” is empty, but during the initial stages of the planning process. Even if it appears, for example, that sufficient funding to implement improvement activities will be available from a State grant source, Districts should be thinking of how these activities can be funded following the termination of grant money. Investigating whether local foundations or the business community would be interested in providing long-term support for an initiative, and/or developing ongoing training programs for volunteers will increase the likelihood that resources will be replenished as they are used.

Districts can also increase the likelihood of sustainability through carefully conceptualizing improvement activities to make the greatest possible use of already available resources. This type of resource is provided without charge and can be supplied in a number of ways. A District, for example, may agree to some percentage of a current employee's regular time being used to support implementation and/or evaluation of improvement activities. The development of improvement activities that can be easily infused into the typical school day dramatically increases the likelihood of this outcome. The use of volunteers can also be viewed as an available contribution. Using older students to mentor younger peers and training concerned parents to serve as progress monitors are both examples of resources that will cost an LEA little to nothing from a financial standpoint but are likely to make a significant, positive impact on educational outcomes.

6 Budget Process

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with information and strategies that will lead to the development of a fiscally sound budget for the proposed improvement plan that will allow for its effective and timely implementation.

Outcomes

- Participants will be able to implement a process to develop cost-effective budget proposals for improvement activities that will result in the acquisition of necessary resources.

Budget Development

Developing a Cost-Effective Budget

Development of a budget for improvement activities is an ongoing process that begins with the initial steps of resource planning. At that point, however, the focus was on the identification of necessary, available, and currently unavailable resources not on considering their cost. Once all necessary resources are identified, costs can be attached to them and a budget developed. The budget detail specifies each line-item or expenditure that is expected to be incurred over the course of the improvement plan along with the justification as to why each budgetary item is necessary.

About Budget

- ✓ The budget includes only approvable expenses.
- ✓ The budget is aligned with action steps.
- ✓ The budget is detailed enough to outline all expected costs.

The process of budget development goes hand-in-hand with resource planning. An appropriate budget cannot be developed until one has identified all critical resources, the degree to which they are needed, which are currently available and can be accessed as in-kind contributions, and those that are not available and will have costs associated with them.

Budget development is a process. Initial estimates of costs tend to vary widely from the actual costs incurred with implementation. As the resource and budget development process continues, however, estimates should become more and more accurate. By the time initial implementation begins, the goal is for projected costs to be within 5% of estimated costs.

Budget Detail

Budget detail outlines all expected costs and also provides justification given the scope of work. In developing a budget, it is critical that *all* expected costs be included. This will allow a more accurate estimate of whether improvement activities related to specific objectives can be sustained within the LEA and/or generalized to other LEAs that are unable to make available the same set of resources.

However, for the purposes of the improvement plan DESE allows only budget items to be entered into IMACS that are funds requests. As a basic template for a budget related to an improvement plan, LEAs can use the same categories employed in resource planning:

- Purchased Services
- Salaries (Stipends)
- Supplies and Material Resources

Purchased Services

Purchased Services refers to those budget items provided or performed by persons with specialized skills and knowledge from outside of the LEA. Included in this budget category are costs of services provided by personnel from other school districts, as well as consultants. Each budget item in this area should include:

- The name of the individual/organization that will provide the support
- A brief explanation of the nature of the service performed (e.g., PBS Training)
- The number of persons for whom the service will be provided
- The amount/extent of the service (e.g., 3- full days or 24 hours of training)
- Total cost of the service

Salaries/Stipends

Within the salaries/stipends section of the budget detail should be included budget items pertaining to the time and effort of individuals employed by the LEA. This includes supervisory staff, direct service staff (i.e., teachers; paraeducators; substitutes; other professional support personnel). Information should be included with respect to the:

- Exact amount of time that each person will devote to program activities (i.e., number of hours)
- Cost of this effort requested as part of the grant

Supplies and Materials

In this section of the budget the team must detail the exact costs of supplies and materials necessary to carry out the improvement plan. Items in this area of the budget generally include: student incentives, curricula and training materials for staff that need to be purchased, supplemental classroom materials (e.g., computer software, DVDs/CD-ROMs), and evaluation materials. In developing this section of the budget detail the estimate should provide:

- Number of each item that will be purchased

- Cost of each item
- Total cost of all items of that same type

Budgets Include Only Approvable Expenses

While most items necessary for improvement activities can be charged to the budget developed by the LEA, there are some items that may not. The easiest way to avoid including non-allowable charges is to carefully review the approvable expenditure object codes. The list of Approvable Expenses is available in the resources section of this manual.

The Budget and Grant Awards

The table on below shows is the list of grant amounts that will be awarded by DESE based upon the enrollment of the school district. Please be aware that districts can apply for the maximum amount in elementary achievement and the maximum post-secondary transition. Use this information to guide the development of the budget. The budget for all strategies together must add up to no more than the above grant amount.

Grant Awards by District Size	
Grant Amount	Enrollment
$75,000	30,000+
$50,000	15,000-29,999
$25,000	5,000-14,999
$17,500	2,500-4,999
$15,000	0-2,499

For the Improvement Plan grant applications, DESE suggests that districts structure their budget requests to use the **majority of funds for professional development activities**. Additionally, funds may not be used to add personnel to a district, although stipends for existing teachers for after school activities or substitutes to allow teachers to attend training are permissible.

Funding for student incentives will be limited to no more than 5% of the total budget and funding for food or meal requests will be capped at 6% of the total budget. Also note that DESE will not reimburse for salaries for employees. Stipends for existing employees to conduct grant activities outside of regular paid business times are allowable. For example, a stipend to attend training in the summer or to develop Curriculum Based Measurement probes after school hours is permissible.

7 Helpful Exercises

Writing Objectives

The objective is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented and Time-bound (SMART goal).

Basic Rules for Writing Objectives

- Objectives should be realistic.
- Objectives should be ambitious, but manageable.
- Objectives should be relevant to stakeholders.
- Objectives should be relevant to State improvement goals.

Considering this information, write an objective that would be appropriate based upon the data drilldown on the sample data.

Evidence-Based Strategy Checklist

Directions

The Evidence-Based Strategy Checklist was designed to invite a “yes-no” or “not-applicable” response to items selected to guide the decision-making process about whether a strategy is “research or evidence-based.” Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers — these items are simply “thinking tools” to help you judge the quality and relevance of the interventions that your team is considering. Note that there are no standard “rules” about what constitutes a “high” number of “Yes” responses — that judgment will need to be made by the district team. Naturally, a majority of “Yes” responses will certainly indicate characteristics of a “research or evidence-based strategy,” while a majority of “No” responses would indicate a need to reconsider the efficacy of the strategy.

	Yes	No	NA
1. There is empirically based research demonstrating the efficacy of the strategy.			
2. The research has been subject to peer-review (i.e., is in peer-reviewed journals/publications).			
3. The consensus of the body of research clearly demonstrates effectiveness of the strategy.			
4. The studies reviewed are not just “opinion-papers”.			
5. The research on the strategy is valid and indicates that the strategy is designed to “work” with intended student population.			
6. The research findings provide a believable demonstration the intervention can produce change.			

Action Step Development Activity

Describe the Strategy

1. **Break the strategy down into its component parts to determine the action steps needed to implement the program.**

2. **Provide a more detailed description of each of the action steps.**

3. **Provide a projected start/end date for each of the action steps.**

4. Identify the person(s) responsible and their role.

5. Determine the impact measures to be used to collect data to evaluate the success of the strategy. Include how frequently the measure will be used to collect data, the start and end dates of data collection, and the person responsible for ensuring the data is collected and evaluated.

Glossary

Action Step: Steps required to successfully implement an intervention activity.

Example: If an intervention activity is to develop and implement a work experience program for students to explore the profession of veterinary technician, one of the action steps could be to contact the local veterinary hospital to meet and discuss setting up work experiences for students.

Baseline: Level of performance at the “start” of data collection. The baseline is a "line in the sand”, which can be used to measure change of important performance indicators for future reference. When baseline data is compared with data collected at later points in the educational process decisions can be made as to whether students are making adequate progress.

Empirical Research: Research that bases its findings on direct or indirect observation of reality. Empirical research seeks systematic information about something that can be observed in the outside world or in a laboratory.

Evaluation: Organized way of measuring work in progress and results obtained.

Evidence-Based: The research on the activity in question involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.

Fidelity of Implementation: Implementation as intended and thus the maintenance of integrity as specified or designed, i.e. the activity or program has been implemented as it was supposed to be and not altered by the implementer(s).

Hypothesis: Assertion or “educated guess” that posits a relationship of some type that exists between two or more phenomena.

Intermediate Target: Interim target. Intermediate targets and target indicators should be measured in the same way. Intermediate targets are often performance levels that are expected to be achieved on the way to the target, often with specific achievement dates.

Intervention: Means the same as “strategy” — a strategy should be based on research that has demonstrated its effectiveness. Interventions or strategies should be evidence based.

Objective: Statement that describes the specific, measurable results to be achieved by whom, by when and by how much or to what degree. Objectives must be measurable and should relate to student performance and/or systems outcomes. They must also specify a final target and the specific date of when that target is to be met. Objectives can break down a goal to specific student populations that need improvement in order to meet the goal and by when. Objectives should relate to and support a district goal.

Outcome Evaluation: Evaluates the extent to which the goals of the strategy have been met and primarily focus on the effects of the intervention.

Peer-Reviewed: Process of subjecting scholarly work or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the field. The peer review process is aimed at getting authors to meet the standards of their discipline.

Professional and Technical Services: Supports that can be performed only by persons with specialized skills and knowledge.

Quasi-Experimental Design: Resembles experimental design, but lacks key elements such as pre and post testing and/or control groups.

Reliability: Extent to which a measurement will yield the same results across time (test-retest reliability) or if measured by alternate forms of the same assessment instrument (alternate form reliability). Reliability indices range from 0.00 (total unreliability) to 1.00 (perfect reliability). In order to be used in educational decision-making a test should have a reliability of .90 or higher.

Strategy: Means the same as an intervention. It represents a measurable strategy that describes how the objective will be accomplished.

Example: Develop and implement a work experience program.

Strategy-Impact Measure: Performance measure used several times over the school year to assess progress or change in student performance or teacher practice.

Example: After implementation of Reading First in the district's Kindergarten through 3rd grade Communication Arts classrooms, teachers administer DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), a standardized, individually administered assessment instrument, at the beginning, middle and end of the school year to measure student progress in each of the four grades.

Sustainability: Manner in which programs will be able to carry-on activities that prove to be effective once initial funding and support is no longer available.

Target: Desired level of performance to be reached. A target is usually the criterion (long-term) level of desired performance. Often the target level is a part of the performance indicator (e.g., % of students with disabilities completing school will be comparable to that of students without disabilities). The same target level may imply different amounts of change for different groups.

Trend: Past and present performance of an individual or group as measured over some time period. Trend data can be used to project the future performance of an individual or group of individuals with and without the implementation of some objective.

Triangulation: Practice of comparing results from different sets of data that are designed to measure the same construct but are collected from different sources and/or by different methods to increase certainty about the validity of the construct.

Validity: Extent to which a test measures what its developers or users claim it measures. There are a number of different types of validity the most important being criterion-related validity or the extent to which a person's score on a criterion measure can be estimated from that person's test score.

Appendix A: Missouri Codes for Expenditures

The table below is included to inform of Missouri Expenditure Codes. Special Education Improvement Grant allowable expenditures may or may not align with the object descriptions. Refer to the grant application part of Section 6: Budget Process for more information.

Class	Code	Detail	Object Description
6100			Salaries - Amounts paid to employees of the LEA who are considered to be in a position of permanent nature or hired temporarily, including personnel substituting for those in permanent positions. This includes gross salary for personal services rendered while on the payroll of the LEAs.
	6130		Certified - Supplemental
		6131	Supplemental Pay - Amounts paid for student activities sponsorship, coaching, stipends for curriculum development and other duties beyond the regular school day or school session. Subject to state and federal tax and teacher retirement whether or not the supplemental duty is related to the employee's regular position. Certificated employees meeting the definition of "new-hire" (hired after March 31, 1986) are also subject to Medicare-only withholdings.
6300			Purchased Services - Amounts paid for services rendered by personnel who are not on the payroll of the LEA and for other services which the LEA may purchase. While a product may or may not result from the transaction, the primary reason for the purchase is the service provided in order to obtain the desired result.
	6310		Professional and Technical Services - Services which by their nature can be performed only by persons with specialized skills and knowledge. Included are the services of other school districts, architects, engineers, auditors, dentists, medical doctors, lawyers, consultants, accountants, etc.
		6311	Instructional Services - Tuition including vocational tuition to other districts and nonpayroll services performed by qualified persons directly engaged in providing learning experiences for pupils. Included are services of teachers and paraprofessional personnel and "Performance Contract" activities provided directly to a child.
		6312	Instructional Program Improvement Services - Services performed by persons qualified to assist teachers and supervisors enhance the quality of the teaching process. This category includes curriculum consultants, in-service training specialists, etc., not on the payroll. The IRS says that a person who is a regular employee may not be treated as a consultant (purchased service) by the same employer for other duties.
		6316	Data Processing Services - Services performed by persons, organizations, or another agency qualified to process data. This category includes those data processing services purchased from another agency or concern of specialists who are contracted to perform a specific task on a short-time basis.
	6340		Transportation Services - Expenditures for transporting children to school and official travel of LEA employees.
		6341	Contracted Pupil Transportation To and From School - Expenditures to persons or agencies for the purpose of transporting children to and from school. Expenditures for the rental of buses which are operated by personnel on the LEA payroll are not recorded here; they are recorded under Purchased Services - Expenditure Object 6334, Rentals - Equipment.
		6342	Other Contracted Pupil Transportation-Nonroute - The LEA with a non district operated transportation system shall record non route mileage expense in this account.

Class	Code	Detail	Object Description
		6343	Travel - Expenditures for transportation, meals, hotel, conference registration fees, and other expenses associated with staff traveling on business for the LEA.
	6390		Other Purchased Services
		6391	Other Purchased Services - Expenditures for all other purchased services not included above such as contracted food service operations.
6400			Supplies and Materials - Amounts paid for material items of an expendable nature that are consumed, worn-out, deteriorated in use, or items that lose their identity through fabrication or incorporation into different or more complex units or substances. It should be noted that a more thorough classification of expenditures will be achieved by identifying the object with the function, for example, the type of supplies, such as audiovisual supplies, classroom teaching supplies, or student incentives. For evaluation of a particular supply object, supplies can be broken into subdivisions such as food and other supplies in the food services program. To determine the merit of prepared food versus raw food, two further breakouts could be used: (1) food prepared for serving, and (2) unprepared food.
	6410		General Supplies
		6411	General Supplies - Expenditures for all supplies for the operation of an LEA, including freight and cartage. If such supplies are handled for resale to pupils, only the net cost of supplies is recorded here.
	6450		Periodicals and Instructional Resource Materials
		6451	Resource Materials - Expenditures for periodicals, newspapers, electronic resource (such as CD ROM, VCR tapes, audio tapes), kits, etc., for general use by the school library.